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Fleshing Out the Animals of British Taxidermy in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1820-1914

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**Taxidermy Time: Fleshing Out the Animals of
British Taxidermy in the Long Nineteenth
Century, 1820-1914**

Alice Would

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for
award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis tracks the flow of animal skins that supplied taxidermy production in the long nineteenth century in Britain and the British Empire. It explores the embodied, material creation of taxidermy – the meeting of animal and human skin – and reveals how taxidermy was a dynamic process. It proposes that dead animal bodies and body parts could still influence human thought and action. Taxidermy was intended to keep an animal skin secured and preserved for the future, and contemporary scholarship has similarly associated taxidermy with timelessness and perpetuity. Instead, this thesis argues that taxidermy was never something that could be entirely stilled, just as it could never be said to be fully completed. It explores the temporalities bound to the slowing and quickening of the skin and mount, of preservation, decay, return and repetition, and conceptualises an idea of *taxidermy time*.

Focussing on the period between 1820 and 1914, each chapter explores a place and a process in the taxidermy journey: skinning in the colonial hunting field, preservation and transportation, taxidermy as a hand craft, the influence of Victorian exhibitions on taxidermic technique, and museum display. It explores the *skin lives* of creatures to demonstrate how animal matter shaped history. This thesis draws on four case study museums and their archives: the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (Exeter), the National Museum of Wales (Cardiff), Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, and the hunter Charles Peel's museum in Oxford. Primary material, such as the writings of nineteenth century hunters, taxidermists, and curators, has also provided valuable insight into the multispecies agents and environmental interactions that shaped taxidermy, from bacteria and moths, to scavenging vultures and human hands.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Alice Would

DATE: 15 July 2021

Plagiarism Statement

In 2020, I published an article which draws on this research:

A. Would, 'Tactile Taxidermy: The Revival of Animal Skins in the Early Twentieth Century Museum', *Environment and History* (Published fast-track online: December 2020).

I have also published writing deriving from this research in blogs and online journals:

A. Would, 'The Curious Creatures of Victorian Taxidermy' *History Today: Miscellanies*, July 2018 <https://www.historytoday.com/miscellanies/curious-creatures-victorian-taxidermy>

A. Would, 'Sensing Victorian Taxidermy in the Present', *Environmental History Now*, November 2019 <https://envhistnow.com/2019/11/12/sensing-victorian-taxidermy-in-the-present/>

A. Would, 'Museum Specimens Across Time', *White Horse Press Blog*, December 2020 https://whitehorsepress.blog/2020/12/11/museum-specimens-across-time/?fbclid=IwARoOuPQ_oQgsBgcuzEcCtByde4mQjE05GtoWuw1JL8i2Q-7cF54Hx7_9zxE

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Introduction

The future always plays a part in taxidermy, as it is an attempt to preserve and secure animal form for posterity. In the long nineteenth century, taxidermists aimed to remake a creature as strong and whole; protected for the future and from the more immediate dangers of tomorrow. They tried to enact a stilling in an already deadened skin. This thesis is about the material production of taxidermy animals in Britain. I explore the embodied historical contact between dead animal and human through the crafty processes of skinning, taxidermy, and display. In doing so, I question whether taxidermy in practice led to this stillness.

I track the taxidermy skin from British colonial hunting grounds through transportation by beast of burden, ship, and rail, to Britain and the taxidermy studio in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I meet the taxidermy animal on display: in the exhibition hall, and in the museum. This is more than simply a history of the hunters, taxidermists, and natural history curators involved in this production line, although their voices are heard: this is the story of the skins themselves. Focussing on the period between 1820 and 1914, my chapters detail the new (and repeated) forms animal bodies inhabited as they underwent skinning, packaging, aging, decaying, taxidermy, hybridisation, display, and remounting.

To look to the material journey of a skin (the animal remains that contained the potential to become a mount) is to explore the relationship between body part and the wider environment.¹ This includes interactions with humans, on whom taxidermy, and writing about the craft, depended. Some human voices are particularly prevalent in this thesis including the hunter and museum owner Charles Peel, the taxidermist Rowland Ward, and the naturalists Charles Waterton and Sarah Bowdich Lee. Environmental interactions also took the form of visitations from the nibbling mouths of moths and *dermestes* beetles, named and defined by their penchant for consuming dried skin. These interactions also featured scavenging birds and mammals, knives, blooming bacteria, and stuffing.

To look at taxidermy is to encounter the histories and the geographies of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century British Empire, and the translocation of such imperial lands in object and animal form to colonial exhibition halls. It is to access the display cabinet in a regional museum, and the taxidermist's bloodied table. Through these encounters, this thesis views taxidermy as a process; a thing of continuous making and flux. It reveals the energy behind and within taxidermy and explores how animal specimens could influence their surroundings

¹ For discussion on the matter and meaning of the environment see: S. Sörlin and N. Wormbs, 'Environing Technologies: A Theory of Making Environment', *History and Technology*, 34 (2018), 1-25; P. Warde, L. Robin and S. Sörlin, *The Environment: A History of the Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

through their deadness. It discovers the human fears bound to, and constructed around, the material animal body – how the actions of hunters, taxidermists, and natural history curators were centred on the threat and realities of decay, and an idealisation of skin wholeness. This thesis argues that taxidermy was never something that could be entirely stilled, just as it could never be said to be fully completed, when a museum conservator, or a moth, might always return to it.

These animals were engaged in something I call *taxidermy time*. This was not the taxidermist's time – although it overlapped with and was sometimes governed by such human constructions of time – but, instead, the temporalities bound to the slowing and quickening of the skin and mount, of preservation and deterioration and looping repetitions. Whilst every chapter in this thesis is interwoven with ideas on time, temporality is developed most explicitly in chapters 2 ('Moving') and 5 ('Displaying'). They detail the merging of different times in the taxidermy animal with reference to nineteenth and early twentieth century transportation and museum display; as something pulled between past, present, and future. Journeys are always temporal, and taxidermy is always a site of transformation. Such movement rejects stasis: stillness in time, place, and body. I found these temporalities in the descriptions of change, in the woes and worries of the writing hunter and taxidermist, as they watched, and shaped, their animal skins. As such, this entire thesis tells taxidermy time.

My Rat

To supplement my thinking on the production of taxidermy specimens in Britain in the long nineteenth century, I followed the advice of the early Victorian taxidermy writer Sarah Bowdich Lee, who claimed that the dead animal, and taxidermy, could only be fully known through hand craft.² In 2018, along with one of my supervisors, Professor Peter Coates, I signed up to an introductory taxidermy class, and was supplied with a dead, white, male rat. I tried taxidermy to add flesh to the skins and the bones of the past.

For me, touching a dead rat, one that was whole and just out of the freezer, meant overcoming a strong urge not to. Sneaking a scalpel inside a rat's white furred coat, sliding it downwards. Trying not to apply too much pressure, too much muscle and exertion and arm strength, but ultimately failing, the body falling open. I slipped my bare fingers inside the skin jacket and attempted to pry it apart from the smooth membrane, lying just within. I softly teased and felt my way under the rat skin, on both sides of the torso, down until my hands could meet. Several hours later – after breaking bones, removing the animal's corporeal cavity, and rubbing salts

² S. Bowdich Lee, *Taxidermy: Or, the Art of Collecting, Preparing, and Mounting Objects of Natural History. For the Use of Museums and Travellers* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), 81.

over the inside of the skin – I began to fill my creature. My hands tried to mimic the past as they poked wire into the spaces where limbs had once grown. I used my palm to push wood wool into the interior, and my fingers to fill out the tricky corners: face, legs, and the indented nub of the inner tail.



Figure 1.1: 'My rat', author's photograph, 2018.

Time did strange things with that rat skin. I was reaching for the past – emulating the hunched back, and the breaking and joining hand of the historical taxidermist. This was similar to the early Victorian technique, using simple stuffing and wire to restore corporeality. I was also trying to recreate this individual animal's past form, to bring the look of life, and solidity back to the flexing rodent skin. I was simultaneously engaged in the present, consumed by the messy sensory shock of taxidermy; the sound of bones breaking, the revolting smells. The rat's death process had been altered by freezing – an imposition of the twenty first century on my Victorian copycatting– but his body now seemed in a rush to make up for lost time, emanating the sickly smells of early decomposition as it thawed. Unlike the taxidermists of the past whom I was attempting to emulate, I was an unpractised novice. I had to concentrate, hard, to prevent the scalpel slicing my own skin, or making unwanted holes in the rat. I could not fall back on the rhythms of routine and experience, those temporal repeats, as a professional taxidermist might have.

After taxidermy, when the rat was as complete as he was ever going to be, the smell of raw flesh remained on my fingers, despite vigorous scrubbing. This pulled me back to that time of making and creation, in that way that smells do. These multiple temporalities were always presented by the rat's skin. The creature was a mobile thing, transforming before my eyes and under my hands from corpse, to skin, to mount. The rat did not stop changing once it had reached a semblance of wholeness; it continues to moult hairs and different smells. Random strands of woodwool poke through the belly sutures: perhaps my stitches were too far apart, or the stuffing too voluminous, straining to escape the confines of the rat's stomach cavity. He continues to age, his body hardening and drying, arching inwards. I learnt from my rat that taxidermy is far from still.

Literature and Historiography

Nature, as something humans see and produce, is never neutral. Yet, natural objects were (and often still are) presented simply as themselves within museums.³ The taxidermy specimen was often positioned as an unadulterated example of the jumping, crawling, climbing, living animals that could be found out there, in the wild places. In the turn of the twentieth century museum in Britain – as based on the foundational Linnean principles of looking and ordering to gain natural knowledge – the human visitor peered at taxidermy to learn about global animal species, taxonomy, habitat, and morphology.⁴ Martin Prösler argues that ‘the museum was, and remains, epistemologically a space in which the world is ordered, in which, with the assistance of material objects, the ‘world’ is realized, understood and mediated.’⁵ This was knowledge in the making, as the march of colonialism continued to lead to so-called discoveries, and their cementation and dissemination in writing and display.

The label that accompanied a display tended to note taxonomic rankings, such as species, genus, and kingdom; names to sort and simplify a Western understanding of the natural world. The label might also have offered some context as to what this creature eats, and how and where it spends its time. Frequently, a specimen stood in for their entire species; the singular individual representing the collective body. A label might also name the (mostly) white male hunters who had claimed a specimen. Other than this small allusion to the animal's deadness – as hunted things generally are dead – the animal was presented as if alive, and as

³ S. Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 49. See also: S. Asma, *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); C. Yanni, *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005).

⁴ H. Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁵ M. Prösler, ‘Museums and Globalization’, in S. Macdonald and G. Fyfe (eds.) *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 22.

if whole. The museologist Sharon Macdonald argues that, regarding science displays in museums, ‘exhibitions tend to be presented as ‘glass-cased’ – that is, as objects there to be gazed upon, admired and understood only in relation to themselves.’⁶ Say the specimen was a taxidermy gerenuk, a slender antelope from Eastern Africa (see Figure 1.2). Together, the antelope mount, the display case, the label, and the very existence of the museum as *the* space for seeing such natural objects, proclaimed ‘you are looking at a gerenuk.’



Figure 1.2: ‘Gerenuk and dik-dik display’, Charles Peel Collection, c.1930, RAMM Natural History Archive.

For the past few decades, scholars have rejected the idea that museums, and museum specimens, could demonstrate unadulterated nature.⁷ This was not a gerenuk, or at least, it was only a bit of a gerenuk. But this bit-of-a-gerenuk could tell stories about humans, power structures, relationships with the natural world, and imaginings of animals. This scholarship has embraced the unnaturalness of taxidermy. This powerful viewpoint was pioneered by

⁶ S. Macdonald, ‘Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition’, in S. Macdonald (ed.), *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), 2.

⁷ See for example: D. Haraway, ‘Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936’, *Social Text*, 11 (1984), 20-64; S. Alberti (ed.), *The Afterlives of Animals: A Museum Menagerie* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 202-18; G. Marvin, ‘Perpetuating Polar Bears: The Cultural Life of Dead Animals’, in B. Snæbjörnsdóttir and M. Wilson (eds.), *Nanoq: Flat out and Bluesome, A Cultural Life of Polar Bears* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), 164-5.

Donna Haraway's 1984 essay 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy'.⁸ Haraway argued that the taxidermy dioramas in the American Museum of Natural History – created by the renowned naturalist Carl Akeley in the early twentieth century – were the products of patriarchal hunting and structures of domination. This practical application of masculinity was bound to other hegemonic ideas: the assumed right of Western, white powers to colonise and to extract. The taxidermy animal was killed and uprooted to become a specimen of science, and its skin remained a symbol of that masculinist and imperialist violence.⁹ This was not nature untouched by human hand.

Such museum dioramas are, as Karen Wonders has written, 'ecological theatres.'¹⁰ This was the animal made cultural, its remains used for playwriting about nature and the world, in a performance directed by the well-heeled, white male. Both taxidermy and curatorship were generally male pursuits. This masculine and imperial worldview also shaped the selection of animal specimens. As the museum curator Rachel Machin has explored through a case study of the Manchester Museum, to this day in Britain more museum specimens and trophies are male than female.¹¹ Male animals' showy colours, vibrant feathers, swooping antlers, and physical size were viewed as attractive by the hunter poised with a hovering gun. The body had to be beautiful or entertaining or of scientific interest to match (generally male) Victorian expectations about what was important and valuable. At the turn of the twentieth century, museum displays incorporated more female creatures, often in dioramas showcasing nuclear families. This was partially influenced by trends in the US, a country experiencing a time of rapid museum building and development.¹² To the peering British visitor, the expected human world – the idealised family unit – was reflected back in animal skin.¹³ In the last decade, scholars have effectively explored how hunting trophies (whether in the home or in the museum) were also cultural devices. The environmental historian Karen Jones has detailed, using the example of visiting hunters in the American West, how trophies became memory

⁸ Haraway, 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy', 20-64.

⁹ For discussion on the 'ultraviolence' of museum collection see D. Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

¹⁰ K. Wonders, 'Habitat Dioramas as Ecological Theatre', *European Review*, 1 (1993), 285. See also: K. Wonders, 'Dioramas and the Issue of Nativeness', *Landscape Research*, 28 (2003), 89-100.

¹¹ R. Machin, 'Gender Representation in the Natural History Galleries at the Manchester Museum', *Museum and Society*, 6 (2008), 54-67.

¹² The *Manchester Courier* reported that 'it is the New York Museum of Natural History that has led the way': 'The Latest Taxidermy', *Supplement to the Manchester Courier*, 2 August 1900, 2. See: K. Rader and V. Cain, *Life on Display: Revolutionizing U.S. Museums of Science and Natural History in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

¹³ For examples in primary sources, see: H. Bolton, 'Bristol Museum Notes', *Western Daily Press*, 4 November 1905. In secondary literature see: R. Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 103, 106; Haraway, 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy', 37.

objects, prompts for the hunter to reflect on the hunting experience; to weave stories with and from.¹⁴

In Britain, museum display and hunting trophies alike spoke both implicitly and explicitly of colonialism and the assumed authority of the British to trample on lands that had been lived on by indigenous peoples for millennia, and to take what they found. To govern people, places, bodies, and to end lives.¹⁵ The geographer James Ryan, in his work on hunting, cameras and taxidermy – all methods to freeze animal life – describes the taxidermy creature as ‘utterly docile.’¹⁶ He interprets taxidermy as passive and inert because its form and meaning have been so entirely dictated by humans. The anthropologist Garry Marvin draws on Ryan’s concept of docility and argues that taxidermy has been ‘domesticated.’¹⁷ Marvin also discusses the taxidermy creature as a ‘reduction’ of the animal. With every step (from the deadly hunt to the display) the animal loses a bit of themselves. This is literal, as the whole animal becomes a skin, with the removal of its skeleton and volatile innards.

This reduction is also figurative, as with every manipulation of the body, distance is created between the animal and a vision of idealised animal life: alive, in the wild places, and untroubled by human interference. Marvin argues that a taxidermy polar bear is therefore an extreme ‘reduction’ of the living animal, as ‘there is so little of it left to make it a polar bear.’¹⁸ Similarly, in 2000, the art historian Steve Baker described the ‘gloriously dumb thingness’ of taxidermy creatures, with reference to taxidermic art.¹⁹ Cultural historian Sarah Amato argues that ‘as taxidermy, animals were transformed into manufactured objects and different kinds of commodities’ and that ‘stuffed animals were put into human situations, integrated into human society, and subjected to the imagination in ways not possible with living animals.’²⁰ In these descriptions, specimens are presented as the passive playthings of human culture. This focus on the meaning and cultural interpretations of taxidermy often goes hand in hand with discussions of permanence and stability. The specimen is inert, stilled, controlled.

¹⁴ K. Jones, ‘The Soul in the Skin: Taxidermy and the Reanimated Animal’, in *Epiphany in the Wilderness: Hunting, Nature and Performance in the Nineteenth-Century American West* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015), 227-70; and G. Marvin, ‘Enlivened through Memory: Hunters and Hunting Trophies’ in Alberti (ed.), *The Afterlives of Animals*, 202-18.

¹⁵ See, for example: Hicks, *The Brutish Museum*; W. Storey, ‘Big Cats and Imperialism: Lion and Tiger Hunting in Kenya and Northern India’, *Journal of World History*, 2 (1991), 135-73.

¹⁶ J. Ryan, ‘“Hunting with the Camera”: Photography, Wildlife and Colonialism in Africa’, in C. Philo and C. Wilbert (eds.) *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000), 209.

¹⁷ Marvin, ‘Perpetuating Polar Bears’, 164-5.

¹⁸ Marvin, ‘Perpetuating Polar Bears’, 164-5.

¹⁹ S. Baker, ‘The Human, Made Strange’ in *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 53.

²⁰ S. Amato, ‘Dead Things: The Afterlives of Animals’ in *Beastly Possessions: Animals in Victorian Consumer Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 183.

Haraway, in her pioneering and transformative essay, described how taxidermy is an animal ‘frozen in a moment of supreme life, and man is transfixed.’²¹ She concluded that taxidermy ‘was a practice to produce permanence, to arrest decay.’ Similarly, cultural theorist Mieke Bal describes how taxidermy represents a ‘fixation and the denial of time.’²² Literary scholar Pauline Wakeham argues that, in the North American context of the late nineteenth century, there developed a racialised ‘sign system’ of semiotics, that linked ‘aboriginality’ with ‘animality.’ These were both connected by a narrative of extinction. She argues that, whilst it is too simplistic to suggest that taxidermy presents a total ‘cessation of time,’ taxidermy as a symbolic system nevertheless ‘perpetually rearticulate[s] pastness and perpetuity.’²³ Conor Creaney uses similar language to describe the work of Victorian anthropomorphic taxidermist Walter Potter: ‘the kittens are here *in perpetuity*. Bride and groom are helplessly bound to stand and gaze upon each other for eternity, with no prospect of aging or decaying.’²⁴ In these works, there is a suggestion of taxidermy as representing both the past – an idealised invention of the past, created by colonising powers – and a timelessness.

Through its objectification, the singular taxidermy mount can speak about the collective slaughter of thousands of other animals, about the endangerment and extinction of entire animal species, and about the desires of the hunter or collector.²⁵ The focus on nature, domination, science, and empire mirrors comparable writings in wider animal history, for instance Harriet Ritvo’s dissection of the British domination of animal lives in the *Animal Estate*.²⁶ Since Ritvo’s 1987 study – and her analysis of the cultures of seeking, naming, and owning – animal history has blossomed as a discipline. Susan Nance argues that the history of animals ‘directs us to document the lives of historical animals as an intrinsically valuable history through which we can better understand nonhumans and ourselves.’²⁷ Alongside environmental history, this interdisciplinary approach to animals deconstructed the binary

²¹ Haraway, ‘Teddy Bear Patriarchy’, 25. Haraway also argues that Carl Akeley, the renowned taxidermist for the mammal hall in the American Museum of Natural History, aimed for ‘the prevention of decadence, of biological decay’: Haraway, ‘Teddy Bear Patriarchy’, 29. This is still a common theme in recent scholarship; Helen Gregory and Anthony Purdy describe taxidermy displays as ‘preoccupied with freezing time and space’: H. Gregory and A. Purdy, ‘Present Signs, Dead Things: Indexical Authenticity and Taxidermy’s Nonabsent Animal’, *Configurations*, 23 (2015), 66.

²² M. Bal, ‘Telling, Showing, Showing Off’ in *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 16.

²³ P. Wakeham, ‘Introduction: Tracking the Taxidermic’ in *Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 17.

²⁴ C. Creaney, ‘Paralytic Animation: The Anthropomorphic Taxidermy of Walter Potter’, *Victorian Studies*, 53 (2010), 19.

²⁵ See Jones, *Epiphany in the Wilderness*.

²⁶ H. Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

²⁷ S. Nance, ‘Introduction’, in S. Nance (ed.), *The Historical Animal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 3.

between our conceptions of nature and culture.²⁸ Geographers Jody Emel and Jennifer Wolch describe a realisation amongst environmentally minded scholars that ‘the entire idea’ of nature and culture as distinct and separable ‘was essentially abandoned as hopelessly naïve and outdated.’²⁹

Animal history forms part of the larger discipline of animal studies. Philip Armstrong argues that ‘work in animal studies over the last two decades has demonstrated that the definition of “the animal” is inextricably bound up with the formation of other notions fundamental to the work of colonialism: “the human,” “the natural,” “the cultural.”’³⁰ Scholars came to recognise that animals (as well as wider nature) are always perceived through layers of interpretation and symbolism.³¹ All historical writing on taxidermy should pay attention to its legacy as imperial commodification. It is also important to look to wider animal and environmental histories of empire and hunting, such as William Storey’s essay ‘Big Cats and Imperialism’, and the works of John MacKenzie.³² Storey demonstrates how vital the imagery of the hunt was to the construction of the British imperial identity, what he describes as ‘a language of power’ and ‘the cultural milieu of colonists and colonized populations in the acting out of hunting rituals.’³³ Such approaches also reveal how taxidermy was bound up in a larger web of the transportation of bits of nature: the ‘eco-cultural’ networks of the British Empire.³⁴

Skin Lives

Scholarship has therefore revealed that taxidermy encompasses a thousand stories of human wants, whims and desires. The representational elements of the taxidermy creature have been picked over; its cultural construction emphasised, and its peculiar status – as an object

²⁸ See for instance: D. Brantz (ed.), *Beastly Natures: Animals, Humans, and the Study of History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); N. Rothfels (ed.), *Representing Animals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) and E. Baratay, ‘Building an Animal History’, in L. MacKenzie and S. Posthumus (eds.), *French Thinking about Animals* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 3-14.

²⁹ J. Emel and J. Wolch, ‘Preface’ in J. Emel and J. Wolch (eds.) *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands* (London: Verso, 1998), xv.

³⁰ P. Armstrong, ‘The Postcolonial Animal’, *Society and Animals*, 10 (2002), 414.

³¹ Garry Marvin describes animals in general as ‘always socially and culturally constructed.’ These constructs are ‘animals that, in terms of our interests and perspectives, have only a tangential relationship with the animals in and of themselves.’ G. Marvin, ‘Wolves in Sheep’s (and Others’) Clothing’, in Brantz (ed.), *Beastly Natures*, 62. For discussion on nature and social constructionism in environmental history see: J.R. McNeill, ‘Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History’, *History and Theory*, 42 (2003), 5-43; R. White, ‘From Wilderness to Hybrid Landscapes: The Cultural Turn in Environmental History’, *Historian*, 66 (2004), 557-64; S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004).

³² See: Storey, ‘Big Cats and Imperialism’, 135-73; and J. Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). See also: P. Armstrong, ‘The Postcolonial Animal’, *Society and Animals*, 10 (2002), 413-19.

³³ Storey, ‘Big Cats and Imperialism’, 137, 136.

³⁴ J. Beattie, E. Melillo and E. O’Gorman (eds.) *Eco-Cultural Networks and the British Empire: New Views on Environmental History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

pretending to be an animal – evaluated. The writer and curator Rachel Poliquin summarised these lines of scholarly inquiry just over a decade ago:

In recent decades taxidermy has been critically reappraised as a historical and cultural object, by which I mean two things. First, the historical bracketing of taxidermy and the practices engaged in collecting and mounting animals, and second, an unravelling of the various cultural, political, and ideological forces which have shaped how nature has been used and interpreted within museums.³⁵

It is entirely fitting that the pushback against the presented neutrality of natural history specimens and displays has been strong.³⁶ However, there is a danger that the animal specimens' physical presence is consequently brushed over.

This presence is what I think of as the animal's *skin lives*. This concept is central to this thesis and builds on Samuel Alberti's idea of animal 'afterlives.'³⁷ It stretches Alberti's idea beyond his museum focus, to take in the material, and to represent the entire corporeal afterlife of the dead animal – the skin that contained the potential to become a specimen. All taxidermy is connected and defined by skin; the term has its origins in the Greek *taxis*, meaning order or arrangement, and *derma*, meaning skin. Skin was both the medium and the flexible matter from which taxidermy was born. The idea of *skin lives* is never to argue that the taxidermy specimen was a purely natural being – scholarship has successfully demonstrated otherwise. Instead, it is to engage with skins as matter which was shaped by (and shaping of) histories. *Skin lives* helped to produce, and sometimes contradicted, the narratives that hunters, taxidermists, and natural history curators wanted specimens to tell.

A motivation behind taxidermy, for those that made it in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was to render something that should be fast decaying, stilled. Staticity is the temporal and material force behind all preservation. The idea of the progress of civilisation, bound to the onwards quest for knowledge, was encapsulated in the quietened animal specimen. Enlightenment thinking saw the human as surging forward – learning through and with the animal– whilst the specimens themselves remained as they were: dead and useful.³⁸ Hunting, including hunting specifically for taxidermy and museum specimens, escalated massively in the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. It coincided with the rapid spread of the British Empire, and the development of public museums across Britain.

³⁵ R. Poliquin, 'The Matter and Meaning of Museum Taxidermy', *Museum and Society*, 6 (2008), 125.

³⁶ As I have outlined, this pushback started with Haraway's 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy.'

³⁷ Alberti (ed.), *The Afterlives of Animals*.

³⁸ Peter Vergo argued in the 1980s that museums have conventionally been interpreted as constantly evolving and bettering themselves. P. Vergo, 'Introduction', in P. Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 1-5.

The rush to harvest the animals of the world played a part in what scholars now consider as the sixth mass extinction event: the actions through which humans, carelessly and sometimes knowingly, ended lives and species.³⁹ A narrative of progress, progress through control and death, coursed through Victorian imaginations and was certainly on display in the museum. Nevertheless, as this thesis demonstrates, hunters, museum curators and collectors of taxidermy also recognised that bodies – the remains of those that had been hunted – changed. To reverse these changes, they meddled, remounted, and returned to animal bodies in a pragmatic way, over time. These specimens were not imagined as entirely frozen beings. Whilst this meddling was often still bound to an idea of improving on what had come before, there was also an appreciation that humans had never entirely mastered the temporalities and the materialities of the animal body. They recognised that there was still an element of unpredictability to organic beings, and this was to be expected.

When scholarship conceptualises the taxidermy animal as frozen, the taxidermy specimen starts to lose shape, and is rendered sluggish and ill defined. Marvin labels the taxidermy polar bear as a reduction, and in doing so, the polar bear becomes reduced.⁴⁰ He adds, in a discussion on hunting trophies, that: ‘although the biological must be rendered inert, taxidermy is not concerned with the preservation of natural objects, dead bodies. Taxidermic objects are not dead animals preserved, rather they are cultural objects created through craft.’⁴¹

Contrary to Marvin, I argue that culture, craft, symbolism, and power do not necessitate the absence of animality. These creatures were always composite products of such structures and ideas, *and* organic matter. Take the example of the colonial hunt. Taxidermic skinning was often undertaken by local and indigenous peoples; their skilled hands, and hunting prowess, were integral to the killing of the animal, its dismemberment and preservation, and the onward journey of the hunting caravan. Their labour was a part of the enactment of white, male British craft. Racial prejudice and hierarchies were embodied and embedded in the very production of taxidermy materials. Taxidermy was a raw product of the structures of empire. These creatures were always both symbol and matter – and this identity was continually engaged in a conversation with the wider world. The geographies and politics of imperialism physically moulded (and were in turn influenced by) animal skins. These skins, and the manufactured bodies they came to encase, were still ecosystems: insects materialised within

³⁹ D. Bird Rose, T. Van Dooren and M. Chrulow (eds.), ‘Introduction: Telling Extinction Stories’, *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death and Generations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 1; D. Jørgensen ‘Endling, the Power of the Last in an Extinction-Prone World’, *Environmental Philosophy*, 14 (2017), 119-38.

⁴⁰ Marvin, ‘Perpetuating Polar Bears’, 164-5.

⁴¹ Marvin, ‘Enlivened through Memory’, 211.

them as if from nowhere. Physical skins were sites of interaction between human bodies, human power structures, and the more-than-human.⁴² They were made and unmade, and it is this energy that this thesis uncovers.

Animal Objects

No object containing animal remains – organic dead matter – is ever inert, however physically and culturally constructed it might be. This claim develops the animal historian Erica Fudge’s proposal that creaturely interpretations must be linked to the physical animal of the past:

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.⁴³

Scholarship is beginning to recognise the continued animality – the animal *something* – of taxidermy. Towards the end of the twentieth century, sociologist Susan Leigh Star and philosopher James Griesemer labelled taxidermy as a ‘boundary object’: ‘adaptable to different viewpoints and robust enough to keep its own identity.’ They depicted the taxidermy animal as a creature inhabiting and exhibiting betweenness. Their focus on interpretation and storytelling is central; they argue that ‘without a label, a specimen is just dead meat.’⁴⁴ Later, Griesemer described such tricky entities as ‘remnant models.’⁴⁵ They are human things with some natural traces.

In the early 2000s, the anthropologist Jane Desmond vividly described the taxidermy animal: ‘soft tissue – eyes, nostrils, tongues – can be glass, wax, plastic, but only the actual skin of the animal will do.’⁴⁶ She argued that these animal bodies were produced to seem ‘authentic’, and that the perception of ‘liveness’ constantly evolved. Desmond was pivotal in arguing that animal skin provided a link to a living, biological animal, which shaped a perception of ‘naturalness’ attributed to the taxidermy creature by humans. More recently, she described

⁴² For discussion on history and the more than human, see: E. O’Gorman and A. Gaynor, ‘More-Than-Human Histories’, *Environmental History*, 25 (2020), 711-35.

⁴³ E. Fudge, ‘A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals’, in Rothfels (ed.), *Representing Animals*, 7.

⁴⁴ J. Griesemer and S. Star, ‘Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39’, *Social Studies of Science*, 19 (1989), 387, 401.

⁴⁵ J. Griesemer, ‘Modelling in the Museum; on the Role of Remnant Models in the Work of Joseph Grinnell’, *Biology and Philosophy*, 5 (1990), 3-36.

⁴⁶ J. Desmond, ‘Displaying Death, Animating Life: Changing Fictions of “Liveness” from Taxidermy to Animatronics’, in Rothfels (ed.), *Representing Animals*, 161, 159-79.

taxidermy as ‘vivacious remains.’⁴⁷ I carry this idea of vivacity with me through the thesis, and take it further, demonstrating how the death process itself was full of hidden action.

The historical geographer Merle Patchett has explored some of the processes in and around taxidermy; for instance, those involved in killing and mounting a tiger in colonial India and displaying its head-trophy in Britain.⁴⁸ She also spent time with a modern taxidermist and thinks critically about technique and embodiment. I followed her example by trying taxidermy and taking a hands-on approach. She focuses on methods, and on studio spaces, and produces the ‘biogeographies’ of specimens, revealing their spatial coming-together from taxidermy parts. She is one of few scholars to meet the taxidermy animal outside of museum space. Patchett writes that a taxidermy specimen is ‘simultaneously representative of itself as a present object but also of itself as a former living animal.’⁴⁹ She discusses extensively the ‘animal/object’ status of taxidermy.

Whilst Patchett’s writing has a real appreciation for materiality – and clearly demonstrates taxidermy as encompassing process rather than staticity in her emphasis on production – it is grounded in and focussed on geographical theory. She does not fully consider the taxidermy specimen as a site of environmental encounter and change, collecting, decaying, aging, and remaking, and she still describes the stasis of the museum mount once completed – thereby suggesting that an animal *could* become both stilled and finished. Patchett has inspired me to look to alternative bodies and spaces in taxidermy history, something that I explore in more detail in the body of the thesis, particularly in Chapter 3, ‘Making’. Her work has encouraged me to push beyond the museum. It has also prompted me to discover and apply geographical approaches to the animal skin; approaches that help me to explicate materiality and uncover varied skin histories.

The animal and environmental historian Karen Jones draws on Patchett in her exploration of Percy Powell Cotton’s big game collection, the communication between Powell Cotton and the renowned taxidermist Rowland Ward, and the creation of his museum and a sense of animal

⁴⁷ J. Desmond, ‘Vivacious Remains: An Afterword on Taxidermy’s Forms, Fictions, Facticity, and Futures’, *Configurations*, 27 (2019), 257-66.

⁴⁸ M. Patchett, ‘Tracking Tigers: Recovering the Embodied Practices of Taxidermy’, *Historical Geography*, 36 (2008), 17-39; M. Patchett, K. Foster and H. Lorimer, ‘The Biogeographies of a Hollow-Eyed Harrier’, in Alberti (ed.), *The Afterlives of Animals*, 110-33; M. Patchett, ‘Taxidermy Workshops: Differently Figuring the Working of Bodies and Bodies at Work in the Past’, *Transactions*, 42 (2017), 390-404; M. Patchett and K. Foster, ‘Repair Work: Surfacing the Geographies of Dead Animals’, *Museum and Society*, 6 (2008), 98-122; M. Patchett, ‘Witnessing Craft: Employing Video Ethnography to Attend to the More-Than-Human Craft Practices of Taxidermy’ in C. Bates (ed.) *Video Methods: Social Science Research in Motion* (London: Routledge, 2015), 71-94.

⁴⁹ M. Patchett, ‘Putting Animals on Display: Geographies of Taxidermy Practice’ (Unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2010.) <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/2348/1/2010patchettphd.pdf> [Accessed 31/12/18], 14.

‘presence’ at Quex Park in Kent. Employing Patchett’s concept, she describes the museum’s tangible ‘necrogeographies’ of pursuit and performance.⁵⁰ Jones has helped to develop and strengthen the conversation on the hybridity and lasting animality of taxidermy display. This animal presence is something I see as fundamental to taxidermy. The curator and science historian Samuel Alberti’s concept of animal ‘afterlives’ provided a foundation for my conception of *skin lives*. Alberti, in his edited book *Afterlives of Animals*, was influential in emphasising the museum and the taxidermy display as valuable places for the historian to explore; that the innumerable histories and biographies of animal life and death are worthy of attention.

Alberti pays some attention to the material hybridity of the animal mount. Nevertheless, in his chapter on Manchester’s elephant Maharajah, he argues that museum animals travelled ‘from nature to culture.’⁵¹ His focus remains on display and interpretation. Similarly, Stephen Asma and Carla Yanni have explored the cultural, and architectural, histories of natural history museums; the exterior, and the innards, of nature’s museums.⁵² Ebony Andrews, in her PhD thesis in museum studies, tracks the cultural shifts in ‘politics, ethics, education and science’ in museum taxidermy in the north of England.⁵³ She discusses how meaning making, with regards to taxidermy, was ‘mutable’ and in ‘flux.’ I consider flux, not only to think about human-held idealisations and meanings in museums, but to learn about the morphing nature of animal bodies *before* they entered the museum.

More directly relevant to this thesis, Liv Emma Thorsen, a cultural studies scholar and historian of museology, provides a wide-ranging analysis of ‘animal matter’ in museums: ‘Dog-skin caps, taxidermied animals, cutlery, upholstered pets, fragments of exotic animals – all are glimpses of singular elements in a vast multitude of objects made from animal materials.’⁵⁴ She designates the taxidermy animal as a chimera – an animal whose identity pushes against

⁵⁰ K. Jones, ‘The Rhinoceros and the Chatham Railway: Taxidermy and the Production of Animal Presence in the ‘Great Indoors’’, *History*, 101 (2016), 710-35. See also: Jones, ‘The Soul in the Skin’, *Epiphany in the Wilderness*, 227-70.

⁵¹ In ‘Constructing Nature behind Glass’, Alberti argues that natural history museums were ‘factories for producing a particular kind of nature.’ His *Afterlives of Animals* does recognise that the museum was a changeable landscape: specimens could be ‘embellished, reconfigured in new and interesting ways.’ However, the focus remains on changing interpretations, not corporeal change. Alberti ‘Maharajah the Elephant’s Journey: From Nature to Culture’, 37-57. S. Alberti, ‘Constructing Nature Behind Glass’, *Museum and Society*, 6 (2008), 83; Alberti, ‘Introduction: The Dead Ark’, *The Afterlives of Animals*, 7.

⁵² Asma, *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads*, Yanni, *Nature’s Museums*.

⁵³ Andrews takes Leeds City Museum, the Great North Museum: Hancock, and Museums Sheffield: Weston Park as case studies. E.L Andrews, ‘Interpreting Nature: Shifts in the Presentation and Display of Taxidermy in Contemporary Museums in Northern England’, Unpublished PhD thesis: <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/6637/1/Thesis%20Hard%20Copy%20with%20Figures%2015-05-14.pdf> [Accessed 13/10/2020].

⁵⁴ L. E. Thorsen, ‘Animal Matter in Museums’ in H. Kean and P. Howell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History* (London: Routledge, 2018), 185.

states, species, and boundaries. I build upon writing on taxidermy and chimerism in my chapter on exhibitions (Chapter 4, 'Exhibiting'). Thorsen also suggests that bits of these specimens could be dismantled, reused and renarrativised. These sorts of ideas – of the strange residual animality of the mount, and of its material processes – provide a springboard for this thesis. In *Animals on Display*, the editors, including Thorsen, recognise that it 'makes little sense' to speak of animals 'in ways that attempt to locate them outside human culture.'⁵⁵ Nevertheless, they suggest that 'greater attention' should be paid to 'relations between animal materiality and animal representation.' They call for scholars to pay attention to physicality, and this is a call I take up.

The curator and writer Rachel Poliquin also offers a nuanced interpretation of taxidermy in the *Breathless Zoo*. She depicts the uncanniness of the taxidermy specimen and tracks changes in interpretation and display over time, from cabinets of curiosity to museums and modern display techniques and encounters. Poliquin effectively depicts the multi-layered complexity of taxidermy as socially constructed yet linked to a real, raw physicality.⁵⁶ Skin connects taxidermy to the fleshy animal world, and Poliquin acknowledges the 'enduring animal magnetism of taxidermied animals', as something concentrated on and within the skin.⁵⁷ As she points out in an article on museum taxidermy, 'In spite of the death, the skinning, dismemberment, and refashioning, the animal form holds. The eyes may be glass, but the animal stares back. An animal – even if taxidermied – is not an arbitrary object.'⁵⁸ The *Breathless Zoo* outlines seven 'cultures of longing' underpinning taxidermies' prized status by humans through history: wonder, beauty, spectacle, order, narrative, allegory, and remembrance. She depicts animality as almost overwhelmed by culture through the human desire to own – to have – the animal: 'in a sense, the animal has been hijacked, pervaded with artistic intention, made to speak a message.'⁵⁹

Chapter 3, 'Making', my chapter on taxidermy as hand craft, explores how animal remains and the taxidermist both continued to play roles in taxidermy. Animality and human intention were not always at odds. Taxidermy was a coming-together of skin, manipulation by the human hand, a human imagining of the animal, and the shadow presence of the once-living

⁵⁵ L. E. Thorsen, K. Rader and A. Dodd, *Animals on Display: the Creaturely in Museums, Zoos, and Natural History* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 2, 4.

⁵⁶ In relation to Brindís Snaebjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson's exhibition of polar bears on Bristol's Spike Island (the same bears which Garry Marvin interprets), Poliquin writes: 'as dead and mounted animals, the bears are thoroughly cultural objects; yet as pieces of nature, the bears are thoroughly beyond culture. Animal or object? Animal and object? This is the irresolvable tension that defined all taxidermy.' Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo*, 5.

⁵⁷ Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo*, 109. See also Patchett 'Animal/ Object' in 'Putting Animals on Display', 21-59.

⁵⁸ Poliquin, 'The Matter and Meaning of Museum Taxidermy', 127.

⁵⁹ Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo*, 106.

animal. Poliquin's focus on the cultural desire for – and display of – taxidermy means that she does not fully grapple with the material animal body and its shifts and realignments. Poliquin provided inspiration through finding new ways to depict the unsettling nature of the taxidermy creature, and in revealing the human attraction to these skins; the Western desire, since the Enlightenment, to meet a glass-eyed gaze. Scholarship is beginning to take the taxidermy animal in several new directions. Nevertheless, it is still predominantly focused on, and continues to emphasise, the cultural layers of animal objects, as they were and are encountered in museum spaces.

My Approach

There are three – separate but connected – ways that this thesis advances on this current taxidermy scholarship. The first is a fleshing out of a material approach to taxidermy. The second is my use of the methodologies of environmental history. The third is my proposal of *taxidermy time*, and a focus on temporal and physical journeys. I developed this approach, which I outline in greater detail subsequently, to seek to answer the following questions:

- How was the taxidermy animal produced in Britain and the British Empire between 1820-1914?
- Was the animal specimen a product of flux or stasis?
- What is the material history of the animal skin and the taxidermy animal?
- How were the imaginings and fears of/for the taxidermy creature embodied and practised by humans?
- What can historians learn from taxidermy about time and temporality?

The first way in which I answer these questions, and advance on taxidermy scholarship, is by fleshing out a material approach. Many of the scholars I have outlined so-far acknowledge the continued animality of taxidermy (the bit of animal remaining in the animal remains), but their primary focus is on display or storytelling. I pay attention to Thorsen, whose writing is akin to an open letter, calling for more historians of animal specimens to take up the mantle of materialism.⁶⁰

Whilst scholars have analysed the object-animal boundary with relation to taxidermy, there remains a gap in current knowledge with regards to production: the meeting of animal and human, of motion, and unfolding. I develop such a material focus through an emphasis on historical production techniques, skinning, craft, matter and tools, bodies, fur, and fluids. To

⁶⁰ Thorsen, 'Animal Matter in Museums' in Kean and Howell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History*, 171-93.

do this, I draw on sensory history, and ideas on skin identity and embodiment. I look to skin – and the interactions between its physical and imagined forms – as integral to self-making. I see the skin as a site of exchange and change, between bodies and boundaries. A site of a human desire for material wholeness, and a fear of the animal skin disintegrating – becoming full of holes. This approach helps to rebalance the cultural focus of scholarship, which can obscure the varied *skin lives* of taxidermy animals. Through a material focus, my argument (and the historical taxidermy mount) rejects a presumption of inertia.

Second, this is an environmental history of taxidermy. The environmental focus brings a range of more-than-human actors into dialogue with taxidermy animals and humans: insects, bacteria, scavenger animals, domesticated creatures. The sea, the sun, the weather, the climate. These actors are not usually included in scholarship on taxidermy, though they all played a part in the taxidermy journey. An environmental focus adds context and life to the interactions of the past. Furthermore, as an environmental *history*, this thesis remains grounded in historical sources: in the writings, descriptions, articles, and handbooks about taxidermy.

An environmental history approach offers a new contribution to a field dominated by cultural theorists, anthropologists, and geographers. This thesis sees the humans who produced these writings, and co-produced these animal mounts, as thoroughly embedded in the biophysical world. It pays attention to a crucial period, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which the British taxidermy animal took shape, with and alongside the rise of British colonialism and museum science.

Third, this thesis looks to new stages and times in taxidermy history. Chapter 1, ‘Skinning’, proposes that hunted animals were potential taxidermy. It views taxidermy, and taxidermic skinning, as rooted in the geographies and histories of the colonial hunting field. It sees the ship, the camel’s back, and the packing case as crucial taxidermy sites. These are what I describe as the *skin lives* of taxidermy; the dead animal’s place, presence, and journey, before it was made into a mount, but after it had been designated as taxidermy of the future. This is to look at the entire production line of taxidermy, and to see taxidermy as a process, full of intermediary stages, and not a finished product.

I also explore the temporal journeys of skins and museum specimens through my new concept of *taxidermy time*. Most scholarship meets taxidermy on display, in the museum. The scholars who write on the animal/object hybridity often reinforce a model of stasis in their attention to the displayed mount, and inattention to changing displays, remounting, and the journeying that led an animal to a museum. This thesis looks to Victorian exhibition halls as spaces that were crucial in presenting techniques, disseminating ideas, and providing an arena for

experimentation with animal form. In reaching beyond the museum (temporally and geographically) I argue that taxidermy was always in the making. In doing so, this thesis breaks new physical ground, and unearths new histories of time, production, deconstruction, and creation.

Timely Deaths

To develop these approaches, and answer these questions, I have looked to a variety of fields and methods, with regards to history and time, bodies, and places. Poliquin argues that animal mounts should never be considered as ‘mute mounted skins.’⁶¹ I take inspiration from this suggestion that taxidermy could still talk – or, to put it more precisely, could have impact and influence on its surroundings, and on people. I propose this is something that can be seen even though an animal was dead, but also *because* it was dead. The deadness rendered the animal unable to run away, to bite, scratch, or eat the human hunter. Yet, it is also through death – death as a process – that animal skins caused a nuisance to British hunters, taxidermists, and natural history curators. Through death, a specimen sometimes declined to hold a form, it slipped into undesirable states.

The decay and deterioration of skins and taxidermy is everywhere in the primary sources. However, it is a subject very rarely touched upon in scholarship on taxidermy.⁶² I have therefore turned to cultural geography for ways to think about the breakdown of bodies and matter. Jamie Lorimer depicts the liveliness of rot: ‘yes, rot is about death, but it also speaks of life. Spending time with enthusiasts, I developed affections for rot. I learned of cycles, of the regenerative power of rot to compost and provision.’⁶³ Taxidermy, and taxidermic decay specifically, speak of dynamism through death. My thinking on decomposition has been supplemented by scholarship on insects and bacteria, the agents of fleshy recycling.⁶⁴

The literary scholar Sarah Bezan has written about taxidermy as it appears in novels and texts.⁶⁵ What is particularly relevant here, though, is her discussion on the general (literary) experience of death; she describes a ‘necro-ecology’, a multispecies alliance ‘that is made

⁶¹ Poliquin, ‘The Matter and Meaning of Museum Taxidermy’, 125.

⁶² For thoughts on animal death see: S. Bezan, ‘From the Mortician’s Scalpel to the Butcher’s Knife: Towards an Animal Thanatology’, *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, 10 (2012), 119-39.

⁶³ J. Lorimer, ‘Rot’, *Environmental Humanities*, 8 (2016), 235–39.

⁶⁴ H. Raffles, *Insectopedia* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011); S. Connor, *Fly* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006); J. Radin, ‘Rot’, *The Multispecies Salon* <http://www.multispecies-salon.org/rot/> [Accessed 21/10/19]. See also: E. Stroud, ‘Reflections from Six Feet Under the Field: Dead Bodies in the Classroom’, *Environmental History*, 8 (2003), 618-27; C. DeSilvey, *Curated Decay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

⁶⁵ Sarah Bezan co-edited the special edition issue on ‘Taxidermic Forms and Fictions.’ S. Bezan, ‘Taxidermic Forms and Fictions’, *Configurations: A Journal of Literature, Science, and Technology*, 27 (2019,) 131-38.

possible by and through death.⁶⁶ Moreover, the geographer Caitlin DeSilvey proposes that we should learn to live with and appreciate decay in heritage sites. DeSilvey explores the shifting ecological relationships between humans, animals, and buildings, and recognises the value of ‘embracing rather than resisting change’ and acknowledging that ‘the disintegration of structural integrity does not necessarily lead to the evacuation of meaning.’⁶⁷ I looked at natural history specimens, and I discovered that the entire identity of taxidermy was bound to the human fears, and physical realities, of decay (see Figure 1.3). This thesis does not only speak of breakdown, but also of rebuilding and realignments; of pulling the animal back from the brink. To understand taxidermy history is to think about time.

Even humans in the Western world, who generally imagine themselves as outside of natural time, existing only in the linear, are pulled back to earth by the making and reforming nature of decay. I explore temporal literature specifically in chapters 2 and 5, (‘Moving’ and ‘Displaying’). Broadly speaking, I have learnt about ecological time – and how turtles could also be clocks – from the philosopher Michelle Bastian.⁶⁸ Work on the knotted nature of time by the late philosopher Deborah Bird Rose has shaped my thinking about the interactions of different times: bodily, imagined, natural.⁶⁹ Through taxidermy, different times – the temporalities of the sea, insect life cycles, the confines of equatorial daylight on the human trying to see and skin a body, the taxidermist’s workday, and the dreams of a perpetual museum time – came together in skin matter.

Paul Huebener has elucidated the importance of thinking with time, in the age of the Anthropocene.⁷⁰ He demonstrates the ways in which human imaginings of time, and different natural times, are failing; the cycles, lines, and intersections, broken. The way that times come together is never as important as when the world is crashing down around us. Historians have also taken a temporal turn, within a subject that was already deeply imbedded in time.⁷¹ The

⁶⁶ S. Bezan, ‘Necro-Eco: The Ecology of Death in Jim Crace’s *Being Dead*.’ *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 8 (2015), 191-207. See also: J. Jones, ‘Fish Out of Water: The “Prince of Whales” Sideshow and the Environmental Humanities’, *Configurations*, 25 (2017), 189-214.

⁶⁷ C. DeSilvey, ‘Postpreservation’ in *Curated Decay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 4,5.

⁶⁸ M. Bastian, ‘Fatally Confused: Telling the Time in the Midst of Ecological Crises’, *Journal of Environmental Philosophy*, 9 (2012), 23-48.

⁶⁹ D. Bird Rose, ‘Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time’, *Environmental Philosophy*, 9 (2012), 127-40. See also: Bird Rose, van Dooren and Chrulew, *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death and Generations*.

⁷⁰ P. Huebener, *Nature’s Broken Clocks: Reimagining Time in the Face of the Environmental Crisis* (Re: University of Regina Press, 2020).

⁷¹ M. Champion, ‘The History of Temporalities: An Introduction’, *Past and Present*, 243 (2019), 247-54; A. Fryxell, ‘Time and the Modern: Current Trends in the History of Modern Temporalities’, *Past and Present*, 243 (2019), 285-98; M. Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time: Michel Serres with Bruno Latour* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 59, 60; and E. Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

environmental historian Frank Uekötter reflecting on the Covid-19 pandemic, argues that the Western human focus on linearity makes people feel soothed and ordered:

First, people favor simple linear narratives for a reason. Stories are a human coping mechanism, and this coping mechanism is particularly in demand in the face of an event with no obvious sense or purpose: a natural disaster, a pandemic, an industrial accident. Stories provide moral clarity or at least the semblance thereof. In other words, linear storytelling is as much about feeling well when words are failing as it is about understanding things.⁷²

I have explained how the taxidermy animal is often imagined, or at least idealised, as static – a state desired by Victorian hunters, taxidermists, and museum workers, and interpreted by postcolonial scholars. Whilst these narratives clearly originated in very different places, they both construct the physical specimen as stuck in time and place, never moving forward or backward, whilst humans used (dead) animal bodies to style narratives of progress.

I take inspiration from the anthropologist Adrian Van Allen’s concept of folded time. She argues that past, present, and future are ‘folded’ into the creation of bird specimens, through a focus on the changing tools and preparation kits.⁷³ I discovered that taxidermy mounts were sites where different temporalities came together: from the forward pull of time, and the rush of decay, to the sometimes return of form through preserving fluids. Chapters 2 and 5 (‘Moving’ and ‘Displaying’) also consider temporal repeats and patches; the experiences of taxidermy animals that might occur again and again. These conceptions of time – of *taxidermy time* – are grounded in changes to the animal body. The interest in, and conceptualisations of, ecological time have germinated from a movement in the growing field of environmental humanities. This is to see all lifeforms, events, lives, cultures, and times as interrelated and intermixed; something commonly referred to as an entanglement. The anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing argues – in her book on the relationship between capitalism and matsutake mushrooms – that ‘entanglement bursts categories and upends identities.’⁷⁴

Lowenhaupt Tsing, and many other voices in the environmental humanist conversation, also refer to such mixings as assemblages. ‘Organisms don’t have to show their human equivalence (as conscious agents, intentional communicators, or ethical subjects) to count. If we are interested in livability, impermanence, and emergence, we should be watching the action of landscape assemblages. Assemblages coalesce, change, and dissolve: this is the story.’⁷⁵

⁷² Frank Uekötter, ‘In Order to Understand COVID-19, Historians Need to Leave Their Academic Silos’, Reflections: Environmental History in the Era of COVID-19, *Environmental History*, 25 (2020), 672-5.

⁷³ A. Van Allen, ‘Folding Time: Practices of Preservation, Temporality and Care in Making Bird Specimens’ in R. Harrison and C. Sterling (eds.) *Deterritorializing the Future: Heritage In, Of and After the Anthropocene* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2020), 120-54.

⁷⁴ A. Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 2015), 137.

⁷⁵ Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 158.

Taxidermy history certainly demonstrates this ephemerality, this propensity for mixing and changeability. It rejects total linearity. By identifying this assemblage and tracking its changes and continuities against time and cultural histories (and ideas such as teleology), I hope to demonstrate why such conceptualisations matter.⁷⁶ How such coming-togethers might matter to history and historians, to museums and curators; how they form the very core of our existing narratives. How they add substance to the afterlives of the animals of the past. How they can be accessible, approachable, and useful for rethinking, in this case, historical hunting and collecting, travelling, taxidermy craft, and display.



Figure 1.3: An aged, faded, and nibbled mandrill specimen in Bristol Museum. @Bristol Culture.

⁷⁶ I take inspiration from Eva Haifa Giraud's *What Comes After Entanglement?* Haifa Giraud argues that a focus on entanglements, whilst moving beyond an anthropocentric worldview, can undermine calls for action. E. Haifa Giraud, *What Comes After Entanglement?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

Sensing and Influencing

Assemblages have their roots in conceptions of agency, as described across both the social sciences and the humanities. Rodney Harrison, a museum scholar, draws on Tony Bennett to describe the networked ‘agencement’ in field collecting; the web of actors, of people, tools and experiences that resulted in the display of objects in a museum. Actors play different parts – but they all contribute.⁷⁷ As Lowenhaupt Tsing acknowledges, an assemblage (or indeed Harrison’s field agencement) should not be assigned human ideas of consciousness and intentionality. But they could still have influence: on humans, and on the wider ecological world.⁷⁸ Helen Steward outlines a basic premise for animal agency, arguing that in their lives, nest making, food seeking, play, and predation, animals are absolutely agents.⁷⁹ But what about dead animals?

A decaying skin drew a human back to it, just as it produced the smells to lure in the blow fly. One was attracted by anxieties around the loss of animal wholeness and the disintegration of the skin as a commodity, the other by hunger and a drive to reproduce. The skin did not have to intend to attract these multispecies visitors – but its luring ways remain significant. When humans reconstructed the animal through taxidermy, they used their own imaginings of that creature. But the skin (its heaviness, thickness, hardness; its constraints and size) still guided this process, as did what I think of as the *shadow presence* of the animal that had once inhabited that skin. Skins still contained the potential and the ability to press themselves on more-than-human lives, as well as human thought and action.

Scholarly efforts have aimed, in the words of geographers Emel and Wolch, to ‘understand how nature-culture boundaries were drawn and redrawn over time as a result of both cultural processes, ecological features and agency, and their interactions.’⁸⁰ I have also looked to the thinking on agency in the field of new materialism. Jane Bennett conceptualises vibrant

⁷⁷ R. Harrison, ‘On Heritage Ontologies: Rethinking the Material Worlds of Heritage’, Special Collection: World Heritage and the Ontological Turn, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 91, (2018), 1375-6; and T. Bennett, *Making Culture, Changing Society* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013). Such ideas have a basis in Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory. This theory proposes that agency exists in associative networks amongst humans and non-humans: B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also: J. Murdoch, ‘Inhuman/nonhuman/human: Actor-Network Theory and the Prospects for a Non-dualistic and Symmetrical Perspective on Nature and Society’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 15 (1997), 731-56; Nance (ed.), *The Historical Animal*, 12, 133-6.

⁷⁸ Influence is a term the environmental historian Andy Flack uses to discuss agency. See: “In Sight, Insane”: Animal Agency, Captivity and the Frozen Wilderness in the Late-Twentieth Century’ *Environment and History*, 22 (2016), 629-52.

⁷⁹ H. Steward, ‘Animal Agency’, *Inquiry*, 52 (2009), 217. See also: R. Foltz ‘Does Nature have Historical Agency? World History, Environmental History and How Historians Can Help Save the Planet’, *The History Teacher*, 37 (2003), 9-28.

⁸⁰ J. Emel and J. Wolch, ‘Preface’, *Animal Geographies*, xv.

matter.⁸¹ Others are object-oriented; looking to the influences of known objects, or things and bits and pieces.⁸² Karen Barad, speaking about present time, conceptualises the ‘thick infinite now’, an articulation of how time and matter are always in conversation.⁸³ Such arguments work to counter the deadening of our surrounding world, to stop it becoming overshadowed by the umbrella of culture. The natural world can and has been portrayed as dulled: Emel and Wolch explain that, with social constructionism, ‘In so completely denaturalizing nature and treating geographic places as cultural productions, the agency of nature and especially animals was denied.’⁸⁴ As I demonstrate in this thesis, even dead things should not be viewed as entirely deadened.

The environmental and animal historian Dolly Jørgensen has outlined how guilt at animal species loss often plays a part in our imaginings of the past, and our attempts to reconstruct animal life through rewilding and reintroduction projects. She suggests, with reference to the European beaver, that people felt a ‘personal guilt over the beaver’s extinction at the hands of others.’⁸⁵ Guilt similarly contributes to the creation of scholarly narratives around taxidermy. Historians want to condemn the actions of the past, the mountain of animal bodies created through the trade in specimens and other natural materials for science. This is particularly the case as these deaths were so bound up in other structures and practices, including colonialism.

The art historian Giovanni Aloï, in *Speculative Taxidermy*, which explores taxidermy and art in the Anthropocene, suggests how ‘a relentless emphasis on animal death has negatively characterized taxidermy through the lens of postcolonial critique and limits serious scholarly consideration of its agency in art.’⁸⁶ Whilst I recognise that it is impossible to untangle ourselves from the present, and I acknowledge the importance of the postcolonial lens, I agree that care should be taken not to allow presentism – current ideologies, feelings and values – to entirely dictate the narrative. This can obscure the focus on afterlives and produce a blunting of animal material. However, unlike Aloï, I think this can still be achieved with an emphasis on death, and through engagement with the ecologies of death and decay. It is possible to hold both states in mind simultaneously: the taxidermy animal as a symbolic and

⁸¹ J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁸² G. Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Penguin UK, Pelican, 2018); K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁸³ K. Barad in a keynote at the Material Life of Time conference in March 2021. See also: Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

⁸⁴ Emel and Wolch, *Animal Geographies*, xv.

⁸⁵ D. Jørgensen, *Recovering Lost Species in the Modern Age: Histories of Longing and Belonging* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 25, 23-54.

⁸⁶ G. Aloï, *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 197.

material representative of colonial violence, and the specimen as embodying animality and an ability to influence through its deadness.

To view the influence of taxidermy on the people, environments, and other actors of the past, is to give the animal specimen more shape. To flesh it out. To pay attention. Thom Van Dooren, Eben Kirksey and Ursula Münster propose that scholars are becoming more attentive to the ‘lifeworlds’ of species other than humans.⁸⁷ I think we should also be attentive to their deathworlds. Another way that I do this is to probe the embodied interactions between actors, particularly with and between skins. Studies of the past are so often focused on the visual. To correct this, a movement towards multi-sensory histories has arisen in recent decades. Some are turning to touch – and how humans have experienced and felt the world around them.⁸⁸ However, the cultural historian Constance Classen argues that there is still a paucity of historical writing on touch: ‘touch lies at the heart of our experience of ourselves and the world yet it often remains unspoken of and, even more so, unhistoricized.’⁸⁹

Touch is often bound to the skin. In the 1980s, the philosopher Michel Serres argued that the (human) skin is a ‘milieu’, a meeting place through which we experience the surrounding world.⁹⁰ Skin was considered by the philosopher and psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu as an expression of the human self – Anzieu described the ‘skin ego.’⁹¹ In recent decades, scholarship on touch, and on the uses and meanings of skin, has turned to bodily matter; this corporeal focus draws on scholarship on embodiment and the history of the body. These are areas that have developed with and alongside the rise of new materialism.⁹² I have looked to the body of work on skin identity. Authors such as the literary scholars Steven Connor and Claudia Benthien, and the gender and disability theorist Margrit Shildrick, argue that the human self

⁸⁷ T. Van Dooren, E. Kirksey, and U. Münster, ‘Multispecies Studies: Cultivating Arts of Attentiveness’, *Environmental Humanities*, 8 (2016), 1-23.

⁸⁸ J. Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); P. Coates, ‘The Strange Stillness of the Past: Toward an Environmental History of Sound and Noise’, *Environmental History*, 10 (2005), 636-65. M. Jenner, ‘Follow Your Nose? Smell, Smelling, and Their Histories’, *American Historical Review*, 116 (2011), 335-51; C. Classen, D. Howes, and A. Synnott (eds.), *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London: Routledge, 1994); J. Reinartz, *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

⁸⁹ C. Classen, ‘The Inside Story’, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), xii.

⁹⁰ See for instance: M. Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008).

⁹¹ D. Anzieu, *The Skin-Ego* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁹² See: J. E. H. Smith (ed.), *Embodiment: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Z. Maalej and N. Yu (eds.), *Embodiment via Body Parts: Studies from Various Languages and Cultures* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 2011); C. Classen, *The Book of Touch* (Oxford: Berg, 2005). The new materialist foundation for this turn towards things bodily and physical includes: S. Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); A. Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

is bound up in both the cultural construction of skin, and the skin as a place of physical interactions between the body and the world.⁹³

Nevertheless, these authors write only of the human skin, and largely an imaginary one at that. Barely anyone has written about animal skin. An exception is Ann Colley, who has explored the myriad (living and dead) uses of wild animal skins in Victorian Britain. Her work is especially useful in depicting how specimen collection was often more a process of chaos than of imperial order, contradicting the classic narrative of control.⁹⁴ She therefore unsettles the idea that animal bodies could also be controlled – I explore her influence in greater detail in Chapter 1, ‘Skinning’, and Chapter 2, ‘Moving’.

Through taxidermy, animals *became* a skin. When touching an animal, we have always felt their skin through our own skin. I see the skin as a site of identity formation and loss – something that relates to both animal and human identity. This is explored in relation to skinning, and embodied taxidermy craft, for which I draw on anthropological theories on handicraft.⁹⁵ It is also touched on in relation to museum space, and curatorial practices of conservation, and remounting.

The final chapter considers museums as pivotal places in the continued journeying of the taxidermy animal. This body of work will be discussed further in Chapter 5, ‘Displaying’, but broadly speaking, I have looked at writing in museum studies and museum history to learn more about processes and theory of collection and display. Steven Conn has argued for the continued importance of object, and object theory, in museum spaces.⁹⁶ Sarah Kenderdine and Andrew Yip explore the creation and maintenance of a sense of ‘aura’ as attributed to museum objects, by exploring digitisation, and codes of authenticity.⁹⁷ As taxidermy is always about recreating both the look of an animal species, and the appearance of life, I view authenticity as central to taxidermy history.

⁹³ C. Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); S. Connor, *The Book of Skin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); M. Shildrick, ‘Corporeal Cuts: Surgery and the Psycho-Social’, *Body and Society*, 14 (2008), 31-46; M. Shildrick ‘Re-Imagining Embodiment: Prostheses, Supplements and Boundaries’, *Somatechnics*, 3 (2013), 270-86. See also: Classen, *The Book of Touch*; A. Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); P. Gilbert, *Victorian Skin: Surface, Self, History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

⁹⁴ A. Colley, *Wild Animal Skins in Victorian Britain: Zoos, Collections, Portraits, and Maps* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 70-4.

⁹⁵ R. Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin, 2009); H. Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); T. Ingold, ‘Telling by Hand’ in *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013); P. Capuano, *Changing Hands: Industry, Evolution, and the Reconfiguration of the Victorian Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

⁹⁶ Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*

⁹⁷ S. Kenderdine and A. Yip, ‘The Proliferation of Aura: Facsimiles, Authenticity and Digital Objects’, in K. Drotner, V. Dziekan, R. Parry & K. Christian Schröder (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Museums, Media and Communication* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 274-89.

Fiona Candlin argues that in specific museums – in particular, small, and independent organisations – objects can be ‘kept alive’ and continue to be considered as ‘potent.’⁹⁸ She contrasts this liveliness with larger museums, which ‘kill off’ their materials through the implementation of umbrella narratives and policy. Candlin sees the inertia of the larger institutions as a state which could and should be ended; it is not a necessary condition for museums. Such theories of liveliness seem particularly relevant to taxidermy; something with a past life, positioned to look alive. The work of Sharon Macdonald is valuable in thinking about what exhibitions and displays do not say. She argues that:

exploring the exhibitionary selections, styles and silences is not, however, an easy matter. Exhibitions tend to be presented to the public rather as do scientific facts: as unequivocal statements rather than as the outcome of particular processes and contexts. The assumptions, rationales, compromises, and accidents that lead to a finished exhibition are generally hidden from public view: they are tidied away along with the cleaning equipment, the early drafts of text and the artefacts for which no place could be found.⁹⁹

Museums were not necessarily an ending for the taxidermy animal, and neither did they represent a moment of certainty and stillness.¹⁰⁰ This thesis looks to the changing material relationship between taxidermy and museum space. Through the processes of remounting and repeating, aging and removal, it looks behind and beyond the taxidermic display.

Methods, Sources and Handling

This introduction has so far outlined how my new approach to taxidermy will add form and solidity to the animal specimen of the past. This approach looks to a wide range of theories and methods, on skin and senses, time, geographies of decay, entanglements, and agency, from both within and outside the field of history. I employ these to draw out the historical complexity of animal specimens, and the interactions between dead animal and human. These approaches and methodologies were carefully selected because of their relevance to the primary material. I looked to the sources first and foremost, and found I needed to know more about insects, about deadness, about skin selves. The primary material guided these selections.

⁹⁸ F. Candlin, ‘Keeping Objects Live’, in M. Henning (ed.), *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Media* (Wiley-Blackwell Online, 2015), 279-304.

⁹⁹ Macdonald, ‘Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition’, in *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ There is a growing movement to decolonise museums, and to contextualising all objects within their varied narratives and meanings and recognising the pivotal role of empires – past and present – in the violence of museum formation and legacy making. This also speaks to repatriation, and to paying attention to non-Western ways of being in the world. See: Hicks, *The Brutish Museums*.

This thesis is clearly shaped by environmental history, as well as the aligned field of animal history. Environmental history – in all its subdisciplines and forms – teaches us that humans have always lived in the environment, and all actions – our concepts of gender, race, class, politics, and identity – are part of an interaction with a wider world of ecology, plants, insects, weather, climate, and other animals. Environmental history underlines that, whilst humans are the only species to be able to write history, we are not the only actors that can influence and make it. It has taught us that all places, from the concrete jungle to the steamy rainforest, are environments, and have a history that encompasses the interactions between nature and humans. Consequently, the museum, the exhibition hall, the travelling case, and the studio, are all places for environmental history. When I read my primary sources, they spoke loudly and clearly of environmental processes and exchanges.

This thesis explores these exchanges, with relation to the taxidermy creature, between 1820 and 1914. From the early decades of the 1800s, varying techniques were evaluated and discussed in taxidermy handbooks, and Sarah Bowdich Lee's influential *Taxidermy* was published in 1820. This marks the first widely disseminated taxidermy manual. This development coincided with the widespread diffusion of preservatives such as arsenical soap; and the ability to – sometimes – contain the animal. To hold it in a desired shape for longer. This thesis tracks British trends as they developed (or retreated) across the long nineteenth century. These products and methods were cultivated alongside the growing belief that bits of dead animals could and should be preserved. This thesis takes in wider colonial histories, such as the birth of exhibitions, and the acceleration of hunting, and museum building. The conclusion discusses recent museums and times; however, I mostly concentrate on the period up until the outbreak of the First World War. With this global happening, British interests were often diverted from taxidermy re-creation, marking the end of the long nineteenth century of taxidermy.

However, this thesis does not track taxidermy chronologically. Instead, each chapter pays attention to the different stages in a taxidermy animal's journey: through skinning, transportation, craft, exhibitions, and museum display. It is skin led. It travels with the skin, through different local and global lenses. It also moves between the micro and the macro scales. The first chapters focus on the animal as skin, but in a global imperial context. In the subsequent chapters, the skin undergoes changes and additions, as it travelled to and within Britain. The focus moves outwards, to take in a skin's mounted form, display, context, and the exhibition or museum space. It sets out to map taxidermy time, rather than the development of taxidermy over time.

The core arguments of this thesis are tightly formed around primary material. I have drawn extensively on the archives of my case study museums: Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, the

Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) in Exeter, and the National Museum in Cardiff. The relevant material is incompletely documented and spread irregularly across these buildings. Nevertheless, these museums hold a wealth of sources. This profusion of material includes museum correspondence with taxidermists and hunters, museum guides, sources pertaining to individual specimens and their displays, architectural plans, annual reports, photographs, and letters. They contain information relevant to the entire taxidermy process, not just museum captivity. These archives were also where I found physical copies of taxidermy handbooks. I researched the records of Charles Peel at the Bodleian Library. Peel is one of the main human actors met in this thesis. He was a prolific hunter, and his specimens made up the majority of the RAMMs collection. Before he transferred his collection to Exeter, he had a museum in Oxford. The Bodleian includes the guide to his Oxford museum, and all his hunting books, such as *Somaliland*, and diaries.

I have also examined physical and online newspaper archives for local papers (in Bristol, Exeter, and Cardiff), and the national British print media, such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Field*. Taxidermists often competed, and compared technique, through letters published in national newspapers. I have accessed exhibition and museum guides, and numerous diaries, taxidermy and hunting and field manuals: for instance, Sarah Bowdich Lee's *Taxidermy*, the outputs of Rowland Ward, and the writings of Charles Waterton. I also conducted research at the Brunel Institute Archives, to access material on customs and shipping. Taken together, these sources offer a detailed overview of *skin lives*. They have also enabled me to track specific specimens: such as the RAMM's giraffe specimen, from site of killing near Mount Kilimanjaro, to display in Oxford, and transferal to Exeter. Yet, animal specimens also serve as an archive in themselves. Stitches snake across the faded skin of Gerald the giraffe (the same giraffe specimen, who is now the RAMM mascot) at the intersections between his torso, neck, and legs. These suggest to the onlooker that his body was hacked into six parts before transit to Britain. This is confirmed by Peel's diary entries, which describe the dismemberment of the giraffe that would become Gerald.

I have read newspapers and published letters in the press, and personal correspondence, to uncover both public and private histories. To find what was common knowledge, and what was sometimes sequestered away. This remains a source base created by white, generally middle class, nineteenth century men. However, in its attention to animal bodies, this is not a history of those men. I read against the grain: to find the lively dead animal within. Many of the animals encountered in this thesis— many of these skins — no longer have a physical presence, although some do.

As Fudge has underscored, the animal can never write its own history, or leave us sources to suggest what such a history should look like.¹⁰¹ Historians try to piece back together the stories of these taxidermy creatures through descriptions and records – we are reliant on the human voice and the animal trace. And yet, my material focus came about precisely because the corporeal changes relating to animal specimens, and their encounters with humans, are so apparent in the archive. Fudge explains that the ‘the inevitable centrality of the human in the history of animals – the reliance upon documents created by humans – need not be regarded as a failing, because if a history of animals is to be distinctive it must offer us what we might call an “interspecies competence”’.¹⁰² The presence of these animal skins, the disruption and the changes associated with them, compelled the human to write and record. This claim draws on thinking in material ecocriticism, which sees ‘that matter and meaning constitute the fabric of our storied world.’¹⁰³ The material skin might be gone, but its influence remains palpable.

To get to know taxidermy, I also undertook a one-day taxidermy course with my supervisor Peter Coates, as an element of my methodological approach. He taxidermied a rabbit, I attempted to re-create a rat, and we were taught by a practising taxidermist in a small group. We used (more or less) the traditional early-mid Victorian technique: sending wires down the limbs for flexibility, and then packing the skin space with wood wool to literally stuff the animal. I read up on practise-led research to aid my reflections on the course.¹⁰⁴ I am aware that my experience of taxidermy can never be the same as that of an early Victorian; my worldview is entirely different, and I could never detach myself from my experiences, opinions, emotions, and intentions, when practising. There were some very modern intrusions to our practice; we used hair dryers to speed up the drying process, and plastic toothbrushes to add a sense of movement to the fur. Even the animal I practised on was post-Victorian: white laboratory rats were only shaped as a subspecies in the twentieth century, alongside the rise of animal testing and laboratory science.

Nevertheless, I gleaned much from the course. I learned about the specificities of technique, and about the balance between strength and delicacy needed to skin and debone a creature. As a handcraft, it is difficult. As an art form, it is even more tricky; it gave me a begrudging respect for all taxidermists in the past, anyone who managed to make a skin look like a living animal. It helped me to reflect on time, and it also added the tactility and the sensory element

¹⁰¹ Fudge, ‘Left-Handed Blow’, 11.

¹⁰² Fudge, ‘Left-Handed Blow’, 11.

¹⁰³ S. Iovinno and S. Oppermann (eds.) ‘Introduction’ in *Material Ecocriticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 5.

¹⁰⁴ H. Smith and R. Dean (eds.) *Practice-led Research, Practice-led Practice in the Creative Arts (Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); H. Hawkins, ‘Geography and Art. An Expanding Field: Site, the Body and Practice’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 37 (2012), 52-71.

of taxidermy back in. These things (smells and noises) are often missing from nineteenth-century handbooks. Perhaps this speaks of strong stomachs, and expectations of masculinity regarding the Victorian hunter and taxidermist. It is likely a result of a nineteenth-century proximity to death and bodies, and my own distance from such corporeal processes.¹⁰⁵

Some things were known and expected in the past and did not need to be put into writing. There is a dominance of seeing and feeling in the instructions for how to do taxidermy – a hierarchy of senses – as sight and touch were the senses that enabled a Victorian taxidermist to craft a mount. Practising gave me an awareness of the omissions and the absences in sources, to think about the relationship between lived experience, and the story presented about such experiences; the things quietly felt and known. Practising also made it abundantly clear that taxidermy engages with tangible, disorderly and visceral animal death, and that this messiness should forever be a part of its history.

Structure

This thesis meets the taxidermy animal in the colonial hunting ground. Chapter 1 ('Skinning') proposes that all animals, when hunted with one eye on museum procurement, were potential taxidermy. These animals were sized up as walking, living skins. I explore the physical processes of skinning, and outline the fears embodied by British hunters regarding the separation of the skin from the treacherous carcass. This was an (unequal) network of human action and power, as British hunters employed the knowledge and the labour of local and indigenous peoples to strip the dead animal of its inner form. This chapter argues that there was a tension between the shrinkage of the animal body under the action of the scalpel, the consequent creation of the animal skin-self, and the lengths British hunters undertook to protect these animal remains from the loss of further bodily material. I look to the geographical case studies of India and (the country then known as) Somaliland – both of which were incorporated into the British Empire by the late nineteenth century.

Chapter 2 ('Moving') tracks the mobile skin, as it was transferred, by animal, and by ship, through the environments of Empire and across oceans to Britain. I argue that, in conjunction with the movement of fluids and forms (such as the seep of decay, preserving liquors, and the spreading humidity of ship travel), the mobile skin was subjected to complex temporalities. I explore the multidirectional movements of skins, as they travelled across time, land, and sea. Time could be paused, or sometimes sped up, with and with relation to the animal specimen. Skins might also be subjected to insect life cycles and times. This chapter tracks trends in preservation, primarily the rise and fall of arsenical soap across the long nineteenth century.

¹⁰⁵ See for instance: T. Taylor, *The Buried Soul: How Humans Invented Death* (London: Fourth Estate, 2002).

Such preparations went to work on animal skins, in a bid to create the ideal suspended state, whilst specimens were rolled and boxed up for onward travel. I discovered that humans could not always control the pluritemporalities and materialities of the (time) travelling specimen.

The studio was the next stage in the journey of the taxidermy creature. Chapter 3 ('Making') focuses on the human hand as the meeting place between the human and animal. It looks to the embodied relationship between taxidermist, hand, animal skin, and the possibility of continued animality in the taxidermy specimen. I argue that taxidermy embodied an active present. I track the changes in the wider craft of taxidermy; as something that moved from stuffing, to modelling in clay and papier-mâché. I also look to influential case studies, such as the outputs of Charles Waterton (1782-1865), who crafted his specimens with no internal support, only skin, mercury chloride, and the massaging of his fingers. This chapter demonstrates that specimens were always products of movement, of knowledge flow and handling, and asks whether animal skin and hand could work together.

Chapter 4 ('Exhibiting') argues that exhibitions were crucial to the development of British taxidermy. It looks to the Great Exhibition (1851) the Colonial and Indian Exhibition (1886) and the Empire of India Exhibition (1895). Exploring the theme of reproduction – the animal body remade in the fertile ground of the exhibition hall – I demonstrate how taxidermic technique and display trends were born out of exhibition space. However, I also argue that there was an undercurrent of hybridity, and experimentation; something mirrored by the ephemeral and changeable nature and time of exhibition space. Exhibitions were essential shapers of British taxidermy, and they shaped by meddling with budding notions of authenticity and animality.

The themes that hold this thesis together – precarity, time, handling, hybridity, and the tension between porosity and wholeness – are brought together in the final chapter. Chapter 5 ('Displaying') looks to museum space through the case studies of the RAMM (Exeter), the National Museum of Wales (Cardiff), Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, and Charles Peel's Oxford Museum. It looks specifically to temporality, to argue that, in museums, places often seen as stable and controllable, taxidermy remained mobile. Specimens were pulled forwards by aging and human manipulation. However, I argue that they were also sites of repetition, grounded in and around animal skin, which I conceptualise as patches of time. Temporality might be repeated through the return of taxidermy time and remounting, continued visitations from insects, or the inclusion of specimens in elaborate hunting scenes and the retelling of their deaths. Taxidermy, natural history curation and preservation – the making, unmaking and repetitions of animal specimens – were open-ended processes.

Why Does This (Animal Matter) Matter?

This thesis adds a fullness to the stories of historical taxidermy creatures. It recognises that dead animals could be both dominated and leave an impression. It acknowledges that they were part of a process, not a complete deadening, and that their remains could be simultaneously symbolic, and an ecosystem in flux. I do not attempt to separate taxidermy from the histories of the humans who made them and wrote their stories. Instead, I look to interactions; to ideas and fears as put into motion, to try to give shape to the dead animals of the past. I pay attention, and respect, to the form and influence of historical animal remains.

My arguments have clear relevance for those interested in museums and taxidermy. They encourage others to think outside of museum space, about process and journeying, and to engage with the unexpected actors as they are offered up by primary material – among them beetles, camels, hands, and vultures. Within the museum, they trouble an idea of object staticity, timelessness, and fixed meaning, and bring into dialogue Macdonald's 'assumptions, rationales, compromises, and accidents': the things that are often tidied away.¹⁰⁶ The taxidermy animal's remnant body is its legacy; and it is only by thinking through the relationship between aging, preservation, and meaning that choices can be made as to what to conserve – to return to – and what to leave be.

More widely, thinking with temporalities holds a particular relevance in our current troubled times. Taxidermy history is a tale in the wider storybook on the human exploitation of planet earth. In 2019, the Anthropocene Working Group ruled that the Anthropocene, this new geological epoch defined by human action and inaction, began with the nuclear age.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, its roots spread into the nineteenth century, the time when colonialist hunters eyed-up the animals of the world.¹⁰⁸ Taxidermy embodies the catastrophically damaging thinking and doing that contributed to mass extinction.

However, one of the possible dangers of thinking with the Anthropocene is that one sees only human supremacy. Humans look at the wider world and see themselves – or, more specifically, the largely Western-imposed devastation of the global environment. It is monolithic: a human centric conception of time.¹⁰⁹ Historians need to look to history and

¹⁰⁶ Macdonald, 'Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition', in *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, 2.

¹⁰⁷ See: M. Subramanian, 'Anthropocene Now: Influential Panel Votes to Recognize Earth's New Epoch' *Nature*, 21 May 2019 <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01641-5> [Accessed 21/04/2021].

¹⁰⁸ There has been a considerable debate about the start date: whether the Anthropocene is a thing of capitalism, empire, and the industrial age, or of nuclear time post-1945. See: 'Roundtable: The Anthropocene in British History' *Journal of British Studies*, 57 (2018), 568-96.

¹⁰⁹ See: D. Haraway, 'Staying with the Trouble: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene' in J. Moore (ed.) *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), 34-35.

simultaneously see the small instances of push-back. The nuisance causing things. The deterioration of a prized skin, destined for a museum, by the action of bacteria. Thinking with materiality and time – times within and overlapping with the wider conception of the Anthropocene – enables us to go some way to fleshing out the dead animals of the past. It would be ahistorical to picture the taxidermist and the hunter as ever in complete control. To look to these material processes, little and big, is to see value in the life and death of the past.

Chapter 1: Skinning

Old Eland bulls have very little hair on their skins, and look a dark slaty – brown colour, owing to the colour of the skin showing through the scanty hair, and on these old animals, naturally enough, no sign of stripes can be perceived.¹

I shot the old bull and the two younger ones, and as the former was a magnificent animal, prepared his skin for setting up, and hoped some day to see him in the British Museum, set up in a manner that would recall to my mind, in some degree, the splendid creature he looked when alive, though I was fully aware how difficult it must be to mount these large skins so as to do them justice... This hope has been realised, and this magnificent animal may now be seen in our national collection.²

Frederick Selous chose this eland bull for his magnificence, and his ‘size and bulk.’ His muscular body was large, and consequently so was his ‘slaty’ coloured skin. The bull was selected, shot, and skinned by Selous in 1883 in the wilds of ‘Mashunaland’ in modern day Zimbabwe. The skin was all Selous wanted from the animal. The hunter soon busied himself with ‘preparing the big eland’s skin with arsenical soap.’ Selous hunted with taxidermy on his mind, and his taxidermic aspirations are outlined at the beginning of his 1893 account *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*. A famed elephant-hunter, in 1881 Selous had visited the African creatures in the Natural History department of the British Museum and documented numerous animal absences. Many ‘noble forms were not represented at all.’³ Selous noted that those that were present in the museum, in specimen form, were often ‘old and dilapidated.’ He soon set sail for Africa with orders from both the ‘British and South African Museums’ and a London based ‘dealer in natural history specimens’, to search for the taxidermy of the future.⁴

Selous, his workers, and skin-conveying wagon, snaked across the plateaus and the highlands of south-eastern Africa throughout the 1880s. He was not just looking for animals to kill for sport; he was looking for animals to preserve. I argue that such creatures were *potential taxidermy*. They were killed, skinned, and treated in such a way as to keep the animal skin intact and viable for remaking into natural history specimens. However, as organic matter, these skins had a tendency to disintegrate. Taking a fresh, material approach to the skin and the skin hunt, I contend that skinning was an intrinsic part of the wider taxidermy process. This chapter explores human interactions with the physical skin, the realities of corporeal

¹ F. Selous in J. G Dollman, *Catalogue of the Selous Collection of Big Game in the British Museum* (London: By Order of the Trustees of the British Museum, 1921), 73.

² F. Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa* (London: Rowland Ward Limited, 1893), 90.

³ Selous, *Travel and Adventure*, 2.

⁴ Selous, *Travel and Adventure*, 2, 3.

breakdown, and the fears bound to the skin by British hunters and naturalists regarding integrity and epidermic wholeness.

To access the world of taxidermic skinning, I engage with the literature on human skin. Much of this writing, such as literary scholar Claudia Benthien's *Skin: on the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, focuses on the skin as a reflection of what it means to be human.⁵ Humans often equate skin with selfhood, as encompassing and reflecting the human, and as something used to both assign societal groupings and express individuality. Abbie Garrington describes skin as the 'most conspicuous' representation of the body.⁶ It is essential to self-making as skin is what is visible of the human. Non-human animals are conspicuously absent in this scholarship; these authors write of skin as if it is possessed only by human animals.⁷ However, this literature still offers a way into thinking about the animal.

The philosopher Michel Serres argues that the (human) skin is a milieu; a meeting place through which humans experience the surrounding world.⁸ Therefore, when touching animals, their skin is felt with and through our own skin. The anthropologist Nina Jablonski describes skin as a 'selectively permeable sheath.'⁹ It is the organ-boundary between all human and non-human animals and the environment: between the outside, and our insides. In taxidermy, the flayed skin becomes a stand in for the entire animal. There are clear parallels with the idea of the human skin-self.¹⁰ For the Victorian naturalist, an animal's potential to represent living nature as a museum specimen (their future), and their legacy as a once living, breathing animal (their past), were present within the skin. This skin must be protected at all

⁵ C. Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). See also: P. Gilbert, *Victorian Skin: Surface, Self, History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); S. Connor, *The Book of Skin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), C. Classen, *The Book of Touch* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); C. Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); M. Shildrick 'Re-Imagining Embodiment: Prostheses, Supplements and Boundaries', *Somatechnics*, 3 (2013), 270-86 and S. Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

⁶ A. Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 16.

⁷ Nina Jablonski is a slight exception to this oversight, although her focus is still on the exceptionalism of the human skin: N. Jablonski, *Skin: A Natural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

⁸ See for instance: M. Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008).

⁹ Jablonski, *Skin*, 1.

¹⁰ The idea of the 'soul in the skin' was presented by the U.S. taxidermist William Hornaday. See: K. Jones, 'The Soul in the Skin: Taxidermy and the Reanimated Animal', in *Epiphany in the Wilderness: Hunting, Nature and Performance in the Nineteenth-Century American West* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015), 228, 227-70.

costs. This new epidermic state is what I think of as the *skin life* of the animal – the afterlife and interactions of the dead animal from the moment it became a skin.¹¹

Whilst much has been written on big game hunting, particularly regarding imperialism and masculinity, very little of it has touched on taxidermic hunting – on the creation of this potential taxidermy.¹² As I outlined in the Introduction, writing on skins and taxidermy tends to focus on museums.¹³ Ann Coley is unusual in discussing the destructive qualities of insects in her exploration of the chaos of Victorian natural history collecting.¹⁴ She argues that the animal skin was a locus for worries of foreign contagion. She has inspired me to think more about how the experience of empire, and field collecting, did not always match a narrative of control and certainty – for Coley, the insect is a symbol of the lived disorderliness of empire. Another notable exception to this museum focus is the work of cultural geographer Merle Patchett, on taxidermy and tiger hunting.¹⁵ Whilst Patchett’s focus is not entirely on skinning – her article tracks a collection of tiger heads from the Indian hunting field to display in a British country house – she explores the multispecies agents involved in the wider taxidermy hunt, such as hunting elephants. As I discovered when researching this chapter, it was not only domesticated animals that played a role in taxidermic hunting.

In focussing on the skin, I argue that potential taxidermy was always engaged in a series of physical transformations through interactions with the environment, humans, and other animals. In paying attention to this underexplored process, I demonstrate how skins were far from ‘docile’, and neither did they exhibit timelessness; the twin narratives that wind through much of taxidermy scholarship.¹⁶ Instead, a tension is apparent between an idealised state of

¹¹ As I explained in the Introduction, this builds on Alberti’s ‘afterlives.’ S. Alberti (ed.), *The Afterlives of Animals: A Museum Menagerie* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

¹² See: W. Storey, ‘Big Cats and Imperialism: Lion and Tiger Hunting in Kenya and Northern India, 1898- 1930’, *Journal of World History*, 2 (1991), 135-73; J. Sramek, “Face Him Like a Briton”: Tiger Hunting, Imperialism and British Masculinity in Colonial India, 1800-1875’, *Victorian Studies*, 48 (2006), 659-80.

¹³ See: D. Haraway, ‘Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936’, *Social Text*, 11 (1984), 20-64; Alberti (ed), *The Afterlives of Animals*; S. Alberti, ‘Constructing Nature Behind Glass’, *Museum and Society*, 6 (2008), 73-97; S. Asma, *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ A. Coley, *Wild Animal Skins in Victorian Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014). Works on insects in general have inspired this chapter, including: H. Raffles, *Insectopedia* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), and S. Connor, *Fly* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

¹⁵ M. Patchett, ‘Tracking Tigers: Recovering the Embodied Practices of Taxidermy’, *Historical Geography* 36 (2008), 17-39. Another scholar who pays attention to the chaotic journey of specimens to museums is Karen Jones: K. Jones, ‘The Rhinoceros and the Chatham Railway: Taxidermy and the Production of Animal Presence in the ‘Great Indoors’’, *History*, 101 (2016), 710-35.

¹⁶ J. Ryan, “‘Hunting with the Camera’: Photography, Wildlife and Colonialism in Africa”, in C. Philo and C. Wilbert (eds.) *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000), 209. See also: Haraway, ‘Teddy Bear Patriarchy’, 16; P. Wakeham, ‘Introduction: Tracking the Taxidermic’, *Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 17; C. Creaney, ‘Paralytic Animation: The Anthropomorphic Taxidermy of Walter Potter’, *Victorian Studies*, 53 (2010), 19; H. Gregory and A.

suspension that enabled taxidermy to be created, given time – the state desired by hunters and naturalists – and the natural tendency of an animal to decompose. I reveal how taxidermy skins embodied multiple futures: the potential to become a museum specimen, and the potential to slip away. Hunting and skinning were the first stages in the processes that made taxidermy. This was the start of taxidermy time.

Skinning often took place in the seemingly ‘wild’ and remote places of empire. To explore the processes behind taxidermy, I draw on two geographical areas: India, and southern and eastern Africa – primarily Somaliland.¹⁷ With the consolidation of British rule in India in 1858, and the creation of the British Protectorate of Somaliland in 1888, these were two important centres for British animal trade. India had a large taxidermy infrastructure, and Somaliland was close to the trading port of Aden.¹⁸ At the turn of the century, Britain also cemented its hold in South Africa, with the ending of the Anglo-Boer War in 1902. To explore taxidermic hunting in these places, I use a broad selection of diaries and books by hunter-naturalists including Charles Peel, Frederick Selous and Henry Zouch Darrah. I also employ taxidermy handbooks, which frequently include instructions on hunting, skinning, and skin preservation. It is clear from these sources that the skinning process – the slicing and unpeeling of the skin from the carcass – changed very little during the long nineteenth century. In fact, skinning today remains broadly the same. Consequently, I foreground the shifting experiences of the animal skin and the human body, rather than historical change.

However, it is important to acknowledge that what changed was not *how* animals were skinned, but the sheer quantity of skins flooding into Britain, and therefore also the quantity of writing about taxidermy and skins across this period. I also consider the acquisition of skins from European zoos and menageries, which likewise developed and grew across the long nineteenth century. These captive skins embody the flexibility of skin obtainment. My own insights from a taxidermy course will also be threaded throughout the chapter.

I tried taxidermy to feel and know how to skin an animal. However, unlike nineteenth century skinners such as Selous, I did not have the commercial, monetary, and intense personal drive to secure animal hides. The grand eland bull shot by Selous was chosen and preserved for his

Purdy, ‘Present Signs, Dead Things: Indexical Authenticity and Taxidermy’s Nonabsent Animal’, *Configurations*, 23 (2015), 66; M. Bal, ‘Telling, Showing, Showing Off’, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 16.

¹⁷ This British protectorate was in present-day Somaliland, currently an autonomous region of Somalia.

¹⁸ There were professional taxidermists and tanners in most large Indian towns and cities, as well as the ‘taxidermy factory’ run by Van Ingen and Van Ingen in Mysore. Local people were commonly employed to move skins from remote hunting areas to towns whilst the hunting party remained in the field. See, for instance: H. Z. Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands of Kashmir: Being a Narrative of an Eight Months’ Trip in Baltistan and Ladak, and a Lady’s Experiences in the Latter Country: Together with Hints for the Guidance of Sportsmen* (London: Rowland Ward, 1898), 219.

‘magnificent’, British Museum-destined, skin. Selous also shot ‘two younger ones’, which he laid out to dry around his campsite.¹⁹ That night a ‘hyaena, having crept through a break in the fence’, seized one of the young eland skins, and dragged it off. Selous set off into the night with his rifle and dogs, following ‘the broad track left by the heavy eland skin as it had been dragged rapidly off.’²⁰ The skin and the hyena left a trail in the dust. Eventually, the dogs managed to scare the hyaena away and stood waiting for Selous, ‘keeping guard over the skin’, until the young eland hide was retrieved. As this animal-theft demonstrates, skins were always inextricable from the wider environment, from dirt, dogs, hyenas, and humans. By exploring skinning, I demonstrate how animal specimens were shaped and manipulated, and yet, through their very deadness, they could themselves shape human and more-than-human lives. They were precarious things, simultaneously both potential taxidermy and potential prey.

Logistics

To secure the skins of distant animals, British hunters travelled by ship around the globe, and journeyed on to the largest town in their desired area. Specimen collection occupied Victorian naturalists throughout the nineteenth century. However, with the consolidation of British rule in India and the Scramble for Africa, there was a surge in hunting towards the end of the period.²¹ Colonial expansion triggered a simultaneous scramble for exotic animals. Lawrence Dundas, big game hunter and Conservative politician, described in 1902 how:

One of the features of the latter half of the nine-teenth century was undoubtedly to be found in the extraordinary facilities for travel which sprang into existence with the subdual of steam and electricity, enabling enormous numbers of people to journey with speed and comfort over the whole of the civilised globe. Countless lines of ocean-going steamers, vast networks of iron ways, rivers and inland seas converted into highways for the use of man, canals, post-roads, cables, and telegraph wires have gone far to bring even the remote corners of other continents into close communication with our own.²²

¹⁹ Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 90-1.

²⁰ Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 92.

²¹ Natural history voyages are mentioned in taxidermy handbooks as early as the 1820’s, such as: S. Bowdich Lee, *Taxidermy: Or, the Art of Collecting, Preparing, and Mounting Objects of Natural History. For the Use of Museums and Travellers* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820).

²² Lawrence J.L Dundas, *Sport and Politics Under an Eastern Sky* (London: W. Blackwood and sons, 1902), xvii. Peel described the pull of ‘the vast new territories in Africa, such as the country north of the Victoria Falls, of the Zambesi, and in British East Africa up the Uganda railway, countries where the climatic conditions are most perfect’: C. Peel, *Popular Guide to MR. C. V. A. Peel’s Exhibition of Big-Game Trophies and Museum of Natural History and Anthropology* (Guildford: Billing & Sons, Ltd, 1906), 4.

Charles Peel, one of this chapter's primary human actors, sailed to Aden in the late 1890's, where he 'set to work at once' organising his hunting party.²³ Like Selous, he was travelling and hunting specifically to secure natural history specimens, which he eventually displayed in his own natural history museum in Oxford. Soon he sailed from Aden on to Berbera on the coast of Somaliland – a short voyage across the gulf of Berbera, between the Arabian and Red seas – where he continued to purchase provisions and employed a 'rabble of 23 men' and 25 camels.²⁴ Towns in popular hunting areas were frenetic nodes, where everything from dissection knives to '33 pack-saddles' could be acquired.²⁵ This was a period of gathering and waiting, in anticipation of the start of taxidermy time. Delays were common, as hunters held out for changes in weather patterns, and the return of other hunting caravans. Peel's 'rabble' comprised of '13 camelmen, 1 headman, 4 shikaris or trackers, a syce (groom), a cook, a skinner, a 'butler', and a donkey-boy.' Most of this workforce was employed either in keeping domesticated animals alive or in finding animals to kill. After a period of weeks, Peel's caravan headed out from Berbera on 'an expedition in search of natural history specimens.'²⁶

Local people were employed as shikaris, hunters and skinners; they were tactually closely engaged in securing and shaping animal skins. As historians have extensively discussed, hunting parties showcased and reinforced British ideologies on racial hierarchies and white exceptionalism, masculinity, and colonial dominance.²⁷ In numerous accounts, local people were injured or even killed by the very animals they had been sent to track. British hunting rituals were both transplanted between the countries of empire and tapped into existing power structures. In India, the British readily engaged with the caste system, and often employed people considered to be from lower castes to do the most perilous roles.²⁸ It was common for local 'beaters' to lead on foot to startle the game animals. The white hunters, and sometimes Maharajahs, followed on elephants, elevated above the danger, their guns poised. In the 1830s, Captain Walter Campbell organised a large hunting party in the 'Neilgherry' (Nilgiri) mountains of Tamil Nadu. Campbell explains in *My Indian Journal* (1864) that, when hunting a man-eating tigress, 'a despairing shriek gave us dread warning that some unfortunate beater

²³ C. Peel, *Somaliland: Being an Account of Two Expeditions into the Far Interior, Together with a Complete List of Every Animal and Bird Known to Inhabit that Country, and a List of the Reptiles Collected by the Author* (London: F. E. Robinson & Co, 1900), 29.

²⁴ Peel, *Somaliland*, 8.

²⁵ H. G. C. Swayne, *Seventeen Trips through Somaliland and a Visit to Abyssinia* (London: Rowland Ward, Limited, 1903), 370.

²⁶ Peel, *Somaliland*, 2.

²⁷ See: Storey, 'Big Cats and Imperialism', 135-73; W. Beinart, 'Empire, Hunting and Ecological Change in Southern and Central Africa', *Past and Present*, 128 (1990), 162-86; Sramek, "'Face Him Like a Briton": 659-80.

²⁸ Racist othering is exemplified in Walter Campbell's *The Old Forest Ranger* (1853). When commenting on an 'effeminate' 'low caste native' beater in his hunting party, Campbell exclaimed 'to what species does this animal belong?': W. Campbell, *The Old Forest Ranger, or Wild Sports of India on the Neilgherry Hills, in the Jungles and on the Plains* (London: How and Parsons, 1842), 14.

had disregarded our caution, and fallen victim to his temerity.’²⁹ The man, who is unnamed, was killed by the tiger. Campbell relieves himself of responsibility for the beater’s death as ‘it was occasioned entirely by the poor fellow’s own impudence.’³⁰ His description seems utterly callous, suggesting how readily the bodies and lives of local peoples were considered dispensable by imperialist hunters.³¹

The assertion of colonial power is also displayed in descriptions of the ownership of the kill, the skinning process, and the preservation of skins. Harald Swayne, hunting in the British protectorate of Somaliland at the turn of the century, described how ‘allowing my men to skin the lion, which was a fine one, I retired to the shade of a spreading *khansa*.’³² Lounging under a tree, Swayne could reflect on his ‘fine’ lion without bloodying his hands. He watched, protected from the sun by a canopy of leaves, as the skinning unfolded before him. In museums – such as Bristol Museum which displayed Swayne’s trophy heads – these creatures would be associated only with the white hunter, thereby erasing the skilled labour of the Somali workers. British hunters sometimes took a role as ‘superintendents’ in the skinning process.³³ However, this was variable, and other white hunters revelled in their own skinning prowess, and hands-on approach.

Peel exclaimed that he skinned a bustard himself as his ‘skin-man’ ‘pulled all the feathers out of the birds I gave him to do.’³⁴ Similarly, Selous described how he left ‘three Mashunas’ with ‘the most beautiful specimen’ of eland, to guard the carcass from prowling hyenas.³⁵ These men had ‘strict orders’ not to touch the body, as ‘they could not be expected to know how to skin him properly for setting up.’ However, on returning in the morning, Selous found his men had unexpectedly ‘skinned and cut it up’ during the night, and the result was ‘ruined’ for taxidermy. In these descriptions, white hunters sometimes privileged their own Western way of treating the animal body; actions shaped by the expectations of waiting museums and taxidermists. They also employed the structures of colonialism to direct others to do the

²⁹ W. Campbell, *My Indian Journal* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1864), 156.

³⁰ Moreover, Campbell reasoned that in killing the man-eating tigress and ‘ridding the country of this dreadful scourge’, ‘we have probably been the means of saving many human lives at the expense of one’: Campbell, *My Indian Journal*, 159.

³¹ Peel described in *Somaliland* how a local woman was carried off by a man-eating lion: ‘One of the women he had taken bodily off and eaten for his supper.’ Peel, *Somaliland*, 130.

³² Swayne, *Seventeen Trips through Somaliland*, 219.

³³ Dundas, *Sport and Politics Under an Eastern Sky*, 128.

³⁴ Peel, *Somaliland*, 15. Similarly, the taxidermist Rowland Ward observed that ‘it is generally far better to attend to the preserving of your own specimens, than to trust to native agents or servants’: R. Ward, *The Sportsman’s Handbook to Practical Collecting, Preserving, and Artistic Setting-up of Trophies and Specimens to which is Added a Synoptical Guide to the Hunting Grounds of the World* (London: Rowland Ward, 1880), 15.

³⁵ ‘Mashuna’ refers to the Shona, a Bantu ethnic group primarily from Zimbabwe. This was a different eland to the one mentioned in the opening quotation: Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 95.

difficult and messy work. When local skinners were engaged, such writings often imply that they had only been made skilled by the white male hunter, thereby disseminating a narrative of colonial expertise to the reading public in Britain. Selous entrusted a ‘young Griqua lad’ ‘who became most useful to me, as I taught him to help me in skinning and preparing skins for Museum specimens.’³⁶ The violence of empire, and the extreme power imbalance between white hunter and local workers, was manifested materially in the animal skin.

As well as racist distrust, there was often a simultaneous acceptance in these writings of the superiority of local skill and knowledge in securing skins, and reading the landscape.³⁷ Moreover, Peel regularly expressed embarrassment on missing an easy shot, exclaiming ‘I’m afraid I did not impress my shikari much.’³⁸ This exemplifies the complex and often contradictory nature of the relationship between white hunter, the labour force of colonised people, and the animal body. As the historian William Kelleher Storey has explored, hunters sought to control both colonised peoples and colonised places by drawing parallels between indigenous and local peoples and the natural world.³⁹ Therefore, their use and acceptance of local knowledge and skill was often also a tool to assert and police British beliefs in scientific racial difference, white supremacy, and the supposed superiority of the urban British worldview.

There is significant absence of black and indigenous voices in the hunting and skinning narrative.⁴⁰ Many white hunters did not include the names of their workers in their diaries, referring instead to ‘my shikari’ or ‘my skin-man.’⁴¹ These workers were defined only by their relationships with the animal prize, and the white hunter. The reader is offered glimpses of their skilled labour in throw away comments: ‘my shikari, to my surprise and joy, appeared, bearing on his head and shoulder the head and skin of my gerenook’.⁴² Tony Bennett and Rodney Harrison call for the modern audience of museum professionals and visitors to recognise the ‘distribution of agency’ that produced museum objects, within a network of human and nonhuman actors. They describe this web as ‘fieldwork agencement.’⁴³ The

³⁶ Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 13.

³⁷ See: Dundas, *Sport and Politics Under an Eastern Sky*; Peel, *Somaliland*; Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*.

³⁸ Peel, *Somaliland*, 19.

³⁹ Storey, ‘Big Cats and Imperialism’, 135-73

⁴⁰ This was also dependent on other hierarchies, and Indian royalty, such as the Maharajah of Cooch Behar, also led specimen-hunting parties, and often hunted with visiting British officials. See: N.N. Bhupa, Maharajah of Cooch Behar, *Thirty-seven Years of Big Game Shooting in Cooch Behar, the Duars, and Assam: A Rough Diary* (Bombay: Times Press, 1908).

⁴¹ See: Peel, *Somaliland*.

⁴² Peel, *Somaliland*, 18.

⁴³ Harrison draws on Tony Bennett for this definition of ‘fieldwork agencement’: see R. Harrison, ‘On Heritage Ontologies: Rethinking the Material Worlds of Heritage’, Special Collection: World Heritage and the Ontological Turn, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 91 (2018), 1369; and T. Bennett, *Making Culture, Changing Society* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013). See also: B. Latour, *Reassembling the*

embodied knowledge of local and indigenous people, and their skilled use of tools and materials, was integral to taxidermy hunting. This animal matter, destined for museums, was shaped by the racist structures of empire. These structures were embodied and embedded by the hands that shot, sliced, and plucked at potential taxidermy.

The Skin Hunt

The first obstacle for British hunters, and their hunting party, was to source a skin which had the potential to make a successful taxidermy mount. The second obstacle was to keep that skin intact. Successful taxidermy depended on an animal looking alive; it could not be holey, rotten, misshapen, or obviously dead. The perceived taxidermic value of a living animal often depended on the proportions of the inner body and the aesthetics of the corresponding skin.



Figure 2.1: A photograph of Charles Peel, with a collection of his skins, c.1900, RAMM Natural History archive. This photograph is also included at the opening of Peel's *Somaliland*.

Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); T. Bennett, F. Cameron, N. Dias, B. Dibley, R. Harrison, I. Jacknis, C. McCarthy, *Collecting, Ordering, Governing: Anthropology, Museums and Liberal Government* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2017).

The pattern and quality of the coat were crucial, as was a skin's integrity.⁴⁴ Peel noted that the striped hyena of Somaliland could make a fine trophy, as, unusually for hyenas, they were free from mange.⁴⁵ Taxidermy hides should not be corrupted by insect life. Peel regularly described how 'beautiful' animal skins were, and, ideally, a skin would be both sizeable and handsomely patterned. 'What struck me most', he explained 'on seeing my first Zebra lying dead before me, was the beautiful colouring and gigantic proportions of the broad ears, rounded at the top, the huge girth of the animal, and the thick short legs.'⁴⁶ The artist and writer Sonja Britz argues that 'embedded in the hunting ritual is the notion that the animal cannot be inferior, but instead must be worthy of an emotional and physical engagement with the hunter: it has to be a 'special' animal.'⁴⁷ The majority of these 'special' hunted animals (as well as the hunters who pulled the trigger) were male.⁴⁸ Hunters perceived males as having large, vividly decorated skins, and considered them as less integral to reproduction.⁴⁹

Such skins were closely shaped by their environments; thick lion coats from the high ground were considered 'more handsome' than those from the 'hot, low plains.'⁵⁰ Hunting caravans trekked great distances in search of the perfect environment and corresponding skins. These hides helped to conceal an animal from predators, including would-be human hunters – Peel described straining to spot the zebra: 'I had been staring at him as he stood broadside on to me, quite close, and had not until now seen him! So marvellously does the skin of this animal blend with the colour of its surroundings.'⁵¹ Animal skins were also seasonal. Lawrence Dundas, hunting in the Himalayas in 1899, claimed that the red bear must be hunted in the spring and early summer, to find the animal at the time when it is 'carrying' the most beautiful coat.⁵² Animal, skin, hair, and environment were inextricably connected; the hunter could carefully select time and place to access specific skins.

⁴⁴ For example, Selous commented that 'besides being fat, she was a beautiful specimen of striped eland, one that would do very well for the British Museum, I resolved to dispatch her at once': Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 75.

⁴⁵ Peel, *Somaliland*, 194.

⁴⁶ Peel, *Somaliland*, 84.

⁴⁷ S. Britz, 'Beautiful Animals in Hunting Wonderland', *Antennae*, 8, 1 (2008), 17.

⁴⁸ There were some exceptions to this trend. For instance, Peel noted with admiration that 'Mrs Stanford', who, along with her husband, travelled with him for some time, shot numerous animals, and sat under a tree all night with a live goat (as bait) waiting for a leopard: Peel, *Somaliland*, 189.

⁴⁹ The Catalogue of the Selous Collection at the British Museum noted that 'unless the contrary is stated, the specimens referred to are all mounted heads of adult male individuals.' Nevertheless, this depended on availability of game, and female animals and their young became desirable for nuclear family style dioramas around the turn of the twentieth century: J. G Dollman, 'Preface', *Catalogue of the Selous Collection*, vi. See also: R Machin, 'Gender Representation in the Natural History Galleries at the Manchester Museum', *Museum and Society*, 6 (2008), 54-67.

⁵⁰ Peel, *Somaliland*, 285.

⁵¹ Peel, *Somaliland*, 84.

⁵² This was probably the Himalayan brown bear, also known as red bear: Dundas, *Sport and Politics*, 66. Selous similarly described that: 'being the cold season, their glossy black coats were in excellent order, I determined to prepare them for specimens, and so carried back their skins, skulls, and leg-bones with me to camp': Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 24.

These superior skins were coveted before an animal's death when creatures became living taxidermy. Swayne described how, in Somaliland, a panther 'came gliding silently through the underbrush... While he was yet one hundred and fifty yards off I saw his beautifully spotted skin and bullet head.'⁵³ The entire panther was intact, vital and alive, but the skin was all Swayne saw. This description exposes the hazy boundary between an animal and its skin, as hunted animals were sized up as walking skins. Taxidermy time had begun. Similarly, Selous, on hunting a lion with a gun and dogs, proclaimed 'bar accidents, his skin was mine.'⁵⁴ The skin was all essential, and Selous seems possessive in his desire to both kill and flay the big cat – hunters became obsessed with securing the best skins, by any means. Peel placed a dead camel outside his camp as bait for lions, a common luring practice in taxidermic hunting across empire. His Somali workforce created a thorn zareba close by, so the British hunter could watch and shoot from under its barbed protection. He squatted and waited, beneath the cover of the thorn branches. Instead of the expected lions, 'two fine' leopards sauntered past the camel. Peel, finding he could not get a good shot, left the zareba's relative safety. He described how this 'was a bit risky, but I was excited now to obtain that beautiful skin.' It is striking that Peel's emphasis is not on the hunt, but on his desire for the skin.⁵⁵

British hunter-naturalists readily acknowledged that by the turn of the twentieth century these charismatic creatures were far scarcer. Peel described how 'with the great influx of hunters into Somaliland in the last few years, the game has shifted further and further west, and he is a clever and lucky man who kills an elephant now in Somaliland.'⁵⁶ Populations thinned along common hunting routes, species became extinct, and the natural history trade thrived. As times changed, and animals might no longer reside in the expected places, the identities of white British hunters, and the codes of conduct they followed, were shaped and reinforced. In 1914, Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy and Governor General of India, travelled to Gwalior in India for a tiger-shooting expedition. Over the course of a fortnight, he had 'the most marvellous sport, the bag being 24 tigers and two bears, of which I shot 14 tigers and one bear.'⁵⁷

⁵³ Swayne also describes seeing a 'fine' panther which had come to lick the blood from an elephant kill 'When I first saw the spotted skin': Swayne, *Seventeen Trips Through Somaliland*, 198, 209.

⁵⁴ Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 133.

⁵⁵ Often, academic writing on hunting focusses on the desire to kill the as the most essential aspect of the experience. See: Storey, *Big Cats and Imperialism*, 135-73; J. Emel, 'Are You Man Enough, Big and Bad Enough? Ecofeminism and Wolf Eradication in the USA', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 13 (1995), 707-34.

⁵⁶ Peel also described how, in some areas, of Africa, 'never again' would anyone hear the 'majestic roar of the lion' or the 'weird trumpet of the elephant' as 'they were both as extinct here as the dodo': C. Peel, *Somaliland*, 129-130, 261.

⁵⁷ C. Hardinge, *My Indian Years 1910-1916* (London: John Murray, 1948), 94. Similarly, for Walter Campbell, also hunting in India, but much earlier in the century, trophies were a by-product of the kill. He explains on the first page of his diary that 'I... was born a hunting animal': Campbell, *My Indian Journal*, 1.

For Hardinge, the emphasis is on the ‘sport’ – the shooting and the camaraderie – not the preservation of bodies. Some of Hardinge’s creatures were turned into taxidermy, however this was not his primary motive. The distinction between those who sought museum specimens, and those, like Hardinge, who hunted for sport, was exaggerated and policed by taxidermy hunters. Their accounts are full of criticisms of sport hunters, coupled with an exertion of their own scientific justifications for museum hunting.⁵⁸ Peel criticised these ‘so-called sportsmen’ who were ‘ruthless’ in their indiscriminate ‘decimation’ of big game such as Koodoo, regardless of sex or age.⁵⁹ Peel viewed himself as a ‘true sportsman’, one of ‘those who wish merely to collect specimens for public or private museums.’⁶⁰ He was highly critical of the intrusion of new technologies such as the motor car into the supposed sanctity of the African hunting field.⁶¹

Peel attempted to position bullets carefully in the animal body to cause a speedy death and minimal injuries. This was partly bound to an idea of manly sportsmanship, and the code of fair chase. However, he was also obsessed with maintaining the integrity of the skin. Direct shots to the brain, lungs or heart meant that multiple bullet-holes could be avoided. He shot a bustard with a 450 Express rifle: ‘the large bullet... smashed up in the interior of the body; scarcely a feather was displaced, so that I was enabled to skin him in almost perfect condition.’⁶² The renowned taxidermist Rowland Ward noted in his *Sportsman’s Handbook* that the ‘Express’ rifle’ with its accuracy and ‘power for internal wounding’ produced the best results for most game.⁶³ Swayne suggested that for ‘thick-skinned game’, such as elephants and rhinoceroses, a more powerful gun was required.⁶⁴ (see also figure 2.2).

⁵⁸ Garry Marvin identifies several different types of hunting practice yet notes that they can intermingle and overlap: these include hunting for food, hunting for sport, or the thrill of the chase, hunting for souvenirs and hunting of so-called pests: G. Marvin, ‘Enlivened through Memory: Hunters and Hunting Trophies’ in Alberti (ed.), *The Afterlives of Animals*, 202-18.

⁵⁹ Peel went on to describe how the lion was becoming ‘extremely scarce’ near the Somali coast: Peel, *Somaliland*, (1900), 285.

⁶⁰ Peel, *Somaliland*, 269.

⁶¹ C. Peel, *Through the Length of Africa* (London: Old Royalty Book Publishers, 1927), 99. William Temple Hornaday, within the North American context, similarly linked the rise of technology with both a disregard amongst hunters for the fair chase, and the resulting loss of animal populations: ‘Since the appearance of this volume, seven years ago, great changes have taken place in the status of the vertebrate fauna of North America. The small-bore rifle has been developed to a degree of perfection which leaves large game *absolutely no show!*’: W. T. Hornaday, *Taxidermy and Zoological Collecting* (New York: C. Scribner’s sons, 1905), vii- viii.

⁶² Peel, *Somaliland*, 170.

⁶³ These were the best results for ‘ordinary game’, excluding thick skinned animals like rhinos and elephants: Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 3.

⁶⁴ ‘When after thick-skinned game, such as elephant or rhino, I think the Lee-Metford would be a useful rifle, provided a quiet head-shot could be obtained with the animal standing still’: Swayne, *Seventeen Trips Through Somaliland*, 340.

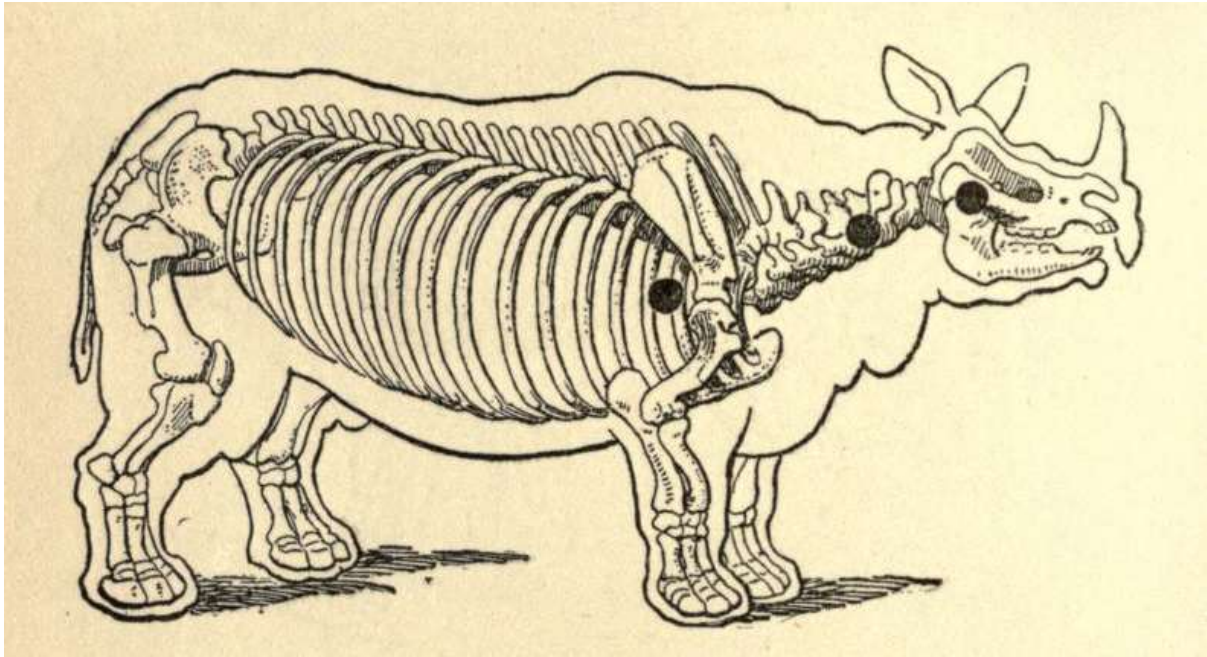


Figure 2.2: R. Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook* (1880), 6.

A bird killed with small shot, so as not to injure the fragile skin, might not die at once: hunters sometimes had to squeeze them to death.⁶⁵ Skin, its heft, or delicacy – its penetrability – determined how and where an animal should be shot. This was species-specific and required a great deal of epidermic knowledge and preparation by the British hunter. According to Ward, ‘the hide of the Indian rhinoceros is harder than that of the African species, but on the living beast is easily permeable by hardened bullets; still, where there is room for choice, it is best to shoot between the folds.’⁶⁶ The skin shaped the hunting experience, and in all taxidermic hunting, the fewer holes the better. However, to shoot an animal is always to puncture the skin, and there was a fine line between internal and external wounding. Henry Zouch Darrah noted how, on shooting a bear in Kashmir in 1896, the bullet made a larger hole as it exited the body than when it entered it. Near these two holes, the dead bear’s fur was mussed and disordered.⁶⁷

The animal as *potential taxidermy* comes alive in these descriptions. Poor shots could undermine this latent promise. In India, Darrah had to pull the trigger seven times to kill a Kashmiri ibex that refused to give up on life. The resulting skin, which was separated from the carcass by Dudson, Darrah’s shikari, was ‘too riddled with holes to be worth keeping.’ Even the meat of this ibex ‘had been so cut up by bullets that it was useless.’⁶⁸ The punctured ibex

⁶⁵ W. P. Manton, *Taxidermy Without a Teacher, Comprising a Complete Manual of Instruction for Preparing and Preserving Birds, Animals and Fishes* (New York: Lee and Shepard, 1882), 52.

⁶⁶ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 6.

⁶⁷ Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands of Kashmir*, 209.

⁶⁸ Similarly, Peel writes; ‘I made a lucky shot at the best male, but the 450 bullet made sad havoc of the skin’: Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands of Kashmir*, 149; Peel, *Somaliland*, 147.

skin would reveal an animal's deadness if taxidermy were attempted, and bullet holes told tales of human involvement. These were both things that should ideally be invisible, or at least discreet, in successful Victorian taxidermy.⁶⁹ However, sometimes if the animal belonged to what was considered to be a charismatic species, these holes could become the material traces of a hard-fought battle. This is suggestive of what historian Karen Jones describes as the 'storytelling' potential of the animal trophy.⁷⁰ Peel proudly described how, after an encounter with a rhino whose 'tenacity for life was simply marvellous', he 'counted eleven bullet-holes in his skin when dead.'⁷¹ This was particularly the case for personal trophy animals, or private museum collections; for public museum taxidermy, skins should remain as intact as possible.

Yet, these skins were already precarious. A combination of mis-shots and the passing of time could further damage skins. Swayne shot a leopard in the stomach, rupturing her intestines and causing a painfully drawn-out death. The hunting party's decision to track the wounded animal in deep vegetation, and through the long night, was not an empathetic one, or one guided by a commitment to the fair chase. They knew that 'if we waited till the morning to follow her up, with this fearful wound, she might die in the night and hyaenas would spoil the skin.'⁷² Dead animals attracted other animals; scavengers and opportunistic carnivores smelled death and moved in. Hunting diaries are filled with tales of such animal thefts.

In the passes and valleys of the Himalayas, potential taxidermy was sometimes taken by wolves.⁷³ In eastern Africa, as well as the common scavengers such as hyenas and lions, a large hawk flew off with the skin of an Abyssinian oribi, a type of antelope.⁷⁴ These are the unexpected multispecies actors in the *skin lives* of hunted animals. Living animals would readily carry a skin off and away from a museum future. It was not only predators that consumed skins; some bodies were lost to the bush or to waterways. Aquatic animals often induced an anxious waiting time in the watching British hunter – dead hippos sank to the bottom of rivers, and potentially resurfaced between two and four hours later, a time that depended on the 'temperature of the water.'⁷⁵ Sometimes, hunters managed to reclaim bodies, or body parts. Peel, after scaring away hordes of vultures, 'found the rotting carcass of a wounded oryx of the morning before, with a bullet-hole in its middle... we managed to cut off the head, which I took home as a trophy.'⁷⁶ Even before skinning, there was an ongoing struggle to keep the skin intact.

⁶⁹ At least according to taxidermists/ writers of handbooks.

⁷⁰ Jones, *Epiphany in the Wilderness*.

⁷¹ Peel, *Somaliland*, 100.

⁷² Swayne, *Seventeen Trips Through Somaliland*, 161.

⁷³ Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands*, 389.

⁷⁴ Peel, *Through the Length of Africa*, 72.

⁷⁵ Peel, *Popular Guide to MR. C. V. A. Peel's Exhibition*, 37.

⁷⁶ Peel, *Somaliland*, 88.

Skinning

After death, the entire animal became a skin. Sometimes they were further condensed to head skins. As I outlined in the introduction, the anthropologist Garry Marvin describes this process as the ‘reduction’ of the animal.⁷⁷ Materially, the animal became a fragment of its former self. Not only was it no longer living, but its life-giving matter (organs, tissue, and vessels) were quickly discarded. Nevertheless, the skin retained an ability to influence, and press itself, on a range of human and nonhuman lives. This occurred through its dynamic deadness. There was a tension between two alternative processes in this stage in the taxidermy journey. The first was the desire of hunter-naturalist to keep the skin whole and enable *future* transformations back to animal form. The second was the natural tendency for an animal to decay and disintegrate, and the anxieties associated with such breakdown by British hunters.

This was a conflict between wholeness and perforation. Margrit Shildrick has written on the Victorian fear of punctured, leaky bodies. This was a concern regarding human skin, as to be wounded was to be vulnerable to diseases and infections, particularly in the pre-antibiotic world, and with the growing awareness of germ theory from the mid-nineteenth century.⁷⁸ Literary scholar Emily Senior writes that there was a mounting feeling that (human) skin ‘needs to be kept perfectly whole.’⁷⁹ This practical need for wholeness was interwoven with the ideas of selfhood associated with the skin, the world-facing organ of the human body, what the psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu has designated the ‘skin ego.’⁸⁰

As well as letting bacteria and viruses in, holes let fluids out. This was a practical concern for hunter-taxidermists. On death, their first act would be to plug the natural and humanmade holes in an animal’s body: to push cotton, or tow, into noses, mouths, and bullet holes, as this would prevent blood, the ‘humours’, or ‘mucus’, from seeping out of the body and permeating the skin.⁸¹ Through taxidermy, the skin came to stand-in for the entire animal. Somewhat comparable to the human skin-self, for the hunter and the taxidermist, the animal skin represented the physical manifestation of the animal being. If enough time had been allowed

⁷⁷ Marvin, ‘Perpetuating Polar Bears’, 164-5.

⁷⁸ This was a striking change from medieval belief in the benefits of bleeding, and humoral medicine. M. Shildrick, ‘Corporeal Cuts: Surgery and the Psycho-Social’, *Body and Society*, 14 (2008), 31-46. See also: A. Walser ‘Bodies in Skin: a Philosophical and Theological Approach to Genetic Skin Diseases’ *Journal of Religion and Health*, 49 (2010), 96-104.

⁷⁹ E. Senior, “‘Perfectly Whole’: Skin and Text in John Gabriel Stedman’s Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam’, *American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 44 (2010), 29-56.

⁸⁰ D. Anzieu, *The Skin-Ego* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). See also: Coley, *Wild Animal Skins*, 66-67.

⁸¹ W. Swainson, *Taxidermy: with the Biographies of Zoologists* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1840), 38; Lee, *Taxidermy*, 19. See also: W. Jardine, ‘Hints for Preparing and Transmitting Ornithological Specimens from Foreign Countries’, *Contributions to Ornithology for 1848* (Edinburgh: W.H Lizars, 1848), 4.

for ‘the muscles to relax from that tension they acquire immediately after death’, dissection could begin.⁸²

Fur was parted on either side of the intended incision place, so that no hair was accidentally cut away – fur and feathers were crucial for creating a healthy-looking taxidermy mount. With birds, feathers might be softly blown over, and the belly exposed by the tickle of human breath.⁸³ A sharp knife sliced downwards, from the neck to the lower stomach of the animal, or, as Ward describes, from ‘head to vent.’⁸⁴ Ward stresses that the travelling sportsman should not carry complicated and heavy equipment, for ‘a tiger can be perfectly skinned by a skilful hand with a shoemaker’s knife, price threepence-half penny.’⁸⁵ The literary scholar Claudia Benthien explores how the cutting and flaying of human skins ‘transcended’ the ‘cutaneous body boundary.’⁸⁶ What was seen and known of the body was unmade and upended. The taxidermy wound should be clean and exacting, and care had to be taken not to cut too deep; as corporeal wholeness was impossible, epidermic integrity was viewed as paramount. In *Taxidermy* (1820) Sarah Bowdich Lee warned that if the skinner presses too firmly ‘the intestines would fall out and soil the skin.’⁸⁷ There was a constant fear amongst Victorian hunters and taxidermists of the skin becoming tainted by the material signs of death. In such descriptions, the animal body was presented as a dangerously fluid thing that the human fought to stopper and seal.

There are limited ways to skin animals, and the descriptions in the Victorian handbooks strongly correlate with my own experience from the taxidermy course. There is subsequently a marked consistency in the reports on skinning across the period, both in taxidermy guides and hunting diaries.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, all species have different skins, so the skinning experience varied depending on the individual animal body, and dermic thickness and tensile strength. Bird skin (underneath the protective second skin of feathers) appears almost transparent and tears very easily.⁸⁹ It had to be peeled and coaxed away from the carcass. Conversely, rhinos have such thick hides they can cut through human skin when removed and dried.⁹⁰ Peel exclaimed that ‘the skin of a lizard sticks with remarkable firmness at the back of the neck and

⁸² Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 30.

⁸³ Jardine, *Contributions to Ornithology*, 4.

⁸⁴ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 37.

⁸⁵ Jardine recommends for birds: scissors, dissecting knife, and a brain scoop: Jardine, *Contributions to Ornithology*, 7.

⁸⁶ Benthien, ‘Flayings’, in *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between the Self and the World*, 63.

⁸⁷ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 26.

⁸⁸ See: Peel, *Somaliland*; Swainson, *Taxidermy*; Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*.

⁸⁹ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 19.

⁹⁰ Peel, *Somaliland*, 299.

on the head itself.⁹¹ It is therefore difficult to know how much pressure to apply when skinning.



Figure 2.3: Author's photograph taken during a taxidermy course, March 2018.

When dissecting my rat, I pressed too firmly when making this first incision. As Lee predicted, the innards and blood began to seep out and stain the skin. The physical and metaphorical skin boundary quickly gave way to bodily fluid and animal matter. We did not wear gloves so that we could get a firmer grip on the slippery body (see Figure 2.3). I was not expecting this and found the visceral sensation of my skin against skin unnerving. To touch a skin is always also to be touched by it.⁹² Whilst we used scalpels to cut through sinew and tissue, much of the skinning process involved coaxing fingers under and around the animal body; pushing gently to, as the Victorian taxidermist William Swainson described, 'separate the skin from the flesh.'⁹³

⁹¹ He similarly described how the skin of a pectinator was 'so tender' that he pulled the tail off when skinning: Peel, *Somaliland*, 131, 304.

⁹² Connor, *Book of Skin*, 264-5.

⁹³ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 30.

Various nineteenth-century taxidermists recommended fingers as the most effective tools.⁹⁴ Gentle teasing breaks through the blood vessels which anchor the skin organ to the body.⁹⁵ W. B. Tegetmeier, writing for *The Field* in 1868, described how ‘the fingers should now be introduced, and allowed to play around the body, separating as far as possible the skin from the chest, back and sides’.⁹⁶ The underside of the skin is coated in a layer of smelly yellow fat, which binds to human fingers – the animal literally leaves its trace on the skinner. The comparable use of fingers demonstrates the spatiotemporal similarities between skinning in the past and present. However, as I mentioned in the introduction, my affective responses, such as a feeling of disgust, simultaneously suggest how different my own skinning-time was.

The Victorian handbooks indicate that, once the trunk of the body had been separated from the skin, the fleshy tail should be cut off from within.⁹⁷ The taxidermy skin was never just a skin. It was always viewed by hunters in anticipation of its transformation back to animal shape. The skin was also temporally close to life – sometimes these bodies were still warm to touch. The taxidermy skin inhabited past, present, and future: its potential usage hovered in the mind of the skinner as they worked. Ward describes how slicing along the inner side of the limbs and the tail makes ‘the seam’ ‘less perceptible’ when finally mounted.⁹⁸ However, the human skinner – whether a Somali shikari employed within the wider system of colonial violence that bolstered skinning practises, or a white hunter, deigning to bloody their hands – could not have complete control. Rachel Poliquin writes that taxidermy animals are ‘dead but not gone.’⁹⁹ I argue that, through this deadness, the skin and the animal body had an element of influence over the taxidermy process. The material contours and thickenings of the animal’s body dictated where and how the skinner cut, and how hard they laboured.¹⁰⁰

Force was required to break the bones in the legs, and birds’ wing bones were cracked open. Through practise, I learnt that taxidermy is more physical than Victorian taxidermy handbooks suggest and requires dexterity in transitioning between delicate handling and a more powerful touch. The leg bones were generally discarded, however, in small mammals and birds, the femur, fibular and tibia and deep ankle bones could be left for structural

⁹⁴ See: C. Waterton, *Wanderings in South America* (London: B. Fellowes, 1839), 293; Lee, *Taxidermy*, 30.

⁹⁵ The skin (the dermis and epidermis) is linked to the fleshy body by thousands of glands, and vessels. Jablonski, *Skin*, 12.

⁹⁶ W. B. Tegetmeier, ‘A Lesson in Bird Skinning’, *The Field*, 25 July 1868.

⁹⁷ ‘We cut the tail interiorly’: Lee, *Taxidermy*, 26.

⁹⁸ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 29.

⁹⁹ R. Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 9.

¹⁰⁰ See: Lee, *Taxidermy*, 19; Peel, *Somaliland*, 299.

stability, following the removal of the flesh and muscles of the thighs.¹⁰¹ After the tissue had been shaved away from bone, the skin was freed from all but the neck.

Freeing the Skin

Skin is always a stretchy and flexible organ. The early Victorian naturalist Charles Waterton elaborates on how, all too easily, fragile bird skin could become distorted:

The plumage must have been disordered by too much stretching or drying, and perhaps sullied, or at least deranged, by the pressure of a coarse and heavy hand — plumage which, ere life had fled from within it, was accustomed to be touched by nothing rougher than the dew of heaven and the pure and gentle breath of air.¹⁰²

Literary critic Connor, in the *Book of Skin*, similarly describes the ‘transformability’ of skin. It is a substance ‘without absolute homogeneity’ akin to clouds and smoke.¹⁰³ He writes that ‘The implicative capacity of the skin – its capacity to be folded in upon itself – means that it is involved in other, much more mobile and ambivalent substances too... in which, so to speak, the surface turns in on itself, goes all the way down: smoke; clouds; dust; sand; foam.’¹⁰⁴ Here, Connor overlooks the solidity of skin, as substance that could be grasped, torn, cut, and pegged. Nevertheless, the shifting nature of skin was exemplified when it was separated from the animal body. It could crease and double over, and, as no longer dependant on the interior body framework, skins could wrinkle into new shapes.

Waterton described in 1839 how ‘while dissecting it will be of use to keep in mind that, in taking off the skin from the body by means of your fingers and a little knife, you must try to shove it, in lieu of pulling it, lest you stretch it.’¹⁰⁵ In large animals, skin could be unruly and difficult to control. Drooping arcs of skin could stretch and warp under their own weight. The skin must therefore be cradled and supported by the body and arms of the human skinner.¹⁰⁶ However, it is difficult to know if Victorian skimmers in the field, if exposed to inclement weather, and pestered by mosquitoes, always treated skins with such care. Indeed, Peel described how he and his shikari, on shooting a ‘gerenook’ (gerenuk) ‘ripped off the skin in double-quick time.’¹⁰⁷ Near the equator, as in Somaliland, days are short, and time for skinning

¹⁰¹ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 31.

¹⁰² Waterton, *Wanderings*, 289.

¹⁰³ Connor, *Book of Skin*, 40.

¹⁰⁴ Connor, *Book of Skin*, 40.

¹⁰⁵ Waterton, *Wanderings in South America*, 293.

¹⁰⁶ ‘That when you come to the head you must take care that the body of the skin rests on your knee; for if you allow it to dangle from your hand its own weight will stretch it too much’: Waterton, *Wanderings in South America*, 293. Similarly, Jardine notes that a bird should never be hung up, as that ‘always’ stretches the skin: Jardine, *Contributions to Ornithology*, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Peel, *Somaliland*, 82.

was limited. Swayne similarly described the rush to finish the operation before sunset.¹⁰⁸ Taxidermy time was influenced by other temporalities, including on a planetary scale.

The final step was to turn the entire skin inside out, over the head. The wrong side of the skin, always before hidden, briefly became the visible exterior (see figure 2.4). The skin is then teased away from the skull. Faces were particularly difficult to skin, as animal and human faces are crucial for interpreting emotion, are closely linked to identity, and are also very intricate.¹⁰⁹ Lee notes that ‘we must also be particularly careful not to injure the eyelids, and not to cut the lips too close.’¹¹⁰ Ward similarly suggests that damage to eyelids can ‘spread’ across the face and ‘render the damage seriously conspicuous.’¹¹¹ A badly skinned head will look ‘conspicuously’ like a skinned head when taxidermied, it will not look alive. After the skull was skinned, the carcass could be separated at the neck. The skin and the internal body finally parted ways.

This skinning process was often undertaken in the bush, at the kill site. This was a practical move, as the dead weight of large animals would be difficult to transport back to camp. Skins were material products of their environment. Peel described a lifeless lion:

Three things struck me as he stretched out dead before me: first, the enormous breadth of the ear; secondly, the quantity of ticks which infested every part of his body, and especially the mane; and thirdly, the quantity of particles of wood and thorns which had gone in at the foot and worked their way right up the legs between the flesh and skin, some having reached the armpits, causing the poor animal a good deal of pain, I should imagine.¹¹²

The skin was a living habitat, and they could become further soiled by vegetation and dirt during dissection. Skins could also reveal stories of an animal’s life, and other near-death experiences. Emma Bond describes the ‘layered temporality’ of (human) skin, as something ‘present in the here and now’, but also ‘holds the marks and memories of the past.’¹¹³ Peel recounted how he made a very good shot at a rhinoceros behind the shoulder, the bullet probably penetrating the animal’s heart. ‘In the afternoon I photographed him, and on skinning him I found a large flattened spherical eight-bore bullet implanted between the skin and the flesh of his neck. How long it had been there it was, of course, impossible to say, for the wound had healed up entirely.’¹¹⁴ Peel was not the first human hunter this animal had encountered, the bullet providing a corporeal trace of this previous meeting. Peel also hunted in the Arctic. Here, he shot a polar bear, and found ‘embedded in the fleshy part of the neck’ a

¹⁰⁸ Swayne, *Seventeen Trips Through Somaliland*, 219.

¹⁰⁹ Jablonski, ‘Emotions, Sex and Skin’, in *Skin*, 115.

¹¹⁰ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 27.

¹¹¹ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 30.

¹¹² Peel, *Somaliland*, 206.

¹¹³ E. Bond, *Writing Migration Through the Body* (Palgrave Macmillan eBook, 2018), 38.

¹¹⁴ Peel, *Somaliland*, 104.

‘particular Snider bullet which has not been in use for the last fifty years.’¹¹⁵ Skins are holders of time. These examples – travelling thorns and bullets – reveal that skins had long memories and contained the ability to both conceal and disclose the past.

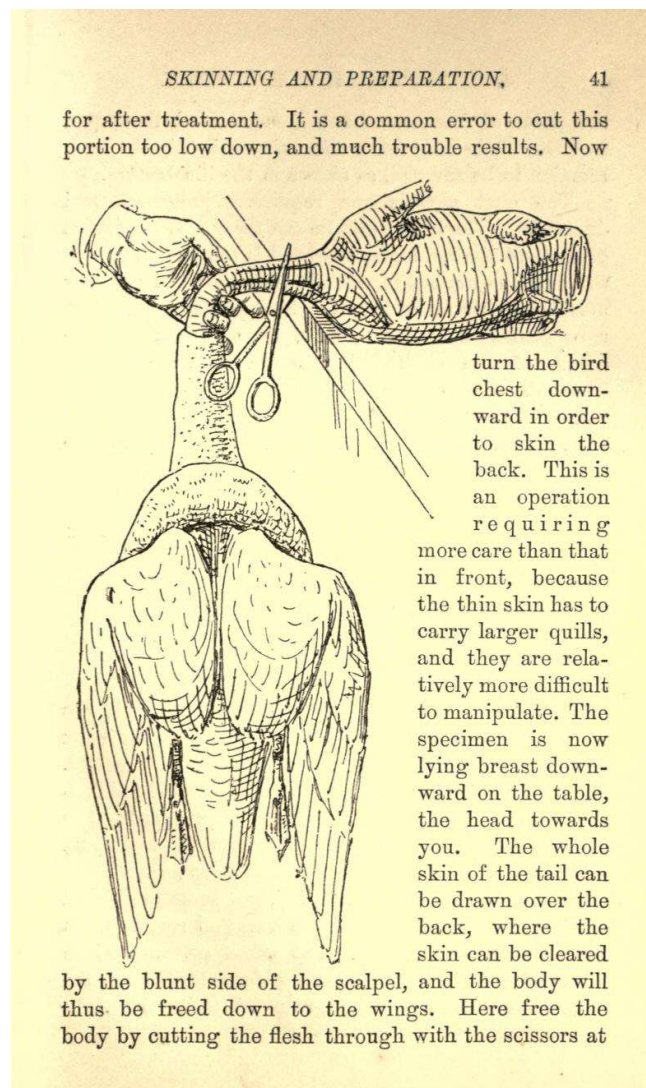


Figure 2.4: R. Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook* (1880), 41.

The animal interior, surplus and seen as somewhat corruptive, was commonly left in the bush to deteriorate, or for scavenger animals to claim; Peel writes of ‘the vultures pouncing down upon the gory carcase... they appeared, as it were, out of space.’¹¹⁶ The exceptions to this rule were edible animals such as antelopes and wild sheep; often these bodies (transformed, in the minds of the hunters, into meat) would be cooked and shared amongst the hunting party. Dundas describes how ‘his flesh is exceedingly good eating, as I very soon found out, and what

¹¹⁵ C. Peel, *The Polar Bear Hunt* (London: Old Royalty Book Publishers, 1928), 39.

¹¹⁶ Peel, *Somaliland*, 82.

with hashed gazelle and burhel chops, I lived pretty well for the next few days.¹¹⁷ The white hunter would generally take the best meat. On Christmas Day, following a (human) life-endangering bull elephant hunt, Peel feasted on elephant heart for his Christmas dinner.¹¹⁸ This bull elephant is on display at the RAMM in Exeter.

The final rupture of body from skin involved the cleaning of the skin's underside; running a knife back and forth to scrape away excess tissue – what was known as 'paring down' the skin. As Ward describes: 'having thus taken off the skin, it must be cleared of all superfluous fat and flesh- and all the fat and flesh is superfluous.'¹¹⁹ The skin, what was once merely the animal surface, was now its entirety. Some Victorian descriptions present these animal remains as having changed dramatically during the skinning process. Ward details how, when skinning legs, 'each limb can then be drawn out – as a glove might be turned inside out.'¹²⁰ Peel proclaimed that the 'skin of the rhinoceros come off very easily, and looks on the inside, together with the denuded body, exactly like the peel and freshly-peeled body of an orange.'¹²¹ Through these bizarre descriptions, the human reaches into the known domestic world to objectify the animal skin. Inside out – the wrong way round – this animal matter did not necessarily look animal. There is a sense that, through figurative language, Peel is attempting to manage the slipperiness of animal bodies.

There is also a supple fluidity in these descriptions, in that the animal takes on new shapes, and becomes new things. Ward asserted that a hunter must take detailed water colour paintings of each animal's skin just after death, as 'the colours not only fade, but change sometimes absolutely; and the taxidermist at home may be led to the wrong conclusion.'¹²² Jardine similarly recommended that, for dead birds, 'sketches of the head or soft parts, and naked skins, wattles, &c., coloured from the objects before they have faded, are very valuable additions; and, for this purpose, a small stock of water-colour drawing materials should accompany the collector's other tools.'¹²³ This loss of colour is an irreversible change. Ward observed that 'It is highly important that some preparation should be made for efficient and accurate record of scientific data, concerning natural features that are evanescent, such as the

¹¹⁷ Dundas, *Sport and Politics*, 133.

¹¹⁸ Peel, *Through the Length of Africa*, 113-14.

¹¹⁹ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 30.

¹²⁰ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 34. The taxidermist who led my course similarly described the folding of the skin over the head as the 'inside out sock phase.'

¹²¹ Peel, *Somaliland*, 299.

¹²² Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 13.

¹²³ Jardine, *Contributions to Ornithology*, 9. This was an addition to an array of paraphernalia Jardine suggested to accompany the skin into its museum future, to help it tell its story. These included a vellum (skin) ticket, attached to the bird's leg detailing 'number, locality, date, the sex,' and a 'memorandum book' noting the abundance of the species, migratory habits, superstitions relating to the bird by local peoples, and what food the bird eats.

colour of the eye, of a bird's bill and legs, etc.'¹²⁴ With taxidermy, skin colouration could be recreated with paint, or wax, but it would never again emanate from within. This dimming was especially visible on animals with naked sections of skin, or fleshy, blood filled appendages, such as female baboons. Skinned creatures were occupied by the death process. Waterton described, in florid detail, the changes which overcame the animal body:

Here, then, rests the shell of the poor hawk, ready to receive from your skill and judgment the size, the shape, the features and expression it had, ere death and your dissecting hand brought it to its present still and formless state. The cold hand of death stamps deep its mark upon the prostrate victim. When the heart ceases to beat, and the blood no longer courses through the veins, the features collapse, and the whole frame seems to shrink within itself. If then you have formed your idea of the real appearance of the bird from a dead specimen, you will be in error. With this in mind, and at the same time forming your specimen a trifle larger than life, to make up for what it will lose in drying, you will reproduce a bird that will please you.¹²⁵

Waterton's hawk is a 'shell' of what it once was. Its body is conspicuously absent, leading to its formlessness. Whilst he describes it as both 'still' and 'prostrate' in the 'present', this is in comparison to the plump liveliness the hawk once embodied – a state that, according to Waterton, could return. There is a mobility even in this stillness, in the features shrinking and collapsing. It is this very flexibility that enabled such skins to be remade in the future. The existence of the *skin life* made it possible to one-day perform taxidermy, and therefore to 'reproduce a bird that will please you.'

Despite the strange novelty of this skin state, these remains still had an animal presence. Peel describes the look shared between himself and a living jackal, as the creature 'saw me, stopped, and stood broadside.' He continues: 'I had no idea about the beauty of this animal (*Canis messomelas*) until he lay stretched before me; a black back with silvery-gray hairs was varied on his sides with bright yellow. My tiny penknife was the only skinning tool between us, so the operation was a lengthy one.'¹²⁶ Here, animality is not lost on death. Instead, it is in death, and skinning, that the true beauty of the animal is felt and realised by the hunter. Significantly, Peel also described his thoughts on a leopard who 'was very prettily marked.' He further detailed how, after skinning the big cat, and when penning a diary entry in his tent, 'his skin lies by me as I write.'¹²⁷ In this description, the leopard was still seen as himself, and still had the capacity to recline besides Peel. He was both supremely dead and very animal. Whilst practising taxidermy, I was also acutely aware of the animality of the dead rat. I felt and

¹²⁴ 'Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 12.

¹²⁵ Waterton, 'On Preserving Birds for Cabinets of Natural History', *Wanderings*, 300.

¹²⁶ Peel, *Somaliland*, 18. Similarly, the American naturalist Hornaday described how 'the site of a particularly fine animal, either alive or dead, excites within me feelings of admiration that often amount to genuine affection': Hornaday, *Taxidermy and Zoological Collecting*, 12.

¹²⁷ Peel, *Somaliland*, 48.

smelled it; nothing about the process felt divorced from the animal. It is this continued material presence that hunters sought, and why they went to such great lengths to source and retain skins.

Precarious Skins

Humans fought to secure the future of animal matter, by acting to prevent the corruption of skins. They believed that the skin must be kept whole, to enable it to successfully represent an animal through taxidermy. However, as well as potential taxidermy, there were other potential futures, always present within the animal skin.

In sun-scorched countries, human skin would burn as hunters leaned over their half-skinned trophies. Peel, in *Somaliland*, writes, on 'bagging' 'half a dozen' 'beautiful birds', "What a trouble the little wretches are to skin under a hot sun, to be sure!"¹²⁸ This was a common issue for the white skinned British hunter, as they marched across hot landscapes they violently claimed as their own.¹²⁹ Whilst quinine made malaria less of a threat to the British than it had been in the previous centuries – effectively enabling the realisation of the carving up of Africa by European powers enacted at the Berlin Conference of 1884 – there were still many environmental hazards.¹³⁰ In India and Africa, British hunters complained of fevers, the weather, and of the difficulty of spending long days on foot. In *Through the Length of Africa* Peel moaned that: 'the ticks on the Athi plains are innumerable and crawl all over one. One is obliged to scrape them off all parts of one's body with a knife every night. Dick was so badly attacked that he contracted very bad sore places on both legs, which became septic and painful for weeks afterwards.'¹³¹ These concerns played into the common trope of the dangers of imperial lands and exoticized nature. Hunters cared little for the men they employed on these long, dangerous marches, prioritising their own skins, bodies, and health. However, arguably their greatest worry was the safekeeping of their animal skins.

Skin had to be promptly separated from the unstable carcass in steamy conditions, where bacteria thrived. Swainson describes how, in humid environs, 'birds will not keep beyond a day without some degree of putrefaction taking place.'¹³² Oxygen starved cells become acidic, and enzymes break down cell membranes and 'leak out'. This is 'molecular death.'¹³³ With time, the animal becomes soupy, as soft tissues turn to fluid and gas. Taxidermic skinning was

¹²⁸ Peel, *Somaliland*, 15, 19.

¹²⁹ For more on the 'ultraviolence' of collection, see: D. Hicks, *The British Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

¹³⁰ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 169-70.

¹³¹ Peel, *Through the Length of Africa*, 103.

¹³² Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 30.

¹³³ M. Costandi 'This is What Happens After You Die', Wellcome <https://mosaicscience.com/story/what-happens-after-you-die/> [Accessed 2/02/19].

a variable event; its timing was bound to the environment, and death is a process that is difficult to halt. Holes and rotten skin (the work of industrious insects and pervasive bacteria) undermined the perception of liveliness crucial to successful taxidermy.

Some Victorian hunters mention the intensity of smells produced by rotting creatures. Peel noted how the memory of a foul-smelling encounter lingered on the mind and in the nose, 'I seem to smell him now.'¹³⁴ Lord Hardinge smelt the dissection of a big cat on the breeze, from a distance: 'One evening in camp the wind was blowing from a spot where a tiger was being skinned and the smell was very unpleasant.'¹³⁵ Mostly, however, smell is not mentioned; taxidermy guides were practical and directive and therefore did give space to odorous descriptions. Hunters used the written word to bolster a persona of manly resilience.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, smell was still an important part of the taxidermy story. Through taxidermy, I learnt that dead animal bodies – even rats in a semi-frozen state – produce an array of unpleasant smells immediately after the body is opened; smells that linger in fatty traces on human fingers. The smell of death emanates from over 400 volatile organic compounds, which are produced by bacteria. The body cavity bloats with gases, which are then released on skinning. Whilst the hunters and guidebooks generally ignore this olfactory assault, it was supremely attractive to more-than-human beings.

As the bacteria spread outwards from the gut, flies were attracted to the smell of death. They arrived almost immediately. Waterton noted that 'in the Temperate and Torrid Zone... almost everything becomes a prey to the insect.'¹³⁷ Peel described how jealously he guarded his skins as 'the ravages made by a little grub-beetle were terrible. I also discovered that part of the head of one rhinoceros was going rotten, and was full of maggots.'¹³⁸ The skin-feeding ground was an ecosystem, which supported waves of arriving insects.¹³⁹ Writhing masses of necrophagous maggots stripped skins of any lingering fat and flesh.¹⁴⁰ Insects such as carrion beetles then preyed on the maggots. Charles Waterton homogenises this co-dependent insect horde: 'Ere

¹³⁴ Peel, *Somaliland*, 55.

¹³⁵ Hardinge, 'The Uses of a Tiger' in *My Indian Years*, 71.

¹³⁶ Peel espoused that hunting 'exercises all the faculties which go to make a man most manly. The big game hunter must be endowed with great powers of endurance, self-denial, forbearance, and tact when dealing with the natives, and he must be able to act with great bravery, often at a moment's notice': Peel, *Popular Guide to MR. C. V. A. Peel's Exhibition*, 6.

¹³⁷ Waterton, *Wanderings*, 305.

¹³⁸ Peel, *Somaliland*, 118-9.

¹³⁹ With regards to human bodies: 'A rotting corpse as the cornerstone of a vast and complex ecosystem, which emerges soon after death and flourishes and evolves as decomposition proceeds.': 'Life After Death: The Science of Human Decomposition' <https://www.theguardian.com/science/neurophilosophy/2015/may/05/life-after-death> [Accessed 2/02/19].

¹⁴⁰ Ward notes that the 'principal of all the marauders' is the 'bacon beetle' *Dermestes Ladratus*, a 'dirty, dark coloured' beetle, and a 'veritable enemy.' This beetle was also known as the larder beetle: Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 19-20.

long the insects claim it as their own, the feathers begin to drop off, and you have the hideous spectacle of death in ragged plumage.¹⁴¹ Whilst this imagery clearly plays on the stereotype of the hostility of imperial environments – as the bringers of death and disease – the writings of hunters also suggest that several skins in every trophy haul, at least in warmer climes, did go bad.¹⁴²

Recent academic writing on animal traces in the history of medicine has discussed the subversive tapeworm: ‘the tapeworm created bodily connections between other animals that already shared an ecological and social space, and simultaneously built relationships between them, which would leave bodily traces upon the victims.’¹⁴³ Insects and bacteria similarly worked together, sharing space, to break down the animal body. This is what Bezan describes as the ‘necro ecology’ of death.¹⁴⁴ The complex dance between insect, bacteria, and host, had the potential to transform a taxidermy skin. The folds and orifices of the dead face were particularly attractive to insect life. Blowflies were often the first to arrive, lured by smell; Lee notes that if the naturalist ‘perceives that any flies have deposited their eggs on the lips of his quadrupeds, he must kill them with spirits of turpentine.’¹⁴⁵ I explore the use of preservatives and insecticides such as turpentine in Chapter 2, ‘Moving’.

With bacterial decay and insect infestation, hair and plumage ‘slipped’ and fell out leaving conspicuous bald patches.¹⁴⁶ With the breakdown of facial features, feathers and hair, the physical appearance of life faded. These multispecies interactions both exposed the animality of the skin and paradoxically undermined its ability to represent the animal through taxidermy. The nature of skin – as something temporally close to life – enabled the liveliness of decay to take hold. In the places where skin folds in on itself, flesh could be concealed between toes, and within ears and tails. Often these places could be reached by intrepid insect and bacterial blooms, but not by human hand and knife.¹⁴⁷ Swainson observed that insects

¹⁴¹ Waterton, *Wanderings*, 293.

¹⁴² Peel, *Somaliland*, 118. See: M. Harrison, ‘The Tender Frame of man’: Disease, Climate and Racial Difference in India and the West Indies 1760-1866’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 70 (1996), 68-93.

¹⁴³ A. Cassidy, R. M Dentinger, K. Schoefert, A. Woods, ‘Animal Roles and Traces in the History of Medicine, c.1880–1980’, *BJHS Themes*, 2 (2017), 11-13.

¹⁴⁴ S. Bezan, ‘Necro-Eco: The Ecology of Death in Jim Crace’s *Being Dead*.’ *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 8 (2015), 191-207. For more on decay and insects see: J. Lorimer, ‘Rot’, *Environmental Humanities*, 8 (2016), 235–39; C. DeSilvey, *Curated Decay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 4,5; H. Raffles, *Insectopedia* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011); S. Connor, *Fly* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006); J. Radin, ‘Rot’, *The Multispecies Salon* <http://www.multispecies-salon.org/rot/> [Accessed 21/10/19].

¹⁴⁵ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 51.

¹⁴⁶ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 19; Peel, *Somaliland*, 209.

¹⁴⁷ ‘The ears of a lion are very thick and contain a good deal of flesh. They should by rights be skinned right out, which, by-the-by, must be done with great care’: Peel, *Somaliland*, 210.

linger ‘where an undue proportion of the fleshy or bony parts has been suffered to remain.’¹⁴⁸ These are areas where the body refused to be entirely divorced from the skin. Eventually, as the skin became sticky, or bits fell away, the illusion of completeness that underpinned potential taxidermy was lost. To have potential is always an unfulfilled promise – it is an anticipation, something that might not come to pass. Irrevocably tainted skins would be returned to the ‘wild’ to complete their decomposition.

Skins hovered somewhere between decay and conservation. Newly preserved skins were rarely entirely stable. In life, Jablonski remarks, the skin is home to ‘hundreds of millions of microorganisms, which feed on its scales and secretions.’¹⁴⁹ The living skin is a product of flux, as the dead top layer sloughs off and is replaced. Parasitic insects, like ticks and fleas, feed on the skin and die with the animal (sometimes remaining clinging to fur after taxidermic preservation).¹⁵⁰ This flux was partially mirrored in death, as hair and tissue dropped away. Skins provided a record of historic and ongoing insect encounters. On skinning an antelope, Peel found it ridden with a ‘huge bot-like grub, very fat and cylindrical, of a dirty olive-brown’ which had ‘burrowed between the poor animal’s skin, and its flesh.’ He ‘squeezed several out of small holes made by them in the skin, by pressure of the finger and thumb.’¹⁵¹ Skins were living landscapes and timescapes. I have shown how, in and through their deadness, skins contained the ability to lure and host other lifeforms and to play on human minds.

Whilst hunters and naturalists idealised wholeness, there was also a pragmatism to their collection of skins, and a recognition that partial skins and bodies were sometimes better than nothing at all. The Scottish ornithologist William Jardine reasoned that: ‘in distant and little visited lands, where circumstances may sometimes occur which render it almost impossible to preserve or bring away perfect specimens, a skin in any condition, or fragments of it, the head, a wing, or foot, are always worth preserving.’¹⁵² Evidently, not every skin decomposed – many made their way to Britain and new *skin lives*. There were many potential futures held, potent and ready, within the taxidermy skin. Nevertheless, in temperate conditions, decomposition commenced within minutes of death. Even if skins were hastily peeled away, and preservatives applied, cellular and chemical change had occurred, and the dead animal was already materially different to the living one. Death was a physical process, which could never be entirely halted or reversed. Skins were inextricable from the effects of climate,

¹⁴⁸ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 30.

¹⁴⁹ Jablonski, *Skin*, 1.

¹⁵⁰ Charles Peel writes of skinning a lion and discovering ‘the quantity of ticks which infested every part of his body, and especially the mane’: Peel, *Somaliland*, 206.

¹⁵¹ Peel, *Somaliland*, 68.

¹⁵² Jardine, *Contributions to Ornithology*, 3-4.

humans, scavengers, insects, and death. They were sites of constant change, as they moved between potential futures.

Captive Skins

Potential taxidermy not only originated in the ‘wild’ places, and when the celebrated animals of city zoos died, their skins often remained urban residents. The National Museum, Cardiff, received a large donation of skins from the London Zoological Society, and regular additions of skins from a local menagerie.¹⁵³ Bristol Museum received animals from Bristol Zoo throughout the Victorian and Edwardian periods: the Museum Annual Report described in 1873 ‘several bodies of Animals which died in the Gardens of the Clifton Zoological Society have been presented by the Committee of that Society.’¹⁵⁴ This was the complex network that connected animal traders, hunters, zoos, museums and taxidermists and crossed nation and globe. Skinning could be completed in the comfortable surrounds of the city.

Hannibal, a famed lion, was born and bred in Britain, and showcased in Wombwell’s travelling menagerie. He was purchased by Bristol Zoological Gardens in 1872, at the Wombwell animal sale in Edinburgh.¹⁵⁵ His living body was renowned for its grand proportions and cost the zoo £270. The *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* reported in 1878 that visitors ‘will learn with regret that the noble lion “Hannibal” ... was found dead on Sunday morning.’ The elderly lion, once ‘considered the finest specimen in Europe’ had been ‘seriously ‘indisposed a few weeks back from a cold.’¹⁵⁶ A few weeks later the newspaper reported that “The carcass of the fine lion Hannibal, who died at the Gardens some time ago, has been stuffed by Mr. Crocker, and will be placed in the Museum at the top of Park- street.”¹⁵⁷ His body travelled less than a mile to be skinned and stuffed by the Museum Assistant. His life, death, and elderly skin were very different to the animals hunted and skinned in the wild.¹⁵⁸ He was no longer a prime specimen, his skin was wrinkled and familiar, and attracted crowds of onlookers.¹⁵⁹ Taxidermy skins came from many places, including those associated with captive spectacle and human entertainment.

However, these caged skins were often surrounded by ambiguity. In 1899, Hannibal’s story was changed, and his mount was reinterpreted and placed in a pride of lions, within a diorama

¹⁵³ Database of donations from the London Zoological Society 1922-3, conversation with Jennifer Gallichan, Natural History Curator at National Museum of Wales (February 2018).

¹⁵⁴ *Bristol Museum Annual Report*, Bristol Museum Fine Art Archive (Bristol: Bristol Museum, 1883), 12.

¹⁵⁵ ‘The Talk of Bristol’ *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 29 December 1890, 8.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Local Views’ *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 1 May 1878, 5.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Local News’, *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 31 May 1878, 5.

¹⁵⁸ ‘The Talk of Bristol’, *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 31 March 1899.

¹⁵⁹ *Bristol Museum Annual Report* (1900), 6.

depicting an idyllic South African savannah scene.¹⁶⁰ Hannibal's popularity did not last, and he was abruptly removed from Bristol Museum in the early twentieth century, to make way for a new lion mount – an animal that looked more like a trophy specimen; younger, and with an impressive skin to match.¹⁶¹ Jenny, a young chimpanzee, also lived in Wombwell's 'fine menagerie of wild animals' after being 'lately kidnapped in the sunny regions of Africa.'¹⁶² The naturalist Charles Waterton visited her five times, and had prearranged with Miss Blight, Jenny's keeper, that if the chimp were to die 'I would spare no pains to make her cherished favourite appear, for ages to come as though the cruel hand of death had never laid it low.'¹⁶³ He selected her skin like choosing an animal at market; captivity allowed Waterton access the living and dead chimpanzee. He had an intimate and tactile relationship with Jenny and 'exchanged soft kisses' with her. She was selected both for her rarity, as chimpanzees rarely survived for long in zoos in this period, and for her sentimental value.¹⁶⁴

When Jenny and the menagerie reached Warrington, 'without any previous symptoms of decay, Jenny fell sick and breathed her last.' Her body was wrapped in linen and placed in a trunk. It was then forwarded to Waterton at his home, Walton Hall, in Yorkshire. Waterton skinned and mounted the young chimp: 'Her skin is as black as a sloe in the hedge, whilst her fur appears curly and brown.'¹⁶⁵ Waterton had predicted Jenny's demise from tuberculosis, fearing that the 'gloomy' British climate would make the 'little prisoner' ill.¹⁶⁶ As the environmental historian Andy Flack has suggested, primates in British zoos struggled to survive in this period, particularly in harsh winters.¹⁶⁷ However, in his writing, Waterton also regularly racializes and anthropomorphises Jenny's body and skin, comparing her with a 'negress.' Waterton's insistence that she was killed by the British coldness is therefore likely to also play on a common trope of the early Victorian period – that people from Africa could not survive in northern European climates.¹⁶⁸ He described her unnatural and painful walk, and

¹⁶⁰ 'The Talk of Bristol', *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 1 April 1899, 4.

¹⁶¹ *Annual Report* (1906), 17. Hannibal was briefly displayed at the museum in Weston Super Mare, before being sold to a private company. His whereabouts are now unknown: *Hannibal: the Tale of a Local Lion*, Bristol Museum Fine Art Archive (1980).

¹⁶² C. Waterton, *Essays on Natural History* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1857), 65-7.

¹⁶³ Waterton, *Essays on Natural History*, 67.

¹⁶⁴ See: H. Ritvo *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 31; and A. Flack, 'Harvest and Heritage' in *The Wild Within: Histories of a Landmark British Zoo* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 31-32.

¹⁶⁵ This racist anthropomorphism highlights Jenny's ambiguous identity as an African chimp touring northern England.

¹⁶⁶ See also: R. Hobson, *Charles Waterton: His Home, Habits and Handiwork: Reminiscences of an Intimate and Most Confiding Personal Association for Nearly Thirty Years* (London: Whittaker & Company, 1866), 181.

¹⁶⁷ See: Flack, *The Wild Within*, 31-32. See also: Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, 31.

¹⁶⁸ D. Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Pan Books, Macmillan, 2017), 442.

how her body was confined and limited by her small treeless room. Waterton fervently believed that the young, wild-born chimp was killed by her British captivity.¹⁶⁹

This example demonstrates that taxidermy skins did not have a singular origin. It also exposes a tension between perceptions of captivity and wildness within the acquisition of skins. Jenny, whilst of sweet temperament, was considered too innately foreign and ‘Other’ to survive in Britain. This tension is made explicit in a final case study; that of Rowland Ward’s elephant. Unlike Jenny, this animal could not be tamed. He lived in the animal trader Carl Hagenbeck’s famed Tierpark in Hamburg and had attacked one of the zoo’s staff. In 1886, Hagenbeck decided to have his dangerous elephant killed. Ward, a friend of Hagenbeck, badly needed an elephant skin to display at London’s Colonial and Indian Exhibition.¹⁷⁰ We will meet this subversive elephant again, in Chapter 4, ‘Exhibiting’. Ward describes how ‘A friend of mine- a Dutch gentleman- said he would like to kill it when I said I was going over to see whether it would suit me.’ He continues:

I went with my friend to Hamburg to witness the shooting of the elephant. I had expected that Hagenbeck would have taken it out of the town away from any crowds, but he had made the preparations for the “elephant hunt” in a square of houses, and with people looking on all around us. It is true that it was in a poor neighbourhood, but I didn’t want to be concerned in an affair of that kind, so I told Hagenbeck that I couldn’t advise my friend to do any shooting in such a place, and I was surprised that he (Hagenbeck) had suggested such a dangerous quarter. I told him that if he killed the elephant, I would take the skin, so he agreed to that. I was told afterwards that he strangled the elephant with a big chain, but neither my friend nor myself saw it.¹⁷¹

It is striking that Ward refers to this scene as the ‘elephant hunt’—the language of the imperial hunt seeped into the acquisition and imaginings of captive skins. The original plan was for the animal to be shot and skinned in the impoverished Hamburg neighbourhood of Neuer Pferdemarkt. He was to be chained and surrounded by onlookers amidst the urban sprawl. Ward plays on a sense of jarring phoniness in his description; implying that this is the antithesis of the fair chase.

Ward and Hagenbeck both blamed each other for this cruel farce. Hagenbeck claimed that Ward’s friend, the intended sportsman, backed out before anyone could ‘see the hunter slay his game.’¹⁷² Hagenbeck then decided to have the elephant hanged. He criminalised the animal

¹⁶⁹ Adopting Jenny’s voice, Waterton writes ‘the food which they give me, is not like that upon which I used to feed, when I was healthy and free in my own native woods’: Waterton, *Wanderings*, 67.

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter 4, ‘Exhibiting’, for further exploration of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, and this elephant: Rowland Ward, *A Naturalist’s Life Study in the Art of Taxidermy* (London: Rowland Ward, 1913), 78.

¹⁷¹ Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, 79.

¹⁷² C. Hagenbeck, *Beasts and Men: Being Carl Hagenbeck’s Experiences for Half a Century Among Wild Animals* (London: Longmans, Green and CO, 1912), 154-5.

body, describing how he ‘signed his death warrant’ and ‘six of my men played the part of executioners.’ They then placed ‘a large noose around the animal’s neck.’¹⁷³ The elephant (wild in attitude, but not in origin) was then taxidermied and placed in a naturalistic Indian setting within London. He was surrounded by foliage and a painted jungle backdrop.¹⁷⁴ The elephant’s body epitomises the human desire to assign wildness, and the imagery of empire, to taxidermy skins, whether in earnest or in satire.

These skins reveal the unpredictability and fluidity of skin acquisition. The caged skin was a varied beast; these animals could be old and imperfect. They could be obtained for necessity, or for practicality. They could also be chosen for sentimental reasons; skins do not have one story, and they were shaped by their individual lives in zoos and menageries. Captivity enabled Hannibal and his skin to grow old and wrinkled. Captivity also resulted in the premature deaths of Jenny and the Hamburg elephant. These varied bodies tell of the human need for skins to nevertheless fit a narrative of hunting and wildness. They reveal a discrepancy between the material flexibility of taxidermy skins (as captive, wild, imperfect, old, young, wrinkled, impressive), and an inflexible expectation of wildness in the stories told about these animal bodies.

Conclusion

The animal skin was defined by what it had been in life, and what it could be in the future. I have revealed how taxidermy hunting and skinning were integral parts of the wider taxidermy process. Such creatures were *potential taxidermy*: selected and skinned to secure them as natural history specimens. Skins were always part of their wider environment. As organic dead matter, they attracted multispecies visitors, from the scavenging vulture to the burrowing blow fly larvae. They were only taxidermy in the minds of the human hunter; for other creatures, both little and large, they were prey and sometimes habitat.

British naturalists hunted with taxidermy firmly in mind. They eyed-up, shot, and sliced the skin so that it could become the natural history of the future. They used the infrastructure and power hierarchies of empire to assemble a hunting party, and to employ the labour of local peoples to process animal bodies. White British hunters idealised a state of completeness, believing that whole skins embodied animality: that they could be successfully returned to a semblance of animal form. I argue that this potential taxidermy always contained the possibility of becoming something else. Through the action of bacteria and insects, this animal matter could slip into undesired states. I discovered that the fears and realities bound to the

¹⁷³ Hagenbeck, *Beasts and Men*, 155.

¹⁷⁴ See: T.N Mukharji, ‘The Exhibition and its Visitors’, in *A Visit to Europe* (Calcutta: W. Newman, 1889), 66; Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, 74-85; ‘A Walk Round the “Colonies”, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 May 1886, 2.

loss of skins were integral to skinning as a process, and to what I describe as *taxidermy time*. Through its deadness, a skin could shape human thoughts, fears, and actions. The skin had to survive intact to be remade as a complete (seeming) animal body – to fulfil its potential as the taxidermy of the future – and yet its very animality attracted decay.

In *Taxidermy*, Lee described how to prepare a bird body for skinning:

tie it underneath the inferior mandible, having the thread the length of the bird, to prevent the blood from coming out of the beak during the operation. We have before said, that when a bird is killed, we must introduce a little cotton into its beak, we repeat this injunction; for the beauty of a mounted bird depends on the freshness of its head; it is easy to repair and clean the soiled feathers of the belly and back, but not so of the head without a great expense of time.¹⁷⁵

Here Lee explained how it was sometimes possible to save deteriorated skins; to return them to animal form, although often at the ‘expense of time.’ This is something I explore in Chapter 2, ‘Moving’, where I outline the temporalities of repetition and preservation that shaped, and were shaped by, animal skins as they travelled across land and sea. However, as Lee suggests, at every stage in the journey, potential taxidermy faced corruption – in this instance from leaky innards and human slipups. Skins were always precarious animal remains.

¹⁷⁵ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 56.

Chapter 2: Moving

In 1901, a Masai giraffe was killed in modern-day Tanzania near Mount Kilimanjaro. He was shot by the British hunter and natural history collector, Charles Peel, and his body was skinned.¹ Masai giraffe skins are a patchwork of abstract spots, their markings drip like brown paint. However, skinning the giraffe was not the end of Peel's epidermic alterations. The giraffe skin was chopped up into six different sections: four legs, a torso, and an extended neck.² This dismemberment enabled the sections of hide to be 'rolled into a bundle', some of which were loaded onto the heads of local porters, whilst others were heaved onto camel's backs.

At the end of a long, hard march, this caravan of animals and people reached the Usambara railway which connected the interior of German East Africa with the coast. After travelling by rail, these sections of skin were shipped to Britain. I argue that such skins embodied movement. Not only were they transported across land and sea, but their remains flowed back and forth between different states. In his exhibition guide, Peel described such giraffe skins as 'immensely thick and heavy, and in consequence they are very difficult to dry, cure and carry.'³ I follow skins through these motions of curing and carrying, and into sites not usually associated with taxidermy; boxes, backs, and ships.

In Chapter 1, 'Skinning', I demonstrated that *potential taxidermy* was bound to the materialities and human anxieties of wholeness and breakdown. I now take this argument further, revealing how there were multiple states – ways of being – occupied by skins in motion. I do this by developing the idea of taxidermy time, within the interlocking local, national, and global networks of transit.⁴ Engaged in these webs, animal remains interacted with numerous human and more-than-human temporalities, and made their own time. Animal skins were multidirectional: they travelled through environments and time.

As I explored in the introduction, time is often imagined as progressive and linear. The Victorians, with their enthusiasm for empire building, eugenics, and the spread of so-called civilisation, espoused this narrative. Conversely, Nature was (and still often is) considered to

¹ See: C. Peel, *Popular Guide to MR. C. V. A. Peel's Exhibition of Big-Game Trophies and Museum of Natural History and Anthropology* (Guildford: Billing & Sons, Ltd, 1906), 11. See also: C. Peel, *Through the Length of Africa* (London: Old Royalty Book Publishers, 1927).

² Peel, *Popular Guide*, 21-2. See also: 'Masai or Kilimanjaro Giraffe', Objects, <https://rammcollections.org.uk/object/99-1919-100/> [Accessed 24/10/19].

³ Peel, *Popular Guide*, 11. Also: C. Peel, *Through the Length of Africa*, 126.

⁴ For scholarship on networks and mobility see: J. Beattie, E. Melillo and E. O'Gorman (eds.) *Eco-Cultural Networks and the British Empire: New Views on Environmental History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); M. Aguiar, C. Mathieson and L. Pearce (eds.) *Mobilities, Literature, Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); and L. Keogh, *The Wardian Case: How a Simple Box Moved Plants and Changed the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

exist in cycles, repeating itself endlessly, in equilibrium. It is outside of human time. Scholars are beginning to reject this narrative and argue for the entanglement of different temporalities. The 'Lifetimes' project, a collective of temporally-minded academics at the University of Oslo, describes this change: 'an alternative view of the temporal order of global society, in which the linear, homogenous times of modernisation is challenged by a multiplicity of rhythms, speeds, and durations, in various historical and geographical contexts, emerging from lives unfolding on and in the planet.'⁵ These are 'different scales of time' and 'different scales of life.' They are 'different timelines.' Both humans and more than humans are bodies of repetition. Humans' skin sheds and is remade, we alter our behaviour with the seasons, we wake and sleep in a circadian cycle. But we are not simply repeating. As William Cronon argues, 'nature and culture change all the time' but 'the *rate* and *scale* of such change can vary enormously.'⁶ The natural scientist Pier Luigi Luisi proposes that all life is a combination of the 'arrow' and the 'circularity' of time: it is a 'kind of spiral-the-spiral.'⁷ Things repeat, but they are never entirely the same. I am drawn to models that emphasise the interconnections between different temporalities, for instance, Deborah Bird Rose's idea of knotted time.⁸

Taxidermy skins were the meeting place for different sorts of time. Hunters and naturalists manipulated and visualised skins with an idea of stability firmly in mind. I explore how, in a bid to reach this idealisation, humans poisoned skins with preservatives such as arsenic. Treated skins were folded up and placed in boxes for onward transportation. They were imagined as sealed off, and outside of the flow of time. However, I question how settled a moving thing can ever be. I argue that skins were pluritemporal: propelled towards Britain, and new *skin lives*, but also exhibiting elements of return and repeat.⁹ It is important to pay attention to this changeability, this ability to move back and forth between different times and states. It was something essential to both human engagement and imaginings of skins, and to the very material being of the animal body.

⁵ 'Lifetimes', Faculty of Humanities <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/projects/lifetimes/> [Accessed 24/10/19].

⁶ W. Cronon, 'The Uses of Environmental History', *Environmental History Review*, 17 (1993), 14.

⁷ P. L. Luisi, 'The Interplay of Cyclic and Linear Time in the Biological World', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, (2006), 98-109.

⁸ The Lifetimes project has been set up to ask questions about time and the Anthropocene. The entangled temporality of the Anthropocene has also been addressed by Deborah Bird Rose and Michelle Bastian: D. Bird Rose, 'Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time', *Environmental Philosophy*, 9 (2012), 127-40 and M. Bastian, 'Fatally Confused: Telling the Time in the Midst of Ecological Crises', *Journal of Environmental Philosophy*, 9 (2012), 23-48.

⁹ Pluritemporality refers to the intersection of different times, speeds and rhythms: A. Fryxell, 'Time and the Modern: Current Trends in the History of Modern Temporalities', *Past and Present*, 243 (2019), 285-98.

The philosopher Michel Serres suggests that time flows like turbulent water.¹⁰ The travelling skin was also the product, quite literally, of flows. With regards to humans, Jane Bennett describes the ‘vital materialities that flow through and around us.’¹¹ Body parts (including animal skins) are always in a conversation with the wider world. Similarly, the feminist philosopher Moira Gatens argues that the (human) body should ‘never be viewed as a finished or final product... since it is a body that is in constant interchange with its environment.’¹² I take inspiration from this idea of never-being-finished and see it as a useful way to think about deadness. Taxidermy, as something that embodied movement, journeying, and changing states, can reveal different layers of deadness – the different ways of being dead inhabited by skins as they moved across land and sea.

However, my ideas about time and deadness and mobility, all hinge on very physical substances and processes. Robyn Longhurst describes how, within scholarship, the body has become shorthand for the ‘fluidity of subjectivity’: ‘whilst it has become highly acceptable to employ postmodernist metaphors of fluidity and mobility, it is still not acceptable for the flesh and boundaries of fluid, volatile, messy, leaky bodies to be included.’¹³ I pay attention to these often-ignored messy things, to bodily fluids and forms, to demonstrate the importance of movement in time, place and body. Like in Chapter 1, ‘Skinning’, I use a broad selection of diaries and books by hunter-naturalists including Charles Peel, Frederick Selous and Henry Zouch Darrah, as well as shipping records and archives. I also employ taxidermy handbooks, which frequently include instructions on packing, transportation, shipping, and skin preservation. My geographical focus begins where the last chapter ended, in the hunting fields of Eastern Africa and India. However, in my bid to let skins lead the way, this focus flows out to port cities such as Aden and Bombay, and to the oceans.

As I explored in the introduction, some taxidermy scholarship is beginning to disrupt the common narrative of stillness and timelessness; for instance, Jane Desmond labels taxidermy as ‘vivacious remains.’¹⁴ Whilst an idea of liveliness is now applied to museum specimens, taxidermy remains woefully undiscovered in other places, beyond the museum. Karen Jones has written on the movement of a rhino specimen on Kent’s Chatham Railway. The rhinoceros’

¹⁰ M. Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time: Michel Serres with Bruno Latour* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 58.

¹¹ J. Bennett, ‘Preface’ in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, London, 2010), x. Stacy Alaimo proposes that, when thinking about embodiment, humans engage in ‘trans-corporeality’: imagining how the human ‘is always inter-meshed with the more-than-human world’: S. Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

¹² M. Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1996), 110.

¹³ R. Longhurst, *Bodies: Exploring Fluid Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 23.

¹⁴ J. Desmond, ‘Vivacious Remains: An Afterword on Taxidermy’s Forms, Fictions, Facticity, and Futures’, *Configurations*, 27 (2019), 257-66.

skin was injured in a tale ‘of damaged goods and railway ineptitude.’¹⁵ This vignette on bodily transit is brief as it provides a way into broader discussion on Percy Powell-Cotton’s museum. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that animals in motion matter. Ann Coley is another exception, and one who tracks the ‘muddles and disappointments’ of natural history collecting, and the ‘disorderliness’ of imperial skin acquisition, including within the movement of skins on ships.¹⁶ She argues that ‘if the specimens survived the journey across a foreign land and reached the ship returning to England, there was the probability that they would not survive the voyage’, due to the possibility of fires, infestations, and shipwrecks.¹⁷ Mostly, however, the travelling skin goes unmentioned. By detailing the physical journeys of skins (between places, times, and states) I explore new ground. In reaching beyond a museum focus, I uncover a set of processes, places, and ways of being, that were integral to taxidermy in the making.

The movement of skins was essential to their eventual recreation as taxidermy. This is exemplified by Charles Peel’s Masai giraffe skin. Twenty years after being shot in Eastern Africa, and shipped to Britain, the taxidermied giraffe entered the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) in Exeter, from his previous residence in Peel’s private museum in Oxford. He had been put back together by the famed taxidermist, Rowland Ward.¹⁸ Over time, he has become known as Gerald, although he was known to Peel only as the ‘Kilimanjaro Giraffe.’ Peel was poetic in his storytelling about giraffes; in his exhibition guide, he described seeing their ‘huge bodies swaying from side to side like rolling ships in a heavy sea.’¹⁹ Once dead, giraffe skins travelled across a rolling sea to Britain, but only once their hides had been condensed and packaged; rolled in on themselves. In the RAMM, Gerald’s past *skin lives* and times are still visible to the museum visitor, if they take the time to look.²⁰ Stitches snake along and across his spotted hide, and in places he is coming apart at the seams. These stitches frame and connect the six segments of his body. Gerald’s journey is stitched into his skin (see figure 3.1).

¹⁵ K. Jones, ‘The Rhinoceros and the Chatham Railway: Taxidermy and the Production of Animal Presence in the ‘Great Indoors’’, *History*, 101 (2016), 710-35.

¹⁶ A. Coley, *Wild Animal Skins in Victorian Britain: Zoos, Collections, Portraits and Maps* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 60.

¹⁷ Coley, *Wild Animal Skins*, 60.

¹⁸ For context see: R. Ward, *The Sportsman’s Handbook to Practical Collecting, Preserving, and Artistic Setting-up of Trophies and Specimens to which is Added a Synoptical Guide to the Hunting Grounds of the World* (London: Rowland Ward, 1880); R. Ward, *A Naturalist’s Life Study in the Art of Taxidermy* (London: Rowland Ward, 1913).

¹⁹ Peel, *Popular Guide*, 11.

²⁰ See ‘Masai or Kilimanjaro Giraffe’, Objects, <https://rammcollections.org.uk/object/99-1919-100/> [Accessed 24/10/19]. For more on the visibility of specimens including Gerald see: J. Ryan, ‘“Hunting with the Camera”: Photography, Wildlife and Colonialism in Africa’, in C. Philo and C. Wilbert (eds.) *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000), 205-07.



Figure 3.1: A postcard of Gerald produced by the RAMM (Copyright RAMM).

Animal Labour

The dead animal body journeyed from kill-site to camp, and then their skins entered a network of human and animal labour and movement. The animal species employed within the hunting party depended on the environment, although horses were the most common hunting assistant. However, in Somaliland, camels were favoured; their wide spreading toes easily traversed undulating, sandy plains (see figure 3.2).²¹ Oxen were loaded up in Southern Africa,

²¹ C. Peel, *Somaliland: Being an Account of Two Expeditions into the Far Interior, Together with a Complete List of Every Animal and Bird Known to Inhabit That Country, and a List of the Reptiles Collected by the Author* (London: F. E Robinson & Co, 1900), 8.

and Asian elephants were utilised as both hunting platforms and skin-carriers in India.²² Charles Peel mentioned using a 'stalking camel' in Somaliland.²³ Hunters often shot from horseback, and then skinned the animal at the kill-site whilst their horse waited and watched on. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, both Peel and Harald Swayne led camels to carcasses to act as skin bearers, as the dead weight of large skins and bones were too much for the human hunters to bear alone. Swayne described: 'we then put the skull and lion-skin on the camel, and after an hour or two, following the tracks of the caravan, found the camp pitched and my tent ready.'²⁴ The reader is offered a glimpse – a trace – of the labour of Swayne's Somali workforce in pitching and organising the campsite.

In northern India, in the 1890s, Henry Zouch Darrah loaded up a pony which 'had as much as it could carry' in the skin and head of a bull yak.²⁵ Animals could be dripping with skins. Dead skin swathed living skin, and animal muscle moved skins recently stripped of muscle and flesh. Sometimes humans were also tactually engaged in this funeral procession. In 1882, Frederick Selous, his shikari, and hunting party, trekked across South Africa looking for lions, and, following a kill, Selous' shikari attached a lion skull to his saddle with a loop of rope, whilst Selous took the skin.²⁶ He described folding the paws and front legs of the lion skin around his waist and letting the rest 'hang' down on either side of the saddle. The remains of the lion enfolded and shrouded the lower human body and rested across the broad back of the horse. Skin cloaks and encloses by its very nature.

On spotting another, living, lion, Selous struggled: 'dropping the reins and working as hard as I could to unfold the skin that was twisted round my waist.'²⁷ This was a multispecies procession, a layering of moving living and dead skin, that depended on the cooperation of the domesticated animal. A 'shooting horse', that had been trained to carry meat and skins, would allow you to 'pack a reeking lion skin upon him... as long as he has never been frightened or mauled.'²⁸ Sometimes, though, the hunt went wrong, and horses were spooked – one of Selous'

²² The taxidermist William Swainson described how 'in Southern Africa, Wagons are used on long journeys, but on short ones the baggage is conveyed upon the backs either of horses or oxen': W. Swainson, *Taxidermy: with the Biographies of Zoologists* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1840), 2-3.

²³ Peel, *Somaliland*, 142.

²⁴ H. G. C. Swayne, *Seventeen Trips through Somaliland and a Visit to Abyssinia* (London: Rowland Ward, Limited, 1903), 219.

²⁵ H. Z. Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands of Kashmir: Being a Narrative of an Eight Months' Trip in Baltistan and Ladak, and a Lady's Experiences in the Latter Country: Together with Hints for the Guidance of Sportsmen* (London: Rowland Ward, 1898), 305.

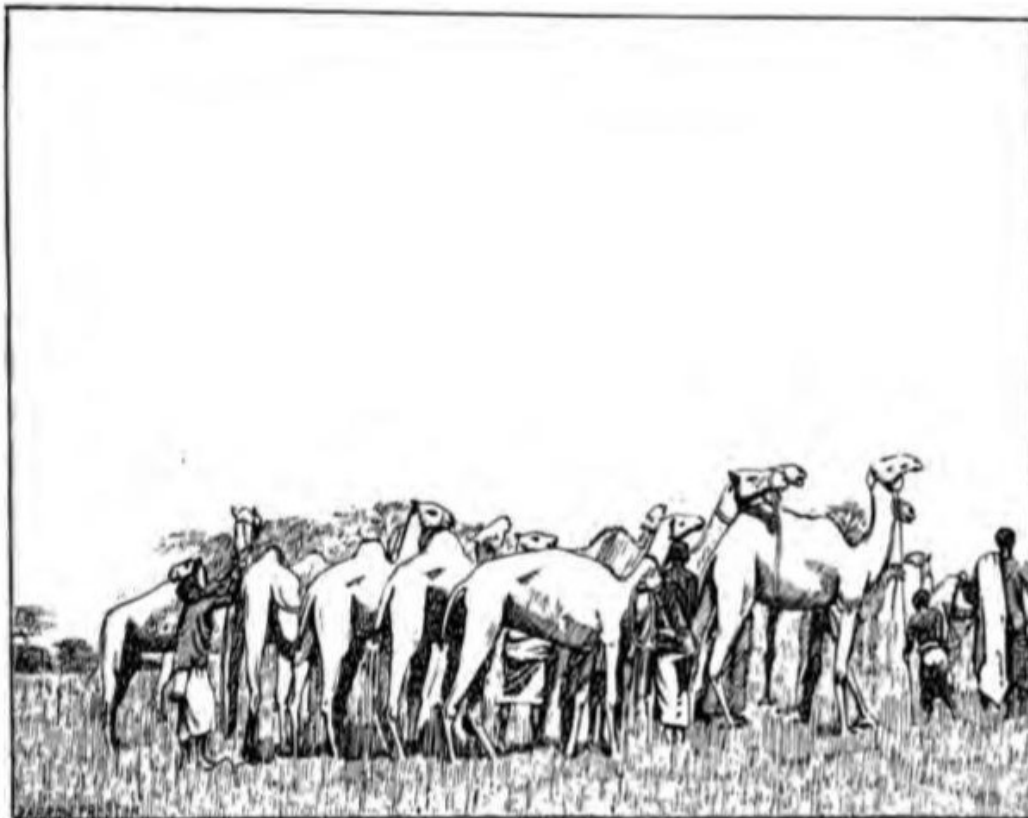
²⁶ Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 37.

²⁷ Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 37.

²⁸ Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 126.

horses 'would not allow' his Shikari to load a lion onto its back.²⁹ It reared and ultimately rejected this leonine second skin as, for the horse, the lion remains still smelled of danger.³⁰

The relationship between human, skin and domesticated animal was further complicated by the use of dead and living animals as bait. On the march between camps and hunting locations, domesticated animals often perished. The dead creature, no longer able to carry its lifeless load, could be laid close to camp to attract wild animals. These scavenging creatures would then be shot. Such wild creatures, when dead, were then skinned and loaded onto the backs of still-living domesticated animals.



HERDING UP THE CAMELS FOR AN ONWARD MARCH.

Figure 3.2: C. Peel, *Somaliland* (1900), 41.

In *Somaliland* (1900), Peel described how a camel and a pony became ill after being visited by the tsetse fly.³¹ As the tsetse parasite coursed through its blood, the pony's skin became swollen around its eyes and belly, and it stopped eating. Both animals soon died, and their bodies were

²⁹ For further insights on imperial animal labour and agency see: J. Saha, 'Colonizing Elephants: Animal Agency, Undead Capital and Imperial Science in British Burma', *BJHS Themes*, 2 (2017), 169-89; S. Swart, *Riding High-Horses, Humans and History in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2010).

³⁰ Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 38.

³¹ Peel, *Somaliland*, 138.

left near the camp in the hope of attracting lions. Peel watched over the corpses, gun at the ready. But their bodies soon attracted the wrong sort of wild animals; hyenas and jackals, rather than more charismatic and valuable creatures, came in their ‘dozens’ to ‘feed on’ the carcasses.³² Conversely, Selous used the excess meat from animals such as antelopes ‘as bait’ to purposefully attract hyenas. He wanted to kill the hyenas, not for their own skins, but to prevent them from stealing skins laid out around the campsite.³³

Domestic animals were employed in life and in death – they had a haptic relationship with (potential) taxidermy skins. They were therefore influencers of taxidermy time. I have included their stories to demonstrate the multi-layered exchange of animal lives, smells, hunger, and muscle power, that produced and moved taxidermy animals. From the tsetse parasite to the camel-as-bait, there was a fluctuating exchange of nonhuman lives and deaths bound to this taxidermy process. Domestic animals were simultaneously dominated and energetic beings, and their living bodies and their deadness both helped and sometimes hindered the British hunter.

Preservation

Once the skin, working animal, and human hunters arrived back at camp, the skins would be prepared. This was often the start of a long wait, a slowing of time, in the wake of the action and quick violence of hunting and skinning. Sarah Bowdich Lee suggested in *Taxidermy* (1820) that ‘it is very advantageous to stay at least a week in the place he has chosen for the first halt, because of the pains required in the commencement of a collection.’³⁴ This waiting time was the period needed for a skin to dry out and become treatable.

Skins were placed in the sun or around fires to promote evaporation. Darrah described leaving skins out about his Kashmiri camp to ‘wind dry’, hoping that water would be whipped away on the active air.³⁵ The elephant hunter Arthur Neuman, in *Elephant-Hunting in East Equatorial Africa* (1898), recalled how skins set the time: ‘It was necessary to wait here another day for my lion skins to dry.’³⁶ This was a temporality dictated by thickness, sponginess and the propensity of a skin to hold onto grease and fluids.³⁷

³² On another occasion, Peel tethered a living donkey and waited behind a thorn zareba: Peel, *Somaliland*, 146, 88.

³³ Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 24.

³⁴ S. Bowdich Lee, *Taxidermy: or, the Art of Collecting, Preparing, and Mounting Objects of Natural History. For the Use of Museums and Travellers* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), 50.

³⁵ Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands of Kashmir*, 489.

³⁶ A. Neumann, *Elephant-Hunting in East Equatorial Africa* (London: Rowland Ward, 1898), 74.

³⁷ Leon Luther Pray recommended drying small creatures by ‘burying the skin for some minutes in dry plaster of Paris...When nearly all the moisture is drawn out, dust the skin in the plaster until natural fluffiness is restored’: L. Luther Pray, *Taxidermy* (New York: Outing Publishing Company, 1913), 25.

How quickly these skins dried also depended on the environment. In mountains such as the Himalayas, in cold European winters, and in icy regions, animals disintegrated slowly.³⁸ The cold environment protected the skin and enabled it to remain relatively stable. Such animals could occasionally be transported whole and unskinned. Preservatives were not entirely necessary in frigid places if skins had been dried by the fireside.³⁹ Nevertheless, extreme conditions could cause other injury; Selous described sleeping with skins in British North America (i.e. Canada): 'If the nights are cold put the skins under your blankets and sleep on them to prevent them from freezing.'⁴⁰ In this new *skin life*, the human lived alongside and with the skin, as animal remains were woven into the everyday experiences of camp life.

It was common practice to stretch the skin across the ground and peg it to the earth. This enabled air to circulate. Even in the freezing hills of Kashmir, skins were pegged to the earth, although sometimes only for the daylight hours.⁴¹ This stretching practice often caused distortion.⁴² As measurements were frequently taken from pegged hides, the data taxidermists back in Britain received regarding an animal's proportions could become exaggerated. Major Campbell noted how this skewed the statistics in many game record books: 'most men content themselves with taking the length of skin when pegged out to dry, after the beast has been flayed. It is thus that the 12 and 14 feet measurements are obtained.'⁴³ Ward similarly pleaded with amateur sportsmen to measure the body *before* skinning, so as not to stretch the skin and its measurements.⁴⁴

Hunting diaries suggest that camps and caravans often moved on more regularly than was ideal for drying. Hunters became impatient; desirous of reaching new environments and better skins. Selous travelled with a large horse drawn wagon in which specimens could continue the drying process, to combine this waiting time with travelling time. He described his mobile arrangement: 'I had made a rough platform, the ends of the poles forming which at one side rested on the rail of my wagon. On this platform were packed several dried skins of large antelopes, all of them preserved for mounting with the leg-bones attached.'⁴⁵

³⁸ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 30.

³⁹ F. Selous, *Recent Hunting Trips in British North America* (London: Witherby & Co., 1907), 394.

⁴⁰ Selous, *Recent Hunting Trips*, 394.

⁴¹ Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands of Kashmir*, 209.

⁴² Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 18; Waterton, *Wanderings*, 289.

⁴³ Campbell, *My Indian Journal*, 73.

⁴⁴ Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 136.

⁴⁵ Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 26.

However, before skins – potential taxidermy – were packaged up, they had to be treated. The cultural scholar Lowell Duckert argues that the (human) skin is a site of liquid ‘exchanges.’⁴⁶ Once bodily moisture was removed from the (animal) skin, it was replaced with other liquids. Skins were basted with preservatives and insecticides, and these took the form of pastes, soaps, and solutions. As Swainson described, “The *chemical preparations* or compositions, used in anointing the skin, are of various kinds.”⁴⁷ Skins were truly saturated with these substances, and preservatives entered the skin and took up the places formerly occupied by bodily fluids.

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Figure 3.3: ‘Taxidermine’ Advertisement in *The Field*, 2 February 1895.

Many of these were poisonous or toxic. Alum, carbolic acid, naphthalene, turpentine, corrosive sublimate (aka mercury chloride), and various salts were popular.⁴⁸ A columnist writing in *The Field* in 1871 under the alias the ‘Wandering Naturalist’, described a strange recipe involving ground salt, alum, and barley meal, mixed with buttermilk that he used when travelling in the Himalayas. The smell of aging buttermilk, spread over skins, must have been pungent. This

⁴⁶ L. Duckert, *For All Waters: Finding Ourselves in Early Modern Wetscapes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 2.

⁴⁷ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 27.

⁴⁸ See: Luther Pray, *Taxidermy*; Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*; W.B Tegetmeier, ‘The Naturalist: Preservation of Objects of Natural History’, *The Field*, 29 December 1886, 306.; E. Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1890).

mixture should be ‘rubbed into the skin daily, washing it every second day with buttermilk.’⁴⁹ Raw and disembodied skins were pliable, something which benefitted the application of these myriad substances. The taxidermist Leon Luther Pray detailed that ‘To prepare mammal skins in the field, for transportation and keeping... Salt thoroughly, rubbing in well, and roll up to drain over night.’⁵⁰

Arsenic was the primary preservative. Things rotted less frequently if they were thoroughly poisoned, and arsenic preserved the look of life. Luther Pray concluded that ‘arsenic is needed for the preservation of all specimens against moths.’⁵¹ Darrah described how the naturalist should ‘paint’ arsenic around the ‘the lips, eyes, nose, and ears, and wherever there are any hollows.’⁵² This was a face paint with a lethal disposition. Arsenic paste could be diluted with cold water ‘to the consistence of clear broth.’ However, as Swainson continues, soap was ‘more adapted for travellers’ due to its ‘a less fluid state.’⁵³ Arsenical soap was invented by the French ornithologist Jean-Baptiste Becoeur in the late 18th century and contained Arsenious acid: a compound of elemental arsenic and oxygen.⁵⁴ The Scottish ornithologist William Jardine instructed the soap be ‘wetted with a hog’s-hair brush, and laid over the skin, of the consistence of not very thick cream.’⁵⁵ Arsenic soap was unctuous and ambiguous, somewhere between a solid and a liquid.⁵⁶ It revolutionised the global taxidermy industry by repelling insects and preventing decomposition with its toxic ooze.

However, towards the end of the period, prominent British taxidermists began to reject the poison. The national press, and particularly *The Field*, hosted a long running debate regarding its sins and virtues. Some sat on the fence: in 1862, a hunter calling himself ‘An Old Bushman’ described how ‘I fancy that the constant use of arsenical soap must in time be deleterious to the constitution, especially if you sleep in the room where the specimens are kept. I certainly never yet felt any ill effects from its use, and in Australia I used to skin on an average 200 skins yearly, but that was in an open tent’.⁵⁷ Whilst the ‘old bushman’ concluded that arsenic is perhaps the best for bird skins, he ‘rarely uses’ it now, instead opting for a heady combination of sugar of lead, alum, white pepper, spirit of wine and gin. Prominent taxidermists such as Rowland Ward and Montagu Browne commented on arsenic’s deadly temperament, and its

⁴⁹ ‘Recollections of the Himalayas by a Wandering Naturalist’, *The Field*, 9 December 1871, 504.

⁵⁰ Luther Pray, *Taxidermy*, 99.

⁵¹ Luther Pray, *Taxidermy*, 11.

⁵² Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands of Kashmir*, 490.

⁵³ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 28.

⁵⁴ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 12; J. Whorton, *The Arsenic Century: How Victorian Britain was Poisoned at Home, Work & Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8-9.

⁵⁵ W. Jardine, ‘Hints for Preparing and Transmitting Ornithological Specimens from Foreign Countries’, *Contributions to Ornithology for 1848* (Edinburgh: W.H Lizars, 1848), 3-4.

⁵⁶ Elliott Coues advocated the use of arsenic, but not in soap form, describing it as a ‘nasty, greasy substance’: Coues, *Handbook of field and general ornithology*, 39.

⁵⁷ An Old Bushman, ‘Arsenic in Preserved Bird- Skins’, *The Field*, 6 December 1862, 515.

ineffectual preservative qualities.⁵⁸ Ward, ever the entrepreneur, invented his own ‘taxidermine’, a vague ‘non-poisonous’ application (see figure 3.3). Nevertheless, arsenic continued to be used by many hunters and naturalists, including Fredrick Selous, into the twentieth century.⁵⁹

Arsenic was a fickle friend. Skinning left its mark on human skin through cuts and tears. Arsenic slipped inside these abrasions. The American ornithologist Elliott Coues describes how ‘it will convert a scratch or cut into a festering sore.’⁶⁰ It sneaked under fingernails, causing abscesses to form and swell: ‘If the least particle gets between the skin and the nail, and it is not immediately removed, it separates both much lower down than their natural limits, causes great pain’.⁶¹ It rendered some taxidermists bedbound or hospitalised. Arsenic is odourless and tasteless; it can creep in and around unnoticed.

Preservatives such as arsenic bound themselves to animal skin. They clung to hair follicles and feather fragments. They entered the epidermis. They coated the animal body with human intervention and intention. And yet they could not always be controlled, endangering both insect and human lives. These were strange materials, full of contradictions: preservatives made the skin wet again, yet they promoted drying.⁶² They theoretically prolonged the look of life in the dead animal by killing other lifeforms. They extended the life of the skin, stilled insect bodies, and stalled bacterial multiplication. They were valued for their ability to slow bodily time, as arsenic disrupts ATP production in mitochondria; it prevents the cycles of life on a cellular scale. Arsenic seems to epitomise the unnatural, and the arsenic sold to hunters by Victorian druggists and chemists was a by-product of the metal refinement process.⁶³ It was an embodiment of heavy industry, and yet it is also an elemental metal, found in soil, air and plants.

⁵⁸ Browne described taxidermist’s preference for arsenic as a ‘fallacy’: M. Browne, *Practical Taxidermy* (London: L. Upcott Gill, 1884). An article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* described how Browne invented a recipe ‘for a non-poisonous preservative soap, more effacious in drying and toughening skins and pleasantly scented with musk, an ingredient to which many insects object’: ‘Reviews: Taxidermy and Modelling’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, June 18, 1896, 11.

⁵⁹ F. Selous, *African Nature Notes and Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), 261.

⁶⁰ Coues, *Handbook of Field*, 40.

⁶¹ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 28-9.

⁶² Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 19.

⁶³ Whorton, *The Arsenic Century*, 27. William Jardine recommended that many druggists in London would sell Arsenic soap including: Messrs Wadworth and Housely, of Broad St: Jardine, ‘Hints for Preparing and Transmitting Ornithological Specimens’, 7. For more on the intersections of nature and culture, and the nature-culture binary, see: M. Shaffer and P. Young, ‘The Nature-Culture Paradox’ in M. Shaffer and P. Young (eds.) *Rendering Nature: Animals, Bodies, Places, Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 1-17.

Back and Forth, Round and Round

In Chapter 1, 'Skinning', I argued that hunters battled to keep skins intact, and that the identity of potential taxidermy was bound to both the anxieties, and realities, of decay. To enable this continued wholeness, and a feeling of control over both the skin and its temporalities, hunters fed their animal remains poison. However, even preserving was not simply a question of 'freezing' the animal. Arsenic did not stop time. These ointments often failed to go to work and successfully preserve skins. Furthermore, I propose that preserved skins were a novel combination of skin and chemical, bound together. The trace of poisons would always remain with and within the skin. This skin-preservative compound, rather than demonstrating a stopping of time, embodied a new *skin life*, a new way of being dead. Infused with poisons, the skin was nothing like what it had been before.

The 'Wandering Naturalist', writing for *The Field* in 1871, suggested that one of the greatest pitfalls of the amateur naturalist was 'over-dosing' skins with arsenical paste.⁶⁴ With too much arsenic, as the wandering naturalist explained, skins became 'sodden' which 'subsequently, on steaming the skin, causes the cuticular surface to crumble to pieces.' Conversely, the preserving process sometimes left skins hardened and warped.⁶⁵ Ward suggested that:

The fact was too often ignored that the use of astringents, necessary to preserve a skin, invariably distort it, and that this distortion differs even in several parts of the same skin, by reason of the varying thickness or even the condition of the health in which the animal was killed.⁶⁶

If the wrong preservative were used – an incorrect skin-pairing – then animal remains could become irreparable, for instance birds treated with alum became 'fatally brittle.'⁶⁷ With the application of corrosive sublimate, if used too freely, a skin could become peppered with burns and holes.⁶⁸ The skin therefore partially dictated its own chemical coupling, and, even when correctly applied, these tricky substances did not always act as expected.

The paradox of skin transportation is that it was an attempt to keep a moving thing stilled in time and body. And yet preservation itself was a drawn-out process. The changes affected by drying and poisoning were not necessarily absolute or sudden. The specimen did not move immediately or evenly from raw to preserved. Sarah Bowdich Lee suggests this when

⁶⁴ 'The Naturalist: Recollections of the Himalayas by A Wandering Naturalist', *The Field*, 24 June 1871, 504.

⁶⁵ Selous describes a 'hard dry skin': Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 30. See also: Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 18.

⁶⁶ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 53.

⁶⁷ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 17-18.

⁶⁸ Jardine, 'Hints for Preparing and Transmitting Ornithological Specimens', 8.

instructing hunters to check ‘parts where the preservative has not yet penetrated.’⁶⁹ Chemicals slowly transformed skins in the time spent travelling by foot, hoof, rail, or ship.

Moreover, this was not a singular act; hunter and skin were engaged in the repetitive process of the application of preservatives and insecticides and observation. Peel placed the skins under a watchful gaze; he described himself as ‘attending to my skins.’⁷⁰ Hunters created a narrative around the reversal of bodily decay and deterioration, achieved through more preservatives, and their application with the exploratory hand, under a roving eye.

Skins infested with insects were not necessarily irrecoverable: ‘I only saved it in time with hot wood-ashes mixed with alum and saltpetre.’ Here Peel positions himself as carer and protector of the skins. Similarly, he recounted that:

After breakfast I made a thorough examination of all my skins, and found that the well-known larvae of the black beetle with white shoulders had been playing sad havoc with some of them. I anointed them freely with turpentine, and the stock of which I was sorry to find was rapidly vanishing.⁷¹

Ward similarly describes regularly reapplying alum and turpentine to areas which suffer from hair ‘slip’ and the ‘taint.’⁷² There is a cyclical element to this transformation, as hunters fought to literally save their skins, and return the animal body to a less unstable state. However, the addition of more poisons could never be a complete return— a true loop in time – as every addition produced a new composition.

This (imperfect) cyclical preservation is mirrored in biology and ecology; the very processes hunters hoped to pause. The historian Joanna Radin argues that:

rot is a way of thinking ontologically in reverse. It can mean understanding the order of things as they disappear rather than as they come into being. Rotting is a process that requires collectivity – from the vulture to the microbe – the scavengers and decomposers who assemble to help metabolize life after life.⁷³

It is easy to think of disintegration as an ending, of a creature’s time being up. In the previous chapter, I explored how decay has elements of quickening, of forward motion. For example, Peel described how, in hastily applying alum and saltpetre to a foul-smelling lion skin, he was ‘just in time to stop it going altogether.’⁷⁴ He was just in (human) time. But human time and

⁶⁹ Lee also described how ‘at the end of three or four days he will again put the spirits on the same parts, particularly round the mouth of the quadruped’: Lee, *Taxidermy*, 50.

⁷⁰ Peel, *Somaliland*, 123.

⁷¹ Peel, *Somaliland*, 119, 209. Infestations were a common, although sometimes controllable, occurrence; Sarah Bowdich Lee confirms that, if insects could not be killed, they could at least often be ‘dispersed’: Lee, *Taxidermy*, 73.

⁷² Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 19.

⁷³ J. Radin, ‘Rot’, *The Multispecies Salon* <http://www.multispecies-salon.org/rot/> [Accessed 21/10/19].

⁷⁴ Peel, *Somaliland*, 123.

clocks are ineffectual for thinking about the interactions of the world; to quote Paul Huebener, they are: ‘maddeningly inadequate for representing the fluctuations of time within the living pulsing irregular world of storms and drought, hummingbirds and glaciers.’⁷⁵ There is more than one way to think with rot, and decay is not simply a forward rush. Materials and molecules are broken apart and endlessly reused and recycled.⁷⁶

Water, an element that is integral to the oozing qualities of rot, similarly operates in a cycle. The ecologist Sandra Steingraber describes how:

I drink water, and it becomes blood plasma, which suffuses through the amniotic sac and surrounds the baby – who also drinks it. And what is it before that? Before it is drinking water, amniotic fluid is the creeks and rivers that fill reservoirs. It is the underground water that fills wells. And before it is creeks and rivers and groundwater, amniotic fluid is rain.⁷⁷

I see taxidermic preservation and transportation, the drying of skins, the sponging of bodily fluids, the addition of poisonous liquids, and the seeping of rot, as all mutually dependent. The Victorians imagined themselves as bound to linear time: to the march of progress, civilisation, and improvement.⁷⁸ Empire, shipping, global trade, and museum display were integral to this vision. However, Victorian bodies were also inextricable from these biological sequences. All animal bodies are bound to repetition and replication and newness, to the hydrological, nitrogen and carbon cycles, and the echoes of other lives. This recycling produced new formations, with different materialities and temporalities to what had come before. Pier Luigi Luisi describes how the life cycle is never static: new life ‘is generated by the ashes of previous existence.’⁷⁹

Taxidermy time moved in multiple directions, often concurrently. Sometimes the distinctions between these different states and times, for instance the liquid materialities of decay and arsenic poisoning, met and blurred. Coues compared preservatives with the bodily fluids of decomposition. He refers to decay as ‘poisonous’: ‘It is a singular fact that this early putrescence is more poisonous than utter rottenness.’⁸⁰ He suggests that the first symptoms of decay are the most dangerous and insidious. They swept through animal skins, making them soggy and stinking. These natural poisons could also occasionally creep inside human skin,

⁷⁵ P. Huebener, *Nature’s Broken Clocks*, Book Talk, The Greenhouse, 1 June. 2020. <http://newnatures.org/greenhouse/events/online-book-talk-paul-huebener-natures-broken-clocks/> [Accessed 02/05/2021].

⁷⁶ The geographer Jamie Lorimer describes how, by studying decay in a cemetery, ‘I learned of cycles, of the regenerative power of rot to compost and provision’: J. Lorimer, ‘Rot’, *Environmental Humanities*, 8 (2016), 235–39.

⁷⁷ S. Steingraber, *Having Faith: An Ecologist’s Journey to Motherhood* (New York: Perseus Books, 2001), 66.

⁷⁸ A. Howe, ‘Free Trade and Global Order’ in D. Bell (ed.) *Victorian Visions of Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 26–7; Cronon, ‘Uses of Environmental History’, 11.

⁷⁹ Luigi Luisi, ‘Interplay of Cyclic and Linear Time’, 107.

⁸⁰ Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 59.

‘poisoning’ taxidermists and hunters and creating ‘pimples’, ‘sores’ and general ‘languor.’⁸¹ His description of bacterial infection – skin and blood infections acquired from rotten skins – is remarkably like that of arsenic poisoning. To Coues, these caustic substances, and their effects on human and animal skin, represented two sides of the same coin. Taxidermy was pluritemporal; made up of many simultaneous materialities, speeds, rhythms, liquids, and directions. These were all different ways of being dead.

The Onward March

By paying attention to this travelling time – to the different shapes a taxidermy skin inhabited, as matter that moved across land and sea – it is possible to learn about these various ways of being dead. Taxidermy teaches us that animal remains have influence; and that their different forms of deadness are essential. These forms drew human and more-than-human bodies and troubled the human mind. The capacity of skins to travel in multiple directions (and through many times) meant that they could be lost, but also saved. They were not a hopeless cause. Furthermore, following the stories and movements of skins reveals how journeying can be just as important as the destination.

Treated and dried skins could be placed in saddle bags, or boxes and crates. When a skin is fully stretched out, it forms the rough shape of the animal it once was. The animal outline is hazy, yet it remains. However, when a skin is folded, tucked, and stacked it looks like something else. Its physical boundaries are established by a human desire for ease and convenience during transportation. Small skins were stored in boxes filled with ‘moveable trays’.⁸² Bigger skins must ‘be conveniently folded, hair-side inwards, for packing.’⁸³ Lee suggested that ‘the hair must be rolled inwards, beginning with the head.’⁸⁴ The loss of individual body mass meant skins were easily rolled and stacked.⁸⁵ This was a communal *skin life*, as singular animal remains met and became a collection.

There is a clear sense of commodification and objectification in these descriptions; of the animal body made controllable and transportable to suit the human. However, the bodies of working animals were also influential in the packing of skins. Swainson instructed that ‘as a general rule, the collector proceeding abroad should adapt the size of all his packages to mule or horse carriage.’⁸⁶ If a wagon or carriage was not used, the size of the animal’s back dictated the shape of the skin package, and the folding of the skin.⁸⁷ Humans often pushed the living

⁸¹ Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 60.

⁸² Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 2.

⁸³ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 19.

⁸⁴ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 55.

⁸⁵ W.B Tegetmeier described how skins should be ‘removed, dried, and rolled up so as to occupy but little space’: Tegetmeier, ‘Preservation of Objects of Natural History’, 306.

⁸⁶ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 2.

⁸⁷ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 2-3.

animal body to its limits and stretched the animal back to breaking point; in *Somaliland*, Peel described a camel as ‘laden to overflowing.’⁸⁸

Sometimes skins continued to travel with the hunting party for weeks, as a mobile, dead menagerie, a localised and slow transit. Indeed, according to Peel, ‘travel in Africa is slow. Fifteen miles a day is the average going with camels or porters when hot. In the cool countries, when plenty of water can be found *en route*, twenty miles can be done.’⁸⁹ This was a slowing of time that depended on the environment and climate. The temporalities of caravan travel – this meandering thread of taxidermy time – relied on the availability of rivers, and the time taken by a camel to lift each two-toed hoof. Skins moved between different material states, as they plodded across the colonial time zones and boundaries imagined and imposed by British officials and mapmakers in London.⁹⁰ In these various ways, they travelled through time.

Between 1812 and 1824, the explorer-taxidermist Charles Waterton ‘wandered into far-distant climes, and gone bare-footed, ill clothed, and ill fed, through swamps and woods, to procure specimens, some of which had never been seen in Europe.’⁹¹ After killing and collecting along the Brazilian coast in 1816 for several months, he considered continuing his ‘wanderings’ into the interior of Brazil by horse. This journey would have taken at least forty days; partially due to the arrival of the rainy season. Instead, he opted to travel with his skins by Portuguese rig up the coast to Cayenne, in French Guiana; a journey that took only fourteen days. He wanted to protect his delicate bird specimens from becoming jostled on horseback and made sodden by rainfall: ‘the conveyance to the interior was by horses; and this mode, together with the heavy rains, would expose preserved specimens to almost certain damage.’⁹² The route taken by wandering skins was dependent on terrain, seasons, infrastructure, and the quantity of game. Deciding when to let skins go was a delicate decision. Hunters desired to keep them close; to shake them and anoint them afresh. Their roving gaze hunted for signs of putrefaction.⁹³ Even when preserved, human anxieties remained, and physical proximity to the skin rendered it visible, touchable, and potentially salvageable. However, in keeping the skins with the hunting party, as Waterton demonstrates, they also risked damage.

Peel recalled ‘reluctantly’ sending ‘three camels and three men’ to collect provisions and take his skins and skulls to a merchant on the Somali coast in the 1890’s.⁹⁴ His specimens were moved from the rugged Somali interior to the nodal port of Berbera. He described handing

⁸⁸ Peel, *Somaliland*, 30-31.

⁸⁹ Peel, *Popular Guide*, 21.

⁹⁰ V. Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 76.

⁹¹ C. Waterton, *Wanderings in South America* (London: B. Fellowes, 1839), 280.

⁹² Waterton, *Wanderings*, 167.

⁹³ Peel, *Somaliland*, 123.

⁹⁴ Peel, *Somaliland*, 78.

over ‘the care’ of the skins; as things to be watched over and treasured. Peel parted with his skins and skulls only as he feared damage on ‘this uneven ground covered with stone.’ Tapping into the racist language and power structures that overlayed skin acquisition and colonialism more widely, Peel was mistrusting of the Somali porters who moved his specimens via camel to Berbera. He suggested that he parted with the skins ‘with a good deal of misgiving, wondering if I should ever see them and the camels again.’⁹⁵

More often, though, the human labour behind the transportation of skins was unremarked upon. The skins are simply sent: Darrah described how he ‘kept sending’ his specimens.⁹⁶ They took a nebulous path to port cities, or large provincial towns, as they left the visual sphere of the white colonial hunter. The people who carried them remain shadowy, peripheral figures. The hands, arms, and backs, and the exertion of folding, heaving and marching, went unspoken. Distance was created between these animal remains, the British hunter who coveted them, and the lifetimes and territories occupied by the once breathing, mobile animal. Dead skins gained a different sort of mobility, as they flowed out across the land.

Darrah, like Peel, was reluctant to let his skins go, but reasoned that he ‘cannot well keep them with him, as his camp is constantly moving, and they would not only add a good deal of expense of travelling but run the risk of being injured.’⁹⁷ The treacherous Himalayan landscape dictated that baggage was kept minimal. The freezing temperatures meant that skins did not have to be treated straight away.⁹⁸ In 1896, he sent the raw skins to his central camp, lower down in the mountains, ‘letting them accumulate there’, before eventually forwarding them on to Srinagar, a city in the Kashmir valley.⁹⁹ Their temporary destination was with a ‘skin-man’, an Indian taxidermist who cured and preserved skins, before they were moved on to the Indian coast and to Britain. This was a specialised and flexing web of movement, accumulation, and modification. This network was particularly developed in India, which had a burgeoning taxidermy infrastructure, including a large-scale taxidermy factory.¹⁰⁰

Towards the end of the period, skin movement was sometimes mechanised. Skins journeyed along the railways laid, sleeper by sleeper, across the British Empire.¹⁰¹ The skin of the Giraffe that would-become Gerald, travelled for several days by (human) foot and camel, from a rural campsite to the town of Moshi at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro. The rolled bundles of Gerald’s

⁹⁵ Peel, *Somaliland*, 78.

⁹⁶ Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands of Kashmir*, 485.

⁹⁷ Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands of Kashmir*, 489.

⁹⁸ See also: Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 30.

⁹⁹ Darrah, *Sport in the Highlands of Kashmir*, 485.

¹⁰⁰ There was a large ‘taxidermy factory’ run by Van Ingen and Van Ingen in Mysore: P. Morris, *Van Ingen and Van Ingen: Artists in Taxidermy* (Ascot: MPM Publishing, 2006).

¹⁰¹ In the 1880s, Selous, and his skins, travelled across Southern Africa by boat. Selous, *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa*, 269.

skin then proceeded to cross 218 miles of German East Africa, on the Usambara Railway. From the coast, the giraffe skin became shipbound and – though it is unclear whether Gerald set sail from Tanga or Mombasa – after three, four, or possibly five weeks spent sailing the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean, Gerald docked along the south coast of England.

But large animals, like Gerald, did not always fit with ease into these modes of transportation; their skins had to be further dissected and manipulated, and broken down into legs, torso, and head skins to fit into railway carriages: vehicles designed around human bodies. Peel noted how transportation by foot intersected with the use of rail: his hippo specimen was ‘cut up into three pieces and carried on long poles by porters to the railway.’¹⁰² The same railways crossed the imaginations of the empire-obsessed public in Britain. However, as the historian Vanessa Ogle has demonstrated using the example of clock-time, the spread of British worldviews, transportation, technologies, and times – these ‘tools of empire’ – were haphazard at best:

in the vast swaths of territory beyond Europe and North Africa, across oceans, deserts, and steppes, and impenetrable jungles, sweeping narratives of successful time unification, discipline, and coordination quickly go amiss. As convincing as such conjectures about controlling colonial subjects are on the surface, they do not hold up to the scrutiny of archival research.¹⁰³

Even in the imperial world, Ogle continues, there was an ‘instability and multiplicity of times.’ This is an idea I have taken inspiration from when thinking about taxidermy time, as something which is both pluritemporal and also formed in relation to myriad changeable human (and more-than-human) temporalities.

The skins’ destinations were warehouses and stores, places of a brief immobility, in ports like Aden, Tanga and Bombay. Lee instructed the early Victorian hunter that:

Before his departure he must be careful to deposit his collection in safety: he will examine, therefore, each object separately, to ascertain if destructive insects (so abundant in warm countries) have attacked those parts where the preservative has not yet penetrated... he may then pack all his objects with safety in a well-joined case, and proportioned to the size of his animals.¹⁰⁴

In this description, only the wellbeing of the skins is central. The town, the dock, the warehouse, are presented as potential safe havens of predictable, controlled, human time. The skin was separated from the wild and corruptive hunting field. However, these were conversely also sites in which the hunter’s power over the skin waned. Warehouses could also be places of unwanted transformation. An article in the *Illustrated London News* described the attack of the clothes moth on hunting trophies, rugs, skins, and wools: it ‘haunts warehouses where

¹⁰² Peel, *Popular Guide*, 37.

¹⁰³ Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time*, 76. See also: O. Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (London: University of California Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁴ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 51.

these goods are stored.¹⁰⁵ The anthropologist Hugh Raffles, in *Insectopedia*, emphasised the dependence of clothes moths' on human trade and transportation. They live by 'feeding off the planet's suffocating mountains of surplus hair, feathers and fur.'¹⁰⁶ Stored skins were sometimes protected, but also physically distant and unknowable. Their temporalities might just begin to detach themselves – to detangle – from human visions and happenings.

Ships and Skins

Before they were lost from sight, naturalists, and hunters packed skins as if to shut them off from the world. Multiple skins were placed together in travelling crates for shipment. Jardine described how 'cases which have to undergo a long sea voyage should be lined with tin; and, when packed, the lide should be soldered down: this may prevent the accidental admission of sea water.'¹⁰⁷ Boxes should not be accessible to leaks and lingering humidity. Lee similarly ordered hunters to 'place the skin in the case, which we cover all over with pitch to defend it from damp, and to prevent the air from getting in.'¹⁰⁸ If the box was not swathed in pitch (a sticky, petroleum-derived, glaze) Swainson instructs to 'inspect them every week or ten days, until they are finally sent on board.'¹⁰⁹

Swainson also recommended rubbing an arsenic paste or corrosive sublimate into the seams so that these wooden strongholds would not be attacked by ants.¹¹⁰ Stout paper could be 'pasted' over the entire box. When poisoned, the box acted as an outer skin to the similarly treated skins within. The box was, supposedly, made uninhabitable, not only to liquids, but also to bacteria and microorganisms who needed oxygen to thrive. Naturalists regularly described these boxes as 'hermetically sealed.'¹¹¹ The travelling case was imagined as a time capsule. They were seen as isolated from the physical movements and the temporal flows of the moving ship. Skins travelled toward Britain and their futures, whilst remaining, in theory, as they were. However, I shall reveal how they were still engaged in (time) travel.

Most skin collections made their way to Britain by sea. This was supervised by either the hunter, or by merchants and traders entrusted with the skins. In 1820, Charles Waterton and his skins boarded the 'Dee' West-Indiaman in George Town, the Cayman Islands. Waterton

¹⁰⁵ The article also describes how the moth has 'found its way, by commerce, into New Zealand, where it causes damage to opossum and other skins awaiting shipment': 'Where Moth and Rust Doth Corrupt', *The World of Science, Illustrated London News*, 4 February 1933, 304.

¹⁰⁶ H. Raffles, *Insectopedia* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 234.

¹⁰⁷ Jardine, 'Hints for Preparing and Transmitting Ornithological Specimens', 11. William Swainson similarly described how the case should close perfectly, with no gaps, and be entirely waterproof: Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 133. William Swainson noted that 'the joints and seams should be closed with tow and pitched over': Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 6.

¹¹¹ See: Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 26; Lee, *Taxidermy*, 90.

suggests that the commander and the first mate of the ship ‘took every care of my collection.’¹¹² Sometimes the hunter travelled on the same ship and could watch over the skins. More often, skins were placed on cargo ships, and hunters either continued their expedition in the field, or returned by a different route. Selous described parting with his skins on the Mozambique coast. He was assisted by the merchant traders Messrs Gould and Edixhoven:

But my weary tramp came to an end at last, and early on the morning of October 7 I crossed the Bay of Delagoa to the town of Lourenco Marques, and, thanks to the kind assistance of Mr. Edixhoven, got all my specimens packed and conveyed aboard the *Pembroke Castle* the same day, for transport back to England, where they duly arrived in very good order.¹¹³

Some of these transported animals eventually entered Selous’ personal collection, whilst others moved on to London’s Natural History Museum.¹¹⁴ Their vessel, the *Pembroke Castle*, was a cargo steamer, which journeyed between Britain and the African coastal ports from 1883. It could travel at twelve knots.¹¹⁵ The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the channel of water carved between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, shortened this voyage. The Suez Canal also reduced travel distance between London and Bombay by 40 percent.¹¹⁶ It rendered sea time speedier; especially when combined with steam technology. An isochrone map from 1914 – a temporal map that recorded the ‘distance in days from London’ – suggests that the journey to Mozambique would have taken between twenty and thirty days (see figure 3.4). Such maps, by depicting both time and space, illustrate time travel.

As well as road and railway building, the historian Helen Rozwadowski argues that between 1840 and 1880, Victorians began to think of the ocean as a workplace, a place of leisure and adventure, and a natural environment.¹¹⁷ Oceans were no longer unknowable. John Gillis proposes a way of viewing this change:

What might be called the second discovery of the sea, beginning in the late eighteenth century and accelerating in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, produced a vast expansion of scientific and humanistic knowledge of the sea as a three-dimensional living thing with a history, geography, and a life all its own.¹¹⁸

In the way that Western humans have often imagined the world post-Enlightenment, people began to see the ocean as a thing that could be managed, even whilst reflecting on its innate

¹¹² Waterton, *Wanderings*, 280.

¹¹³ Selous, *African Nature Notes and Reminiscences*, 253.

¹¹⁴ Selous, *African Nature Notes*, 253, 243.

¹¹⁵ ‘Union Castle Line’, Merchant Navy Association <http://www.red-duster.co.uk/wp/2016/02/25/union-castle-line-5/> [Accessed 16/10/19].

¹¹⁶ Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time*, 101.

¹¹⁷ H. Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 2005), 4.

¹¹⁸ J. Gillis, ‘The Blue Humanities’, *Humanities*, 34 (2013)

<https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2013/mayjune/feature/the-blue-humanities> [Accessed 24/10/19].

liveliness. In much the same way, shipped skins were also imagined as controllable. But a skin inside a box inside a ship journeying across hundreds of miles of rolling sea could not be entirely separated from the outside world.

Once on board, the skins would be placed within the hold, and imagined as safe in the belly of the ship. Sometimes skins were successfully kept in a state of settled stillness.¹¹⁹ Waterton suggests that the crew of the 'Dee' opened his boxes 'almost every day since they had come on board.'¹²⁰ However, mostly these shipbound skins were left to themselves. Lee described how:

When the cases are filled, closed, and covered with pitch, they should be enveloped in an oiled canvass, and placed in a part of the vessel where they may remain until their arrival; sheltered as much as possible from excessive heat, and out of the reach of rats. It is desirable that they should not be opened or unpacked at the Quays, or Custom- houses, or until they reach their destination, as there is always a risk of their being broken or injured.¹²¹

Unseen by humans, and therefore lacking in textual descriptions, for a historian, this is a difficult time to access. However, to skip over this section of a skin's journey would be to continue to contribute to the cultural deadening of animal remains. Instead, I have looked for the multispecies traces within texts, and the descriptions of the aftermath of shipments, to enable me to follow the skin into the hold.

If insects were already inside the shipping case, then there they remained. Eggs and insects travelled with the skin; deposited by insects when skins were drying, they clung to hair or feather roots. Coues observed that 'the insidious larvae, however, are not so easily observed, burrowing as they do among the feathers, or in the interior of a skin; whilst the minute eggs are commonly altogether overlooked.'¹²² Attached with a sticky 'proteinaceous' glue secreted by the parent insect, eggs were tiny and often imperceptible to the human eye.¹²³ Boxes paradoxically kept insects locked up with skins where humans could not save them. Coues added that (for the naturalist) 'there is misery in store if any bugs or nits be put away with

¹¹⁹ Coues described how with a combination of a strong case and a good preservative, skins would be safe on board: 'birdskins entirely free from insects or their eggs, encased in some such secure manner, will remain intact indefinitely': Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 84.

¹²⁰ Waterton, *Wanderings*, 280.

¹²¹ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 160.

¹²² Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 82.

¹²³ D. Li, M. Huson and L. Graham, 'Proteinaceous Adhesive Secretions from Insects, and in Particular the Egg Attachment Glue of *Opodiphthera* sp. Moths', *Archives of Insect Biochemistry and Physiology*, 69 (2008), 85-105.

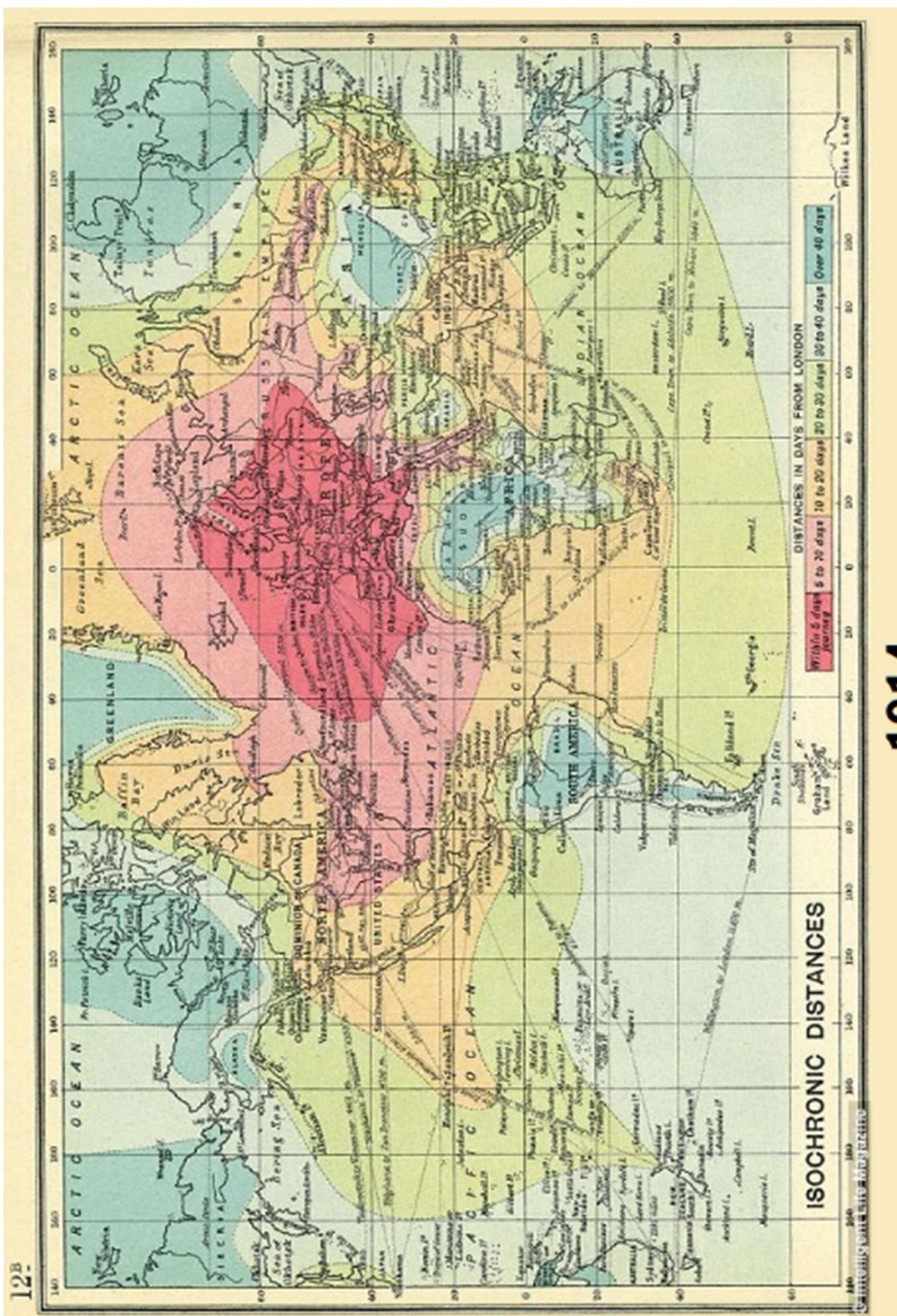


Figure 3.4: An isochrone map showing various travel times from London in 1914. Created by the Scottish cartographer John George Bartholomew.

them.¹²⁴ Astrida Neimanis' description of (human) skin has remarkable parallels with the 'hermetic' travelling box.¹²⁵ She writes that 'my skin gives the illusion of a hermetic seal.' However, in reality 'my body of water breaches the skin sac... water body sloshes and leaks, excretes and perspires.'¹²⁶ The box – this second skin – was similarly permeable. This is made clear by Coues, who bluntly writes that, 'In spite of all mechanical precautions the insects will get in.'¹²⁷

Such boxes became subject to insect time; the entire life cycle (or almost-cycle) of the insect was played out within the sealed travelling box. An article in the *Morning Post* in 1852 detailed how:

The eggs are generally deposited in some crevice about the head of the skin. These produce a swarm of hairy grubs, which feed upon the pelt, and grow to the size of small caterpillars. Instances have been known where the entire value of a foreign package of skins has been destroyed by these insects.¹²⁸

As the composition of skins changed, so did the insect species they attracted. Dried skins lured moths, who fed on their hairy pelts, and *Dermestes* beetles.¹²⁹ These beetles included the 'bacon' or 'larder' beetle, named for their penchant for dried meat. Insect eggs, stowed inside skins, did not abide by human time. Moth eggs sometimes lay dormant for months, only hatching when at sea and far away from the hunter's gaze.¹³⁰ Storage boxes could be places of sudden surges of action and change, as time could be sped up. These were the private spaces of the insect and the skins, only discoverable when the boxes were docked and unpacked: Ward described how sometimes he unloaded skins to discover the hair had been 'entirely removed from the pelt by the exertions of the *Dermestes*'.¹³¹ Coues detailed how sometimes, though, 'leaving the plumage intact, insects eat away the horny covering of the bill and feet, making an irreparable mutilation.'¹³²

Many other forces also threatened to disrupt the quasi suspension of packaged skins. Ship fires were not unheard of, and both Stamford Raffles and Alfred Russel Wallace lost specimens to the flame. Wallace reflected on the perils of ship travel, following a fire on the 'Helen' in 1852, as the brig crossed the Atlantic after setting sail from Pará, Brazil:

¹²⁴ Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 84.

¹²⁵ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 26; Lee, *Taxidermy*, 90.

¹²⁶ Neimanis, *Bodies of Water*, 46.

¹²⁷ Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 85. Peel explained that 'In spite of every precaution and the expenditure of much labour and every care, many skins are ruined': Peel, *Popular Guide*, 21-2.

¹²⁸ 'The Great Exhibition', *The Morning Post*, 19 November 1852.

¹²⁹ Ward describes *dermestes* beetles as 'veritable enemies': Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 19-20.

¹³⁰ Coley, *Wild Animal Skins*, 73.

¹³¹ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 20.

¹³² Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 83.

My collections however were in the hold and were irrevocably lost. And now I begin to think, that almost all the reward of my four years of privation and danger were lost. What I had hitherto sent home had little more than paid my expenses and what I had in the “Helen” I calculated would realise near £500. But even all this might have gone with little regret had not far the richest part of my own private collection gone also. All my private collection of insects and birds since I left Pará was with me, and contained hundreds of new and beautiful species which would have rendered (I had fondly hoped) my cabinet, as far regards American species, one of the finest in Europe.¹³³

The physical heaving and tossing of the boat as it crossed churning oceans could also cause damage: ‘care must be taken to put a layer of dried grass or moss to avoid the friction spoiling the hair in its conveyance.’¹³⁴ Jardine similarly warned that: ‘the labour of a long season may be lost by carelessness of packing, or by tumbling them loose into some box, in which the rolling of a ship, or the admission of sea-water, may reduce the bird-skins into a bundle of felt.’¹³⁵ In addition to fires, soakings and tumbings, specimens might nurture fungi and moulds.¹³⁶

Ship time, as something visualised in isochrone maps, was governed by humans only superficially. This is something Ogle makes evident, with regards to clock time:

There may have been imaginary time zones between continents, allowing one to arrive at the correct time zone for the American East Coast when counting from Greenwich. But ships did not follow these zones in navigation, for officially they did not exist. Timekeeping at sea was uncharted, and improvised solutions prevailed. British ships, as one example, usually kept two times. One was the time of a chronometer taken aboard and set to Greenwich time, used to navigate the ship. Another set of timekeepers regulated life and record keeping on board. These clocks normally showed solar time, adjusted at noon, and if a ship crossed significant distances between noon on one day and the next, adjustments were made over the course of the hours. Such alterations relied exclusively on the judgements of officers in observing the position of the sun, rendering the times kept on seaborne vessels incomparable.¹³⁷

Here Ogle demonstrates that, for all their instruments, technologies, and imagined time zones, time could not easily be controlled at sea. Thinking with taxidermy time, and its intersections

¹³³ ‘Wallace Letters’ The Alfred Wallace Correspondence Project <http://wallaceletters.info/node/198/visions/215/view> [Accessed 11/10/19]. See also: Coley, *Wild Animal Skins*, 60.

¹³⁴ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 54.

¹³⁵ Jardine, ‘Hints for Preparing and Transmitting Ornithological Specimens’, 10.

¹³⁶ Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 51. Jardine similarly noted that ‘they should be packed firmly; for it must be recollected, that the jumble of travelling makes them settle down, and leaves an open space, which causes the specimens to be rubbed together’: Jardine, ‘Hints for Preparing and Transmitting Ornithological Specimens’, 11.

¹³⁷ Ogle, *Global Transformation of Time*, 88.

with other times, has shown me that the temporalities of the skin-at-sea were bound to the sun, and moon, to rolling water, insects, and wave-making winds.

Floating Skins

By following shipped skins, and their stories, I learned about the material states occupied by travelling skins; their ways of being dead, and of shaping, and being shaped by, the world around them. I also discovered a taxidermy process that made shipped skins more stable, paradoxically by making them completely wet.

In the *Sportsman's Handbook* (1880), Ward described the twin preservation processes:

There are two methods of preserving animals, or the skins of animals, on the spot where they are collected till they can be transmitted for definite treatment by skilled practitioners at home: viz. (1) by means of preservative applications, so that natural decay and the ravages of insects, etc., may be prevented; (2) by immersion and packing of specimens, on proper principles, in spirit, pickle, etc.¹³⁸

Small animals could be placed, whole, in spirit bottles. After shipment, these would then be drained, unpacked, and skinned in Britain. Before immersion, Sarah Bowdich Lee suggested they be brushed free of dirt.¹³⁹ After being placed in the liquor, their bodies would engage in an exchange of fluids with their new watery surroundings. Tegetmeier recommended slitting the stomach open to encourage the infiltration of the liquor: 'Smaller quadrupeds may be preserved in spirits, having first made an opening in the chest and a second into the belly, to allow the spirit to gain access to those cavities.'¹⁴⁰ Blood, urine, lymph, bile, and faeces would be drawn out from the body and mix with the preserving fluid. I am reminded of Neimanis' argument that, whilst we consider bodies to be 'discrete and coherent individual subjects', water connects all bodies, and bodies of water.¹⁴¹ If animals were submerged for substantial periods in spirits, the liquor would have to be changed regularly as it became diluted by bodily fluids. How quickly the fluid needed to be replaced depended on the animal: Ward writes that 'reptiles, being less watery than fish, generally require only one change.'¹⁴²

Small animals, either whole or skinned, could be attached to a cork, to prevent them from brushing the bottom of the vessel.¹⁴³ Coues suggested that 'As glass bottles are liable to break when travelling, do not fit corners, and offer practical annoyance about corkage, rectangular metal cans, preferably of copper, with screw lid opening, are advisable.'¹⁴⁴ He recommended

¹³⁸ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 16-17.

¹³⁹ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 134.

¹⁴⁰ Tegetmeier, 'Preservation of Objects of Natural History', 306.

¹⁴¹ Neimanis, *Bodies of Water*, 2. See also: Duckert, *For All Waters*, 5.

¹⁴² He describes how the 'first tub of spirit used... will of course decrease in strength by the addition of the water drawn from them': Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 26.

¹⁴³ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 134.

¹⁴⁴ Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 72.

that these cans were then placed in ‘strong wooden boxes’, and the unoccupied space filled with tow ‘to prevent the specimens from swashing about’ on the ship. Conversely, Lee suggested in 1820 that glass bottles were better, as the liquor would evaporate through the pores in the wood.¹⁴⁵ A varied array of ‘spirits’ were used.¹⁴⁶ In the early-mid Victorian period, specimens were sometimes transferred in alcohol. Rum, arrack, and brandy could also be employed.¹⁴⁷ However, these strongly coloured liquids stained skins, rendering them a tawny brown. Gin and other colourless spirits were therefore preferred.

However, a briny pickle was the most common preserving fluid. Towards the end of the period, naturalists began to transfer larger (disembodied) animals in this way.¹⁴⁸ Sometimes multiple skins would be packed in the same barrel. Skins would be fully immersed in pickle and placed in the ships’ hold. Pickling was not as common as dry preserving; nevertheless, it was ardently promoted by influential taxidermists, including Ward.¹⁴⁹ Leon Luther Pray noted in 1913 that the hunter should ‘boil salt in water until heaviest brine possible to make is produced. Add a tablespoonful of carbolic acid to the gallon while hot. Stir well. Let the solution cool thoroughly before submerging skins in it.’¹⁵⁰ There is a strange mirroring between the salty sea below and the pickle above. Skins bobbed about in miniature oceans.

These were hostile environments. The brine repelled bacteria and insects, killed eggs, and kept the skin concealed and surrounded. Like skins in travelling boxes, they were closed off: Ward described how the ‘vessel must be kept closed.’¹⁵¹ These boxes, and this new *skin life*, seem incredibly distanced from the life of the terrestrial animal. However, whilst being unwelcoming to life, there were also womb-like in their envelopment of the dead skin. These skins floated through time to something like a gestational state. Surrounded by a liquid that was reminiscent of a past life, skins were suspended in anticipation of a museum future. Lee noted that it was very difficult to injure skins submerged within fluid.¹⁵² The liquid was protective and cushioning, and it also enabled freshness; Ward described the transportation of an elephant skin in an enormous barrel:

The whole skin was then rolled as tightly as possible around the head... in this condition it was placed in a great barrel, which was then completely filled with liquor, and properly coopered for transmission to this country. On arrival in London, when the head of the barrel was removed, the perfect

¹⁴⁵ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 133.

¹⁴⁶ Jardine, ‘Hints for Preparing and Transmitting Ornithological Specimens’, 12-13.

¹⁴⁷ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 134.

¹⁴⁸ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 29.

¹⁴⁹ He described pickling as ‘frequently most convenient on shipboard’: Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 20.

¹⁵⁰ Luther Pray, *Taxidermy*, 100.

¹⁵¹ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 21.

¹⁵² Lee, *Taxidermy*, 134.

success of this mode of transport was at once apparent. There was no unpleasant odour. On taking out the mass and unfolding the skin, it was noticeable that every part of the surfaces had been properly acted on, and there was not a single tainted fold.¹⁵³

For transportation, skins had to be made bone dry or utterly waterlogged. Anything between these states was dangerous; if a dried skin rotted, it became too wet. Wet skins were preserved more completely and more successfully than dried ones. Lee suggests that, on ships, ‘Bottles thus prepared, may without inconvenience, be turned over in all directions, exposed to all the tossings of the tempest, and support the strongest heat without the alcohols escaping.’¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, pickling was not infallible: Lee adds that ‘the perfect preservation of the animal depends on the quality of the liquor, the manner of placing them in the bottles, and the method of luting these bottles.’¹⁵⁵

A womb is a place of submerged safety, but also of bodily change. Taxidermy skins and unskinned bodies were always in an exchange – of mixing, and of becoming new things – with and within their bizarre new medium. Even pickled skins were not entirely stilled, and neither were they timeless: floating outside of time. Paul Heubener writes of a way of thinking with time and sea simultaneously:

the word *time* is linked etymologically with the Old English word for *tide*. Both words call to mind the processes of change that shape our experiences as living beings, and the link between the two words evokes the deep connection between our experience of time and our experience of the physical earth; we have always understood one in terms of the other.¹⁵⁶

Bodies of water, like time, are always changing. The pickling of skins was only a brief period of submersion, one that could not ensure a skins’ long term stability. The new-found liquidity of skins was a passing state, a moment in time. Therefore, it did not represent a truly stable way of being. Dead animals could not stay under water for long: pickle barrels were detrimental to onward transit due to their propensity to slosh about, their substantial weight, cost, and considerable size.

Arrival

Wet or dry, skins sailed to British ports such as Bristol, Portsmouth, London, and Liverpool. In 1820, Charles Waterton and his skins boarded the ‘Dee’ West-Indiaman.¹⁵⁷ From the Cayman Islands, they crossed the Atlantic, and eventually entered the Mersey. In the past, when Waterton arrived in Liverpool, he was greeted ‘as an old friend’ by the ‘gentlemen of the

¹⁵³ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 22-3.

¹⁵⁴ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 137.

¹⁵⁵ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 133.

¹⁵⁶ P. Huebener, *Nature’s Broken Clocks: Reimagining Time in the Face of the Environmental Crisis* (Regina, Sask: University of Regina Press, 2020), 11.

¹⁵⁷ He did not record his adventures until 1839: Waterton, *Wanderings*, 280.

Liverpool Custom-house', who knew he would not 'introduce any thing contraband' or try to profit from his specimens. Ordinarily, they fixed a 'moderate' duty. However, when unloading the 'Dee', everything changed. Waterton and a 'very civil officer' boarded the ship, to peer within his travelling boxes. There they were accosted by another officer 'wonderfully aware of his own consequence':

The boxes, ten in number, were conveyed in safety from the ship to the depot... as one of the inferior officers was carrying a box thither, in stepped the man whom I suspected I should see again at Philippi. He abruptly declared himself dissatisfied with the valuation which the gentlemen of the customs had put upon the collection, and said he must detain it.¹⁵⁸

After a dispute, Waterton reluctantly handed over the keys to his specimen boxes and left for his home in Yorkshire. His creatures were detained for six weeks of unexpected waiting, before he relented and paid an additional fee. They were returned in an acceptable state; however, Waterton lost a number of bird eggs he had been meaning to incubate and breed.¹⁵⁹ He attributed the customs officer's suspicion to a recent bout of animal smuggling. Disembarkment could be a hazardous affair.

On the ship, and in the depot, skins shared space with an odd assortment of other products. The Ships Reports in the Liverpool Bill of Customs describe this vividly. On 4 April 1853, a ship from Melbourne unloaded '2 cse turpentine' and '1 cse specimens.'¹⁶⁰ On the same day, one from Sydney unloaded wool, two cases of wine, and '1 cse curiosities.'¹⁶¹ Another from the Cape of Good Hope unloaded '6 bls of wool, 2 cs beads, 3 cs ivory, 16 elephant teeth, 6 bls skins, 53 bgs argols, 1 bx smpls crockery ware.'¹⁶² These reports give an indication of just how common animal bits (and liquid preservatives) were on ships. Specimens rubbed shoulders with teeth and ivory, and with skins and furs destined to become clothing. They also met with the inorganic and the human made. In these descriptions, the animals lose their individual identities amidst a jumble of stuff and matter; they become a collective of 'curiosities' and 'specimens.'

¹⁵⁸ Waterton, *Wanderings*, 281-2.

¹⁵⁹ Waterton, *Wanderings*, 282.

¹⁶⁰ 'Melbourne', 'Ship Reports' for 4 April 1853, Liverpool Bill of Customs, Brunel Institute: V9, No.10591.

¹⁶¹ 'Sydney', 'Ship Reports' for 4 April 1853, Liverpool Bill of Customs, Brunel Institute: V9, No.10591.

¹⁶² 'Cape of Good Hope', 'Ship Reports' for 4 April 1853, Liverpool Bill of Customs, Brunel Institute: V9, No.10591.

Indeed, after lengthy transportation, taxidermy skins could be almost unrecognisable. Preservatives had bided their time, working on and within skins.¹⁶³ These animal remains could, seemingly, lose their animality. In an interview with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Ward described the appearance of a shipment of rhino head skins and tiger skins: ‘When the heads reach me, they are just a shapeless mass, like a dried turtle perhaps more than anything else, and the tigers’ skins are, of course, as stiff as boards, before they are dressed.’¹⁶⁴ They were shapeshifters; formless or rigid, and sometimes resembling the wrong species. I perceive this to be the part of the taxidermy process where the skin resembled the living animal the least. With each passing day, they became more distant from the living animal, in time, space and body.

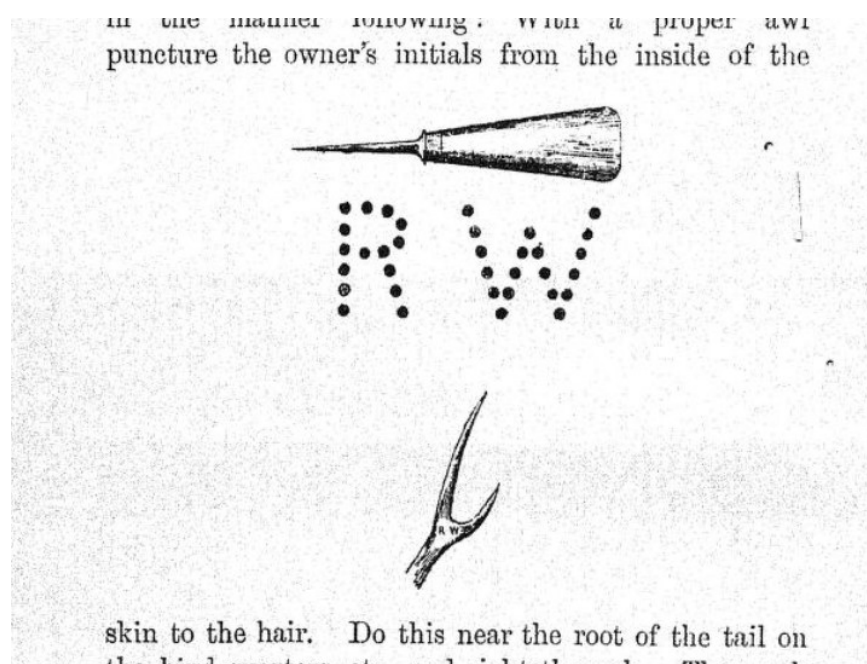


Figure 3.5: R. Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook* (1880), 20.

However, every day also brought them ever closer to a time of remaking. Back in time, in the hunting field, hunters tried to make sure that their dead skins were still identifiable to merchants and taxidermists. They attached labels, and velum tags: Coues described how labelling should ‘never be neglected’.¹⁶⁵ Some skins were even branded with the mark of their skinner. Ward suggested the hunter ‘With a proper awl puncture the owner’s initials from the inside of the skin to the hair... The mark is indestructible, even if it seem to close up and always

¹⁶³ ‘There is little if any doubt that the brilliant colours on a fresh, healthy specimen, at the moment it falls, are always deteriorated. Sometimes totally altered, under treatment by any preservative’: Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 14.

¹⁶⁴ ‘The Jungle Trophy at the Colonies, A Chat with Mr. Rowland Ward’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 June. 1886, 6.

¹⁶⁵ Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 34. Swainson described how ‘each specimen should be numbered, or have a label attached to it, specifying the sex, the place and date when found, the contents of its stomach’. Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 6. See also: Tegetmeier, ‘Preservation of Objects of Natural History’, 306.

becomes visible on cleaning the pelt'.¹⁶⁶ (see figure 3.5). The skin was owned like a piece of meat; this was a permanent wound left by the hunter, in a skin that could no longer heal. Through this puncture, the remains could be associated with a time, a place, and a life.

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Figure 3.6: 'Warehousing Trophies', Advertisement in *The Field*, 24 December 1904, xxvi.

In the late nineteenth century, Ward ran 'special services' in London for the warehousing and 'safe keeping' of natural history specimens (see figure 3.6). Most skins travelled directly to taxidermists or museums to be further treated. But not all taxidermy bodies made a journey from abroad. As I explored in Chapter 1, 'Skinning', some animals originated in zoos and menageries. In his *Essays on Natural History*, Waterton described how this internal transit could also be precarious. In the 1820's, one of Wombwell's touring chimpanzees died – this was a different chimpanzee to Jenny, whose story I told previously. Wombwell hatched a plan with Waterton that the dead animal would still travel to Huddersfield, so the public might still get to see the advertised chimpanzee.¹⁶⁷ The chimp would then be delivered to Waterton and preserved and taxidermied.

The weather was frosty, so the chimpanzee (not yet skinned) was fairly stable. But the dead chimp was late. The porter tasked with carrying the body 'took off to Leeds, quite out of the

¹⁶⁶ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 21.

¹⁶⁷ Waterton, *Essays on Natural History*, 54.

direct line' to drink with his cousin, and several days of 'mirth and mental excitement' passed before the chimp was finally deposited. Waterton described how 'This provoking loss of time cost me five full hours of nocturnal labour with the dissecting knife.'¹⁶⁸ The chimps bodily time had been extended by the freezing weather, however, this time was again contracted by the drunken courier. With the transportation of all specimens, whether national or international, the body clock of dead animals ticked ever on.

The chimp was saved and salvaged. However, sometimes packages would be opened in customs, warehouses, or taxidermy studios to reveal a material loss.¹⁶⁹ Coues described how, on handling a putrescent bird, 'whole plumes come away at a touch.'¹⁷⁰ Skins were sometimes deemed irreparable and therefore discarded. For the waiting taxidermist, these remains – sites of activity and energetic recycling – were animal absences. Ward opened a package from India, to discover the hunter, who had not used enough preservatives, had made 'an awful mess of the skin' of a tiger.¹⁷¹ It was now up to the taxidermist, and the skill of their hands, to decide if from within this lively matter, the appearance of animality could be reborn.

Conclusion

Taxidermy skins embodied movement. By hoof and back, hand and head, they were heaved to waiting trains and ships bound for Britain. I have shown how, as these skins travelled, they moved between different states. I argue that they were both multidirectional and pluritemporal, intersecting with temporalities and lifeforms, fluids, and fantasies, whilst setting their own time. They travelled through these times as they moved through a colonial network of local and global transit, and across the imaginary borders of time zones and continents. Hunters, and waiting taxidermists and museums, depended on a skins' ability to be moved. I have shown how journeying was also crucial to the very being of the taxidermy animal; something that shaped its' form, and its' future.

Travelling skins were idealised by hunters and other humans as safe, tucked up and sealed away; inside a box, underneath a skin-blanket of preservatives and insecticides. But I discovered that, like all moving things, skins were in a continual conversation with their changing environment: with dampness, invertebrates, and the physical motion of lifting and rolling. Time and new materialities flowed freely through their skins. They could be pulled back just in time, by hunters and naturalists and poisons, to a state of near freshness. But these returns were not entirely cyclical as they always also embodied a new way of being. In my endeavour to provide a solidity to the animal remains of history, I let the skins lead the way

¹⁶⁸ Waterton, *Essays on Natural History*, 55.

¹⁶⁹ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 20.

¹⁷⁰ Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 83.

¹⁷¹ Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 40.

into crates and oceans, and I discovered the different layers and forms of deadness inhabited by moving animals.

The contradictions and delicacies of skin movement were summed up by Elliott Coues:

At sea, however, or during unusually protracted wet weather, they of course dry slowly, and may require some attention to prevent mildew or souring, especially in the cases of very large, thick-skinned, or greasy specimens. Thorough poisoning, and drying by a fire, or placing in the sun, will always answer. Very close packing retards drying. When travelling, or operating under other circumstances requiring economy of space, you must not expect to turn out your collection in elegant order. Perfection of contour-lines can only be secured by putting each specimen away by itself; undue pressure is always liable to produce unhappily *outré* configuration of a skin.¹⁷²

Humans tried to make a skin impermeable to time. However, in their bid to do so, in their poisoning and their journeying, they opened skins up to innumerable temporalities. As Coues explains, moisture from the ocean, or from rain, could creep across skins, bringing fungi with them. This wetness could be kept at bay by exposure to fire, or to the sun. But no bodies, ‘when travelling’, could be expected to be ‘in elegant order’. Even the pressing of other skins could squeeze a specimen out of shape, and into a new way of being dead. In the next chapter, ‘Making’, I explore how this lively and changeable deadness met and shaped human hand and intention within the taxidermy studio.

¹⁷² Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology*, 51.

Chapter 3: Making

The taxidermist William Swainson, in 1840, described how to stuff a skin to make it look whole and alive and as if, beneath the skin surface, lay animal tissue: ‘when the skin is sewed up, the subject is to be turned in all directions, and kneaded or pressed by the hand in every part, in order to model into a more correct shape, and restore as much as possible the appearance of various muscles.’¹ Swainson suggests that it was the action of the hand that held the potential to breathe life into a collection of skins and bones. By kneading and pressing, the shape of the animal could re-emerge under knuckle, palm, and probing fingers. I argue for the importance of handling to the very form and being of taxidermy. I also explore how the hand was influenced by the animal matter it met.

I trace the changes in taxidermy technique between 1820 and 1914, as the artificial animal body moved from being a thing of wadding and wire, to a rigid framework; and as the human hand moved from stuffing to modelling. Both animal and invention, these creatures were always products of tactile movement – of flows of knowledge, and of energy coursing through human fingers. Swainson noted that the animal ‘subject’ be touched by the hand in every part of its skin-body.²

As a boundary and a bridge between taxidermist and the creaturely, the hand was an adaptable organ; its movements shifted as technique transformed. The literary scholar Abbie Garrington describes how the ‘hand is a knower and a learner.’³ I demonstrate how the hand learned from skin, whilst also moulding it to meet human-held idealisations. In a quotation I examined in my introductory chapter, the anthropologist Garry Marvin argues that ‘although the biological must be rendered inert, taxidermy is not concerned with the preservation of natural objects, dead bodies. Taxidermic objects are not dead animals preserved, rather they are cultural objects created through craft.’⁴ Contrary to Marvin, I demonstrate how skin and hand *could* work together. Craft did not always undermine a lingering animal presence. Nevertheless, this relationship hinged on the skill of the hand, and it was also highly dependent on the workability of the animal skin.

In *A Theory of Craft*, the critical theorist Howard Risatti argues that, when thinking about craft:

¹ W. Swainson, *Taxidermy: with the Biographies of Zoologists* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1840), 35.

² Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 35.

³ A. Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 30.

⁴ G. Marvin, ‘Enlivened through Memory: Hunters and Hunting Trophies’ in S. Alberti (ed.), *The Afterlives of Animals: A Museum Menagerie* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 211.

stressing the importance of material on the one hand or process on the other suggests a split or separation between the two. This is unfortunate because both material and process are essential to craft and must be understood together as the basis of craft technique, a unity of operations centered in functional purpose.⁵

He goes on to explain how ‘in a very real sense, it can be argued that properly made craft objects choreograph the hands and body’s movements by making the user respond, literally and figuratively, to the object’s physical properties, to its structure, weight, and texture.’⁶ The skin material was a dynamic part of the wider taxidermy process. It was matter which could shape, and press back against, human intention and intervention. Risatti discusses everyday craft materials like wood and clay and glass; raw materials that had not held a form in a previous life. Instead, I investigate how skin-matter – as an organic material which had both a previous shape and a past life – and human taxidermist came together.

Constance Classen, a cultural historian, argues that ‘touch lies at the heart of our experience of ourselves and the world yet it often remains unspoken of and, even more so, unhistoricized.’⁷ Humans access the past through written texts, and through our visual imagination. We struggle to feel the past. For centuries touch was regarded as a lower sense.⁸ It is often associated with base feelings; with ‘mindless’ pleasure and pain, as opposed to knowledge and learning.⁹ Sensory touch was therefore seen as somewhat primal, or animal. In *the Mindful Hand*, Lisa Roberts, Simon Schaffer, and Peter Dear suggest that, in the Aristotelian schema, touch falls far below sight.¹⁰ Classen argues that there is a class element to this view: ‘this opposition is socially entrenched in the class distinction between people who work with their hands and people who work with their heads.’¹¹

However, touch was all important to taxidermy. A taxidermist could not visualise a creature into being. The anthropologist Tim Ingold summarises and translates the archaeologist Andre Leroi Gourhan to argue that: ‘whether or not the artisan has an idea in mind of the final form of the artefact he is making, the actual form emerges from the pattern of rhythmic movement,

⁵ H. Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 99.

⁶ Risatti, *Theory of Craft*, 114. Similarly, Nithikul Nimkulrat argues that ‘knowledge of a creative practice thus lies in and can be acquired from within the practice itself’: N. Nimkulrat, ‘Hands on Intellect: Integrating Craft Practice into Design Research’, *International Journal of Design*, 6 (2012), 1-2.

⁷ C. Classen, ‘The Inside Story’ in *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), xii.

⁸ P. Gilbert, *Victorian Skin: Surface, Self, History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 184; Classen, *The Deepest Sense*, xii.

⁹ C. Classen ‘Fingerprints: Writing About Touch’, in C. Classen (ed.) *The Book of Touch*, (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 5.

¹⁰ L. Roberts, S. Schaffer, P. Dear (eds.), *The Mindful Hand: Inquiry and Invention from the Late Renaissance to Early Industrialisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), xiii, 34-5.

¹¹ Classen, ‘Fingerprints’ in *Book of Touch*, 5.

not from the idea.¹² Scholars have recently paid more attention to the importance of the hand in creating and knowing. The sociologist Richard Sennett views making as a process of thinking and labels the ‘intelligent hand.’¹³ Similarly, Ingold explains how a skilled craft is honed by training the human body over a lengthy period, through repetition and concentration. Roberts, Schaffer and Dear describe these as the ‘complex entanglements of head and hand.’¹⁴ Such works build on Heidegger’s assertion that ‘all the work of the hand is rooted in thinking.’¹⁵

Pamela Gilbert, in *Victorian Skin*, argues that hands were crucial to the Victorian experience of the world, in a period in which both fingerprinting, and eugenics, surfaced.¹⁶ English literature scholar Peter Capuano develops this in *Changing Hands*, adding that ‘between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a sudden but sustained spike in representations of hands in British fiction and in English culture more generally.’¹⁷ However, Capuano suggests that whilst historical circumstances made the Victorians ‘preoccupied by the materiality of their hands’, within scholarship ‘no one has taken much notice of it.’¹⁸ This is certainly the case amongst taxidermy scholars, who rarely mention the influence of the human hand. Furthermore, taxidermy animals – creatures shaped by the human hand – are often depicted as uniform and unchanging.¹⁹ Yet every taxidermy animal was unique.

The historical geographer Merle Patchett watched a modern taxidermist (Peter) at work. She drew on both her observations of Peter’s labour, and Ingold’s idea of ‘sensory correction’, to argue that:

By leaving the stitching loose, Peter is able to continually correct the alignment of the skin through the placing and pulling of the stitches: adjusting each time he places a stitch on each side and pulling the thread slightly tighter after each stitch to see whether he is stitching evenly up the

¹² T. Ingold, ‘Telling by Hand’, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013), 115.

¹³ R. Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin, 2009), 150.

¹⁴ Roberts, Schaffer and Dear, ‘Introduction’, *The Mindful Hand*, 7.

¹⁵ M. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc, 1968), 16.

¹⁶ Gilbert, ‘Marked’, *Victorian Skin*, 305-6.

¹⁷ P. Capuano, *Changing Hands: Industry, Evolution, and the Reconfiguration of the Victorian Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 1.

¹⁸ He also notes that the hand occupies a central place in the English language: we grasp, hold, handle ideas. However, he suggests that, these metaphors, far from being abstract figures of speech, were ‘still deeply embodied concepts in the Victorian practical consciousness.’ Capuano, *Changing Hands*, 2, 4.

¹⁹ Ann Larsen typically describes taxidermy as ‘reducing’ living animals ‘to simpler, static elements’: A. Larsen ‘*Equipment for the Field*’ in N. Jardine, J. A. Secord and E. C. Spary (eds.), *Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 358. See also: J. Ryan, “‘Hunting with the Camera’”: Photography, Wildlife and Colonialism in Africa’, in C. Philo and C. Wilbert (eds.) *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000), 209; D. Haraway, ‘Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936’, *Social Text*, 11 (1984), 20-64; G. Marvin, ‘Perpetuating Polar Bears: The Cultural Life of Dead Animals’, in B. Snæbjörnsdóttir and M. Wilson (eds.), *Nanoq: Flat out and Bluesome, A Cultural Life of Polar Bears* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), 164- 5.

cut. As a consequence, no two stitches are the same as he moves back and forth across the cut. Yet, this is also precisely why Peter's movements can be considered rhythmic rather than repetitive.²⁰

I take inspiration from this idea of rhythmic change. It suggests that, although working from experience and practice, taxidermists were never simply repeating their past movements. I therefore propose that taxidermy occupied a time of active present. I explore how the here and now was critical to taxidermy and skins, to meeting and making, and to producing taxidermy time in the studio. It was the time when the present and the purpose of the taxidermist, and the potential held within an animal skin, came together, and were realised. That is not to say that the hand always worked well with the skin; often things that have long been anticipated can lead to disappointment.

To access taxidermy as a handicraft, I draw on an assortment of taxidermy handbooks and manuals, for instance by Sarah Bowdich Lee, Thomas Brown, William Swainson, Charles Waterton, Rowland Ward and Montagu Browne.²¹ I also look to newspaper reports, to learn about how technique flowed through Britain, and sometimes crossed the Atlantic to the U.S. However, this is a chapter about skin-to-skin touch, and it would be amiss not to include reflections on my own experiences of the taxidermy present. From the rat (and my own hands) I learned about bones, hardening bodies and how taxidermy never ends. In the long nineteenth century, taxidermists often depicted a very specific, hands-on, working relationship with their animal skins. The renowned Victorian taxidermist Montagu Browne described how:

Now gradually, by persuasive means, pull the skin over the false body; and lift the starling up and observe what faults are apparent—possibly a little difficulty exists at the shoulders, if so, press them in with the thumbs, and then note if there are any apparently hollow places; if so, fill them out with a little more tow.²²

Fingers and thumbs pressed material into hollow corners, to become muscles. The hand pulled in a 'persuasive' manner. Under Browne's hand, and through the action shared between animal skin, hand, and tow, this lump of stuff and skin became a starling once more.

²⁰ Contrary to what the reader might expect from the title of this article, Patchett does not conceptualise an active present. Instead, she offers a comparison of historical practice and the 'present-day.' Whilst she thinks with time, and how craft 'resonates' across past and present, she therefore engages with a different idea of the present to the one I outline. M. Patchett, 'The Taxidermist's Apprentice: Stitching Together the Past and Present of a Craft Practice', *Cultural Geographies*, 23 (2016), 412. See also: T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000); T. Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011).

²¹ Whilst most of these texts are British, I have also used some from U.S. authors, some of which, such as the writings of the naturalist Robert Shufeldt, provide an overview of the British field as well. R. Shufeldt, 'Taxidermy as an Art', *The Art World*, 3 (1917), 210-14.

²² M. Browne, *Practical Taxidermy* (London: L: Upcott Gill, 1884), 108.

Stuffing

On receiving dried, wet, or fresh skins, taxidermists worked to soften them. Almost every British town, from Newport to Inverness, had a practicing taxidermist at some point in the nineteenth century.²³ The first stage was to ‘pare down’ and wash the skin. Sarah Bowdich Lee described how this was done:

when the skins arrive at their destination, they require another preparation before being placed on a factitious body... It must then be placed in a tub or large bucket, and covered with cold water, saturated with alum by ebullition. Eight days afterwards it must be extended on pieces of wood half rounded, thinning it with the help of a large and sharp knife; this operation is performed by passing the skin over the round surfaces of the demi-cylinders of wood.²⁴

The cutting away of dermis was the final removal of animal tissue before the creature was rebuilt. Many taxidermists note how, after being pared down, the skin should be ‘relaxed.’²⁵ The last act of explicit violence against the animal, the slicing of the skin until it reached a uniform thinness, gave way to washing or bathing. To ‘relax’ suggests an easing of both animal bodies and human movements. Rowland Ward described it as a ‘softening.’²⁶ There was a necessary delicacy to this. As Montagu Browne suggests, sometimes the bird skin ‘drops to pieces’ when ‘relaxed.’²⁷ Ward added how, after having immersed the skin ‘hold the specimen within the heat of the fire, all the while beating it briskly and lightly with the folded end of a clean towel.’²⁸ The corporeal residues of transit were washed and dabbed away.

In these descriptions of animal skin preparation, I encountered a change in attitude. As taxidermists prepared to add to the skin rather than to take from it (as the creature was to be rebuilt and no longer cut away into smaller fragments) their descriptions became imbued with an element of care. The care taxidermists took in washing skins – not just being careful but seeming to *take care* of the skin – continued throughout taxidermic practice. The manhandling and the violence of death and dismemberment was replaced by a lightness of

²³ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 7 November 1892, 4; ‘Percy Wadham: Taxidermist and Naturalist’, *Isle of Wight County Press and South of England Reporter*, 6 March 1897, 6.

²⁴ S. Bowdich Lee, *Taxidermy: or, the Art of Collecting, Preparing, and Mounting Objects of Natural History. For the Use of Museums and Travellers* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), 55.

²⁵ An article in *The Field* also describes how one should ‘Compress and relax the skin repeatedly while immersed in both these baths’: ‘The Naturalist: Recollections of the Himalayas by A Wandering Naturalist’, *The Field*, 24 June 1871. See also: R. Ward, *The Sportsman’s Handbook* (London: Rowland Ward, 1880), 65.

²⁶ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 55.

²⁷ He described how the ‘oldest plan’ was to wrap the limbs of the skin creature with wet cloths: Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 205, 199.

²⁸ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 67.

touch. An 1875 article entitled ‘Amateur Taxidermy’ described how ‘moderate knowledge of practical taxidermy necessitates two essential qualifications: first, a touch both gentle and delicate; second, some knowledge of natural history and anatomy.’²⁹ As I outlined in Chapter 1, ‘Skinning’, hunters also sought to protect their skins. However, they policed their animal skins to keep them intact, and separated from pests and blooming bacteria. Taxidermists sought to work with the skin, distanced as they were (physically and temporally) from the violence of the hunting field. Generally, they had not laid a hand on the animal before.

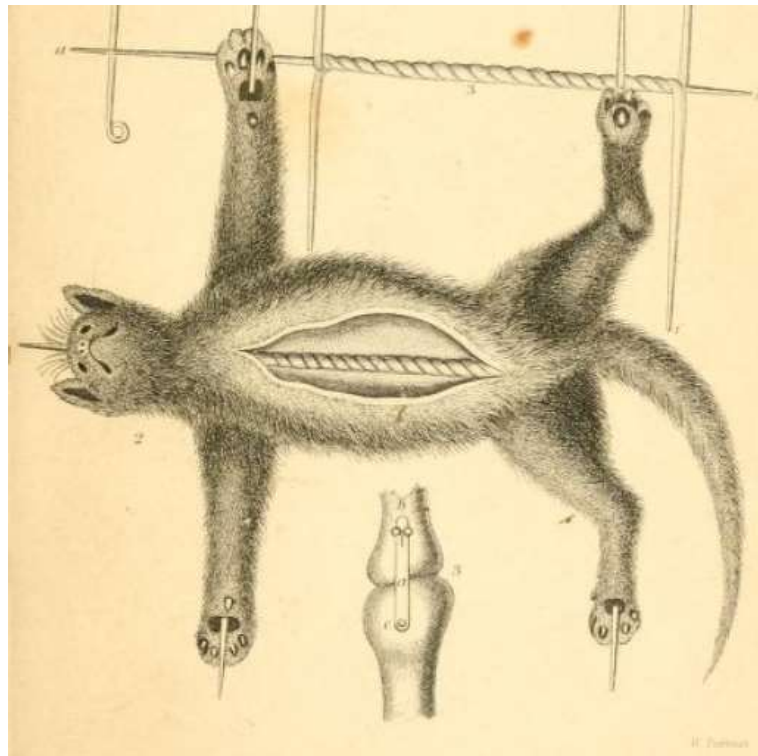


Figure 4.1: T. Brown, *The Taxidermist's Manual* (1853), xv.

Early in the period – until, roughly, 1850 – the vast majority of skins were literally stuffed with organic materials. Wire formed the foundations of these taxidermy creatures (see figure 4.1). Four, or five, pieces of wire were pushed along the skin of each limb, down the tibia bones, and pressure was exerted until the wire pierced the soft pad of each foot.³⁰ Wires snaked along the place formerly occupied by the tail bone and out into space. Each new component was likened to its anatomical counterpart; the wire ‘iron’ represents the back-bone.³¹ They were cut and modelled in relation to the lengths of each skin section, and then made a little longer.

²⁹ ‘Amateur Taxidermy’, *Scientific American*, 32 (1875), 159-60.

³⁰ See: Lee, *Taxidermy*, 15, 29; Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 40; Browne, ‘the Rise and Progress of Taxidermy’ in *Practical Taxidermy*, 12.

³¹ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 33.

The skin and its measurements guided this bodily recreation. Thomas Brown, an influential taxidermist and writer of handbooks, detailed how ‘all the cavities which the muscles before occupied are filled with chopped tow, flax, or cotton, well mixed with preserving powder.’³² I propose that this sense of the animal that once was – as something that had ‘before occupied’ the skin – continued to play on the mind of the stuffer. It ‘occupied’ their thoughts and handling. I think of this as the shadow presence of animal flesh and life. The stuffer knew that their animal skin had once been filled; the living animal of the past was made present through its absence, and in corporeal traces left within the skin. Brown adds (with original emphasis) ‘as a rule, COPY NATURE WHENEVER YOU HAVE IT IN YOUR POWER.’³³

The taxidermy that I practised in 2018, as part of a small group on a beginner’s course, was very similar to this early Victorian stuffing technique. I used wood-wool to fill out the rodent body. Feeding the wire along the skin of each leg, out through the paw, and then hooking it onto the stuffing ball in the main cavity, demanded a tricky deftness of finger. In early Victorian stuffing, integral bones, such as skulls, were generally left in the skins and in the final mount.³⁴ This was particularly the case for the smaller, fiddly creatures. I was instructed, by my modern-day taxidermy teacher, to leave the skull, feet, and lower leg bones. The appearance of my rat’s cranium, limbs, and grasping claws, were helped enormously by the continued presence of these skeletal remains. In all animals, these bones know the skin intimately already; their fit is guaranteed, and they continue to play the role they had in life. Large creatures, such as bears, would be crammed full of straw. For elephants, colossal wooden cages would occasionally be made and packed full of hay.³⁵ However, in the early-mid period, smaller animals, and particularly birds, were far more common visitors to the taxidermists’ workbench than larger fauna, as big game hunting was yet to peak.³⁶

Intricacies were added to soft-stuffed bodies by hand, or by tool. Lee described how, in stuffing the head of a monkey, ‘we take the end of the nose with the left hand, thrusting it again into the skin, we receive the bony head with the right hand, which we have introduced into the neck.’³⁷ This was deliberate, careful, choreography between left and right hands. The fingers also came into play; William Swainson recommended wrapping the wire in ‘flax’ by the motion

³² T. Brown, *The Taxidermist’s Manual; or the Art of Collecting, Preparing, and Preserving, Objects of Natural History* (London: A. Fullarton & Co., 1853), 10.

³³ Brown, *Taxidermist’s Manual*, 11.

³⁴ See for instance: ‘the long piece of wire is now passed into the middle of the skull’: Brown, *Taxidermist’s Manual*, 10.

³⁵ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 41-5.

³⁶ As I explored in Chapter 2, ‘Moving’, there were also fewer successes in transporting and preserving larger skins from distant climes: Ward described how ‘transport and the means of preservation were serious difficulties... It would astonish some of the younger generation of sportsmen to see the rough material I used to make trophies of’: Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, 39.

³⁷ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 30.

of winding round 'between the fingers.'³⁸ These creatures were products of tactile motion. Garrington argues that tools 'symbiotically connected to the hand', and also 'echo' the hands 'operations in their form.'³⁹ Tools are shaped around hands, and they could become long, metallic extensions of the fingers; Lee instructed how, to finish the monkey head, 'introduce some chopped flax, with pincers or forceps, about every part of the head where flesh or muscles existed.'⁴⁰

I also discovered that the taxidermy body was often crafted around the dimensions of the human hand. To make the internal wire structure, 'At the blunt end of the longest piece a ring is formed, large enough to admit of the point of a finger entering it.'⁴¹ Similarly, Swainson described gauging and shaping the interior body: 'a thinner piece, of about two feet long, is next taken, and bent at nearly one third of its length into an oval shape somewhat smaller than the hand.'⁴² In this description, both feet (the unit of length, measured originally on human foot size) and the literal human hand guided the creation of the animal body. All humans have different sized hands and fingers, so each interior would be individual: to both the creature, and to the taxidermist. These instructions are remarkably imprecise, and every hand must have produced an animal body simultaneously tailored to both animal skin *and* human handler.

These were generally male hands. Taxidermy manuals were directed towards an anonymous amateur male and, unsurprisingly, used the 'he' pronoun. The belief that a taxidermist should be educated to a high level in anatomy, natural history and biology largely excluded women, in a time when equality in education was still in its infancy. Sarah Bowdich Lee was an obvious exception to this rule. She entered the industry with her husband, the naturalist Thomas Bowdich. The first edition of her manual *Taxidermy* was published anonymously.⁴³ However, after her husband's death, rather than stepping back from natural history, she continued with her taxidermic writing endeavours under the name 'Mrs Lee'. Though, towards the end of the century, hobby taxidermy for women was growing in respectability, taxidermy, whether professional or personal, remained a male domain.⁴⁴

After it was put back together, these (male) hands would be pressed over the creature to shape it. Human and animal briefly shared skin, as the animal pressed into the out-stretched palm.

³⁸ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 33.

³⁹ Garrington, *Haptic Modernism*, 33.

⁴⁰ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 30.

⁴¹ Brown, *Taxidermist's Manual*, 9.

⁴² Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 33.

⁴³ M. Orr, 'The Stuff of Translation and Independent Female Scientific Authorship: The Case of Taxidermy...', anon', *Journal of Literature and Science*, 8 (2015), 27-47.

⁴⁴ 'Taxidermy' in *Ladies' Manual of Art* (Philadelphia: American Mutual Library Association, 1887) 203-94.

Risatti argues that ‘the hand actually *informs* the craft object, actually gives it physical form and formal meaning.’⁴⁵ There was a sensory reciprocity between hand and animal skin, and there was also a specificity and a pointedness to taxidermic touch. Lee noted that the way to finish forming a bird was to press ‘the two thumbs’ on the ‘limbs or tarsi’, to bend sixty degrees into a position ‘natural to the bird.’⁴⁶ Through tactile taxidermy, the animal skin was imbued with an element of wholeness; both something utterly new— an invention – and something closer to the old.

In successful taxidermy, human influence should be supportive of, but hidden by, the skin surface. The taxidermy skin was manipulated by human hand; but by a human (hand) attempting to reach an ideal interpreted from nature. The shadow presence of the once-living animal, and the dead skin, with its dips and hollows – the spaces waiting to be refilled – met with human hand and idealisation. This was a (re)emergence of the skin-self I explored in Chapter 1, ‘Skinning’, something I interpret in Swainson’s description of the skin as a ‘subject.’⁴⁷ These intermingling pasts, presents, interpretations, ideals, and solidities influenced the animal that the human sought to reproduce. The taxidermy creature was formed through a conversation between the creaturely and the cultural; however, it was a product of communicative touch rather than of words. The animal was the result of a series of nudges, tweaks and touches between the living human, the dead skin, and the enduring influence of the animal that once was.

Model Animals

I have shown how hands were integral to stuffing. Throughout the mid-late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, taxidermy continued to hinge on the movements of fingers, but these digits met with new materials, and moved in different ways. The entire taxidermy process changed exponentially between 1820 and 1914.⁴⁸ The Great Exhibition was a time of speedy bodily modification, one that I explore in the next chapter, ‘Exhibiting’. Browne argued that ‘in fact, the French and German taxidermists were then far in advance of us, a stigma which we did not succeed in wiping off until after the Great Exhibition of 1851.’⁴⁹ This change hinged on the hands and minds of influential individuals, such as John Hancock: founder of the Hancock Museum, exhibitor at the Great Exhibition, and the so-called father of British taxidermy. Later in the period, Browne himself, as an author and a curator at Leicester Museum, shaped taxidermy through both his making and his writing hand. Britain’s new

⁴⁵ Risatti, *Theory of Craft*, 108.

⁴⁶ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 61-2.

⁴⁷ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 35.

⁴⁸ Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 1-17.

⁴⁹ Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 13.

taxidermic status also centred on commercial studios, such as Rowland Ward's 'Jungle' in Piccadilly, in central London.⁵⁰ (See figure 4.2).

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the tangle of movements and temporalities bound up in travelling taxidermy. The onwards journey to the taxidermist was similarly meandering and nonlinear. Charles Peel hunted for his own personal collection.⁵¹ These animals were then sent to Gerrard and Sons of Camden to be taxidermied, before being forwarded to Peel in Oxford—when he had returned from his hunting endeavours.⁵² Conversely, Frederick Selous hunted under commission from the British Museum.⁵³ His skins were often taxidermied by Rowland Ward. Ward also had a shop and studio, and a storage facility, filled with 'stock' skins-in-waiting.⁵⁴ Flurries of letters, skins, and mounts, connected this triangular exchange between hunter, museums, and taxidermy firms.⁵⁵

An increase in hunting, as well as colonial expansion, and a push for scientific exploration through natural history, resulted in a flush of sizable animal bodies in the latter half of the century. Taxidermic technique shifted with this animal influx. Taxidermists and naturalists criticised what had come before. They depicted the stuffed creature as a swollen skin-bag. 'The greatest improvements', exclaimed Herbert Bolton, the natural history curator at Bristol Museum, speaking in 1899, 'had been made in regard to taxidermy, or as it was formerly called, "stuffing", and stuffing it certainly was, for skins were made to hold as much as they possibly could of chopped hay or some other material.'⁵⁶ These creatures were made so full they 'were distorted out of all knowledge and natural shape.' The hand-body relationship changed as techniques altered and faded. The shift in hand-use is reflected in the new description of taxidermy animals: they were no longer stuffed, but 'modelled.'⁵⁷

⁵⁰ 'Mr. Rowland Ward', *The Sketch*, 8 August 1894, 97-8. See also: R. Ward, *A Naturalist's Life Study in the Art of Taxidermy* (London: Rowland Ward, 1913), 18; and R. Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*.

⁵¹ C. Peel, *Somaliland* (Bloomsbury: London, 1900).

⁵² I learnt about Gerrard and Sons from their correspondence. See, for instance: Letter from Gerrard and Sons to the National Museum Cardiff, 4 April 1927, Department of Zoology, National Museum Cardiff Natural History Archives.

⁵³ F. Selous in J. G Dollman, *Catalogue of the Selous Collection of Big Game in the British Museum* (London: By Order of the Trustees of the British Museum, 1921), 73.

⁵⁴ 'The Jungle Trophy at the Colonies, a chat with Mr Rowland Ward', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 June. 1886. 6.

⁵⁵ The curator at the National Museum Cardiff wrote to both Ward and Gerrard and Sons requesting a red deer skin, in winter coat. Ward did not have one, but Gerrard and Sons soon did: Letter from Gerrard and Sons to Colin Matheson, 1 April 1927, National Museum of Wales, National Museum Cardiff.

⁵⁶ 'Museums: Their Modern Development. Lecture by Mr Herbert Bolton', *Western Daily Press*, 26 May 1899.

⁵⁷ Montagu Browne, quoted by Shufeldt, described how: 'A new school of taxidermy, with new methods, whose aim is to combine knowledge of anatomy and modelling with taxidermic technique, are now coming to the front, and the next generation will discard all processes of "stuffing" in favor of modeling.' R. Shufeldt, *Scientific Taxidermy for Museums* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1894), 375.



Figure 4.2: 'Mr Rowland Ward' *The Sketch*, 8 August 1894, 98.

Over time, the hand became used for building-up the body. From the 1850s, more and more taxidermists incorporated frameworks into their practice. In national taxidermy firms, every taxidermy creature was produced through an assemblage of rejected and accepted techniques from the preceding period. Some professional taxidermists had numerous apprentices – many hands might produce one mount. Rowland Ward taught young men with no previous experience of practical taxidermy: 'When I started taxidermy on lines far ahead of the old "stuffing" methods, I worked with pupils who had no previous knowledge of the subject, and who had, therefore, nothing to unlearn.'⁵⁸ Their hands and heads were unsullied; they had not grasped and pushed cotton into bodily corners. Each apprentice specialised in one area, such as glass-eye production, until 'he was perfect.' These animal and artificial fragments were then pieced together by hand to create a collaborative mount.

Iron rods were used as backbones, and a wooden frame was carved around an artificial skeleton. Ward described how a 'hollow space should be cut out, not only to lighten them, but that they may be riveted together over the iron, so that the rod occupies the place, as it were, of marrow in the bone.'⁵⁹ The absent presence of the bone marrow influenced the hands and decision making of Ward as a designer. In these early models, however, bones were still often

⁵⁸ Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 38.

⁵⁹ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 57.

included, creating a hybridised skeletal frame of iron, collagen, and calcium.⁶⁰ A review of Montagu Browne's *Practical Taxidermy*, published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1884 under the title 'Stuffed Animals', explains how unknown the technicalities of large-body taxidermy were to the nineteenth century British public. It details the inside of a lion mount (for a depiction of this lion see figure 4.3):

Yet how seldom have we ever reflected that the head, in order to assume that natural pose, has had to be moulded upon the actual skull of the deceased monarch; that the teeth are still deeply implanted in their original sockets; and that even the graceful tail itself can only be kept in its ingeniously wrathful attitude by the cunning insertion of a metal substitute for the caudal vertebrae.⁶¹

Here, the reviewer is surprised to discover the physical presence of bones – the deep animal interior – guiding the human interventions.

Taxidermists learnt about animal bodies from visits to urban zoos; they imbued their (often wild) skins with interpretations of captive life. From their observations, many sketched and drew animal figures or created miniature models in clay or wax – animals to fit in the palm of the hand. A report on new taxidermy technique in the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* suggests that 'this small model is prepared with great care and its anatomical details are carefully worked out.'⁶² Browne noted that the best taxidermist would be a 'welding of the educated artist, designer, modeler, sculptor, biologist, and naturalist.'⁶³ Taxidermists in this period regularly described themselves as artists.⁶⁴ Indeed, Ward came to sculpture before he came to taxidermy:

You must know that what I really wanted to be when I left school was a sculptor... At school I was always casting the boys' feet and hands, and when I left I got several commissions for the modelling of hands and the making of coloured busts... so you can easily understand that I turned my love of modelling to profitable account, imparting to my specimens as much verisimilitude to Nature as possible in pose, expression, and the characteristic features of the animal under treatment.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Walter Beasley described how, when the framework was built, the bones and skull are attached then 'the clay is applied, and, with the bones as a fundamental guide, the anatomy and form are gradually worked out.' W. L. Beasley, 'Modelling Animals in Clay the Passing of Taxidermy', *Scientific American*, 90 (1904), 496-8.

⁶¹ 'Stuffed Animals', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 October 1884, 4.

⁶² 'The Latest Taxidermy', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 2 August 1907. With the popularisation of the portable camera in the 1880's, some taxidermists replaced this moulding and sketching with photography.

⁶³ M. Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling* (London: A. and C. Black, 1896), 17.

⁶⁴ Herbert Bolton, the natural history curator of Bristol Museum at the end of the nineteenth century, described how 'a taxidermist must be an artist': 'Museums: Their Modern Development. Lecture by Mr Herbert Bolton', *Western Daily Press*, 26 May 1899.

⁶⁵ 'Mr. Rowland Ward', *Sketch*, 97-8.

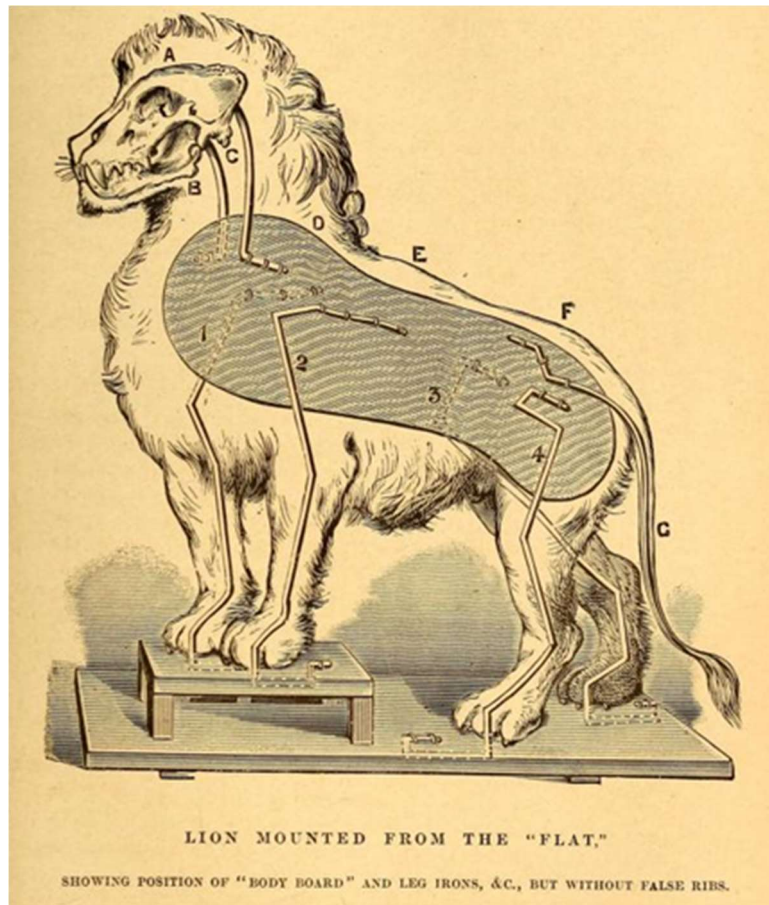


Figure 4.3: M. Browne, *Practical Taxidermy* (1884), 168.

Ward's own hands modelled human hands before they modelled animal anatomy.⁶⁶ Many taxidermists, when moving from models to full-scale bodies, used plaster, and later, clay, for intricate anatomical modelling; shaped, cupped in the palm, and smoothed over their hybrid animal interiors.⁶⁷ The living animal's muscles were honed over years of movement, injury, and strain, and then they were cut away. Sennett, referencing Claude Levi-Strauss, writes that 'clay, like meat, is good to think with. In pottery, raw clay is "cooked" both by the tools that shape it into a pot and by the kiln, which does the literal work of cooking.'⁶⁸ In taxidermy, the energy and action of human muscle, in arm and hand, was transferred into the clay until it became, not simply clay, but a muscular prosthesis for the animal.

⁶⁶ *The Globe* similarly described how 'Mr. Rowland Ward's real distinction is that he turned a rather poor handicraft into a magnificent art': 'The Art of Taxidermy,' *The Globe*, 6 January 1913, 4.

⁶⁷ Ward spent years honing a 'plastic substance' which had the 'appearance of carved stone-work.' This smothered the frame: Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 40.

⁶⁸ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 129. Similarly, the artist and writer Courtney Lee Weida argues that clay has a natural kinship with flesh and meat. She adds that the 'rich, muddy tactility of clay work is undeniable and can be intimate, like touching skin': C. Lee Weida, 'Flesh Pots and Clay Bodies' in 'Meet Animal Meat', *Antennae*, 15 (2010), 19.

I see this meeting of animal and taxidermist – whether through the stuffing or the modelling hand – as inhabiting an active present. It was an energetic period of interspecies contact and production. Within the greater expanse of taxidermy time, I argue that this was the temporality in which the present played the greatest role. Whilst skinning and decaying were both also defined by the now, their transformations ultimately hinged on future form: on recreations, recycling, and the loss of corporeality. Conversely, taxidermy embodied both the present and the future; the active now playing out under the hands and skins of taxidermists.

This was the time in which the potential of taxidermy was realised; the skin's promise, idealised by hunters and naturalists throughout the processes of skinning and transportation. It was the timely present for which humans had been waiting, and skins prepared. The Reverend Wood, a friend and biographer of Waterton, explained how Waterton's revival skills were channelled through his fingers – he had 'magic fingers.'⁶⁹ Lee similarly described Waterton's 'magic touches which seemed to restore the dead to life.'⁷⁰ His tactual wizardry seemingly had the power of resurrection. However, Waterton, like all taxidermists, could not conjure the look of life from nothing. Ingold argues that crafting is a 'relation between rhythmic movement and emergent form.'⁷¹ However, in taxidermy there was another actor in this relationship, and this was past form. The skin-creature was not created from scratch, and therefore had a natural affinity to take the shape it had once held. For the first time, taxidermy time – as something bound to the skin, not the human – and the *taxidermist's* time twisted and ran together.

Over time, yet newer frameworks were popularised, partially due to influences from the U.S, where Carl Akeley, and the American Museum of Natural History, were experimenting with plaster and paper bodies.⁷² Prior to this adoption of American technique, from the 1850s onwards, British taxidermists were considered leaders in the modelling field.⁷³ The new technique was reported widely throughout Britain. The *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* explained that 'the newer method of preparing museum specimens is not

⁶⁹ J. Wood, 'Afterword: Taxidermy' in C. Waterton's *Wanderings in South America* (New Edition) (London: Macmillan & Co., 1885), 497.

⁷⁰ S. Lee, 'Mr. Waterton's Method of Preserving Animals' in *Taxidermy* (Sixth Edition) (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1843), 239.

⁷¹ Ingold, *Making*, 120.

⁷² See: J. Dickinson, 'Taxidermy' in M. Kite and R. Thompson (eds.), *Conservation of Leather and Related Material* (London: Routledge, 2011), 133.

⁷³ The American taxidermist Robert Shufeldt described in 1894 how 'Our Government museums are as yet very faulty in this particular and far behind some of the better institutions in, for example, England and elsewhere': Shufeldt, *Scientific Taxidermy for Museums*, 433.

to “stuff” the animal at all but to draw the skin over a carefully modelled plaster cast. It is the New York Museum of Natural History which has led the way.⁷⁴

However, this new technique was expensive and time consuming.⁷⁵ Only the largest museums and taxidermy firms remade creatures this way, and many different bodily techniques and forms were practised at the same time. Sennet explains how, in craftwork, ‘progress is not linear. Skill builds by moving irregularly, and sometimes by taking detours.’⁷⁶ There were a multiplicity of taxidermy presents, occupied by skins and hands across Britain.

The Taxidermy Present

This individual present was produced by the specific taxidermist, their techniques, idealisations, and tools, and the workability of the skin. Every taxidermist had a different idea of what animality meant, and at what point it had been successfully reached. It was recognised that all taxidermy was imbued with the human, as Brown suggests: ‘The attitude of the bird will, or course, depend upon the fancy and taste of the operator.’⁷⁷ They acknowledged that there was a very fine line between human embellishment and human imposition.

The finer modelling of the face and features was reliant on a knowledge of what lies beneath the skin. The American naturalist Robert Shufeldt depicted the animal body as a landscape, urging taxidermists to know the ‘topographical anatomy, especially the osteology and superficial myology of mammals glands, veins, arteries, appendages, teeth, etc.’⁷⁸ In 1888, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, describing birds ‘stuffed by the hand of Mr. Hancock himself’, added that ‘only one who has made a deep and searching study into the habits of the feathered community could have succeeded in giving them that natural appearance.’⁷⁹ This knowledge would be formed through a coming together of the reading eye and the exploratory hand; taxidermists poured over books of anatomy. They also looked to living animals. On viewing a Wardian tiger, a journalist writing for *The Field* described how ‘Mr Ward must have studied the motion of these animals in the Zoological Gardens.’⁸⁰ On their zoo visits, numerous taxidermists mention rattling cages to make creatures (generally predators such as big cats, wolves and bears) assume an angry snarl.⁸¹ These taxidermists held, in their mind’s eye, the bodily form they wanted the animal to take. They then provoked the captive creature until it assumed such

⁷⁴ ‘The Latest Taxidermy’, *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 2 August 1904, 907. See also: ‘New Art in Taxidermy: An American Discovery’, *Sheffield Independent*, 1 August 1904; Beasley, ‘Modelling Animals in Clay’, 497-8.

⁷⁵ ‘New Art in Taxidermy’, *Sheffield Independent*, 1 August 1904.

⁷⁶ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 237-8.

⁷⁷ Brown, *Taxidermist’s Manual*, 34.

⁷⁸ Shufeldt, *Taxidermy as An Art*, 212.

⁷⁹ ‘John Hancock, Naturalist’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 December 1888, 1-2.

⁸⁰ ‘Taxidermy at the Great Exhibition’, *The Field*, 539.

⁸¹ Ward, *Naturalists Life Study*, 76: ‘The Jungle Trophy’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 6.

a form, and captured it in clay, in photograph, or in sketch. In this way, they shaped their own understanding and expectations of the animal body.

Mostly though, this knowledge came from experience and handy practice with dead creatures. Poliquin argues that ‘bad taxidermy, lacking any sense of physical intensity, is rarely able to cast a spell of “living nature.”⁸² Bad taxidermy could highlight, rather than hide, an animal’s deadness, and amateur taxidermy was painfully obvious:

A badly prepared bird or animal is worth-less as a specimen, and a ghastly object to behold. The last mentioned application will, we have no doubt, be peculiarly applicable to the result of our reader’s first effort after he rises from the perusal of the lines below. We do not say this in order to discourage such attempt – far from it- but merely to insinuate, in advance, that the practice of the art is not half so easy as it appears from the simple description of the various processes ... in lieu of the life-like image existing in their mind’s eye, a badly rumped little knob of yellow feathers reward their toil. Skill is only to be gained by study and practice, and the path is sure to be thickly strewn with monstrosities in astonishing variety; but when once a certain degree of deftness is attained.⁸³

This article, written in 1875, suggests that the amateur would not be able to summon life from death. Their hands could not bring the creature (living on in their ‘mind’s eye’) into being. Their little ‘knob of yellow feathers’ is more object than animal. These creatures are ‘monstrosities’ because the promise of animality held within the skin, and the human-held vision of the living animal, jarred with the reality of the taxidermist’s ineptitude.

They were bad because the taxidermist was inexperienced, but also because the skin did not work well for them. The dead animal did not always respond as expected and long anticipated.⁸⁴ *The Globe* reported that, in bad stuffing, ‘there were bulgings where there should be no bulgings and depressions where they should not exist.’⁸⁵ In this quotation, it is the authors’ knowledge of the living animal – its shadowy presence – that reveals the inadequacies of the mount. The spaces waiting to be refilled within the skin were still empty, and areas that never before had ‘bulged’ were stuffed and swollen. The human stuffer had failed to follow the lead of the animal body, and the result was an inversion of living animal form. In the active now, the taxidermist might also be let down by their hands. Montagu Browne suggests that stuffers and modellers with ‘clumsy fingers’ might invest specimens with their ‘own sombre personality.’⁸⁶ There was a need for control over the trembling hand, otherwise the skin could

⁸² R. Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 82.

⁸³ ‘Amateur Taxidermy’, *Scientific American*, 32 (1875), 159-60.

⁸⁴ At the turn of the twentieth century, Bristol Museum contained an old and badly stuffed big cat. It was ‘a leopard, but they could only tell that that was the animal by its spots’: ‘Museums’, *Western Daily Press*, 26 May 1899.

⁸⁵ ‘The Art of Taxidermy’, *The Globe*, 6 January 1913, 4.

⁸⁶ Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*, 166.

become a reflection of the human. Hands were not always in time with skins, and the potential of taxidermy might not be achieved in the moment.

For Ward, and other professional taxidermists, the taxidermy present was short, and shared out amongst his workers. Its timescale was set by profit and commercial interests. However, some taxidermists revelled in an extended present. All taxidermy was a thing of movement, a dance between skin and human body. Waterton pushed this tactual relationship further; both temporally, and through excessive handling. He kept a natural history museum at his home, Walton Hall, near Wakefield. As an aristocrat, he did not pursue taxidermy for money, but for pleasure: he had the privilege of time on his hands. Unusually for a taxidermist, he had killed many of his skins himself, and his home was filled with the animals he collected on his voyages in South America.⁸⁷ As his technique developed between the 1810s and the 1840s, his taxidermy became less and less full of stuffing; these new creatures were mostly skin. He described how ‘wire is of no manner of use, but, on the contrary, a great nuisance; for where it is introduced, a disagreeable stiffness and derangement of symmetry follow.’⁸⁸

Waterton bathed his skins in ‘corrosive sublimate’, mercury chloride.⁸⁹ Soaked and stabilised, he placed his skins upon a bizarre wooden contraption. Its earliest incarnation was a modified wooden box, complete with small wooden stick and pegs, but over time this morphed into a framework with an adjustable pole (see figure 4.4). Once the skin was attached and upright, Waterton turned his attention to careful handling.⁹⁰ Wood saw Waterton’s introduction of human touch as adding the ‘flow’ of life to the body.⁹¹ Sometimes his genius extended through his ‘magic fingers’ into his tools:

With a piece of iron, from the size of a large darning needle to that of a ramrod (or larger and thicker still, if the bulk of the animal require it), and shaped at one end like a carpenter’s pricker, he will push out every part of the skin which ought to be pushed out, and then reduce with the end of his finger any part that may be too prominent.⁹²

⁸⁷ C. Waterton, *Wanderings in South America* (London: B. Fellowes, 1839). These included a boa constrictor, winding around the entrance staircase: ‘in this enchanting staircase, the huge snake which the Squire contended in single conflict’: R. Hobson, *Waterton; His Home, Habits and Handiwork* (London: Whittaker & Company, 1866), 153.

⁸⁸ Waterton, *Wanderings*, 293. Hobson described how ‘Another great advantage is obtained by this ingenious method, inasmuch as it requires neither stuffing nor wires to sustain and preserve the attitude or position once given’: Hobson, *Waterton*, 144.

⁸⁹ ‘The Wandering Naturalist’ described in *The Field* how ‘the only sure way of preserving stuffed heads of large quadrupeds or their skins... is the plan adopted by the late Mr Waterton of immersing them in baths of corrosive sublimate’: ‘The Naturalist: Recollections of the Himalayas by A Wandering Naturalist’, *The Field*, 24 June 1871.

⁹⁰ Waterton described how ‘it will remain for ages yet to come, free from mould, and from the depredation of the moth; and without any wires, and any internal support whatever, it will retain the exact form which I have given to it.’ Waterton, ‘On Preserving Birds’, *Wanderings*, 305.

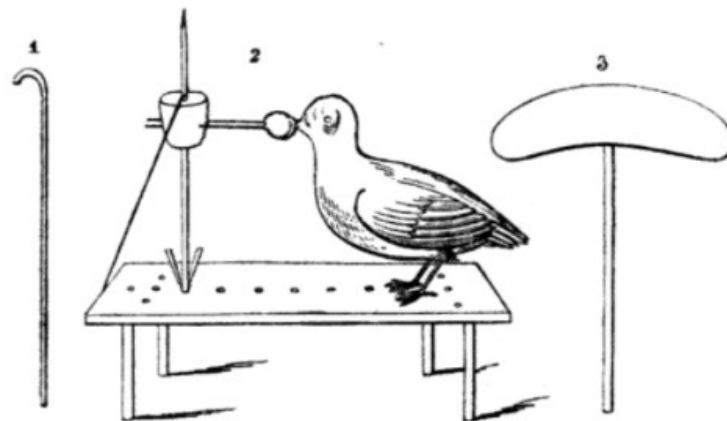
⁹¹ Wood, ‘Afterword: Taxidermy’ in Waterton’s *Wanderings*, 508.

⁹² Wood, ‘Afterword: Taxidermy’, 497, 500-1.

Waterton's fingers were described by Richard Hobson, another of his friends, who exclaimed how 'in the most delicate manipulations of any kind he notoriously excelled, having fingers as nimble, as pliable, and as sensitive as those of a well-bred lady.'⁹³

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top of which is perforated with holes at various distances, some of which form a horizontal line,



and others right angles to it, but which may be made as required. These tools will serve for

Figure 4.4: S. Bowdich Lee's *Taxidermy*, Sixth Edition (1843), 222.

However, this caring touch was also one of domination. In *Wanderings*, Waterton recommended that 'every now and then touch and retouch all the different parts of the features, in order to render them distinct and visible, correcting at the same time any harshness, or unnatural risings or sinkings, flatness or rotundity. This is putting the last finishing hand to it.'⁹⁴ There are connotations of both assistance and chastisement in giving 'a hand' to the skin. Wood described how Waterton 'kept every feather and hair under command and put in touch after touch to the skin just as the painter does to his canvas.'⁹⁵ Waterton seemed to have control over every inch of the animal skin. Nevertheless, Risatti argues that materials always 'choreograph' the hand and the human body.⁹⁶

⁹³ Hobson, *Waterton*, 118. It is thought that Waterton and Hobson may have had a row shortly before Waterton's death, which might have contributed to Hobson's focus on Waterton's eccentricities in this text.

⁹⁴ Waterton, *Wanderings*, 303.

⁹⁵ Wood, 'Afterword: Taxidermy', 507. Similarly, Hobson described how 'it gives him the power also of raising perpendicularly, and of sustaining in a permanent position, even any individual feather that may be required to imitate nature by standing erect': Hobson, *Waterton*, 144.

⁹⁶ Risatti, *Theory of Craft*, 114. See also: Nimkulrat, 'Hands on Intellect', 1-2.

For Waterton, this was a slow, building, relationship between human hand and animal skin:

No vestige of an attitude can be seen, and the operator feels very much inclined to give up in despair. Day after day he works at it according to instructions, and seems to make no progress whatever. Presently, however, he is encouraged by finding that the skin begins to respond to his touch, and before very long it becomes as plastic as clay in the hands of the sculptor.⁹⁷

‘Presently’, in this period of extended now, the skin seemed to wake up. Taxidermist and skin began to move together. These hollow skins were self-supporting: Hobson described how they needed ‘no artificial support of any description whatever.’⁹⁸

Waterton was a highly influential taxidermist. Lee went to stay at Walton Hall to learn from him, and his skins and hands, a visit that she described in her sixth edition of *Taxidermy*. In 1858 the *Field* suggested that ‘The best system of taxidermy is undoubtedly that which Mr Waterton has carried to such perfection.’⁹⁹ On Waterton’s death, the *Glasgow Herald* mentioned that Walton Hall contained ‘skins’, ‘so adroitly worked while wet and fresh that, as they stiffened, every muscle and ligament is shown upon the preparation.’¹⁰⁰ Waterton had sculpted convincing muscles out of skin and air and time.¹⁰¹

Yet, his exact techniques were not taken up by many. The *Glasgow Herald* added that ‘Mr. Waterton was by no means a scientific naturalist, like Professor Owen or Baron Cuvier. He was, on the contrary, in the best of words, a “*rusticus, abnormis sapiens*.”¹⁰² Browne similarly explained that:

This, it will be seen, is really nothing more than a “skin” with the eyes inserted and legs bent, and although it is not gainsaid that such a method will give good results in the hands of a man who has the requisite time, patience, and space at command, yet at best it is but an amateurish “fad,” serves no useful purpose, and, whilst likely to get the amateur into bad methods of work, is an impossible system for the professional.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, Browne still contended that Waterton was highly influential. He saw Waterton’s handling as inspiring the later system of modelling: ‘that eccentric genius Waterton, who we

⁹⁷ Wood, ‘Afterword: Taxidermy’, 506-7.

⁹⁸ Hobson, *Waterton*, 145.

⁹⁹ ‘Taxidermy’, *The Field*, 17 July 1858.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Charles Waterton & Walton Hall’, *The Glasgow Herald*, 2 September 1865, 2.

¹⁰¹ These efforts were compared positively to ‘the ordinary efforts of the bird-stuffer, who succeeds in making a pincushion of his subject rather than a bird or beast’: ‘Charles Waterton & Walton Hall’, *Glasgow Herald*, 2. The *Telegraph* also suggested that Waterton invented ‘the new method of preserving specimens without the cumbrous drugs, wadding, and wires of other collectors’: ‘Death of Charles Waterton’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 March 1864, 3.

¹⁰² ‘Charles Waterton & Walton Hall’, *Glasgow Herald*, 2. Waterton’s eccentricities (he was known for excessively bleeding himself and sleeping on a wooden plank) affected his credibility, although they were likely exaggerated by Hobson. When he was not pursuing naturalism, he also made strange animal hybrid taxidermy: Hobson, *Waterton*, 230.

¹⁰³ Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*, 182.

may call the pioneer of our present system of mounting.¹⁰⁴ I argue that Waterton's extended present, whilst being too time-consuming for direct imitation, greatly influenced the taxidermy of the future. In the words of Browne, his experiments led to a 'happy compromise' between stuffing and modelling. His techniques reached across the Atlantic: Shufeldt saw Waterton as 'standing almost alone as he did as a sound instructor of the taxidermic art in the first quarter of the present century, he is represented at this writing, or in the very last part of the century's last quarter, by scores of teachers in Europe and America who entertain precisely similar opinions.'¹⁰⁵ In pouring himself, and his time, into his animal skins, Waterton shaped the taxidermy present of the future.

Feeling the Animal

I have paid attention to the ways that taxidermists shaped skins with their hands; and how skins influenced each press and nudge. The final touches were completed once the animal was almost sewn-up. The skin would be puckered into 'folds' if such wrinkles existed in the living animal.¹⁰⁶ Mucus membranes were smeared with wax. Wax could also be used to restore shrunken skin, and bills, feet, and naked skin (once coloured by the flush of blood) would be painted. Glass eyes, either made by the taxidermist, or purchased from a specialist eye maker, were squeezed beneath eyelid skin: 'care should be taken in arranging the eyelid, for the expression depends altogether upon this point.'¹⁰⁷ The careful (caring) taxidermist was fastidious.

After the expression had been added, creatures needed to be made whole again through sewing. Montagu Browne urged taxidermists to 'try on' the skin 'jacket', before commencing with sewing from the tail end.¹⁰⁸ With sewing, the animal became a garment, the taxidermist their tailor. After the trying on, the needle entered the skin, slipped out, hovered in the hand, and re-pierced the skin on the other side. Classen describes how 'needlework was understood to be work of the hand rather than the eye.'¹⁰⁹ This was a time of intense concentration; a precise present, of pulling the animal back together. Feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz argues that 'habit does not arrest or mechanize, or reduce consciousness to unconsciousness or automatism; rather, it brings about a new kind of consciousness, one not aware of itself but prone to act.'¹¹⁰ Whilst taxidermists were well practiced, each interaction was different to what

¹⁰⁴ Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Shufeldt, *Scientific Taxidermy*, 374.

¹⁰⁶ Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Modelling*, 136.

¹⁰⁷ 'Skinning and Stuffing of Small Quadrupeds', *Scientific American*, 5 June 1869, 357.

¹⁰⁸ Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 212-3.

¹⁰⁹ Classen, *Book of Touch*, 229-30.

¹¹⁰ E. Grosz, 'Habit Today: Ravaissou, Bergson, Deleuze and Us', *Body & Society*, 19 (2013), 223.

had come before; it was of the moment.¹¹¹ Lee explains that, through such action, the skin was made whole: ‘we then unite the skin by sewing it.’¹¹² But the needle also produced new holes – tiny puncture wounds, connected to one another by an uninterrupted turn of thread.¹¹³

The relationship between hair and skin was integral to this process. Taxidermists noted the care needed to ensure fur and feathers were not caught within the stitching and pulled into the interior body space. Browne described the importance of avoiding ‘the common fault of sewing the feathers in with the stitches.’¹¹⁴ If freed, the hair could be smoothed back over the stitches, to obscure the join. Thomas Brown explained how the skin will be:

Sewed within and without, while attention is paid to divide the hairs, and not to take any of them in along with the thread; but should any of them be inadvertently fixed, they can be picked out easily with a point. When this is completed, the hair will resume its natural order and completely conceal the seam.¹¹⁵

If stitches were small and well done, they could be hard to see. Shufeldt noted how skin sometimes ‘fits like a perfectly fitting glove and it would puzzle one to find the original incision after it is sewed up.’¹¹⁶ Similarly, Browne instructed the handler to ‘draw the skin over the model like a glove upon the hand.’¹¹⁷ Taxidermists relied on hands not only when making a specimen, but also in their instructions and figures of speech.

Unlike scars on living skin, these stitches would never heal and fade. Like all objects in the present, stitch-scars were produced from the materials and actions of the past.¹¹⁸ Stitches spoke both of taxidermy and dismemberment. Whilst stitch-scars were long-lasting, they could still change with time. The contemporary handbook, *Conservation of Leather and Related Material*, describing historical taxidermy, notes that ‘where the skin has not been glued to a solid form, shrinkage usually first shows itself by the bursting of stitched seams.’¹¹⁹ These stitch-scars could become the places of bulging, of poking through, and, if hair or feathers dropped out, they would be made highly visible once again.

¹¹¹ Similarly, Patchett argues, drawing on Ingold, that taxidermy stitches are always new actions; they are never entirely ‘repetitive.’ Patchett, ‘The Taxidermist’s Apprentice’, 412.

¹¹² Lee, *Taxidermy*, 60-1.

¹¹³ Different materials were used as thread – Browne recommended using ‘strong hemp’: Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 161. William Swainson described how ‘the skin must then be sowed up with a triangularly pointed or a common needle and strong silk; passing the stitches from the interior surface, so that the needle comes out in a direction towards the operator’: Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 41.

¹¹⁴ Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 101.

¹¹⁵ Brown, *The Taxidermist’s Manual*, 12.

¹¹⁶ Shufeldt, *Taxidermy as an Art*, 214.

¹¹⁷ Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 159.

¹¹⁸ In a paper presented at the international conference, *The Material Life of Time*, Philipp Bohlen argued that, within an object, all different times – pasts and futures – exist together in the present. P. Bohlen, ‘All at Once – The (Schellingian) Conception of Inner Time’, *Material Life of Time*, March 2021.

¹¹⁹ Dickinson, ‘Taxidermy’ in *Conservation of Leather and Related Material*, 134.

When I see stitches in a skin, I know that a hand was also once there. They prompt me to remember that taxidermy is an action (*to taxidermy*), as well as an object. The stitch-scar tells of violence and care, deadness, and duplicity. Connor argues that humans' 'desire to tear the skin is inseparable from the need to darn it or make it whole.'¹²⁰ The taxidermist's hands were like a surgeon's hands; the needle both stabs and unifies, but, unlike a surgeon, the taxidermist profited from death. Their livelihoods and identities as taxidermists were defined by the present moment in which their hands met with animal death.

Once the last thread was cut on the last stitch, taxidermists began to attend to the outer animal. Lee described how Waterton taught her that 'the fur of quadrupeds should be as carefully attended to as the feathers of birds, and if long, daily brushed upright with a soft brush.'¹²¹ Whilst Waterton was an extreme example, all taxidermists paid intense, tactile attention to the creature. Similarly, the article 'Amateur Taxidermy' described how 'The operator must now, with a fine pair of forceps, carefully adjust the feathers, smoothing them down with a large camel's hair brush.'¹²² Taxidermists held a privileged position as, when the animal made its way to the museum, the public would be forbidden from touching.¹²³ Ward, in the *Sportsman's Handbook*, chastised that taxidermists should nevertheless take care not to over-stroke their mounts: 'He spoils a restored specimen who destroys this character by too much smoothing... purposeless stroking of the fur.'¹²⁴

To stroke an animal is to share skin, and it is often something humans find comforting.¹²⁵ Sinking our fingers into fur, running up and along the curvature of a back-spine, repeating. The hair – which feels different to our own, denser, sometimes softer, often oilier – rises to cover our fingers, our knuckles, as our hands burrow closer to the warm skin itself. Except that, in taxidermy, there is no warmth and life. For this reason, when I had sewn-up my rat, I did not want to feel his fur. After the gruesome tactility of the dismemberment, I wanted as much distance between my fingers and his skin as possible.

I was surprised, at first, that my rat looked somewhat lifelike. When the eyes were pressed into place, something rodent returned. And yet he was also very dead – beneath one eye rests a blob of glue. Wood-wool pokes through his stitches. His fur moults and leaves his trace on your fingers. I was instructed to massage the creature in the two weeks after the course, this

¹²⁰ S. Connor, *The Book of Skin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 52, 53.

¹²¹ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 236.

¹²² 'Amateur Taxidermy', *Scientific American*, 32 (1875), 159-60.

¹²³ Classen, 'Touch in the Museum' in *Book of Touch*, 275-86.

¹²⁴ Ward, *Sportsman's Handbook*, 65.

¹²⁵ This is something the Victorians also knew well, in the great age of pet keeping: H. Ritvo, 'Prize Pets' in *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 82-123.

would keep the skin supple and active and ensure the animal set in the intended pose. Taxidermy is not something that is finished when the skin is sewn up; attention to the animal continues. This extended period of taxidermy reminded me of Waterton, and his prolonged contact with animal skins.

Yet, repeated handling is something I neglected to do. With the absence of continued human touch, the rat became brittle and stiff-looking. He no longer looks as if, below his skin, is a warm, pulsating body. His back is lumpy and unshapely and he has become more dead looking, and his body carries the imprint of my fingers and my labour. Classen describes how ‘touch is the sense least susceptible to deception and hence one in which we tend to put the most trust.’¹²⁶ To guarantee something is real, we touch it. I did not want to touch the rat, as his dead animality – his continued realness – already felt too close for comfort. I wanted him to remain something I had made, rather than something I continued to make.

Skins, Fur and Hands

I was not comfortable with meeting the deadness of my rat, and with continuing the motions of taxidermy. The look of life is so reliant on the human hand, and his lively deadness was too much for me. For the Victorians, however, contact with dead things was a feature of the constant present. Taxidermy and objects made from dead animals entered the home. The long nineteenth century saw the continued rise of the fur trade, and the development of the fur and feather fashion industries.¹²⁷ Fur became associated with wealth, femininity and luxury, as fashion-conscious women wrapped themselves in animal skins. This was dead animal trade without the respectable cloaking of natural history. However, this was often a murky boundary. The taxidermy firm Gerrard and Sons described themselves as ‘Naturalists and Furriers’ specialising in ‘Skins, skeletons and skulls. Specimens mounted singly, or in groups with natural surroundings. Articulated and disarticulated skeletons and skulls. Biological and anatomical models. Rugs, furs and fur coats.’¹²⁸

Since Freud, scholarship has analysed the sexualization of fur.¹²⁹ The psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu describes how ‘the fur carries over the figurative representation of a recovered skin-to-skin contact, velvety, voluptuous, and scented (nothing is so strong as the scent of a new fur garment).’¹³⁰ Furthermore, the sociologist Lise Skov identifies the ‘double meaning of

¹²⁶ Classen, *Book of Touch*, 76-7.

¹²⁷ J. Emberely, *The Cultural Politics of Fur* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

¹²⁸ Letter from Gerrard and Sons to the National Museum Cardiff, 4 April 1927, National Museum Cardiff, Natural History Archives.

¹²⁹ S. Walsh, ‘Bikini Fur and Fur Bikinis’ in K. Lesnik-Oberstein (ed.) *The Last Taboo: Women and Body Hair* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 166.

¹³⁰ D. Anzieu, *The Skin-Ego* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 46.

undressing for the animals' – they are stripped of skin and of life.¹³¹ Considering this, the taxidermist's caress could have different connotations. The artist and writer Sonja Britz argues that there is a long history to the relationship between hunting and eroticism, and a 'conquest in love.'¹³² I interpret a similar trace of eroticism – if only a whiff of one – in the relationship between taxidermist, hand, eye, and animal skin. For instance, Browne described how taxidermy, as an art, must 'be wooed with patient determination and loving pains until technical skill invests it with beauty.'¹³³ Taxidermists always sought specimens with the longest, fullest coats.¹³⁴ Animal fur marks a material, and very visible, difference between the human and the animal. Human skin is bare, apart from varying amounts of bodily hair. To some extent, the animality of the (nonhuman) skin is contained within such skin appendages, within the density of fur and the strange softness of plumage.

Moreover, the absence of fur could pose problems for taxidermists. Stitches were particularly visible on thin-furred creatures. Montagu Browne described how 'the hands of monkeys also must be carefully skinned out to the extreme tips of the fingers. These latter animals are best skinned out from the back, as a great many of our "relatives" have but little hair on the abdomen to hide the stitches, added to which their usually upright position tends still more to show up any defect in sewing.'¹³⁵ Here, the lack of fur (the human-seeming skin), is coupled with the uncanny familiarity of the primate 'relative.' Darwinian evolutionary theory crept into taxidermy. Ward was unsettled by the arrival of primates to his 'Jungle' studio:

an enthusiastic collector of gorillas in the Congo sent me an adult specimen in a cask of rum, and when the carcass was removed from the barrel at my studios it revealed a very gruesome sight. I can well remember, as the "old man" gorilla lay on the floor, the many human traits – his sunken eyes and fleshy chest in the dim light of the evening were almost hideous, and I have heard men say that one gorilla is enough for any man to collect, for it is far too much like killing a man.¹³⁶

For Ward, the animal-human boundary broke down in the presence of the dead gorilla. Peel felt similarly: when explaining why his museum in Oxford did not contain many primates, he admitted that 'no sportsman likes shooting a monkey.'¹³⁷

For other taxidermists, this bodily transgression is suggested in their descriptions of 'hands.' Primates are the only creatures described as having hands: Thomas Brown notes how 'one of

¹³¹ L. Skov, 'The Return of the Fur Coat: A Commodity Chain Perspective', *Current Sociology*, 53 (2005), 26.

¹³² S. Britz, 'Beautiful Animals in Hunting Wonderland', *Antennae*, 8 (2008), 22.

¹³³ Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, viii.

¹³⁴ See, for instance: Peel, *Somaliland*, 285.

¹³⁵ Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 149.

¹³⁶ Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 37.

¹³⁷ C. Peel, *Popular Guide to MR. C. V. A. Peel's Exhibition of Big-Game Trophies and Museum of Natural History and Anthropology* (Guildford: Billing & Sons, Ltd, 1906), 7.

the chief difficulties to contend with in setting up monkeys and apes, is the preservation of their hands and hind hands, or what are commonly called their feet; because we must not attempt to deprive these limbs of their flesh, as we never could again supply its place anything like what is in nature.¹³⁸ Without a cloak of fur, primate hands could easily give away a taxidermy creatures' deadness by becoming shrivelled. Rachel Poliquin argues that one can judge a taxidermist on their primate hands, as, full of joints and skin and flesh, they are 'really difficult to sculpt.'¹³⁹

Through taxidermy, primate hand met human hand. Primate fingerprints enabled the human taxidermist to grasp and grip; the anthropologist Nina Jablonski explains how the 'touch is central to primate experience.'¹⁴⁰ Humans killed and skinned monkeys and apes, thereby stripping them of their ability to touch, and then modelled their hand-skins, using their own highly adapted sense of touch. In the early-mid period, many Victorians saw the hand as a physical manifestation of human exceptionalism. Only humans could easily grasp and know; could use opposable thumbs and tools. Capuano describes the developments which disrupted this narrative, and eventually culminated in the publication of the *Origin of Species*. 'The popularization of the 'Development Hypothesis,' combined with England's "discovery" of the gorilla in the 1850s, rocked the hand from its privileged status as *the* physiological appendage separating humans from presumably lower animals.'¹⁴¹

The animal-human boundary was troubled by the gorilla's hand. There was some confusion about how to order, and taxidermy, these bare and handy look-alikes. In 1891, nearly half a century after the publication of the *Origin of Species*, the natural history curator of Bristol Museum, Edward Wilson, still used hands as a way of distinguishing humans from other primates. Employing categories of classification that had had echoes of the Great Chain of Being – in which humans occupied the pinnacle position – he separated the 'the highest group of Mammals, the Bimana ("two-handed") or MAN' from the 'Quadrumana, or "Four-handed Mammals."¹⁴² Such ideas combined with evolutionary theory, and both continued to shape Wilson's worldview and curatorial hand. He took a middle ground, accepting that many of these 'four-handed' creatures were 'Anthropoid' including, the 'most man-like as well as most formidable of all the Apes – the Gorilla.'

¹³⁸ Brown, *Taxidermist's Manual*, 15.

¹³⁹ R. Poliquin, 'Ravishing Beasts' Interview, *Antennae*, 6 (2008), 10.

¹⁴⁰ N. Jablonski, *Skin: A Natural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 97.

¹⁴¹ Capuano, *Changing Hands*, 6.

¹⁴² E. Wilson, *Guide to the Bristol Museum*, (Second Edition) (Bristol: W. C Hemmons, 1891), 4. Lee, writing pre-Darwin, argued that 'in all systems monkeys are placed immediately after man': Lee, *Taxidermy*, (Sixth Edition), 27.

There was no easy solution to this debate, and primates and their hands continued to unsettle the human. Writing in the 1930s, Martin Heidegger thought the hand was the site of humanity:

No animal has a hand, and never does there arise a hand from a paw or a claw or a talon... the hand has in it the essence of man, because the word as the essential realm of the hand is the essential basis of man... Apes, too, have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands... Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands and can be handy in achieving works of handicraft.¹⁴³

According to Heidegger, monkeys and apes could not name the hand, so they could not possess the hand. Yet, the primate hand continued to trouble the anthropocentric world view. Later in the passage I previously quoted from, Brown briefly switches to describing monkey ‘paws’, instead of hands.¹⁴⁴ From the 1830s onwards, the bodies of taxidermy creatures (and the human hands that made them) were positioned at the intersection of developments in scientific, philosophical, and theological thinking on human exceptionalism. Not only did taxidermy remain resolutely animal, but it also had the potential to make humans consider their own animality.

The Writing Hand

The hand can be used to separate humans from animals as it is the only known hand-organ which contains within it the ability to write. It was also employed in an attempt to turn the taxidermy animal into written form. As the literary scholar Verity Burke argues, ‘material specimens were accompanied by another way to read and articulate the ‘truths’ of the body: anatomical literature such as the taxidermy manual had to construct taxidermy techniques and represent bodies through description and analogy.’¹⁴⁵ In the long nineteenth century, such taxidermy manuals were produced on a regular basis. In their naming – as manuals and handbooks – these texts suggest tactual labour, and words to be put into action.

As I have demonstrated, taxidermy as a craft developed down the century. Later handbooks generally positioned themselves as introductions to a professional craft, rather than as guides for amateurs. As technique changed, new manuals were published to keep amateur taxidermists up to date. However, I have identified a strange trend. Bizarrely, much of what the early-mid manuals said remained the same. Three manuals from this period follow a similar structure, and sometimes repeat each other word for word. The first is Lee’s *Taxidermy*, the first edition of which was published in 1820. This work was not completely original – it was an adaptation of a French text by Louis Dufresne, of the Paris Muséum

¹⁴³ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 16.

¹⁴⁴ Brown, *Taxidermist’s Manual*, 15.

¹⁴⁵ V. Burke (Darke), ‘Reading the Body-Object: Nineteenth-Century Taxidermy Manuals and *Our Mutual Friend*’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 19 (2017), 1.

National d'Histoire Naturelle.¹⁴⁶ It also contains instructions of techniques inspired by the famed naturalist Georges Cuvier.

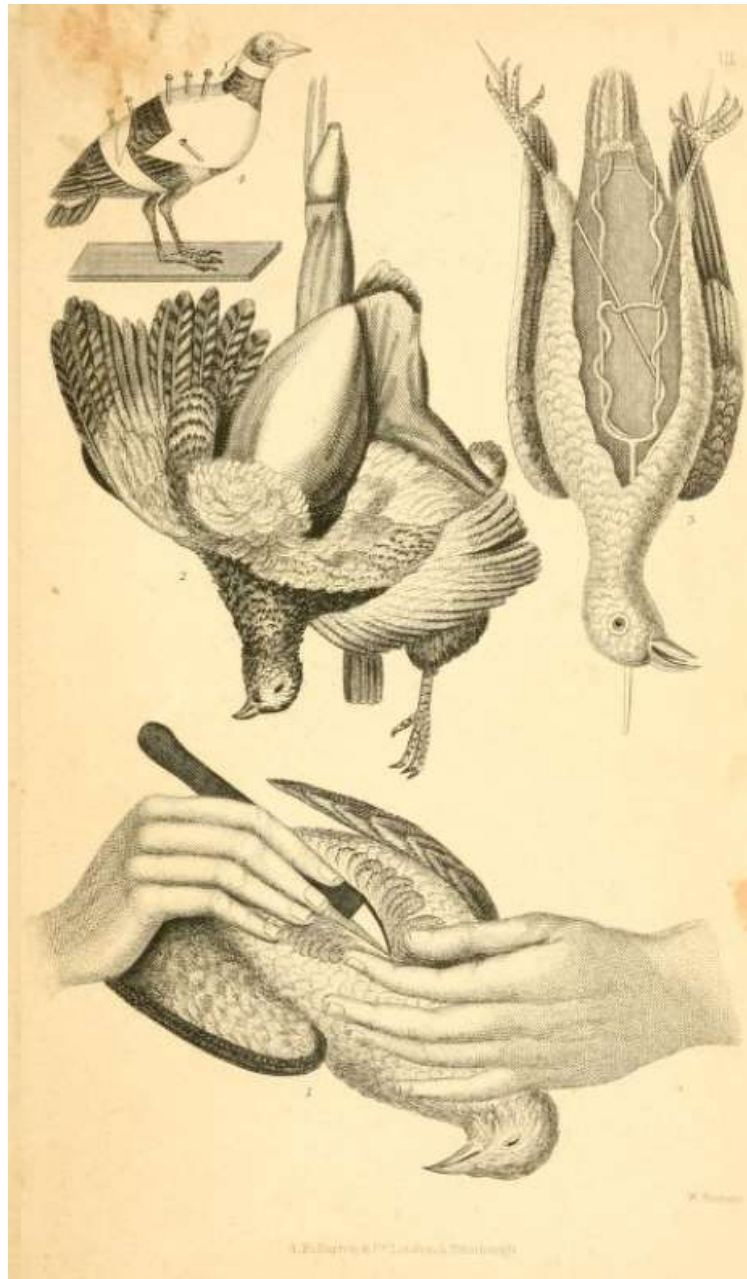


Figure 4.5: T. Brown, *The Taxidermist's Manual* (1853), xvii.

However, Lee acknowledges this, and spent years in the Paris natural history museum with Dufresne and her husband, learning these corporeal techniques.¹⁴⁷ The second text is William Swainson's *Taxidermy: Bibliography and Biography* (1840). Swainson was a renowned taxidermist, and he includes information 'for mounting quadrupeds, -- that is, for giving them their natural form and attitude,-- the following process, practised in the French Museum, is

¹⁴⁶ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 14; Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*, 117.

¹⁴⁷ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 43, 109-10.

recommended.¹⁴⁸ He sometimes copies directly from Lee. Montagu Browne, in his overview of the field, acknowledged this duplication in describing ‘the following translation of the original, rendered by Bowdich’ which ‘has since been copied by many industrious authors.’¹⁴⁹ The third text, *The Taxidermist’s Manual* (1853) by Thomas Brown, is an almost exact copy of the French text, without acknowledgment of its origins. The human hands and morphing animal bodies that populate Brown’s work are depicted in figure 4.5. Brown’s manual became highly influential in the U.S and was reproduced in numerous newspaper articles – although these, too, were often published without acknowledging Brown.¹⁵⁰ The use of an anonymous author was commonplace in nineteenth century Britain and the U.S.

The texts all described a process of mounting birds that had decayed on their journey; often rare birds of paradise that were considered too valuable and beautiful to simply discard. After their travels, only the feathers remained; there was no longer a skin, or only the sticky traces of one. Through their deadness, the birds’ potential to become taxidermy had almost entirely slipped away. But not quite. For this incredibly complex process, the taxidermist produced a flax and wire body, and then glued each feather individually onto this frame. Lee explains how:

we often receive birds from distant countries in such a state of decay, that it is impossible for us to take advantage of them by any of the methods we have previously described; however, when the birds are interesting for science, or they are wanting in our collections, it would be mortifying to lose them.¹⁵¹

The texts echo each other. Thomas Brown’s book states: ‘Rare birds are frequently received from foreign countries, the skins of which are in such a state of decay, that it is impossible to mount them by the ordinary processes above described. The only way in which they can be preserved, is to mount them feather by feather, which however is a very tedious method.’¹⁵² There is word for word duplication in the instructions for body production, including that ‘the model may then be dried by the fire, or in the sun.’¹⁵³ If the reader studies only these manuals, they would be left with the impression that skinless taxidermy was commonplace. However, this technique is mentioned by no other taxidermists, and I suspect it was an exceptionally rare occurrence. I have identified, then, how taxidermic writing has the potential to distort a historian’s understanding of taxidermy practices by making it unclear what were extreme or

¹⁴⁸ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 32.

¹⁴⁹ Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*, 117.

¹⁵⁰ See: ‘Taxidermy’ in *Ladies’ Manual of Art* (Philadelphia: American Mutual Library Association, 1887) 203-94; and ‘Hints on Taxidermy’, *The American Naturalist*, 3 (1869), 136-46.

¹⁵¹ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 78.

¹⁵² Brown, *Taxidermist’s Manual*, 45. Similarly, Swainson writes ‘the foregoing process, however tedious and difficult, is absolutely necessary on many occasions; particularly for mounting the rarer species of Paradise birds, and other sent to Europe’: Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 50.

¹⁵³ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 78; Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 48.

unusual measures. These repetitions create a strange, and sometimes misleading, uniformity in the presentation of the early taxidermy body.

Textual copycatting, and anonymity, were commonplace in Victorian texts. I believe, however, there are several additional explanations for this consistent but deceptive writing hand. Taxidermy was a competitive industry, and there was heated debate in newspapers regarding the quality of others' work. William Hornaday, an American who was influential on both sides of the Atlantic, suggested that taxidermists, since the very inception of the practice, liked to keep an air of mystery. 'At present most taxidermists are fiercely jealous of each other and outsiders, and guard their little knowledge as a miser hoards his gold.' He added that:

I have known taxidermists, who, when visited by other member of the profession, would invariably stop working the moment the visitor appeared and remain idle during his entire stay even though their specimen *spoiled*. Such men must think they are the only taxidermists in the world.¹⁵⁴

Here, the taxidermist, through their own inactivity, enabled the animal to travel beyond the taxidermy present and enter a state of decay, rather than reveal their secrets to another. Taxidermists alternated between boastfulness and mystery; Ward enthusiastically laid claim to inventing a secret modelling compound.¹⁵⁵ I think it is likely that the repetitive written narrative – shared between Lee, Swainson and Brown – became the accepted public face of the early-mid taxidermy creature, thereby allowing taxidermists to keep their own animal experimentations to themselves.

There was also a certain disconnection between the writing hand and the crafting hand; they did not always work well together. Lee described how Charles Waterton 'urged' her to visit Walton Hall, to 'witness his operations, as he felt it impossible to convey a correct idea of them by means of pen and ink. This in a measure disheartened me; for if the inventor himself could not enlighten the world at large, how could I hope to do so?'¹⁵⁶ Lee (as a writer of handbooks) was discouraged to find that Waterton thought his method was not a thing for words. However, once she had practiced with Waterton, she 'became fully convinced of the inadequacy of language to give an idea of the nice touches, the delicate handling of the tools, or the extreme beauty of the specimens when finished.'¹⁵⁷ For Lee, this had to be witnessed and felt to be realised.

¹⁵⁴ W. T Hornaday, 'The Society of American Taxidermists', *Science*, 1 (1880), 37-8.

¹⁵⁵ Ward also complained that his own ideas were copied: 'especially in America and India, as new ideas... A process, for instance, which I used for the first time in 1871, and which was commended at the time in various London journals, was brought out in America as a new invention in 1907, when it was belauded by the very same papers that had credited the discovery to myself thirty-six years previously': Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 71, 40.

¹⁵⁶ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 219-20.

¹⁵⁷ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 220.

Taxidermy was always an active process, one which was sometimes difficult to put into words. Montagu Browne noted that, when modelling a face and features, ‘nothing but educating the hand and eye to the point of being able to take a dead head, and, by knowledge of its living anatomy, to model it in clay so truthfully as to far surpass any other process whatever. I can, unfortunately, give no directions for doing this.’¹⁵⁸ The only way to learn was through skilful practice, and by schooling of eye and hand. The ornithologist, W. B Tegetmeier, thought that any attempt by an amateur to mount skins from a book was folly.

It will be seen that no attempt has been made at the useless task of endeavouring by written directions to teach amateurs to mount their specimens. Taxidermy is a fine art, and can no more be taught by books than can painting or sculpture; but the preparation of skins, so that they are available for future mounting, can be performed by anyone who has the use of his fingers.¹⁵⁹

Here, Tegetmeier suggests that it is only the practiced taxidermist who should engage with the taxidermy present. Amateurs, if learning through the written word rather than hands-on teaching, should be content with preparing skins. Mounting should be left to a skilful human (hand) of the future. The repetitive descriptions in the early handbooks may therefore also reflect the extreme difficulty of putting taxidermic handicraft into words.

Returning to the descriptions of skinless, feather-by-feather mounting, the authors all alluded to its complexity. Lee described how ‘we agree that it is almost impossible to succeed perfectly in the first trial; but if practice and experience are necessary in other things, they are particularly so for this part of taxidermy.’¹⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly, the skinless mount could not be recreated by simply reading instructions. Lee therefore suggested bodily experimentation and a ‘sort of apprenticeship.’ Swainson, true to form, also directly copied Lee and recommended a ‘sort of apprenticeship.’¹⁶¹ In this ‘apprenticeship’, the taxidermist takes two bird skins of a common species. One is stuffed in the usual style, as a guide. The other is broken up into feathery pieces, scattered, and the skin disposed of, so the taxidermist can practice piecing its jigsaw-body back together from only the feathers. It is worth remembering that this skinless technique was probably very rarely attempted. Even so, it further suggests that it was only through skilful and tactual hand-practice that the animal could truly be known.

¹⁵⁸ Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 156. Similarly placing emphasis on the seeing and feeling organs, Lee explained that ‘long and constant observations, assisted by practice will do more for the naturalist than we can write on the subject’: Lee, *Taxidermy*, 61.

¹⁵⁹ W. B Tegetmeier, ‘A Lesson in Bird Skinning’, *The Field*, 25 July 1868.

¹⁶⁰ Lee, *Taxidermy*, 81.

¹⁶¹ Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 50.

Conclusion

Pamela Smith argues that historians should pay attention to a type of ‘knowledge as produced by bodily labour, rather than by words’, something which ‘is often embodied in objects (and in artisans’ practices), rather than in texts.’¹⁶² I have shown how the taxidermy creature was a material repository of such knowledge – of embodied human skill and interpretation, and, most importantly, of handling. Yet, taxidermy also contained the remnants of animal life; something which was not ‘produced’, but which persisted. Skin, bone, and the influence of the once living animal remained and continued to bother the taxidermist. This is what I think of as a shadow presence.

In following taxidermy into the studio, I learnt that all taxidermy bodies tell a different story and were highly personalised products; tailored to the human hand that made them, and their own matter. I argue that this was a time when the skin was most engaged in an active present, within the wider muddle of taxidermy time. It was the time for which skins had been prepared. Taxidermy is both the thing that is made, and the process that makes it; it is grounded in the here and now.

Through this energetic meeting, animal skins and hands could disturb the queasy boundary between the animal and the human; particularly if the dead creature was a (nonhuman) primate. I was similarly unsettled by the prospect of continuing to touch my taxidermy rat and by prolonging the taxidermy present. Taxidermy skins were also sites of the exertion of human power; under ‘the hand’ of humans such as Waterton.¹⁶³ Waterton met with skins in his own, personal, extended present. Yet taxidermists were entirely dependent on the dead animal skin for their livelihood. The ornithologist Elliott Coues explained how the smallest fumbling nudge from a hand might change the entire aspect of a bird’s face: ‘no precise directions can be given for the set of the head, but you may be assured that it is a delicate, difficult matter; the slightest turn of the bill one way or another may alter the whole expression of the bird.’¹⁶⁴ The taxidermist’s own hands could let skins down if they wobbled or over-stuffed. Taxidermy animals were literally embedded with human influence, but they still embodied the animal.

It is difficult to think about the present from the distance of the future—to conceptualise the present of the past. The past always feels less active than our current times. However, I believe that it is important to acknowledge the energy within such historical processes. It helps us to recognise that all times are mobile, and, within taxidermy, that these were not simply actions of further deadening and manipulation. Whilst humans exerted great control over animal

¹⁶² P. Smith, ‘In a Sixteenth-Century Goldsmith’s Workshop’ in Roberts, Schaffer and Dear (eds.) *The Mindful Hand*, 34.

¹⁶³ Waterton, *Wanderings*, 303.

¹⁶⁴ E. Coues, *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1890), 65.

form, their hands were also shaped by animal skins and lingering traces. This active present was not the end of taxidermy, or taxidermy time. In Chapter 4, 'Exhibiting', I explore how, within Victorian exhibitions, taxidermy entered a fast time; one of quickening and ephemerality.

Chapter 4: Exhibiting

Here the mighty elephant was shewn with his uplifted trunk, his mouth open as if roaring from fear and pain, failing to shake off the royal tiger which had fixed his firm grip upon his huge head, from which several streams of blood trickled down dyeing the yellow grass below a mottled crimson. The roar of the elephant and the angry growl of the tiger had evidently startled a herd of deer which might have been quietly grazing in the neighbourhood, but had now succeeded by rapid strides to gain the hill opposite the place where the fierce struggle was taking place; all but a brave antler, which, after running for a certain distance, but now stood still with inquisitive look expressive of wonder, curiosity, and an earnest longing to sift to the bottom the cause of all this tremendous uproar.¹

This description by Trailoykanath Mukharji of Rowland Ward's taxidermy display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, is full of movement, noise, and life. The creatures roar and growl, stalk, creep up and startle one another. The wildlife is active and engaged. Their blood stains the grass, leaving an imprint on the land. Mukharji appears transfixed by this dead display. Mukharji was an author, curator, civil servant, and a collector and organiser for the exhibition. Even as an Indian national, he was captivated by this depiction of Indian life. In a vast hall of glass and iron, amid London's busy streets, these animals seemed to leap and shriek and live.

In the previous chapter, 'Making', I explored how animal skins inhabited an active present as they took shape through physical handling. In exhibitions, taxidermists took a small step back from their specimens, and their creatures were placed behind glass. Nevertheless, taxidermists still hovered, close at hand. In this chapter, I demonstrate how exhibitions and their animals, far from being timeless and of the past – the temporalities often associated with taxidermic display – were frenetic and fast-paced.² In British exhibitions, taxidermy became a site of spectacle, as animals were placed in displays with other dead creatures, plants, and painted backdrops. Empire was central, a British vision of imperial animals, environments, and people, squeezed into galleries, fabricated city scenes, and display cabinets. It was not just imagined movement – Mukharji's assertion that, if the onlooker turned at just the right moment, they might catch the upwards lift of an elephant's trunk – that revitalised these taxidermy creatures. Their very display was a product of great exertion, of journeying, and an energy that did not cease.

¹ T. Mukharji, 'The Exhibition and its Visitors', *A Visit to Europe* (Calcutta: W. Newman, 1889), 66.

² For examples, see: C. Creaney, 'Paralytic Animation: The Anthropomorphic Taxidermy of Walter Potter', *Victorian Studies*, 53 (2010), 19; M. Bal, 'Telling, Showing, Showing Off', *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 16; H. Gregory and A. Purdy, 'Present Signs, Dead Things: Indexical Authenticity and Taxidermy's Nonabsent Animal', *Configurations*, 23 (2015), 66.

I explore the exhibition space through the lens of reproduction. Taxidermy is always about remaking something, through the recreation of the animal, its body, and a semblance of life. Reproduction also encompasses fertility and birth. I investigate these twinned meanings by examining the (re)birth of taxidermy animals and the creation of new ideas, in the frenzied, fertile space of the exhibition hall. Popular taxidermic technique and display were born out of the exhibition craze, and this began with the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Yet exhibitions were only ever designed to be temporary; the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* described their ‘evanescence.’³ They were part museum, part site of spectacle, as well as a trades place, workspace, and an enticing day out. They were shapeshifters, and encompassed different things to each day-tripper, consumer, and purveyor.⁴ Competition was rife, as taxidermists and naturalists competed to showcase their skill through their specimens. However, I also discovered that the changing identities and temporalities of exhibitions, as places of impermanence and quick decisions, was mirrored in the display of sometimes hurried and incomplete animal bodies – even by taxidermy’s standards. This was an accelerated taxidermy time. The frantic reproduction of creatures, and the fact that, unlike most museum specimens, exhibition taxidermy was not supposed to stand the test of time, resulted in the display of physically misshapen mounts. Taxidermy animals aged prematurely in exhibition space, under the watchful eye of their creators. They were consequently improved upon, experimented on, and sometimes, literally conjoined.

Liv Emma Thorsen argues that every taxidermy animal is a material chimera – a mythical creature ‘traditionally composed of parts from different animals’, which, in the case of taxidermy, purveys an element of betweenness as ‘hybrids that interact between nature and non-nature.’ They ‘raise the question of what kind of artefact we are dealing with.’⁵ All taxidermy occupies this between state. I argue, though, that this condition was stretched and exaggerated through and within exhibition space. This could be very literal, with exhibition taxidermists using artificial skins, and animal ‘dummies’, thereby stitching the animal to the synthetic. Or it could be more subtle, through the amplified presence of the taxidermist.

Within exhibitions, the parent-like taxidermist was on display alongside and within the specimen. Margrit Shildrick has written of the chimerism inherent in human bodies. She draws on Donna Haraway’s classic description of the cyborg (*A Cyborg Manifesto*, 1985) and

³ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 22 May 1866.

⁴ Gerry Turcotte writes that: ‘shapeshifters, by definition, challenge boundaries of all kinds... A shapeshifter is a being that can move between worlds, identities, values and styles.’ This thesis extends this definition to animal bodies, and to taxidermy places, both animal ‘beings’ and the sites they inhabit; G. Turcotte, ‘Foreword: Shapeshifters know no bounds’ in *Werewolves and Other Shapeshifters in Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company Publishers, 2012), 1.

⁵ L.E. Thorsen, ‘Animal Matter in Museums’, in H. Kean and P. Howell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History* (London: Routledge, 2018), 181.

argues that ‘where Haraway’s cyborg was once so astonishing’ many scholars now ‘play critically with the idea that we are all always already prosthetic.’⁶ Shildrick’s use of the idea of chimerism alongside prosthesis – a mixing of states and species, of animal, human and machine – has shaped my thoughts on hybridity. In exhibitions, the addition of body parts and bits was supposed to create a sense of wholeness but could instead result in a detraction from animal form.

Exhibition taxidermy was specific, bizarre, and highly influential. Nevertheless, the museum focus of existing scholarship has left other taxidermy places, such as exhibitions, somewhat uncharted.⁷ This underplays their importance in birthing the taxidermy craze, and in the development of taxidermic technique. I will discuss several exhibitions, but the Great Exhibition (1851), the Colonial and Indian Exhibition (1886), and the Empire of India Exhibition (1895) serve as the primary case studies. These exhibitions all have a wealth of associated primary material, were international in focus and form the beginning and peak of the British exhibition craze.

Postcolonial scholarship has revealed exhibitions to be places of power brokering, in which narratives of empire and race were shaped and disseminated.⁸ They were also spaces in which nature was demarcated and showcased; Carla Yanni argues that buildings, such as the Crystal Palace, ‘were mechanisms for defining natural knowledge, and tools for presenting nature to tourists, students and naturalists.’⁹ Exhibition taxidermy is generally discussed in relation to tensions and a growing unease about the links between animality and humanity in nineteenth-

⁶ M. Shildrick, ‘Re-imagining Embodiment: Prostheses, Supplements and Boundaries’ *Somatechnics*, 3 (2013), 275, 271-2. Jeanine Thweatt-Bates also points to the ‘fundamentally prosthetic’ nature of the human: J. Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves: A Theological Anthropology of the Posthuman* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Farnham, 2012), 145.

⁷ D. Haraway, ‘Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908–1936’, *Social Text*, 11 (1984), 20–64; M. Henning, ‘Display’ in *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), 44-54; R. Poliquin, ‘The Matter and Meaning of Museum Taxidermy’, *Museum and Society*, 6 (2008), 123-34; S. Alberti (ed.), *The Afterlives of Animals: A Museum Menagerie* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

⁸ In *Empire on Display*, Peter Hoffenberg examines the participatory nature of exhibitions, and their importance in shaping society, culture, and transnational ideas on empire. In *India By Design*, Saloni Mathur describes how India was constructed and displayed at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, but does not address the Indian ‘Jungle’ dioramas: P. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (London: University of California Press, 2001); S. Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). See also: T. Barringer and T. Flynn (eds.), *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998); P. Greenhalgh, ‘Education, Entertainment and Politics: Lessons from the Great International Exhibitions’ in P. Vergo (ed.), *New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 74-96; P. Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition: The Victorian New World Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁹ C. Yanni, *Nature’s Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 2.

century Britain.¹⁰ This materialised through anthropomorphic taxidermy; animal skins imbued with human facial expressions, popularised by Hermann Plouquet at the Great Exhibition.

Rachel Poliquin discusses the quantity of taxidermy (of both natural history mounts and ‘violent’ dioramas) at the colonial exhibitions, and focusses on the ‘bloodlust’, ‘spectacle’ and danger associated with imperial display.¹¹ Giovanni Aloï similarly describes the importance of taxidermy at exhibitions, and briefly notes that the Colonial and Indian Exhibition was ‘particularly responsible for the coming into fashion of large, exotic taxidermy trophies.’¹² Nevertheless, exhibition taxidermy – its breadth, newness, eccentricity, subversiveness, materiality, and reaching influence – remains underexplored. Indeed, Yanni, in *Nature’s Museums*, claims that ‘the only natural objects in the Great Exhibition were raw materials for industry’, discounting the reams of taxidermy and other natural history specimens.¹³ Exhibition spaces produced an acceleration of technique and time, as taxidermists competed, their animals showcased alongside one another. Taxidermists used exhibitions to test ideas, and twist skins in new directions.¹⁴ They were fertile ground, promoting experiment and excess, and sometimes delivering the hurried and the misshapen.

Animal and Human Visitors

Before I explore the new ways that skins were imagined and formed in exhibition space, I will pay attention to the array of animal visitors that frequented these soaring halls of glass and iron. The *Edinburgh Evening Courant* described the Great Exhibition of 1851 as a bountiful reproducer: every exhibition since ‘may be said to owe its origins to that prolific mother, the Great Exhibition.’¹⁵ This brainchild of Prince Albert even replicated itself; the exhibition moved from Hyde Park to the area now known as Crystal Palace in 1854. Yanni describes the Great Exhibition as ‘a watershed for architectural design, ferrovitreous technology, display techniques, popular edification and public entertainment.’¹⁶ For the ‘mother’ of exhibitions, many British taxidermists and naturalists displayed their creaturely wares in an area set aside

¹⁰ See, for instance: R. Youdelman, ‘Iconic Eccentricity: The Meaning of Victorian Novelty Taxidermy’, *PsyArt Journal*, 21 (2017), 38-68.

¹¹ R. Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 91-2, 96.

¹² G. Aloï, *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 130-1. Aloï gauges the importance of exhibitions more generally from the classic taxidermy text by Pat Morris. In *A History of Taxidermy*, Morris argues the Great Exhibition was ‘catalytic’ for taxidermy: P. Morris, *A History of Taxidermy: Art, Science and Bad Taste* (Ascot: MPM Publishing, 2012), 54, 75, 123.

¹³ Yanni, *Nature’s Museums*, 94-95.

¹⁴ A wide range of Victorian papers and magazines have been drawn on for this chapter, including but not limited to: the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Illustrated London News*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Athenaeum*, the *New York Times* and the *Leeds Mercury*.

¹⁵ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 22 May 1866.

¹⁶ Yanni, *Nature’s Museums*, 6.

for skilled workers, artisans, and craftsmen. The Great Exhibitions' scope extended beyond Britain, and British imperial lands, so taxidermy was also included in patriotic displays, and was used to symbolise national place and the commercial riches of individual countries. From across the globe, items were sent, as nations were encapsulated in object form.¹⁷ For example, as part of their collection, Russia exhibited specimens and skins of sable, the small furry marten: the animal's fleecy coat suggested the natural wealth of the Siberian plains.¹⁸ Mother countries could be captured in fur.

The Great Exhibition's other offspring took the form of hundreds of exhibitions across the globe. Many of these became increasingly specific in nature. This specialisation was evident in the Fisheries Exhibition—literally an exhibition of fish and aquatic animals—which took place on the original site of the Great Exhibition.¹⁹ The 'fisheries' also had the same footprint as the founding exhibition; it inhabited the same amount of space. The *Official Guide* highlighted this relationship: 'The purpose of the International Fisheries Exhibition differs from that of the Prince Consort's wise and beneficent scheme, as a special treatise differs from a cyclopaedia, or a monograph differs from a general history.'²⁰ If 'the fisheries' became specialised by reproducing the sea, then the imperial exhibitions reproduced colonised landscapes. Imperial display was practised at the Colonial and India Exhibition in South Kensington and rolled out once again at the Empire of India Exhibition in Earls Court.

For the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, in addition to furs, Canada – a self-governing entity of the British Empire since 1867 – produced a vertical display of taxidermy specimens, each placed on an 'octagonal in shape' frame.²¹ Each body and body-part within the pile, from the bison head to the moose precariously balanced above, originated in, represented and displayed the adaptations for a specific Canadian environment.²² The polar bear, fittingly exhibited near the top of the pile, signified the frozen far north, an image reflected in its snow-white fur (see figure 5.1). The effect is a strikingly visual stacking of the diversity of Canadian lifeforms and corresponding environments. The animals and objects within these patriotic

¹⁷ Aloï describes the Great Exhibition as a 'monument to consumption': Aloï, *Speculative Taxidermy*, 130.

¹⁸ *Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations* (London: Spicer Brothers, 1851), 531.

¹⁹ As the American curator George Brown Goode explained, at this exhibition, 'the word 'fish' is broadly interpreted, and is held to signify any creature living in the waters.' This included reptiles, whales, and otters: G. B. Goode, 'The International Fisheries Exhibition', *Science*, 40 (1883), 612-3.

²⁰ G. Turner, *Official Guide to the Fisheries Exhibition by Godfrey Turner* (London: William Clowes and Sons, Limited, 1883).

²¹ F. Cundall (ed.), *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition* (London: William Clowes and Sons Limited, 1886), 73-4.

²² The well-loved and over-stuffed walrus of London's Horniman Museum was exhibited in this display and purchased by Frederick Horniman following the exhibition: 'Walrus', Natural History, Horniman Museum <https://www.horniman.ac.uk/object/NH.H.44/> [Accessed 22/08/20].

displays suggest a highly connected world, with a pronounced emphasis on material things. This nationalistic symbolism would be nothing without fur, and colour, teeth, antlers, and glass eyes.

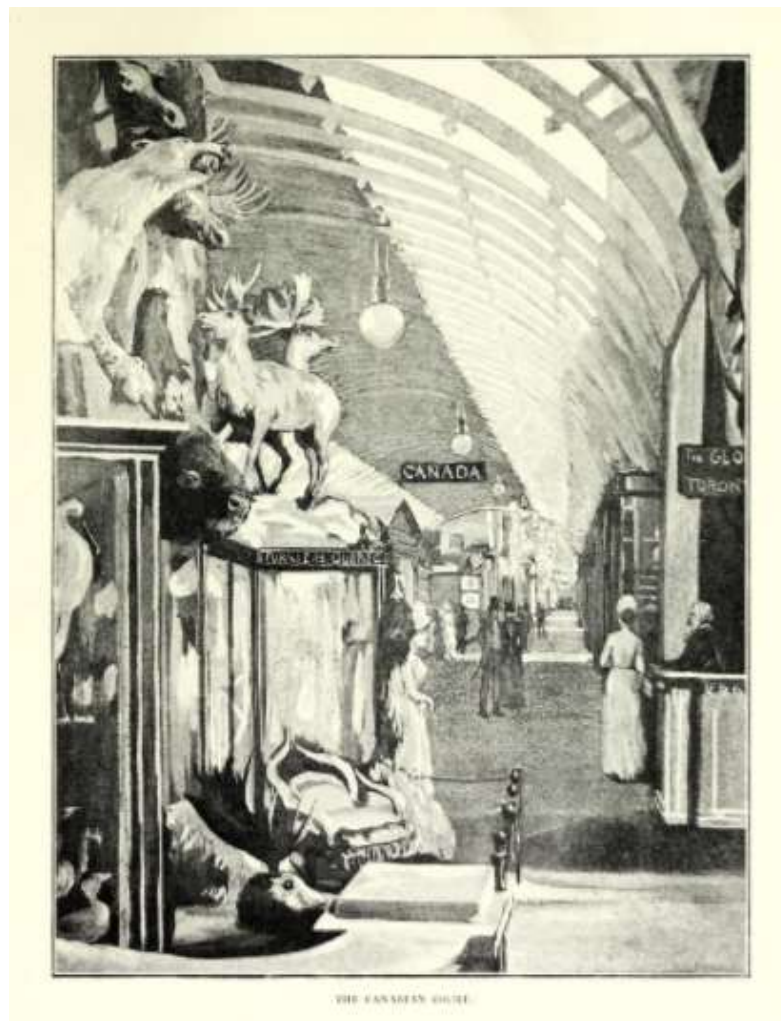


Figure 5.1: F. Cundall, ‘The Canadian Court’ *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition* (1886), 73-4.

A variety of display techniques were employed within exhibitions, from singular animals in bare glass cases, to elaborate dioramas with numerous specimens, painted backdrops and dried or artificial foliage.²³ These dioramas aimed to contextualise specimens within environments and recreate foreign rural place.²⁴ Sometimes, creatures were borrowed and loaned from existing collections to create these dead menageries. For the famed taxidermist Rowland Ward’s ‘Jungle’ diorama at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, many animal skins

²³ See: *Official Catalogue of the Empire of India Exhibition: Earl’s Court, London* (London: J.J. Keliher & Co., 1985), 361; Mukharji, ‘The Exhibition and its Visitors’ in *A Visit to Europe*, 1-10.

²⁴ On museum dioramas, and the diorama movement, see: See: K. Wonders, ‘Habitat Dioramas as Ecological Theatre’ *European Review*, 1 (1993), 285; S. Quinn, *Windows on Nature: The Great Habitat Dioramas of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2006).

were sourced from Ward's Indian contacts.²⁵ Several were loaned by the Maharajah of Cooch Behar, a district in West Bengal, from the Prince's personal collection; the Maharajah was a prolific hunter of game. Ward wrote that, following the exhibition, 'these animals, which are lent by the Rajah, are going back to India to be fitted up in his palace.'²⁶ As I have explored throughout this thesis, taxidermy embodied movement and flux.

Ward boasted about their authentic origin: not only were they Indian species, but they had specifically travelled to the exhibition by ship from India. There is a sense that these animals were only paying a passing visit to the metropole, briefly bringing the Indian jungle with them. Their presence attracted a great deal of attention at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, as evidenced in press reports from London and beyond. As the *Leeds Mercury* reported in 1886, 'a struggling crowd on the right indicates the locality of Mr Ward's jungle scene, which forms a sort of introduction to the Indian courts.'²⁷ Similarly, Mukharji wrote that 'As the visitor stood facing this vast panorama of India's artistic wealth, he could watch on his right the multitude crowding to the spot where the Jungle life of India was illustrated.'²⁸ It seems that a mass of human bodies was drawn towards these taxidermied visitors. They might have been dead, but they could still cause a stir; they could entice and animate others.

International human travellers flocked to exhibitions to view these animals, objects, and corresponding countries-in-miniature. Visitors also partook in the shaping, judging, and disseminating of ideas on the exhibition globally. Aloi argues that 'themes of visuality and the inherent power/knowledge relations that configured visualities of subjugation typical of imperialism began to surface more clearly in the spatializations outlined by the world expositions.'²⁹ Jérôme-Adolphe Blanqui, a French political economist, reported theatrically in both the French and British press in 1851 how the Great Exhibition provided 'a genuine comparison of the assembled products of the whole human race'.³⁰ In colonial exhibitions, the organisers recreated Indian architecture and cityscapes; the urban environment was simplified and reproduced. Such displays, alongside the jungles, were used to display centralised imperial power. However, the historian Antoinette Burton has suggested that visitors from the colonised world also worked to 'manage and to challenge' the terms upon which the spectacle of empire was produced, in arenas such as exhibitions.³¹ Mukharji, the

²⁵ R. Ward, *A Naturalist's Life Study in the Art of Taxidermy* (London: Rowland Ward, 1913), 76.

²⁶ 'The Jungle Trophy at the Colonies, A Chat with Mr. Rowland Ward', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 June 1886, 6.

²⁷ 'The Colonial and Indian Exhibition: First Article', *The Leeds Mercury*, 16 June 1886, 3.

²⁸ Mukharji, *A Visit to Europe*, 69.

²⁹ Aloi, *Speculative Taxidermy*, 130.

³⁰ J.A. Blanqui 'The Report of Blanqui' in *The Crystal Palace and its Contents: Being an Illustrated Cyclopaedia of the Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations* (London: W.M. Clark, 1851), 211.

³¹ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-24. See also: A. Burton, 'London and Paris Through Indian Spectacles.

Indian author and exhibition collector, travelled to London to see the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, and wrote perceptively of his experience in his widely circulated diary *A Visit to Europe*.³² He was one of the Indian agents employed to source objects for the exhibition. The displays were a demonstration of strength – flexing the British imperial muscle – to put colonised people in their supposed places. Nevertheless, overseas workers, artisans, and travellers still influenced and debated these British interpretations of their home countries. This wider context of movement, exchange, and domination is critical to an exploration of exhibition taxidermy.

Alongside the spectacular and the symbolic trophy displays, less-grand animal specimens were also born out of the exhibition craze. Creatures that would never normally be taxidermied went under the knife. For the *International Health Exhibition* of 1884, which was known as the ‘Healtheries’, Ward created scenes titled ‘Food for the London Markets’ and ‘Food from the Poultry Yard.’ The latter also included ‘a gabled farm-building, closed in with glass’ in which ‘All the best breeds were represented with as much completeness as possible, and arranged in a natural manner.’³³

The London and Provincial Dairy Company displayed ‘stuffed specimens of the Whistley four-horned sheep’ alongside live pedigree shorthorn dairy cows. Alfred Beales of Portobello Road also displayed ‘stuffed specimens of domestic poultry.’³⁴ Selective breeding blossomed in the nineteenth century, and dead animals could be easily eyed-up in the exhibition hall as they could not fidget, bite, or run away. These creatures were bred, killed and reborn as taxidermy; their skins spoke of wool, or the promise of meat and milk held within, even if their insides were stuffing and wire. Dolly Jørgensen suggests that animals (and plants) are themselves technologies; their bodies altered by the ‘direct evolutionary force’ of humans, and then engineered to fit into agricultural systems.³⁵ In exhibitions, the taxidermy animal was an inedible object, but, as a representative of its species, it suggested gustatorial and commercial gain.

Most scholarship on taxidermic display and dioramas focusses on museums and suggests that such displays aimed to separate creatures from humanity.³⁶ When museums constructed

Making a Spectacle of Empire: Indian Travellers in Fin-de-siecle London’, *History Workshop Journal*, 42 (1996), 127-42.

³² Mukharji, ‘The Exhibition and its Visitors’ in *A Visit to Europe*, 1-310.

³³ Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, 73-74.

³⁴ ‘Division: Health’, *International Health Exhibition, 1884: Official Catalogue* (London: William Clowes and Sons, Limited, 1884), 7.

³⁵ D. Jørgensen, ‘Not by Human Hands: Five Technological Tenets for Environmental History in the Anthropocene’, *Environment and History*, 30 (2014), 481-82.

³⁶ Poliquin writes that, whilst humans could imagine themselves within dioramas, in general ‘humans are absent from the scenes’: Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo*, 83. Whilst often applicable to museums, this concept does not ring true in the exhibition.

dioramas, towards the end of the nineteenth century, they often depicted the untouched places. To some extent, exhibitions did the same – Ward’s Indian environments at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition displayed the wild and unfettered abundance of the imagined jungle. Yet, exhibition displays, reproducing both urban and rural scenes, often predated the creation of such displays in museums, a trend that developed in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. In exhibitions, they were conceived out of a desire for spectacle and ocular entertainment, and to recreate specific commercial and imperial environments.

Depictions of animals and humans together – or at least the suggestion of humans, through objects representing farming, trade, and the built environment – were a frequent occurrence at exhibitions. These animals were portrayed as touched and shaped by human hand and desire. At the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, taxidermy domesticated camels and merino sheep grazed in front of a ‘bushman’s hut’ in the Australian court, whilst in the display for the Cape of Good Hope, several stuffed ostriches and a trophy of feathers depicted the pursuit of ostrich farming.³⁷ This was taxidermy as possibility. Exhibitions were fertile ground, materially bringing together living and dead animals, and humans, in ways that had not been seen before. Exhibition taxidermy was a thing of empire, and business and consumption, of dreams of the exotic and the wild, of home and health. This was opportunity, grounded in skin.

The Birth of Exhibition Taxidermy

Dead animals were made mobile by the exhibition craze. New animals were born into – and out of – the exhibition hall, as novel techniques were showcased. The exhibition provided a space in which ideas were trialled and tested on animal bodies. In his taxidermy manual, Leon Luther Pray depicts the Great Exhibition as *the* moment at which specimens came to be seriously judged on their ‘lifelike’ manner.³⁸ Montagu Browne also suggests that the Great Exhibition was a turning point which led to a more ‘correct and artistic delineation of animals’.³⁹ *The Crystal Palace and Its Contents*, an ‘illustrated cyclopaedia’ of the Great Exhibition, described how taxidermy should aspire to be ‘fac-similes of living nature.’⁴⁰ This was the first large scale event at which taxidermied forms came together, as they, and their human creators, were judged side by side.

³⁷ Cundall, ‘South Australia’ and ‘African Colonies’ in *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition*, 61-3, 83-4.

³⁸ L.L. Pray, *Taxidermy* (New York: Outing publishing company, 1913), 2.

³⁹ M. Browne, *Practical Taxidermy* (London: L. Upcott Gill, 1884), 15.

⁴⁰ *Crystal Palace and its Contents*, 206.



Figure 5.2: 'India No.6' *Dickinsons' Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851*, (1851).

The exhibition was a place to create practical codes about what constituted as good taxidermic practice, and these were then widely reported throughout Britain. For instance, Canada's displays at the Great Exhibition were considered favourable by the *Newry Telegraph*, an Irish paper: 'the stuffed aquatic and other birds may be considered as highly creditable specimens of the art of taxidermy in the colony.'⁴¹ Competing taxidermists at the Great Exhibition displayed a variety of new-fangled techniques. The *Morning Chronicle* described how successfully the taxidermist Francois Comba, of the University of Turin, had recreated the look of life. The paper reported that his 'magnificent' taxidermy European Elk was 'all but breathing' and looks as if he were 'petrified in his own skin.'⁴² The secret of Comba's success was to mould his animal frames in clay, before casting them in papier-mâché, and covering this casting in the elk's heavy skin.⁴³ This technique was widely disseminated by the *Morning Chronicle*, and was the precursor of the modelling technique, discussed in 'Making', that became so popular in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. It seems that, despite Ward's claims to have been the first to mould the interior of the taxidermy animal, this technique can be

⁴¹ 'The Great Exhibition', *Newry Telegraph*, 26 February 1851.

⁴² 'The Great Exhibition', *Morning Chronicle*, 1 September 1851, 5.

⁴³ 'The Great Exhibition' *Morning Chronicle*, 5.

attributed to Comba.⁴⁴ The modelled specimen was delivered into the world at the Great Exhibition.

Exhibitions – their time and energy – encouraged a more rapid diffusion of new ideas and techniques than museums at the time could provide.⁴⁵ *The Athenaeum* suggested how unusual the Great Exhibition was for presenting to the visitor ‘some specimens which raise the art into the region of picture’, in stark contrast to ‘the ordinary wretched looking things that he will find in our museums.’⁴⁶ The high visitor footfall, the detailed reports in the press, and the element of rivalry inherent in the showcasing of specimens’ alongside one another, ensured that new techniques were the focus of gossip and exchange. The sportsman and politician Grantley Berkeley, writing in *The Field*, suggested that ‘It was with much interest that, in this wilderness of things to be seen and moving multitude of people, I sought out the stuffed specimens of animals, to contrast the rival efforts of the trade to represent the living in the dead.’⁴⁷ The taxidermy animal took on a competitive, shifting form. The Great Exhibition, and the exhibitions that followed in its wake, were therefore more central in shaping and speeding up the transformation of the animal body than many scholars have acknowledged.

Following the success of his displays at the Great Exhibition, the naturalist John Hancock came to be known as the father of modern British taxidermy.⁴⁸ *The Athenaeum* praised the vitality of Hancock’s exhibited taxidermy, including ‘Struggle with the Quarry’, which portrayed a gyrfalcon killing a heron and won a prize from the exhibition commissioners (see Figure 5.3).⁴⁹ The magazine reported that ‘In the way that Mr Hancock has set up the Falcon we have an excellent instance of how the dead animal may be made to assume the attitude of life.’⁵⁰ *A Guide to the Great Exhibition* reported that the heron ‘lies quivering with pain, as the

⁴⁴ See R. Ward, *The Sportsman’s Handbook to Practical Collecting, Preserving and Artistic Setting-Up of Trophies and Specimens* (London: Rowland Ward, 1880), 57.

⁴⁵ The press and taxidermists were disparaging about the quality of taxidermy in museums at the time. *The Morning Chronicle* described the taxidermy in the British Museum as ‘monstrous libels upon the forms of animal nature which there daily misinform the ignorant and distress the eyes of the learned.’ Even as late as 1881, the director of London’s Natural History Museum lamented: ‘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’: ‘The Great Exhibition’, *Morning Chronicle*, 5; W. H. Flower, *Essays on Museums and Other Subjects Connected to Natural History* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1898), 17.

⁴⁶ ‘Stuffed Animals in the Palace of Glass’, *The Athenaeum*, 21 June 1851, 661-2.

⁴⁷ G. Berkeley, ‘Taxidermy at the Great Exhibition’, *The Naturalist, The Field*, 14 June 1862.

⁴⁸ Pray, *Taxidermy*, 2.

⁴⁹ *A Guide to the Great Exhibition* (London: George Routledge and Co, 1851), 49-50. Hancock was one of the founders of the Hancock Museum (now the Great North Museum) in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

‘Struggle with the Quarry’ is displayed here.

⁵⁰ ‘Stuffed Animals in the Palace of Glass’, *The Athenaeum*, 661-2.

talons of its foe pierce its flesh.’⁵¹ Here, the bird on the edge of death was filled with finite life, as it appeared to shiver and flinch. In this mount, the wings mirror each other, large and small.



Figure 5.3: ‘Struggle with the Quarry’ by John Hancock, currently on display at the Great North Museum (Newcastle-upon-Tyne).

When taxidermy was exhibited in such a way, as an example of the naturalists’ vocation, skill, and talent, I argue that the taxidermist was also on display. As the *Athenaeum* suggests, it was all ‘in the way that Mr Hancock’, as father figure, had ‘set the Falcon up.’ The American ornithologist Robert Shufeldt described how ‘Mr. Hancock’s name is a Password throughout England wherever taxidermy is mentioned.’⁵² The best taxidermy was the mount considered the most lifelike. The more animal the mount, then, somewhat paradoxically, the more attention was given to the creator. The less the human was visibly present within the taxidermy – through mistakes and mishandling, lumps and bumps, and loose thread – the more they presented themselves to the onlooker. I propose that exhibitions differed from museums in that, in exhibitions it was *taxidermy* that was on display rather than the animal. The animal did not need to look lifelike purely as a tribute to taxonomy, animality and biological realism, but as a demonstration of skill. In exhibition space, the parent-taxidermist hovered, close at hand.

⁵¹ *A Guide to the Great Exhibition*, 67.

⁵² R. Shufeldt, *Scientific Taxidermy for Museums* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1894), 376.

Hancock, who was an ornithologist and taxidermist in Newcastle, and became one of the founders of the Hancock Museum, also showcased an additional display technique:

Amongst these examples will be found some in which the specimen is exhibited as dead,- and these show strikingly the artistic power which the taxidermist possesses of contrasting in his specimens death with life. The dead Gull is an instance:- a specimen representing the living creature appearing as a mourner over its dead mate. Such stories are somewhat new in the history of preserving dead animals ; but they are all well worthy of the attention of those who have the arrangement of museums.⁵³

The dead-looking taxidermied gull made the alive-looking dead gull appear more lively. This fusion of animal matter (skin, and possibly bone), and human interpretation and storytelling, was considered somewhat novel. The doubled death, the creature looking like they had just slipped beyond life, the mourning mate. Here, Hancock played with the temporalities of death to make a dead skin resemble, if not quite itself, then the corpse it had once been. *The Athenaeum* suggests that museums should take note of this display, of the stories that were told in exhibition space, and of the potential of taxidermy to move and affect.

There was a great sense of urgency connected to authentic taxidermy display. The *Morning Chronicle*, a London daily, reported in dramatic style how exhibition taxidermy was of vital importance as a means of preserving animals destined for extinction:

the art of taxidermy is one which will enable us to hand down to future generations the most perfectly preserved specimens of the animals which now exist, thus securing to posterity valuable assistance in the study of natural history. Should civilization continue to advance as rapidly as it has done during the last fifty years, and should the human race extend itself over the face of the earth, this increase will probably lead to the destruction, and eventually to the extermination, of most races of wild animals.⁵⁴

There was a growing awareness in the natural history community regarding the depletion of big game – demonstrated here as early as the Great Exhibition, in 1851. These mounts could be a way of memorialising precarious animal life, and it was considered important that they would be ‘perfectly preserved.’ As the *Morning Chronicle* continued, ‘to do this properly, we must study the best means of giving to the skins their true external form.’⁵⁵ They perceived that the animal must look most like itself, for the sake of its species. The decline of a species should lead, not to attempts to protect animal life or stem hunting, but to improved taxidermy. Exhibitions, starting with the Great Exhibition, provided space and opportunity for knowledge

⁵³ Whilst the *Athenaeum* suggested that Hancock’s displays were novel, the paper also described how Mr. A.D. Bartlett, who was superintendent at London Zoo, presented a similar display, titled ‘life and death.’ This display included a hound with a ‘freshly killed’ antelope: ‘Stuffed Animals in the Palace of Glass’, *The Athenaeum*, 661-2.

⁵⁴ ‘The Great Exhibition’, *Morning Chronicle*, 5.

⁵⁵ ‘The Great Exhibition’, *Morning Chronicle*, 5.

transfer, as the taxidermied body was viewed as a product of natural history *as commerce*. It was taxidermy that must be saved and must be bettered, not the (still) living animal.

However, there could be complications in the exhibition hall, and such high expectations were difficult to meet. As I already mentioned, in Montagu Browne's opinion, the pioneering Great Exhibition was the place in which an expectation of better, more lifelike, taxidermy was formed. However, he also explained that exhibition taxidermy often fell short.⁵⁶ Similarly, after visiting the Great Exhibition, renowned naturalist Charles Waterton wrote to the *Illustrated London News*, criticising the taxidermy and stating that he 'went away dissatisfied'.⁵⁷ The technique on display was 'so devoid of real principle', Waterton asserted, that 'he who pursues it, be he ever so clever and intelligent, will never succeed in producing an exact copy of nature's true form and appearance.'⁵⁸

Whilst it is worth remembering that Waterton believed that only his specific skin-setting technique could achieve such heady heights, his comments still caused a stir. J. B.P. Dennis, of Bury St Edmunds, who exhibited at the Great Exhibition, responded with indignation to Waterton in a later edition of the *Illustrated London News*.⁵⁹ Dennis was 'convinced' that his own taxidermy peacock was 'a very near approach to the peculiar character of that bird.' Nevertheless, he agreed that *other* taxidermists did not appear to have the same dedication to naturalism: 'If any person is curious enough to compare some snowy owls in the Exhibition with one *alive* in the Zoological Gardens, he would hardly know them to be birds of the same species.'⁶⁰

Exhibition taxidermy was placed on a pedestal, peered at, and analysed by a crowd of critical eyes. Dr J. Beevor, of Newark-on-Trent, showcased an innovative method, in which the skinned carcass was covered with a tropical tree sap to make a casting. The *Morning Chronicle* described this technique: 'the form is obtained by covering the carcass, when divested of the skin, with thin gutta percha, which, while warm, takes the shape, and when cold retains it- its pliability allowing the carcass to be removed, when the skin of the animal is placed on the gutta percha form.'⁶¹ In this new technique, the skinned body, the fleshy cadaver, was covered with an oozing skin replacement. The animal inner left a physical trace upon this mould, and its entire bodily form was replicated. However, the *Morning Chronicle* was critical of this method as 'the outer side of the casting, which is to give form to the skin, must always be rough and

⁵⁶ M. Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling* (London: A. and C. Black, 1894), 14-15; Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 15-16,

⁵⁷ C. Waterton, 'Taxidermy in the Great Exhibition', *Illustrated London News*, 2 August 1851, 150.

⁵⁸ Chapter 3 of this thesis, 'Making', discusses these changing trends, and Waterton's unusual skin technique.

⁵⁹ J.B.P Dennis, 'Taxidermy', *Illustrated London News*, 20 September 1851, 371.

⁶⁰ Dennis, 'Taxidermy', *Illustrated London News*, 371.

⁶¹ 'The Great Exhibition,' *Morning Chronicle*, 5.

defective, while the inside takes the true impression and possesses the accurate form, where it is, however, useless to the artist.’⁶² For this reviewer, the new technique was close to falsifying the animal in its distance from the ‘true impression’ of the body. The authentic skin met with the ‘defective’ face, whilst the animal imprint remained hidden and unusable.

Hybrid Bodies

I have shown how exhibitions were fertile ground for improving on the taxidermy specimen – for bodily enhancement, and the pursuit of lifelike countenance. Montagu Browne described how the Great Exhibition ‘marked an era in English taxidermy’ and that ‘soon after this date, the English and others bestirred themselves.’⁶³ In this description, this new taxidermy time is associated with a heightened energy – with waking up. I suggest that, in exhibitions, the taxidermist was on display almost as much as the animal. However, like in all taxidermy, (human) actions were also shaped by a desire to do justice to the animal skin. A drive to compete with other taxidermists, and match the potential offered by the skin, particularly if this potential had seemingly been met by *other* naturalists, hastened the minds and hands of exhibition taxidermists. Whilst the examples I have discussed so far all aimed to make the mount better – more befitting of the animal and its skin – there is already a suggestion that the results could be experimental. There is a whiff of the bizarre, and the malformed.

With Beevor’s taxidermic offspring, the ‘rough’ inside impacted the entire mount. The issue was unseen, but it was not invisible. Taxidermy generally hides its underbelly of construction and invention. However, I argue that exhibitions exacerbated this trait, drawing out elements of hybridity and mutation, partly because of their rushed and temporary character. A tension exists within exhibition space in that it both promoted and policed the purported advancement of taxidermy, *and yet* these codes and standards were not always seen as necessary within the actual exhibition. The nature, and temporalities, of these fleeting events meant that displays were often rushed and haphazard. Time – even time associated with supposed progress – is rarely straightforward. This tension is highly apparent in Ward’s ‘Jungle’ displays.

Ward boasted, in an interview with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, of the exacting levels of realism he required in a mount. Regarding a tiger, exhibited at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, he exclaimed: ‘look at that tiger. Would you believe it? All the expression on the noble beast’s face is gained by the disposition of his whiskers... Thirty hours at a stretch have I given to the preparation of that tiger.’⁶⁴ And yet, Ward’s idea of realism was not necessarily the same as that of his audience. He created two large, and very similar, Indian jungle displays, one at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, and one at the Empire of India Exhibition. Both displays

⁶² ‘The Great Exhibition,’ *Morning Chronicle*, 5.

⁶³ Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*, 14.

⁶⁴ ‘The Jungle Trophy at the Colonies, A Chat with Mr. Rowland Ward’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6.

received favourable reviews in the press.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, there is some suggestion that they were considered excessive.⁶⁶ To try to bring his second jungle, at the Empire of India Exhibition, to life, Ward played booming animal noises. Adopting a biting, tongue in cheek, tone, the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported that:

As you enter the place, and indeed long before you enter, you hear a noise which at first sounds like the moving of heavy furniture, or the rumble of distant thunder. When you realise you are near the jungle you interpret the noise as that of roaring beasts. Further investigation lead to the discovery that the din is manufactured, by some hidden showman's device, in the building. It is Mr. Ward's idea of giving verisimilitude to his jungle. Now a man who knew that stuffed animals did not roar would not, merely for the sake of attracting the few sixpences of a passing public, rend the welkin with an incessant roaring. Thus, it follows that Mr. Ward does not know that stuffed animals do not roar, and, therefore, Mr. Ward believes that the animals who roar in the jungles in the far east are stuffed.⁶⁷

Ward aimed for a spectacular auditory effect. His animals appeared to be mid-roar, so, of course, roars should be heard. Yet for this reviewer, rather than adding vitality, the animal noises exposed the artifice and the 'showmanship' of the display. The sensory element made the animals seem more stuffed, and less lively. The roars were heard, and yet the animal mouth did not move. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, pushing the satire further, published this article under the title 'An Un-Natural Naturalist.'

Browne suggests how influential Ward was – both in the development of technique, and in thinking up new ways of displaying the animal. However, Ward's display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition was so large – 'it occupied a great space' – that Browne concluded that it lost animality:

to him, and to his whole family, taxidermists are indebted for many and notable applications of little-known methods, and for improvements in others, especially in those dealing with the larger mammals, until the culminating point was reached in the largest group ever attempted, viz "The Trophy of Kooch Behar" or "The Jungle," exhibited at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, which occupied a great space. Probably it was considered that, in a large trophy such as this, detail was hardly necessary, the correct pose and arrangement only of the subjects being aimed at; otherwise a critical observer might take exception to the fact that the tigers nearest the entrance were ill-managed about the heads – the tongues, thickly painted and exhibiting no papillae, being apparently made of slabs of some material, probably clay., and the other parts of the mouths being somewhat

⁶⁵ See; 'The Colonial and Indian Exhibition: First Article', *Leeds Mercury*, 3; 'A Walk Round the "Colonies"', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 May 1886, 2.

⁶⁶ See; Mukharji, *A Visit to Europe*, 71; and 'An Un-Natural Naturalist', The Earl's Court Exhibition, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 May 1896, 7.

⁶⁷ 'An Un-Natural Naturalist', The Earl's Court Exhibition, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7.

shrivelled and destitute of palatal ridges and of large muscles around the teeth.⁶⁸

There is a sense that, built so large, Ward hoped the onlooker would take a step back, and be overwhelmed by busy jungle spectacle. Browne did the opposite; he took a step closer. For Browne, the display's artifice was the result of a lack of care and technique. The tigers were heavy handed. The materials from which an animal might take shape remained in their original states; the 'tongue' was still just a slab of clay.

The perception of realism that Ward aimed for was not applied evenly throughout his dioramas. In creating his first jungle, at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, Ward had a 'free telegraph pass' to wire 'for anything I wanted' from around the globe.⁶⁹ He sent for skins, and dried Indian foliage. However, he did not receive several of the specimens requested from India, a reminder of the time delays and physical difficulties faced when sending and receiving animals and objects by sea. Sea time, slow and unpredictable, did not always correlate with the frenzied, productive energy of the exhibition hall.⁷⁰ Taxidermy time was always bound to the skin, and its tangled interactions and journeys. Whilst this time could be influenced by the taxidermist, they were not its sole producer. To overcome this time delay, Ward proceeded to manufacture animal bits and to create a motley assortment of taxidermy-artificial hybrids.

He placed synthetic skins on some specimens. These human-made skins (or skin lookalikes) rendered the mounts as materially incomplete, even for taxidermy. Their skin-envelope was absent, meaning they were technically not taxidermy at all, missing the essential epidermal link to animality. Ward also mounted 'several real heads' on 'imitation bodies and coloured them, and no one found it out.'⁷¹ Here, artificial fur met with head-skin, and was combined and conjoined with needle and thread. There are elements of the mutant, or the fantastical. Ward seems to praise his hybrid specimens for passing as the 'real' thing, in stating that they were good enough that 'no one found it out.' However, later, with the distance of time, he felt the need to confess his forgery. He stated in his autobiography, *A Naturalist's Life Study*, that:

Looking back to this work, done more than twenty-five years ago, I recall the endless thought and labour bestowed on the undertaking. To design it and get the objects together, to hide the defects of some of the imperfect specimens, make dummy animals where required, paint the backgrounds,

⁶⁸ Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*, 14-15.

⁶⁹ 'The Jungle Trophy at the Colonies, A Chat with Mr. Rowland Ward', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6.

⁷⁰ For the Danish displays at the 'Fisheries' exhibition, the frozen sea limited what arrived for exhibit: 'owing to some of the exhibits having been delayed by the frozen state of the Baltic, the show was not so large as it will be, if all the things expected duly arrive': 'The International Fisheries Exhibition', *John Bull*, 19 May 1883, 309.

⁷¹ Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 77.

and group the animals, birds, and foliage so that it became a scene in the Exhibition which everyone went to see, gave me many sleepless nights.⁷²

Ward desired to control every element of his taxidermic offspring, yet they also restricted him, took his time, and energy and sleep. To describe them, he uses the language of fakery, of ‘dummies.’ He also uses the idea of ‘defects’ and ‘imperfect’ bodies: creatures that were reborn, in Ward’s mind, wrongly. I find it intriguing that, even though Ward made these creatures, their presence nonetheless worried him. Rushed and haphazard, they continued to play on Ward’s mind, years after their inception.

A shipment of Indian grasses also failed to arrive in time for this display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition. Ward therefore journeyed to rural Norfolk to collect reeds, rushes, and dead trees for the display ‘to take the place of the Indian foliage.’⁷³ Armfuls of local vegetation were incorporated along with ‘imitation rock work’, for which Ward recommends, in *The Sportsman’s Handbook*, using painted fabric, covered in glue-coated paper.⁷⁴ There is a sense of a hidden history of diverse and distorted environmental influences: in Norfolk’s grasses masquerading as, and mingling with, Indian palms. These were used, Ward wrote, for ‘concealing any portion of an animal I did not desire to expose.’⁷⁵

Although Ward had been perfecting his taxidermy technique on individual specimens for several years, this was the first time he had produced such a collective.⁷⁶ What Ward was doing at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, with extravagant contextual display, was considered new and exciting. With reference to Ward’s ‘Jungle’, the *Leeds Mercury* reported that ‘The scene all together is the largest and most comprehensive work of taxidermy ever created.’⁷⁷ These were the precursors of the museum diorama.

As a new way of showcasing animal form, Ward’s display could push against the boundaries of possibility and animality, as he had fewer conventions to adhere to. Nevertheless, as a respected naturalist, he was still governed by the idea that skin, and animal mount, should radiate animal wholeness. Ward’s additions have elements of the prosthetic; bodily bits added to the available animal material, joined to make the creature seem complete.

Shildrick argues that, with regards to prosthesis, people always ask ‘the inevitable question’ of ‘which is foundational and which the supplement?’⁷⁸ Ward felt that his taxidermy was not

⁷² Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, 82.

⁷³ Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, 77-8.

⁷⁴ Ward, *Sportsman’s Handbook*, 66.

⁷⁵ Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, 78.

⁷⁶ ‘The Jungle Trophy at the Colonies, A Chat with Mr. Rowland Ward’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6.

⁷⁷ ‘The Colonial and Indian Exhibition’, *The Leeds Mercury*, 3.

⁷⁸ Shildrick also discusses how ‘prosthesis itself profoundly unsettles the conventional binaries that substantiate the clean and proper body of the psycho-social imaginary’: Shildrick, ‘Re-imagining Embodiment’, 277, 271.

complete enough, even with the supplementary parts. I suggest that he also felt they were not complete *because* of these additions. Ward's mounts amplified the human through their grandeur, pomp, and novelty; Ward was very much on display in his specimens. To the trained eye of Montagu Browne, these creatures also spoke of mishandling. Browne concluded that, 'Indeed, taking the mammals as a whole, with the exception of the eyes, the faults of the ordinary taxidermist were apparent.'⁷⁹ The expectations of animality had not been met. Yet, it was through their subversive materiality – their interlocking animal and manmade bits – that they provoked human reflections and anxieties. To Ward, the display was forever marked with the presence of his 'defective' reproductions.

The Human Animal

For Ward, this was a secretive, furtive, hybridity. Sometimes, though, taxidermists meddled with animal form more blatantly. At the Great Exhibition, Hermann Ploucquet's animals, which were showcased in the section dedicated to the German kingdom of Württemberg, were positioned as human characters.⁸⁰ The *Crystal Palace and its Contents* described 'animals of various species, endowed with a caricatured expression of human intelligence, and represented in illustrations of legends and fables, occupied with human pursuits, and performing human actions.'⁸¹ Examples included a group of kittens sipping tea, duelling dormice and a pine marten dentist performing an oral examination 'with an expression of fiendish glee'⁸² (see Figure 5.4). These scenes inverted the very crux of taxidermy as a reproduction of the animal in body and behaviour. This was the animal purposefully reborn as (almost) human. These animals drew a throng of human onlookers so regularly that they became 'one of the points in which policemen had to be stationed to marshal the crowd.'⁸³ *A Guide to the Great Exhibition* noted how these animals 'must tickle the fancies of old and young, and certainly draw crowds of visitors.'⁸⁴

In scholarship, more has been written on these quasi-human animals than on any other Victorian exhibition taxidermy. The artist Rachel Youdelman questions why this taxidermy was made, concluding that it 'reflected pre-Darwinian anxiety regarding the collapse of the

⁷⁹ Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*, 15.

⁸⁰ Ploucquet also showcased more traditional taxidermy, including nuclear family groups of European animals: 'Stuffed Animals in the Palace of Glass', *The Athenaeum*, 662.

⁸¹ 'Stuffed Animals from Wirtemberg', *The Crystal Palace and its Contents*, 207.

⁸² Other scenes included 'a grotesque sporting-piece in, which the sportsmen are weasels and stoats, firing with miniature guns on the smallest of leverets': *A Guide to the Great Exhibition*, 136-7.

⁸³ 'Stuffed Animals from Wirtemberg', *The Crystal Palace and its Contents*, 207. The *Morning Chronicle* described the display as 'so popular with all', and Queen Victoria supposedly wrote in her diary that they were "really marvellous"; 'The Great Exhibition,' *Morning Chronicle*, 5; Youdelman, 'Iconic Eccentricity: The Meaning of Victorian Novelty Taxidermy', 46.

⁸⁴ *A Guide to the Great Exhibition*, 136-7.

taboo on violating the strict distinction between human and nonhuman animals.⁸⁵ Historian and artist Michelle Henning takes a critical tone, arguing that ‘the fact that the living animals’ bodies would not be able to manage the poses struck by their mounted skins heightens the sense that animals are being forced to populate human situations.’⁸⁶ These bodies were distorted into a bipedal way of being.

The display most lauded in newspapers depicted the ancient fable of Reynard the fox, which was popular in both Ploucquet’s native Germany and in Britain. In one scene, Reynard lounged on a sofa, enjoying, as the *Guide* described, ‘with the most comic dignity and comfort, the sacred post-prandial hour of rest so necessary for digestion.’⁸⁷ The anthropomorphic fox is uncannily familiar, and both physically and allegorically present. By comparing Ploucquet with Hancock (the so-called father of British taxidermy) I will reveal the contrasting ways the skilled taxidermist was made present through skin.

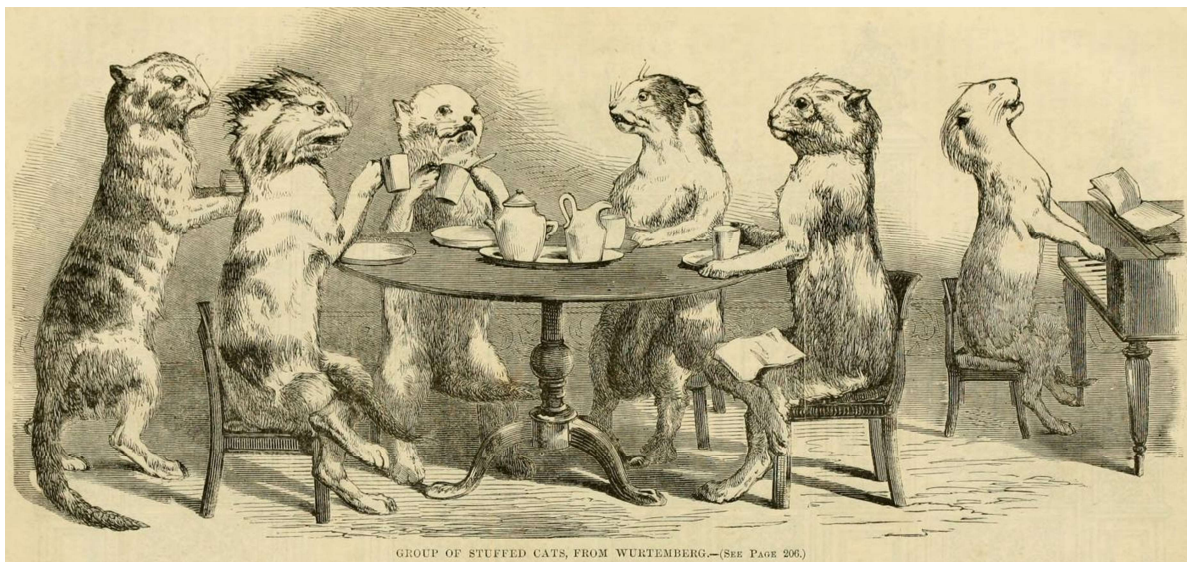


Figure 5.4: ‘Group of Stuffed Cats From Wurtemberg’, in *The Crystal Palace and Its Contents* (1851), 196.

Hancock was so absent, his gyrfalcon and heron so animal-like, that he resurfaced through clever craftsmanship. Ploucquet was supremely – brazenly – evident in these scenes as narrator, and as curator of props and body parts. He was inventor, parent, author. In Ploucquet’s mounts, human physiognomy was born from hands and animal skin. In bringing species together, he showcased the permeability of the human-animal boundary. Yet

⁸⁵ Youdelman, ‘Iconic Eccentricity’, 39.

⁸⁶ M. Henning, ‘Anthropomorphic Taxidermy and the Death of Nature: The Curious Art of Hermann Ploucquet, Walter Potter, and Charles Waterton’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35 (2007), 667. Rachel Poliquin takes a more material approach, noting Ploucquet’s skill and ability to seamlessly merge human and animal countenance: Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo*, 175-82. See also: V. Burke (Darke), ‘Reading the Body-Object: Nineteenth-Century Taxidermy Manuals and *Our Mutual Friend*’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 19 (2017), 1-24; Creaney, ‘Paralytic Animation’, 7-35.

⁸⁷ *A Guide to the Great Exhibition*, 136-7.

Plouquet's creatures simultaneously maintained this rift. Their mounts embodied, and were the product of, traits and actions the Victorians saw as most human: handicraft, creativity, and humour. In exhibition space, eccentricity flowed through the animal body.

In these displays, the animal is somewhat decentred, certainly more so than in naturalistic displays, as the human took up space. Nevertheless, it was the suggestion of continued animality – offered by the 'real' skin, and the presence of the animal that had once inhabited it – that made these creatures so alluring. Moreover, I argue that it was the lively flexibility of the dead animal skin that enabled Plouquet to mould and to channel both animal and human. The *Guide to the Great Exhibition* stressed that Reynard was 'in his own skin.'⁸⁸ *The Athenaeum* concluded that, whilst the tale was 'familiar enough in story and in picture... we do not recollect to have ever seen [it] attempted before with real animals.'⁸⁹ This delicate balance of skin and storytelling was summarised in the *Morning Chronicle*: these animals presented 'the wonderous union of brute face with human expression.'⁹⁰ If Reynard were merely symbolic, he is unlikely to have attracted such eager crowds.⁹¹

For the scene to possess power, he had to remain somewhat foxy.⁹² These animals visibly occupied both species, they were Thorsen's taxidermic chimeras, but in a new material combination.⁹³ The press and reports highlighted how these animals were simply 'portraying' or 'playing' human characters – they were not truly becoming human.⁹⁴ This language suggests how these animal bodies both lured people in, as an audience to their performance, and simultaneously induced worry in the watching-human. Assumingly, their ability to play the human drew them even closer to humanity, as only humans could be actors. I have shown how the hybridity of taxidermy – something critical to all taxidermy – was amplified within exhibition space. The very inclusion of such subversive taxidermy at the Great Exhibition

⁸⁸ *A Guide to the Great Exhibition*, 136-7. Similarly, the *Morning Chronicle* described that these characters were 'portrayed in action by real animals': 'The Great Exhibition,' *Morning Chronicle*, 5.

⁸⁹ 'Stuffed Animals in the Palace of Glass', *The Athenaeum*, 661-2.

⁹⁰ 'The Comical Creatures from Wurtemberg', *Morning Chronicle*, 12 August 1851, 6.

⁹¹ This retained animality has been underplayed by scholars. Henning suggests that, in most of Plouquet's displays, 'the animal is not a natural animal but a symbolic one': Henning, *Anthropomorphic Taxidermy*, 665.

⁹² Such scenes did not simply recreate human acts, but also imbued the creatures with stereotyped animalistic characteristics. The *Morning Chronicle* described how the frogs had a 'cool, slippery demeanour': *Morning Chronicle*, 'The Comical Creatures from Wurtemberg', 6. Some of these transgressive tableaux were also risqué. In one 'a gentleman Weasel is making love to a lady of the same species': 'Stuffed Animals in the Palace of Glass', *The Athenaeum*, 662.

⁹³ Thorsen, 'Animal Matter in Museums', 181.

⁹⁴ 'The Comical Creatures from Wurtemberg', *Morning Chronicle*, 6; *A Guide to the Great Exhibition*, 130.

exposes the differences between museum and exhibition space, as exhibitions could be bold and playful trendsetters.⁹⁵



Figure 5.5: 'Reynard on His Pilgrimage to Rome', *The Comical Creatures from Wurtemberg* (1851), 85.

The surprising popularity of Hermann Ploucquet's anthropomorphic taxidermy led to a dash to secure the creatures for perpetuity. Daguerreotypes (precursors to the photograph) were taken by 'Mr Claudet' of these 'semi-human' animals.⁹⁶ These were then turned into woodcuts. These engravings were transposed onto the pages of a storybook entitled 'the Comical Creatures from Wurtemberg' (see figure 5.5). Animal, human and skin were captured in paper and light, and in indented wood and ink, and Reynard the fox was taken back to two-dimensional fable form. The *Morning Chronicle* described how these were 'careful and clever, and convey a very correct representation of the original creatures with all, or nearly all, their subtlety of expression and aspect.'⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Montague Browne suggested that Ploucquet's 'grotesque' school of taxidermy 'though it may perhaps be decried on the score of misrepresenting nature...yet teaches a special lesson by the increased care necessary' [in giving animals a] 'serio-comic and half-human expression which was so intensely ridiculous and yet admirable': Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*, 15.

⁹⁶ 'Preface', *The Comical Creatures from Wurtemberg* (London: D. Bogue, 1851).

⁹⁷ 'The Comical Creatures from Wurtemberg', *Morning Chronicle*, 6.

Ploucquet sold his collection following the exhibition, and many of the physical specimens have long since disappeared.⁹⁸ These images now stand in as taxidermy replacements, as exhibition taxidermy was rarely long lived; their bodies fast, and fleeting. The legacy of those animal forms was also continued in another way. Anthropomorphic taxidermy took off following the Great Exhibition, as evidenced in the elaborate work of British taxidermist Walter Potter, who created whimsical displays such as a ‘Kitten’s Wedding’.⁹⁹ As the setting at which what *The Strand* magazine described as Ploucquet’s ‘highly original idea’, the Great Exhibition was critical in shaping (and perhaps misshaping) the taxidermy creature.¹⁰⁰ In birthing the anthropomorphic mount, the exhibition provided a platform for the anatomically incorrect and the malformed – a stage from which the curious creatures could entice the crowds.

Shaping Space

I have demonstrated how taxidermy could embody new and bizarre progeny, born into and out of the experimental space of the exhibition. They shaped, and were shaped by, the displays in which they were housed. Exhibitions often sought to replicate the environments of empire: imperial place, condensed and made accessible, in the heart of the capital. Within the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, this was reflected in the construction of multiple Indian Courts or ‘princely states’, and the replication of architectural style and stereotyped urban motifs, such as the Jaipur Gate which was constructed and donated by the Maharajah of Jaipur.¹⁰¹ Similarly, the official catalogue of the 1895 Empire of India Exhibition, at Earl’s Court, detailed its ‘Indian City’ which incorporated buildings from numerous regions and cities, spliced together to create a singular urban centre.¹⁰² A diverse tableau of urban Indian environments, as well as their lively human and non-human inhabitants, was combined into a singular interactive vision, within a London exhibition hall. The historian Thomas Prasch describes this fusion of architectural styles and places as a ‘mongrelized’ portrayal of India.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Youdelman, ‘Iconic Eccentricity’, 52-3.

⁹⁹ See Creaney, ‘Paralytic Animation’, 7-35.

¹⁰⁰ W.G FitzGerald, ‘Side Shows Part III’ in G. Newnes (ed.), *The Strand* Vol. XIII (London: George Newnes LTD, 1897), 524.

¹⁰¹ Mukharji, ‘The Exhibition and its Visitors’, 66; ‘Introduction’, *Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886: Official Catalogue* (London: W. Clowes, 1886), 9-10.

¹⁰² This exhibition also had ‘camels for hire’, an Indian theatre, a brass founder, a shoemaker, and a teahouse: *Official Catalogue of the Empire of India Exhibition*, 365. Similarly, the International Exhibition of Navigation, Commerce, and Industry which was held in Liverpool in 1886, contained an ‘Indian Pavilion with performance of natives and procession of animals’: ‘Liverpool’s Big Show’, *New York Times*, 16 May 1886, 12.

¹⁰³ T. Prasch, “‘A Strange Incongruity’: The Imaginary India of the International Exhibitions”, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 34 (2012), 485, 488. Alayna Heinonen has written that, in the creation of exhibitions, the British ‘appropriated and manipulated three iconic representations of Indian “tradition”: the village, bazaar, and palace.’ She argues that these representations positioned India as ‘pre-modern’ in contrast to an ever ‘progressive’ Britain: A.

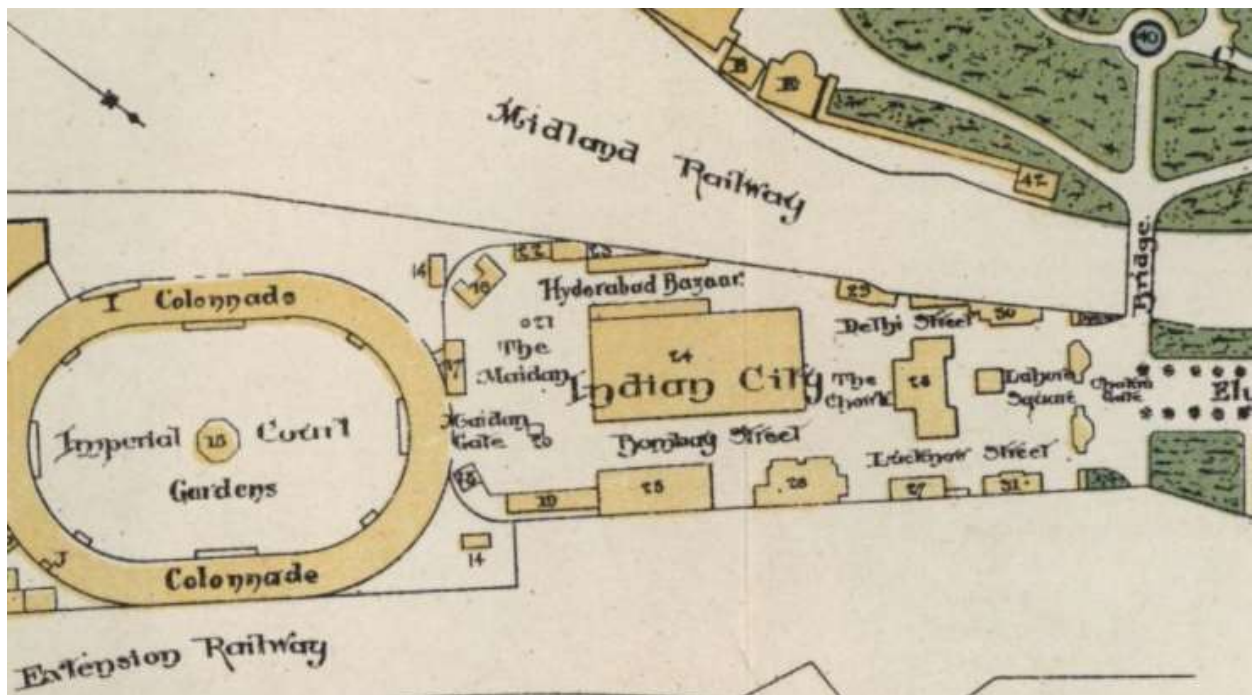


Figure 5.6: 'Map of the Exhibition', *Official Catalogue of the Empire of India Exhibition* (1895), 1.

I propose that this animalistic notion is particularly fitting when it is further applied to the creation of rural environments, and animal inhabitants. The historian Mark Harrison outlines the British obsession with the jungle motif in defining Indian identity.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the historian Alix Heintzman has explored the prolific use of exotic jungle animals in the late nineteenth century as representations of both 'savage colonial danger and the success of the civilising mission.'¹⁰⁵ This jungle obsession was visually showcased in the Empire of India Exhibition.¹⁰⁶ Cartography of the exhibition depicts Ward's 'Jungle' as occupying a space in the very heart of the recreated city, symbolically positioned as the locus of Indian identity, more central and much larger than the urban displays (number 24 on the map in Figure 5.6).

In *The Sketch* in 1894 Ward described the display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition as a 'highly realistic jungle scene' which was 'represented to the minutest detail.'¹⁰⁷ However, he

Heinonen, 'Contested Spaces in London: Exhibitionary Representations of India, c. 1886-1951' Unpublished Thesis

https://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1000&context=history_etds [Accessed 01/02/2021] 11.

¹⁰⁴ M. Harrison, 'The Tender Frame of man': Disease, Climate and Racial Difference in India and the West Indies 1760-1866', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 70 (1996), 68-93.

¹⁰⁵ A. Heintzman, 'E is for Elephant: Jungle Animals in Late Nineteenth-Century British Picture Books', *Environmental History*, 19 (2014), 553-63.

¹⁰⁶ 'The Indian City' in *Official Catalogue of the Empire of India Exhibition*, 36; and Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 80.

¹⁰⁷ 'Mr Rowland Ward', *The Sketch*, 8 August 1894, 97-8.

also commented that the aim of the display, as approved by the Exhibition Commissioners, was 'to illustrate some of the more striking representatives of the flora and fauna of India as a whole.'¹⁰⁸ In the attempt to squeeze an entire country, with geographies which ranged from the tropical Keralan backwaters to the soaring Himalayas, into one discrete display, India became a singular and composite vision.¹⁰⁹ Mukharji alluded to this misrepresentation in describing the scene as 'over-drawn.'¹¹⁰

Displays could also warp animal and environment in other ways. At the Empire of India Exhibition, the catalogue reported that: 'some thousands of specimens are to be seen, including elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers, leopards, buffaloes, bison, wild sheep, ibex, antelopes, gazelles, snakes, crocodiles, and a vast number of birds, butterflies and insects.'¹¹¹ Ward placed together numerous animals which would very rarely be found in the same ecosystem, let alone in such cramped proximity.¹¹² Ward's (mis)placing of mountain-inhabiting animals such as Ibex within this tropical scene created a contorted vision of India's ecology.¹¹³ It was akin to the 'mongrelized' cityscapes, with everything forced to populate the jungle imaginary. I interpret these displays as simultaneously excessive and lacking – they spoke of both decadence and absence.

Much of Ward's jungle display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition was literally recycled at the Empire of India Exhibition. Animals were added into the display, as the scene became filled – engorged – with animal bodies. This was rebirth, not direct repetition. Exhibitions were always something in the making; buildings made mobile, as their internal and external structures were easy to assemble, reuse and remove. Liverpool's International Exhibition of Navigation, Commerce and Industry, recycled building materials from the Antwerp Exhibition held the previous year, producing a spatiotemporal transplantation of exhibitions.¹¹⁴ The *New York Times* reported on the Liverpool exhibition that 'the new buildings (which in their present form look very much like half a dozen undersized railway stations tied together in a

¹⁰⁸ Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 76.

¹⁰⁹ As India has a status as one of the most biodiverse global regions and is the seventh largest country in the world with a modern land mass of 3.287 million km² (a figure that was even greater in 1894 before Pakistani and Bangladeshi independence), this was never going to be an easy venture.

¹¹⁰ Mukharji, *A Visit to Europe*, 71.

¹¹¹ 'The Jungle' in *Official Catalogue of the Empire of India Exhibition*, 13.

¹¹² 'The Indian City' in *Official Catalogue of the Empire of India Exhibition*, 367; and Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 80.

¹¹³ Furthermore, crocodiles and gharials, not alligators, are native to the Indian subcontinent. It is not clear whether Ward used the wrong bodies, or whether, at the time, the distinctions between these reptilian forms were hazy.

¹¹⁴ K. G. Beauchamp, *Exhibiting Electricity* (London: The Institution of Electrical Engineers: 1997), 144.

bundle) are being developed with all possible speed into the stately structure of wood, glass and iron.’¹¹⁵

This experimental building style was heavily influenced by the Great Exhibition, which was the first large scale ‘prefabricated ferro vitreous’ (iron and glass) building.¹¹⁶ The Great Exhibition was designed, by architect Joseph Paxton, to fit over an array of tall tree species found in Hyde Park.¹¹⁷ As the building process did not require the usual earthy excavations and traditional foundations, the structural frame could be rapidly removed from Hyde Park (and later reassembled in the area now known as Crystal Palace), without leaving a permanent mark on the landscape. Like the *skin lives* of the animals they contained, these exhibitions were fleeting, but could also be transplanted and reformed.

Experimental taxidermic technique – born out of the exhibition – reflected the novelty of the spaces in which specimens were housed. Prince Albert’s Great Exhibition was the parent, or grandparent, to generations of exhibitions around the world. The ideas, newly spawned and displayed, were not meant to be confined to the temporary walls in which they were delivered into the world. The hybrid specimens – or even those that were excessive to the point of deficiency – were not the finished articles. Many of these ideas were developed and grew-up in museum space, or subsequent exhibitions; their bodies influenced other bodies and the hands and minds of subsequent taxidermists. As the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* suggested, ‘The Hyde Park Palace, the creature of a summer, was happily destined to reproduce itself not in the evanescent form of exhibitions, but in the permanent shape of museums, of art, science, and industry.’¹¹⁸ Other ideas, and the specimens they influenced, were discarded. In exhibitions, taxidermy was not born from a pursuit of timelessness, or longevity, but a desire to continuously shape and improve the dead animal body.¹¹⁹ In their newness, and their ‘evanescence’, exhibition spaces could be unpredictable; their animal objects not always easy to control.

They could quite literally crumble. Built as temporary structures, natural forces and the passing of time could erode and destroy the buildings and the animals they housed. Ward reported in *A Naturalist’s Life Study* that the Prince of Wales requested the ‘Jungle’ display remain in the exhibition hall of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition for an extended period.

¹¹⁵ ‘Liverpool’s Big Show’, *New York Times*, 12.

¹¹⁶ R. Agren and R. Wing, ‘Five Moments in the History of Industrialised Building’, *Construction Management and Economics*, 32 (2014), 7-15.

¹¹⁷ L. Picard, ‘The Great Exhibition’, The British Library <https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-great-exhibition> [Accessed 02/013/18]. See Also: Yanni, *Nature’s Museums*.

¹¹⁸ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 22 May 1866.

¹¹⁹ Perhaps the exception to this was the rush to secure extinct species – these were to be kept, memorialised and studied. But even then, the techniques by which they were secured were a changeable process of trial and error, and the methods were ever being adapted.

This greatly concerned Ward, particularly as the display was ‘full of rats’.¹²⁰ He felt its time was up. The lively rat had the potential to disrupt the live-seeming nature of the dead taxidermy; to reveal its lifelessness.

There is a suggestion of a heightened propensity for deterioration within the exhibition, affecting specimens which were sometimes only half-formed to begin with. Decadence, excess, and acceleration were only a step away from decay. This was a quickening of time, bodies, and exhibition space. Elizabeth Grosz argues that ‘time is not merely the attribute of a subject, imposed by us on the world: it is a condition of what is living, of matter, of the real, of the universe itself. It is what the universe imposes on us rather than we on it; it is what we find ourselves immersed in, given, as impinging and enabling our spatiality.’¹²¹ Time, fast or slow, was always in relation to matter and space. These things – animals, displays, even exhibition halls – were not built to last; Ward also commented on ‘the wet coming in through the roof of the building’ and saturating the animal display.¹²² Unlike a real forest, a jungle of dried plants, dead skin, fabric, paint, and glue, does not readily embrace saturation. Similarly, at the Great Exhibition, the *Illustrated London News* reported that ‘several mishaps have lately occurred.’¹²³ Mr. Thomas’s famed large model of a fountain, which was a central feature of the Grand Avenue, ‘crumbled, by the action of the water.’ Built to be temporary, a profusion of environmental factors could cause bodies and buildings alike to disintegrate.

Exhibitions could mould, and be transformed by, their animal inhabitants in more abstract ways. Blanqui described the power of light and glass at the Great Exhibition: ‘The most curious of all is decidedly the Building itself, composed, in reality, of three or four principal portions repeated many thousands of times, in which the light penetrates in waves through the glazed enclosure.’¹²⁴ Blanqui creates a rich depiction of this building, in which sunlight was a mutable force that illuminated the specimens below. Yanni argues that ‘architectural historians are sometimes so happy swooning over its tectonic purity that they forget the Crystal Palace was full of purchasable, consumable bourgeois stuff, and that the purpose of the iron and glass was to maximise natural light.’¹²⁵ Sometimes these animals and objects – this ‘stuff’ – reflected the light back: the *Morning Chronicle* described the hummingbirds, famed for their iridescent quality, as rivalling ‘in beauty the chromatic reflections of the crystal fountain, and the

¹²⁰ Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, 81.

¹²¹ E. Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

¹²² Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, 80-1.

¹²³ ‘The Great Exhibition’, *Illustrated London News*, 2 August 1851, 150.

¹²⁴ Blanqui, *The Crystal Palace and its Contents*, 210.

¹²⁵ Yanni, *Nature’s Museums*, 94. The historian Nick Fisher has suggested that the Great Exhibition’s ephemerality led to a paucity of descriptive accounts, as visitors found the space ‘indescribable’: N. Fisher, ‘The Great Exhibition of 1851: The Struggle to Describe the Indescribable’, *Endeavour*, 36 (2012), 6-13.

attractions of the koh-i-noor.¹²⁶ There is a suggestion of body, object, diamond, and space shaping and mirroring one another.

The glass of the display cases could have more unpredictable effects. The *Pall Mall Gazette* described Ward's Jungle display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition: 'the only drawback being the glass, which at certain angles so refracts the light so as to render the tiger invisible'¹²⁷ Exhibition glass could help a big cat to hide, in the right light. Ward was very conscious of other distorting effects of glass. He wrote that 'I enclosed the space in large sheets of plate-glass and canvas, and painted on the latter the foliage of the banyan tree; to avoid the "Pepper's Ghost" effect, in one portion I enclosed it with banyan leaves, so that the visitor would get no reflection, and the whole scene was lit up with electricity inside.' Without a shield of leaves, the glass case could produce unwanted reflections.¹²⁸ This doubling of the resident animal bodies might reveal the construction behind the display and spoiled its naturalistic effects. Light, when combined with glass, could both duplicate animal bodies and conceal them.

I have demonstrated that, within exhibitions, the human was often on show within and through the animal. However, as occupiers of such an ephemeral timescape, taxidermy animals did not always follow the path set by their watching-human. It was not only light that could transform specimens. J.P.B. Dennis (the proud purveyor of the taxidermy peacock at the Great Exhibition) suggested that, if any issue was found with his bird, it was because 'possibly, having no case, the currents in the Building may partially have disarranged the tail feathers.'¹²⁹ Dennis argues that unwanted breezes, and the movement of human bodies circulating throughout the exhibition, could disrupt the lifelike appearance of the taxidermy. As Dennis's bird was not behind glass, its dead body could be wakened by external forces, to the consternation of the taxidermist who wished to keep it in a state of static perfection. Whilst taxidermists may have wished their animal progeny to remain stilled and quiet, taxidermy creatures and exhibition space alike were always in the process of being remade.

Elephant Tales

The threads of transformation and experimentation, and malformed bodies and spaces, which connect the specimens, displays and exhibitions, is exemplified by the tales of two elephants. These creatures, and the stories revealed by their bodies, demonstrate the complex intertwining of life and death in exhibitions. Narratives could be birthed in exhibition space,

¹²⁶ 'The Great Exhibition,' *Morning Chronicle*, 5

¹²⁷ 'A Walk Round the "Colonies"', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 May 1886. 2.

¹²⁸ Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 77. Pepper's ghost is an illusion technique, whereby 'apparitions' or holograms can appear to the audience, through the use of glass and light.

¹²⁹ Dennis, 'Taxidermy', *Illustrated London News*, 371.

as animal lives were ended, and their bodies shaped to provide a material focal point for these new stories.

The first was exhibited by Ward at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, in a display which was separated from his 'Jungle' by a screen of Indian and East Anglian vegetation.¹³⁰ This exhibit showcased an elephant, and two tigers. As Ward described: 'A hunting elephant preceding the beaters had come upon the group of tigers, one of which had sprung upon him with a deadly grip; others were near or retreating in the tall grass and bamboo copse.'¹³¹ Such hunting elephants were used by the Maharajah's and British officials in India.¹³² They were commonly sent ahead of the hunting party to cut swathes through the thicket and vegetation, for the human hunters – often local beaters – to follow on foot. However, rather than hailing from this luxuriant vision of rural India, the elephant specimen came from an urban European world. A resident of Carl Hagenbeck's famed Tierpark Zoo, the elephant in question was executed on the streets of Hamburg, in a public display of spectacle that Ward helped to orchestrate.¹³³ This is the elephant I introduced earlier, in Chapter 1, 'Skinning'.

He was killed for two reasons. Firstly, the creature was described by Hagenbeck as so dangerous that he was 'reluctantly compelled to sign his death warrant.'¹³⁴ He had attacked a keeper, subverting the expectations of a captive and displayed creature. Secondly, Ward, who was a friend of Hagenbeck, communicated his urgent need for an elephant skin. As Ward explained: "The tigers came from Cooch Behar, but we had to get an elephant, or the "Jungle" would not have been complete."¹³⁵ Ward's need for an elephant skin coincided with Hagenbeck's urge to be rid of his elephant. After being shipped from Germany to Britain, the dead animal's identity was remade as that of a hunting elephant of West Bengal. This captive elephant from a German city was showcased as a semi-domesticated elephant of India.

His body was moulded and placed to interact with the 'authentically' Indian tigers. *The Pall Mall Gazette* commented that:

the blood spurts from the wounded trunk as the tiger's teeth sink into the mangled flesh, the left forefoot of the creature plunged its cruel claws, now all blood red, into the skin... there is a wonderful vigour and verve about this great picture of jungle realism: the pain and fury of the tusker, the fierce

¹³⁰ Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 79.

¹³¹ Ward, *Naturalists' Life Study*, 75.

¹³² M. Patchett, 'Tracking Tigers: Recovering the Embodied Practices of Taxidermy', *Historical Geography*, 36 (2008), 28-9.

¹³³ C. Hagenbeck, *Beasts and Men: Being Carl Hagenbeck's Experiences for Half a Century Among Wild Animals*, Translation by H. Elliott and A. Thacker (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1912), 153-5.

¹³⁴ Hagenbeck, *Beasts and Men*, 153.

¹³⁵ Ward, *A Naturalists' Life Study*, 78

energy with which the monster cat drives its fangs into the elephant's trunk.¹³⁶

This is a scene of movement and fabricated animal drama – ‘jungle realism’ – which unseated the reality of the elephant's physical death by human hands. Ward's description of the ‘deadly’ tiger attack infers that, in his mind at least, the elephant's second death was imminent.¹³⁷ Mukharji also described a fatal injury, noting that ‘several streams of blood trickled down dyeing the yellow grass below a mottled crimson.’¹³⁸ This elephant body was transformed to fit exhibition space: he died so that he could be reborn as (dying) exhibition taxidermy.

Ward was not happy with the elephant. He assessed the living animal, when he visited it in Hamburg: ‘We saw the elephant, and although it wasn't as good as I wanted, I decided to have it.’¹³⁹ The time pressure of the pending exhibition, Ward's desire for spectacle, and the physical presence of the tigers – a presence that had to be matched in some animal form – meant that the elephant would have to do. In this, I interpret an element of something lacking: the creature was needed to make the scene ‘complete’, even though the body was not what Ward wanted.¹⁴⁰

Like Ward, the commissioners of the Great Exhibition were also desperate for an elephant. They ‘sought for a long time in vain for a stuffed elephant.’¹⁴¹ This elephant was to be displayed as a creature of Indian high culture. She formed a structural framework on ‘which to display’ a ‘howdah.’¹⁴² The ‘howdah’ in question was an elaborate carriage, containing chairs or beds, which is placed astride an elephant's back. It was used by Maharajahs and the British elites in India for transport and as a platform for hunting.¹⁴³ It was a gift for Queen Victoria: ‘This howdah, with magnificent trappings worked in gold and silver (intended to be borne on the back of an elephant) was sent to the Queen by the Nawab Nazim of Moorshedabad.’¹⁴⁴ The elephant was positioned more as a prop than as a natural being, a structure on which to exhibit the real object of the display. This howdah was fashioned partly from sculpted ivory, the elephant specimen adorned with elephant fragments (see figure 5.7).

¹³⁶ ‘A Walk Round the “Colonies”’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 May 1886, 2.

¹³⁷ Ward, *Naturalists' Life Study*, 75.

¹³⁸ Mukharji, *A Visit to Europe*, 79.

¹³⁹ Ward, *Naturalist's Life Study*, 78.

¹⁴⁰ Ward, *Naturalists' Life Study*, 78.

¹⁴¹ ‘India’ in *Dickinsons' Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851* (London: Dickinson Brothers, Her Majesty's Publishers, 1851), 20.

¹⁴² ‘India’ in *Dickinsons' Comprehensive Pictures*, 20.

¹⁴³ W. Storey, ‘Big Cats and Imperialism: Lion and Tiger Hunting in Kenya and Northern India’, *Journal of World History*, 2 (1991), 161.

¹⁴⁴ J. Nash, L. Haghe, and D. Roberts, *Dickinsons' Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851* (London: Dickinson Brothers, 1851), 20.



Figure 5.7: 'India', *Dickinsons' Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition* (1851).

Unlike the howdah, this elephant did not come to Hyde Park from India, but from Essex; transported by road from the Saffron Walden Museum.¹⁴⁵ The museum had acquired her skin from a contact in South Africa in the 1830s and she had been on display in Saffron Walden for two decades. There are clear similarities with Ward's elephant exhibit. Both displayed 'authentically' Indian animals and objects *and* continental European and British sourced specimens, as global and local influences shaped the animal body. Both displays tweaked and transformed the elephant body to fit the narrative of the exhibition space. Nevertheless, I argue that the Great Exhibition exacerbated this trend even further. The elephant was an old specimen, from the 1830s; a skin, draped over a metalwork frame, and loosely stuffed with straw.¹⁴⁶ Most significantly, I discovered that the specimen was not an Asian elephant, but an African elephant.¹⁴⁷ This is visible in the large, fan-like shape of the animal's ears, and in the

¹⁴⁵ 'Natural History', Saffron Walden Museum <http://saffronwaldenmuseum.swmuseumsoc.org.uk/discover/natural-history/> [Accessed 01/02/18].

¹⁴⁶ L. Pole, 'Not Jumbo: Saffron Walden Museum's Elephant 1834-1960', *Saffron Walden Historical Journal*, 11 (2006), 2.

¹⁴⁷ See Figure 5.7; Pole, 'Not Jumbo', 2.

presence of tusks on a female specimen.¹⁴⁸ This elephant was a species shifter. Her African skin was sourced from Essex and exhibited in London as an Indian animal.

The immense back of the African elephant arches in a different way to that of the Asian elephant. Therefore, a howdah could never sit flush with this creature's skin, the elephant was simply the wrong shape. In ignoring the material variations between these two species (and discounting the differences between both their nationalities and their environments), the exhibition commissioners displayed a hazy, hybrid elephant specimen. Amongst the excesses, the grandeur, the royalty, and the riches of exhibition display, animal specimens – their wholeness, and their form – were sometimes diminished. The exhibition space did not require a modern specimen, or even an Asian elephant, it simply needed an animal that was just elephant-shaped enough to take on the role of howdah bearer.

It was the animal's skin, shaped into a rough human interpretation of elephant form, that made this creature just animal enough. As a fleshy link to a once living, breathing elephant (even one of the wrong species, size and shape) it provided a semblance of authenticity. It pulled this creature back from the brink of being an entire fabrication. The rushed and impermanent nature of the exhibition – its ephemerality and its newness – led to the selection and the rapid reproduction of animal bodies. The frame of the Great Exhibition's 'Indian' African elephant seems particularly incomplete, a skin reborn as a different species, and yet it was considered just whole enough to play its part.

Conclusion

Elephant, and exhibition, were both designed to be temporary and to demonstrate a concept to be transplanted elsewhere. In this fleeting and fertile ground, taxidermy technique prospered. I have shown how exhibitions altered and transformed the skin-body. I argue that exhibition specimens were born out of the competitive and rapid energy of the exhibition hall, and that their forms reflected this fast pace. These creatures then shaped and influenced the pursuit of taxidermy long term; Rowland Ward's displays were a precursor to the museum diorama, and exhibitions also nurtured both an analytical eye, and taxidermic realism. Taxidermy and *taxidermists* were put on display. The profession was on show, rather than animality, and yet this was often achieved through a dedication to lifelike animal form.

This was an accelerated taxidermy time. The frenetic rush to display creatures pulled specimens in strange new directions – animals that did not have to stand the test of time. I argue that this is the paradox of exhibition display and its temporalities: that, whilst advancing

¹⁴⁸ 'History of the Museum- Part Two', Saffron Walden Museum <http://saffronwaldenmuseum.swmuseumsoc.org.uk/history-of-the-museum-part-two/> [Accessed 01/02/18].

taxidermy technique, high standards were not always considered necessary in exhibitions. I have demonstrated how these creatures could be subversive, and anxiety inducing, through their mixed materiality. Exhibitions provided space to play with and trouble the animal-human boundary; to push the human to the foreground, through animal skin. Yet sometimes these (sort-of) animal bodies pushed back.

The evanescent space of the exhibition evolved each day, as a tide of visitors flooded its makeshift halls. Mukharji, on one such visit, described the animals he gazed upon at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition:

The peafowl had taken shelter among the green leaves, but the vulture had risen in the air exultant at the prospect of the dainty meal which he knew by experience was being prepared by the brave tiger. In another part of the scene, the Bengal tiger was shewn in his attitude of noiselessly creeping through the friendly grass preparatory to that fatal spring on his unsuspecting prey.¹⁴⁹

When watching Ward's animals, Mukharji saw moving, fleshy beings, and created his own stories from their dead bodies. Beneath Mukharji's imaginary landscape, lay a very real assemblage of animal and manmade matter. In this display, alongside the (secretly) synthetic creatures, the same animals that caused Ward anxiety, were specimens that had been shipped in from the Indian motherland. Authenticity met with artificiality. Exhibitions were places of storytelling, and yet it was the specimen's obstinate, material presence that demanded attention, for these narratives always relied on skin, or, on occasion, the absence of skin. The results of exhibition taxidermy could be spectacular, profitable, bizarre, realistic, malformed, subversive, and comical, and ultimately, these myriad animal forms were significant shapers of the British taxidermy landscape.

¹⁴⁹ Mukharji, *A Visit to Europe*, 70-1.

Chapter 5: Displaying

In 1910, William Evans Hoyle, the director of the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff – a museum on the verge of opening for the first time – wrote to the explorer Ernest Shackleton. Shackleton had returned from Antarctica in 1909, and word had got out that he had not come back empty handed:

and I therefore take the liberty of asking whether you have amongst your stores any specimen which you could present to the Museum in order to help in the formation of the collection. I need hardly say that anything which you are able to give us would be greatly valued, not only for its own sake, but as a constant reminder of your Expedition and your visit to Cardiff, and the visitors would always associate the specimens with your name.¹

Hoyle suggested that an Emperor Penguin, or one of ‘the larger seals’, would suffice. The next day, he received a letter from Shackleton explaining that the explorer had ‘much pleasure in presenting’ a penguin to the museum.² A King, not an Emperor. The penguin was being housed with the taxidermist Rowland Ward, who soon wrote to the museum suggesting that ‘these skins are not preserved to keep in the present condition for a long period, we suggest it may be wise to have this one preserved and set up.’³ Once Ward had set-up the skin, it was to become a feathered memorial to Shackleton, as well as a representative of its species.

A museum is the destination that hunters often imagined when their finger pressed against the trigger. Animal bodies were moved and handled with this endpoint firmly in mind. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, natural history curators, taxidermists and museum directors often used the language of stillness. The King Penguin was to be a ‘constant’ reminder, one that visitors would ‘always’ associate with Shackleton. Hoyle wrote as if, not only would the penguin be suspended bodily, but time would be stopped. Within museums, taxidermy animals were physically distanced from their past experiences of making and moving; from the hunting ground, handy labour, flows of travel, and experimentation. However, I shall reveal how, as experiences which were stitched into the very being of the taxidermy body, these were not simply things of the past.

I met the king penguin in letters and in records in the National Museum of Wales. I also encountered the creature in the skin: the penguin stood on a table in the museum storeroom, its body framed by a wall of files, and leathery feet skirted by a protective layer of bubble wrap. This penguin was no longer on display to visitors and is certainly not a ‘constant’ reminder of Shackleton. Whilst stores are used to protect vulnerable and valuable specimens, they also

¹ Letter from Hoyle to Shackleton, 16 March 1910, National Museum Cardiff, Natural History Archive.

² Letter from Shackleton to Hoyle, 17 March 1910, National Museum Cardiff, Natural History Archive.

³ Letter from Ward to Hoyle, 18 March 1910, National Museum Cardiff, Natural History Archive.

keep creatures out of the public eye: they are often the places of the leftovers, the duplicates, or items too fragile for display. With age, the penguin's neck feathers had become matted, they are missing in places along the side of the head, and the once-bright yellow plumage has faded (see figure 6.1). Times change, and so do animal bodies.



Figure 6.1: King Penguin, National Museum of Wales store, author's photograph (2019).

Throughout this thesis, I have rejected the idea that taxidermy is still and silent, or, in James Ryan's words, 'utterly docile.'⁴ Instead, I have explored the movement and lasting influence of skins – their potential and their deadness – and argued for the importance of places *other* than museums. Most scholarship meets taxidermy in museums, and I wanted, instead, to show the critical importance of journeying to the understanding of dead animals, as makers of history. However, as the narrative surrounding museum taxidermy so often propagates themes of timelessness and conquest, it is important to demonstrate how the museum was also a place of lively deadness. An example of this narrative is Helen Gregory and Anthony

⁴ J. Ryan, "Hunting with the Camera": Photography, Wildlife and Colonialism in Africa', in C. Philo and C. Wilbert (eds.) *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000), 209.

Purdy's description of taxidermy displays as 'preoccupied with freezing time and space'.⁵ Whilst some scholars have recognised the subversive, 'vivacious' qualities of museum taxidermy, they are yet to embrace physical movement, embodied contact, and skin-to-skin process.⁶ I pay attention to such things. In the introduction to this thesis I quoted from Sharon Macdonald, and her words warrant repetition here:

exploring the exhibitionary selections, styles and silences is not, however, an easy matter. Exhibitions tend to be presented to the public rather as do scientific facts: as unequivocal statements rather than as the outcome of particular processes and contexts. The assumptions, rationales, compromises, and accidents that lead to a finished exhibition are generally hidden from public view: they are tidied away along with the cleaning equipment, the early drafts of text and the artefacts for which no place could be found.⁷

Taxidermy continued to take up space and occupy time in the museum, through these often-hidden processes and interactions with humans and other animals.

The stories that museums and historians tell matter. Objects in museums are often rooted in colonial violence. The director of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, a museum of anthropology and archaeology, recognises the perception that its displays are unchanging. Laura Van Broekhoven suggests that 'the 'static' public face of our museum does not always reflect that we are at the forefront of establishing collaborative museology, opening doors to previously uninvited communities, engaging with stakeholders near and far.'⁸ Through repatriation, new interpretations, and the removal of objects from view, many museums are trying to tell more complex stories about their collections, and the role of museums in imperial power brokering.⁹ But, they remain contested spaces, and ones that often rely on the spoils of empire. Carolyn

⁵ H. Gregory and A. Purdy, 'Present Signs, Dead Things: Indexical Authenticity and Taxidermy's Nonabsent Animal', *Configurations*, 23 (2015), 66. See also: D. Haraway, 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936', *Social Text*, 11 (1984), 20-64; G. Marvin, 'Perpetuating Polar Bears: The Cultural Life of Dead Animals', in B. Snæbjörnsdóttir and M. Wilson (eds.), *Nanoq: Flat out and Bluesome, A Cultural Life of Polar Bears* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), 164-5; M. Bal, 'Telling, Showing, Showing Off', *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 16.

⁶ J. Desmond, 'Vivacious Remains: An Afterword on Taxidermy's Forms, Fictions, Facticity, and Futures', *Configurations*, 27 (2019), 257-66; K. Jones, 'The Rhinoceros and the Chatham Railway: Taxidermy and the Production of Animal Presence in the 'Great Indoors'', *History*, 101 (2016), 710-35; L. E. Thorsen, 'Animal Matter in Museums' in H. Kean and P. Howell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History* (London: Routledge, 2018), 171-93; R. Poliquin, 'The Matter and Meaning of Museum Taxidermy', *Museum and Society*, 6 (2008), 123-34.

⁷ S. Macdonald, 'Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition', in S. Macdonald (ed.), *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), 2.

⁸ L. Van Broekhoven, 'Calibrating Relevance at the Pitt Rivers Museum' in J. Pellew and L. Goldman (eds.) *Dethroning Historical Reputations: Universities, Museums and the Commemoration of Benefactors* (London: University of London Press, 2018), 77.

⁹ See, for example: B. Onciul *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice: Decolonising Engagement* (London: Routledge, 2015); D. Batty, 'Off With the Heads: Pitt Rivers Museum Removes Human Remains from Display', *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/sep/13/off-with-the-heads-pitt-rivers-museum-removes-human-remains-from-display> [Accessed 14/10/20].

Rasmussen argues that ‘a recurring theme in the history of museums is the readiness of each succeeding generation to declare the displays and practices of their predecessors to be dusty, dead and lifeless.’¹⁰ To some extent, this narrative reinforces Western capitalist notions of progress. For the colonised and indigenous peoples from whom objects were often stolen, museums have never been still or lifeless.¹¹

I explore the liveliness of animal objects (and argue that they have never been ‘dusty dead and lifeless’) not to disregard their troubling colonial histories, but to flesh them out, and to show the ways that animal specimens emerged from material violence. I follow the lives of skins – to and within the museum – to pay respect to animal remains, and their reaching influence. I follow Matthew Champion’s call for historians to ‘to pay attention to their own role as masters and measurers of time, quite capable of colonizing histories with fantasies of static time: still, stable, unchanging and lost.’¹²

Fiona Cameron suggests that museums should shake off an image of permanent control, of fixity:

The dominant image of museums as an organization is one of hierarchy, considered as a whole composed of parts hierarchically organized and operating together according to a centralized plan. That is, as an enclosed space, as a solid, fixed entity, analyzed as an apparatus in the service of a particular political rationality, and in scholarly terms accorded a habitualized ordering of the social (e.g., knowledge/ power; discipline and disciplinary effects; sign and interpretation; subject and subjectification).¹³

She argues that museums should reimagine themselves as ‘liquid’ institutions: fluid spaces, with porous boundaries, and unpredictable stories. The idea of a liquid museum is intriguing. However, I argue that, whilst historically museums associated themselves with the steady march of progress – a progress that could be strived for through attempts to still the animal body – they have *always* been porous and fluid. An outward narrative of human control is not necessarily evidence that such was the case.

I argue that museums were places of continued journeys, of loss, and of repetition and loops in time. A moth might attack the same place of material weakness, a place of coming apart, again and again throughout the decades. A human might return, across time, to this fragment of moth-eaten skin with a needle and thread. The themes that run like thread through this

¹⁰ C. Rasmussen, ‘How Can a Museum Collect Dead Things and Remain Alive?’ *CIRCA: The Journal of Professional Historians*, 3 (2012), 63.

¹¹ See, for instance: Onciul, *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice*; D. Hicks, *The British Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

¹² M. Champion, ‘The History of Temporalities: An Introduction’, *Past and Present*, 243 (2019), 250.

¹³ F. Cameron, ‘Ecologizing Experimentations: A Method and Manifesto for Composing a Post Humanist Museum’ in F.R. Cameron and B. Neilson (eds.), *Climate Change and Museum Futures* (London: Routledge, 2014), 25, 24.

thesis – shifting time, porosity, and wholeness, precarity and handicraft – stitch the museum creature together. Like sutures, they can overlap and loop, or be unravelled and replaced.¹⁴

Few scholars have touched on the concept of bodily time within museums. An exception, the anthropologist Adrian Van Allen, describes the temporal processes bound to the production of museum bird specimens:

past and future both seemed very present: as my hands pinned out feathers which looked like a vignette out of one of the historic specimen preparation manuals, I experienced a link to the past and a continuity with histories of collecting...Various futures also seemed immanent through the potential uses for the tissue samples I was taking, coupled with the idea that I was making something that would be kept in perpetuity, tended to for unknown decades or centuries.¹⁵

Van Allen maintains the narrative that specimens are to be kept ‘in perpetuity.’ Whilst somewhat underplaying the (physically) morphing nature of museum creatures, she explains well how past, present, and future are ‘folded’ together within the production of a specimen, in her emphasis on historical tools and the inventories of contemporary preparation kits. Van Allen’s temporal thinking has inspired my idea of ‘patched’ time. In the second half of this chapter, I propose that museum skins underwent what I call physical and temporal ‘patching.’ A moth-eaten skin might be patched, and layers of matter and time overlaid. A patch is something new, but it is also a repetition.

Ideas of the ‘fullness’ of time strive to demonstrate how time meets, and overlaps.¹⁶ Lynda Nead, developing Michel Serres, explains how modernity can be imagined as ‘pleated or crumpled time, drawing together past, present, and future into constant and unexpected relations.’¹⁷ This extravagance of times might seem overwhelming. In response to this temporal excess, Paul Huebener argues that the ‘multiplicity of times experienced by all people, all ecosystems, and every grain of sand do not ultimately create a sense of irrevocable fragmentation. Instead, they show us a model of how we might understand a world of shared multitemporal existence.’¹⁸ I demonstrate how historical time and space infiltrated the

¹⁴ As I have discussed previously, Deborah Bird Rose conceptualises ‘knotted time’: D. Bird Rose, ‘Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time’, *Environmental Philosophy*, 9 (2012), 127-40.

¹⁵ A. Van Allen, ‘Folding Time: Practices of Preservation, Temporality and Care in Making Bird Specimens’ in R. Harrison and C. Sterling (eds.) *Deterritorializing the Future: Heritage in, of and after the Anthropocene* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2020), 129. See also: T. Malkogeorgou, ‘Folding, Stitching, Turning: Putting Conservation into Perspective’, *Journal of Material Culture*, 16 (2011), 441-55.

¹⁶ A. Fryxell, ‘Time and the Modern: Current Trends in the History of Modern Temporalities’, *Past and Present*, 243 (2019), 285-98. See: M. Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time: Michel Serres with Bruno Latour* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 59,60; L. Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 8,9.

¹⁷ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 7-8.

¹⁸ P. Huebener, *Nature’s Broken Clocks: Reimagining Time in the Face of the Environmental Crisis* (Regina, SASK: University of Regina Press, 2020), 29.

museum. These were patches of time: the past experiences, reminders, and remnants of previous *skin lives*. With the return of the temporalities of making, deteriorating, and hunting, taxidermy time was never straightforward.

I engage with four museum case studies – the National Museum of Wales, Bristol Museum, the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter, and Charles Peel’s museum in Oxford. I conducted research in the archives of the first three museums, and in the Bodleian Library, which houses the records of Peel’s museum. These museums contained – and still contain – some of the largest natural history collections in South West Britain, yet they have rarely been studied by scholars of taxidermy.¹⁹ My focus is later than in previous chapters; museum building, and improvement, were a thing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the National Museum of Wales did not open until 1912. Nevertheless, these museums fashioned their displays with older creatures. Peel’s specimens were first displayed in his museum in Oxford, and in 1919, the collection was transferred to the RAMM in Exeter. Taxidermy was still mobile. Museums were not an ending, or a place outside of time, and the patches of an animal’s past lives continued to overlay their museum present. The museum creature – and taxidermy time – were shaped by what had come before.

Space Makers

Museums were intimately connected to the other places in the taxidermy creature’s journey. Peel’s museum, which opened in Oxford on 6 July 1906, was something of a museum exhibition hybrid. For instance, like an exhibition, Peel’s museum was a commercial enterprise, and had a side project of fur salesmanship. However, as if to claw back a bit of respectability (to place emphasis on the museum as a place of natural history, and to cloak itself in a mantle of science and propriety), the museum guidebook claimed that ‘Mr C.V.A. Peel begs to inform visitors that he is in no way connected with the fur or hide trade. All skins, heads, and furs are duplicates, and are sold at low prices to make room for specimens new to the collection.’²⁰

¹⁹ Exceptions include Hannah Paddon’s discussion of Bristol Museum, and its mascot, Alfred the gorilla, and James Ryan’s writing on Gerald the Giraffe. It is the famous creatures – the mascots and those that were celebrity animals in life – that have been focussed on: H. Paddon, ‘Biological Objects and “Mascotism”: The Life and Times of Alfred the Gorilla’ in S. Alberti (ed.) *The Afterlives of Animals* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 134-150; J. Ryan, “Hunting with the Camera”, 205-222.

²⁰ Peel added that ‘all furs are guaranteed real. There are no imitation of ‘faked’ furs in the collection. People are warned to be on their guard against unscrupulous furriers who label their marten skins ‘sable’, ‘Canadian sable’, ‘sable hair’ etc.’ C. Peel, *Popular Guide to MR. C. V. A. Peel’s Exhibition of Big-Game Trophies and Museum of Natural History and Anthropology* (Guildford: Billing & Sons, Ltd, 1906), 39, 40.

Between 1918 and 1920, Peel closed his personal museum and moved his collection to Exeter. This was a large undertaking: a spatiotemporal relocation, and a recycling of animal display. The local newspaper described why Peel moved his collection:

Proceeding, Mr. Peel observed that when he lived at Oxford he was able to look after his collection of natural history specimens, but having moved his home to Devonshire – (applause) – the things in Oxford began to get neglected, and would have eventually gone to decay had he not had the good fortune to find a home for them in Exeter.²¹

These specimens absorbed time and attention. They were neglected by human hand, and they were also challenging in and of themselves. Peel's collection threatened to go over, to push beyond the limits of presentability. They still held within their dead bodies the ability to morph into something unacceptable. His specimens cried out for maintenance; to have humans close at hand.

On the founding of the RAMM, in 1868, much was written about the influence of the Great Exhibition on the museum's inception. This was partially due to the importance of Prince Albert to both projects, the first during his life, the latter through his death and memorialisation. A museum history and overview, published in 1899, suggested that:

The inception of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial building was, like most great schemes, a gradual process- so gradual, in fact, that it is not easy to say exactly what was the first step taken or by whom it was taken. The Great Exhibition of 1851 had given an impetus to the spread of Science and Art throughout the country and a feeling had been steadily growing in the minds of some of the leading citizens of Exeter that it was incumbent upon the City, as Capital of the County, to possess an institution which should be a great Educational Centre.²²

There was flow and reciprocity between such display places. As time passed, and the RAMM grew into these lofty expectations, the museum space began to fill up with objects and animals.

By the early twentieth century, when Peel bestowed his creatures to the RAMM, the museum simply did not have the space to house them. Also short on money, the RAMM placed most of the collection in an army hut, purchased for the task and known as the 'Peel hut', or sometimes 'the annexe'.²³ The transfer and installation was time consuming work, Channing Wills, the museum chairman, asked 'that a war vote of thanks be accorded the Curator (Mr. Rowley),

²¹ 'Peel Collection: Formal Opening of Exhibition at Exeter', *The Western Times*, 20 July 1920, 2.

²² A poem about Albert, and the Great Exhibition, was read at the museum opening: *The Albert Memorial College Museum and Library: A Brief Description* (Exeter: Printed by Exeter Council, 1899), 1; *Memorial Poem on the Opening of the Museum by James Bridger Goodrich* (Exeter: Devon & Somerset Steam Printing Co, 1868), 4.

²³ Like Peel's museum in Oxford, the RAMM found 'it necessary to impose charges for admission to the hut – 6d for adults, 3d for children, and special terms to school parties in charge of teachers—to cover the cost of an attendant and other expenses': 'Mr. Peel's Fine Collection in Exeter Museum: To Be Opened: To-Morrow', *Western Times*, 15 July 1920.

who had been tireless in his zeal in the erection of the annexe, and in the arrangements for the transit and grouping of specimens, the latter of which had been done with true artistic skill.’²⁴ Described as ‘temporary’ and tacked onto the back of the museum, the space spoke of transience and impermanence.²⁵ A hut seems a stop off point – an interim resting place – rather than a home. It jutted out awkwardly from the graceful and carefully designed museum perimeter. Nevertheless, in 1920 the RAMM opened the hut with much fanfare. One newspaper proclaimed that the space represented a ‘grander’ time for the museum. However, for the time being, the grander animal specimens were not to be housed within the hut, but within the original museum building. The *Western Times* suggested that, faced with the ‘housing difficulty’, Mr Rowley, the natural history curator, had resorted to ‘skilful overcrowding’ on the ground floor, and made room for a giraffe, an elephant, a hippopotamus, and a rhinoceros.²⁶

It is easy to imagine museums as solid places. Their Victorian walls are sturdy: they work to protect, to hold, to keep things both in and out. Yet, taxidermy creatures pushed at these boundaries. Their bodies could be space shapers, and makers of museum time. The elephant was nicknamed Jumbo, an ode to the famous Victorian creature of the same name. The *Western Times* reported that ‘in order to get this and other specimens into the Museum a large window and stonework had to be removed from the side of the building abutting on Paul-street.’²⁷ This taxidermy specimen was obstinately elephantine, as it travelled through the museum’s outer skin-wall. For taxidermy, a museum building could be made porous.

The giraffe was originally placed ‘lying on its side’, as the museum ceiling was ‘not sufficiently lofty to enable the animal to be stood upright.’²⁸ This was the Giraffe that would become Gerald – the current mascot of the RAMM. At first, the giraffe’s body was moulded to fit fixed museum space. The jarring sight of a recumbent giraffe (a most unnatural pose for an ungulate) pushed the museum committee into action. To accommodate its body, one of the ceiling lights was raised, enabling the dead creature – all eighteen feet of towering leg and neck – to stand tall.²⁹ The museum described this, in the interview with the *Western Times*, as giving ‘him headroom.’ Roles were reversed, as the giraffe began to shape the time and space of the museum from within.

²⁴ ‘Peel Collection: Formal Opening of Exhibition at Exeter’, *Western Times*, 20 July 1920, 2.

²⁵ ‘Financial Difficulties of the Exeter R.A.M’, *Western Times*, 13 May 1919, 5.

²⁶ ‘Mr. Peel’s Fine Collection in Exeter Museum: To Be Opened: To-Morrow’, *Western Times*, 15 July 1920.

²⁷ ‘Big Game in Exeter: Hunter’s Notable Gift to the City - Museum Specimens Arrive’, *Western Times*, 10 February 1920, 5.

²⁸ ‘Big Game in Exeter’, *Western Times*, 5.

²⁹ ‘Mr. Peel’s Fine Collection in Exeter Museum: To be opened: To-Morrow’, *Western Times*, 15 July 1920; ‘Big Game in Exeter: Hunter’s Notable gift to the city- Museum Specimens Arrive’, *Western Times*, 10 February 1920, 5.

David Gange argues that time should never be considered in isolation from space.³⁰ In this example, even a building can be made flexible, and space grew up around taxidermy animals. Later, these large creatures travelled once again, to re-join the animal bodies in the Peel hut. In time, the annexe was assigned to other uses – it was taken over by the art department. However, after Peel’s death, his wife, Ethel, donated further specimens to the museum: ‘the major part of the Peel Collection of great game and other animals, which was closed to the public some years ago, has now been renovated and is again accessible to visitors. A number of new trophies came to the Museum after Mr. Peel’s death, so that the collection has been considerable enlarged of late.’³¹ These creatures were subsumed into the original collection, and in 1933 the Peel hut was rolled out to the public once more. The museum’s rhythm was variable, and, amongst Peel’s animals, time slowed and then gained speed.

Meeting the Animal

As space makers and shapers, these creatures worked on different sensory levels. In 1820, in *Taxidermy*, Sarah Bowdich Lee commented on the ‘sickly’ smell of many natural history museums.³² This was caused, she argued, by inadequate preservative techniques, leading to a quickening of the body. If successfully dried, skins have a different smell. Must, moth, mould. They smell of old age, and like a wardrobe full of fur coats. Sometimes, I have detected a lingering edge of something chemical. However, the smell of taxidermy is rarely – if ever – commented on in Victorian and turn of the twentieth century sources. Lee offers us a rare, faint whiff of the early Victorian museum. Similarly absent are the sounds: the echo of cavernous halls, the clip of shoes on stone, the muffling of audio as it is trapped by thick materials and skins.

Visiting a natural history museum is an overwhelmingly visual experience. In 1903, Bristol Museum reported the ‘regret’ they felt that ‘for want of space, more of the treasures of the museum could not be exhibited.’³³ Instead, the creatures were residing in storerooms. In 1905, Bristol therefore constructed an elaborate extension, designed to house natural history specimens (see figure 6.2.). Space was literally made for taxidermy, and the outer building was carved with engravings of the animal kingdom, to reflect what lay inside. In 1906, the museum chairman described how, prior to the extension, ‘the cases and drawers were overfull, and the provision of store cabinets was found only to increase the evil by keeping out of sight things

³⁰ D. Gange, ‘Time, Space and Islands: Why Geographers Drive the Temporal Agenda’, *Past and Present*, 243 (2019), 299-312.

³¹ ‘Something to be Seen in Exeter Museum’, *Express and Echo*, 15 April 1933.

³² S. Bowdich Lee, *Taxidermy: Or, the Art of Collecting, Preparing, and Mounting Objects of Natural History. For the Use of Museums and Travellers*. (Sixth Edition) (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), 223.

³³ *Bristol Museum Annual Report* (Bristol: Bristol Museum, 1903), Bristol Museum, Fine Art Archive, 38.

that should be seen by the public.’³⁴ It was the seeing of creatures that was emphasised; knowing the animal by eye. On entering a museum, the visitor is met with a spectrum of colour, from the brilliant hummingbirds to the muddy grey arch of the elephant’s back. For the visitor, there is something of a sensory time lag. Eventually, however, the other senses do begin to catch up, and I argue that there is a hidden tactility to museum mounts.

In the late nineteenth century, museums began to close some specimens off from the public. Sheets of glass, framed by heavy wooden cabinets, were erected around museum objects.³⁵ This move was partly due to the swift rise of the public museum and the new accessibility of museum spaces. After Bristol Museum was made public in 1894, the *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* described how:

Amongst the visitors during the holiday season have been a large number of street urchins who seem to greatly appreciate the “free gratis” system. They go in small bands- probably on the principle that there is safety in numbers- and appear much interested in the large number of stuffed animals and birds...³⁶

The cultural historian Constance Classen has suggested that there was a class element to the enclosure of specimens – patronising and paternalistic museum committees did not trust working class hands and intentions.³⁷ Oily fingers and fur could degrade fur and feathers, and taxidermy cries out to be touched.³⁸ Poorly preserved creatures might reveal their fragility if handled; an article in *The Field* suggested that, with regards to a museum’s arsenic dosed skins ‘the fur or feathers would drop out at the slightest touch.’³⁹ Vibrations – caused by music, machinery, or the movement of human bodies – can also cause creatures to split.⁴⁰ Putting a dead thing in a box does not necessarily protect it from sensation. Unboxed specimens would often be cloaked in warnings and threats and placed near ubiquitous ‘do not touch’ signs. Humans fought to protect animal bodies from change. However, I argue that, even in aging, museum animals were in a state of flux.

³⁴ W. Barker, *The Bristol Museum and Art Gallery: The Development of the Institution during a Hundred and Thirty-Four Years, 1772-1906* (Bristol: Bristol Museum, 1906), 60.

³⁵ See: *Bristol Museum Annual Report* (1898), 7; *Bristol Museum Annual Report* (1905), 16.

³⁶ ‘The Talk of Bristol’, *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 29 March 1894.

³⁷ C. Classen, ‘Museum Manners: The Sensory Life of the Early Museum’, *Journal of Social History*, 40 (2007), 895-914.

³⁸ See: F. Candlin, ‘Rehabilitating Unauthorised Touch or Why Museum Visitors Touch the Exhibits’, *The Senses and Society*, 12 (2017), 251–266; D. Howes, ‘Introduction to Sensory Museology’, *The Senses and Society*, 9 (2014), 259–267.

³⁹ ‘Preserving Bird Skins Without Arsenic’, *The Field*, 31 January 1863.

⁴⁰ ‘This can cause damage within only a few years of preservation and causes the skin to become very brittle and will either split or break into pieces if the specimen is touched or vibrated’: J. A. Dickinson ‘Taxidermy’ in M. Kite and R. Thomson (eds.) *Conservation of Leather and Related Material* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, Elsevier, 2006), 132.



Figure 6.2: Architectural Plans, c.1905. Bristol Museum Fine Art Archive.

Contrary to the norm, most of Peel's creatures – in both his museum in Oxford and the RAMM – inhabited open displays. On the launch of the Peel hut in 1920, an article in the *Western Times* commented on the handy interactions between a hippo and a child:

The hippopotamus from Lake Baringo, East Africa, is a fearsome-looking creature, and, possibly, it would be as well if a finger-trap were placed at the back of his great open mouth, for it is said that more than one youngster has sought to prove his pluck by thrusting his hand in as far as it would go. That, of course, was when the attendant was round the corner.⁴¹

⁴¹ 'Mr. Peel's Fine Collection in Exeter Museum: To Be Opened: To-Morrow', *Western Times*, 15 July. 1920.

The flesh of the creature's mouth had been scooped out, and the tongue and gums replaced with sculpted parts, painted a bubblegum pink and glazed with a saliva-like coating. In this example, the drama of reaching a hand into the mouth of something that looks alive – half anticipating a clamping down and a searing pain – is coupled with the danger of disobedience, and the potential of a telling off. For a child, this was closer than they would ever get to a living hippo; the creature had been made approachable in death, touchable but not quite tame (see figure 6.3).



Figure 6.3: The Peel Hut, date unknown. RAMM Natural History Archive.

I have used this example to show that taxidermy, on occasion, met with visitors. However, when humans do get to feel taxidermy, it is often a disappointment. Or at least, this has often been my experience. Victorian mounts can feel lumpy and hard; they feel exactly like what they are made of – like compressed wadding and wire. They are firm and cold. There is a disconnect between the feeling in my head – a composite of imagination, and past experiences of stroking living skin– and the reality. Taxidermy does not respond to your hand as an animal would. Modern museums are increasingly bringing touch back. For example, the Oxford Museum of Natural History has strokable taxidermy specimens on rotation. I suspect, though, that a prevention of touch, and the separation of animal and human by glass, could paradoxically aid the museum's creation of a sense of animality.

There was nevertheless a tactility to the closed-off skin. Classen argues that 'most tactile sensations reach us indirectly, through the eyes. Our physical environment feels ineluctably tactile even though we touch only a small part of it. Reddish fluffy surfaces are warm, light-

blue glittering ones cool.’⁴² Martijn Stevens has described a process of affective browsing of museum objects.⁴³ Whilst he refers to the digital presence of museum objects – the online museum – his concept of ‘haptic looking’ is applicable to encased specimens. What humans see in a skin is texture as well as colour, and texture is always tactile. Plush fur, or knobbly scales, are still somewhat knowable, feelable, even if sequestered behind glass. Whether through illicit, stolen, touches, or through tactile observation, I have shown how taxidermy remained in contact with visitors.

Bodies in Time

Even closed off skins were regularly physically touched. Natural history curators and taxidermists, and, later, conservators, were all authorised to touch specimens. The animal skin remained the medium through which the animal object met with the human body. In this period in Britain – the turn of the twentieth century – natural history curators were fashioned as experts on the specimens in their collections, and these collections were positioned as integral to scientific development, research, and education.⁴⁴

The role of natural history curator developed and became more specialised around the turn of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, this role remained highly dependent on the landscape of individual institutions. Curatorship was fluid. Sometimes natural history curators were intimately involved in the wider taxidermy process of sourcing, procurement, and making. They might work closely with a specific local taxidermist and suggest measurements and poses. For example, in 1927, Colin Matheson, from the Zoological department of the National Museum of Wales, explained to Gerrard and Sons that they only required the skin of a red deer, not a full mount. ‘[We] wish our own taxidermist to do the modelling and mounting as the animal is to be used as one of a group and I want it set up in a particular attitude, which could be done, I think, only by someone on the spot who is familiar with the dimensions of the case and of the other animals to be placed in it.’⁴⁵ The body was to be shaped in situ, by in-house taxidermists. It was to be fitted to space, and to other animal specimens.

In 1898, the Bristol Museum appointed a new natural history curator, Herbert Bolton. The museum committee explained that they hired Bolton, who had experience at the Manchester

⁴² C. Classen, *The Book of Touch* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 76.

⁴³ M. Stevens, ‘Touched from a Distance: The Practice of Affective Browsing’, In C. Van Den Akker and S. Legêne (eds.) *Museums in a Digital Culture* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 13–30.

⁴⁴ See: P. Schorch and C. McCarthy (eds.), *Curatopia: Museums and the Future of Curatorship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); S. Dudley, *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010); V. Golding and W. Modest (eds.), *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration* (London: Berg Publishers, 2013).

⁴⁵ Letter from Matheson to Gerrard, 2 April 1927, National Museum Cardiff, Natural History Archive.

Museum, for his ‘scientific training’ and his ‘experience in museum management.’⁴⁶ Bolton tried to impose a new time of order and completeness on Bristol’s taxidermy collection. He described that ‘a clearance of imperfect specimens of birds has now been effected.’⁴⁷ Some of the holeyest, the most bizarre, and the unabashedly rotting creatures were disposed of.⁴⁸ Their time was up.

Creatures were brought in as replacements, and the specimens that remained were cleaned, coloured, and fluffed. In 1905, the Swayne collection of big game heads (Major Swayne was one of the hunters introduced in Chapter 1, ‘Skinning’) was moved around the building; the head-skins were fading, fast, under the action of direct sunlight.⁴⁹ Bolton, who by 1911 held positions both as the curator of natural history at Bristol Museum, and museum director, tried to control these animals in time and body.⁵⁰ His actions were powered on by a dedication to new ideas and fresh specimens, used to bolster a commitment to an idealisation of (Western) human progress. Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell argue, with regards to heritage, that such embodied responses are always rooted in emotion.⁵¹ Indeed, following an interview with Bolton, the *Bristol Mercury* linked the curator’s aspirations and actions with a sense of anxiety. ‘The curator, Mr Bolton, is anxious to continue this improvement until the museum shall rank second to none in the provinces.’⁵²

A museum had to reflect modern developments in science, technology, and natural history. On its founding, an outline of the history and aims of the RAMM proclaimed that:

Some of the subjects or collections have naturally a more immediate popular appeal than others, either because they are intrinsically more arresting and spectacular, or because they are linked more closely with previous knowledge. In others the exhibition plan must attempt to ensure that the connection between previous knowledge or experience and the new facts and ideas offered is readily grasped, so that achievement of understanding may inspire the wish for further progress in the pursuit of knowledge. It must offer the visitor the opportunity of study at ease, of recreation with meditation; and provide the means of satisfying an innate but often un-

⁴⁶ *Bristol Museum Annual Report* (1898), 6

⁴⁷ *Bristol Museum Annual Report* (1898), 8.

⁴⁸ Changes were made inside and out. In Exeter, the museum reported that: ‘the Mayor remarked that one could foresee the time when the entire income of the Museum and library would be absorbed in structural repairs’: ‘Financial Difficulties of the Exeter R.A.M’, *Western Times*, 13 May 1919, 5.

⁴⁹ *Bristol Museum Annual Report* (1905); *Bristol Museum Annual Report* (1903), 22.

⁵⁰ For more on museums, curatorship, and control, see: T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995).

⁵¹ L. Smith and G. Campbell, ‘The Elephant in the Room: Heritage, Affect, and Emotion’ in W. Logan, M. Nic Craith and U. Kockel (eds.) *A Companion to Heritage Studies* (Oxford: Wiley and Blackwell, 2016), 443-60. See also: L. Smith, G. Campbell and M. Wetherell, *Emotion, Affective Practices and the Past in the Present* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

⁵² ‘The Talk of Bristol’, *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 28 August 1899.

expressed desire for some mental stimulus or outlet beyond the humdrum of daily experience.⁵³

The RAMM and Bolton both helped construct and maintain an idea of museological linearity. On the donation of Peel's collection, Frederick Rowley, the natural history curator at the RAMM, similarly reported that if they accepted Peel's offer 'it will be necessary to take a step forward, and I feel very strongly that this decision which has to be made is bound to exercise a very far-reaching influence upon the development of the museum in after years.'⁵⁴ For Rowley, the animal collection would enable the RAMM to take a step forward in time.

Museum space and animal object were envisioned as working together for the (human) future, by supporting the dissemination of new knowledge. Ideas were framed with and around animal bodies. Creationism, and a focus on taxonomic charts, gave way to evolution, and, later, ecological framings.⁵⁵ Within the above quotation from the RAMM – in language such as 'mental stimulus or outlet' – there are clear allusions to the idea of rational recreation.⁵⁶ Animal bodies were imagined as helpers in the betterment of the working classes; helping to keep them on the straight and narrow. Deborah Bird Rose suggests that humans imagine that the past is filled up, and the future is empty time waiting to be filled.⁵⁷ Museums were 'anxious' to fill this forward-time with orderly animal objects.

To try to reach this goal, the Enlightenment march forward was pared with the language of stilling. The controlled animal would be a prop for telling these new stories; and they also physically embodied the advancement of civilisation. The taxidermist William Swainson described how the 'the art of taxidermy, which teaches the various processes by which the form and substance of animals may be preserved from decay, and rendered subservient to the studies of the naturalist in his closet.'⁵⁸ Rachel Poliquin argues that 'taxidermy exists because of life's inevitable trudge towards dissolution. Taxidermy wants to stop time. To keep life.'⁵⁹

⁵³ *Royal Albert Memorial Museum Exeter: An Outline of the History, Aims and Collections*, RAMM Archive.

⁵⁴ F. Rowley, *Royal Albert Memorial Museum: Report on the Accommodation Needed for the Peel Collection of Big Game Animals, and Our Future Outlook*, 27 February 1918, RAMM Archive.

⁵⁵ See, for instance: *History and Description of the RAMM*, (Second Edition), (Exeter: 1879); *Bristol Museum Annual Report* (1872), 6-7.

⁵⁶ This concept was described, by Peter Bailey in the late 1970s, as the middle-class desire to promote 'self-improvement' and education in the working-classes, as a means of social control: P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1886* (London: Methuen, 1987).

⁵⁷ D. Bird Rose, 'Reflections on the Zone of the Incomplete' in J. Radin and E. Kowal (eds.) *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 145-56.

⁵⁸ W. Swainson, *Taxidermy: with the Biographies of Zoologists* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1840), 1.

⁵⁹ R. Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 6.

Contrary to Poliquin, I argue that this is simply what taxidermists, natural history curators, and other humans, wanted. Taxidermy easily fell into other ways of being. Far from ‘subservient’, it was these dead creatures that caused human bodies to expend a great deal of energy, time, anxiety, and muscle power. They could be nuisance-makers. Despite the intensive labour of the curatorial team, animal skins were always also touched by insects; whole communities of organisms lived within the museum ecosystem. Light damage, moulds and fungal growth could also creep in and around specimens. The themes that hold my thesis together – time, precarity, handling, and the tension between porosity and wholeness – continued to play out in museum space.

By aging and fading, taxidermy also moved forward in time; a distorted reflection of the ‘step forward’ that Western humanity idealised. Champion argues that ‘temporalities are to time what materialities are to matter: a blurring of what might seem determined, an entangling of time with action, a refusal of subject-object divisions.’⁶⁰ I believe that time should always be considered in relation to matter. When animal bodies were not always easily controlled, they demonstrated that humans had not mastered the temporalities of death. Their body clocks were still ticking.⁶¹ The thread-like conception of progress – for which their bodies were employed – twisted and became tangled. Montagu Browne, discussing Leicester Museum, where he was lead curator and taxidermist, offers a striking insight into the bodily toll that taxidermy specimens might take on museum workers:

Since 1884 the whole of the zoological collections in the Leicester Museum have been remodelled, and, in taking down the old specimens and dusting them out, the men were constantly affected with feverish colds, sore throats, and other symptoms of arsenical poisoning, and much milk was drunk by the doctor’s orders. Some hundreds of birds – old specimens undoubtedly “cured” with arsenic – were badly “moth-eaten” and infested with larvae. All the groups executed by various London and provincial taxidermists, and certainly “cured” by some arsenical preparation, were burned.⁶²

Through their interactions with poison, and burrowing insects, these bodies were out of control. This quotation reveals how taxidermy time, within museums, was still set by the skin and its engagements with lively surroundings. These creatures had spent a great deal of time in Leicester Museum, but they had not become ‘subservient’ with old age. Their bodies infected human bodies and spaces. Whilst, to some extent, their burning seems callous, in going bad – and by being bad to start with, due to their blanket of arsenic – these creatures refrained from doing what a museum specimen was supposed to do. They made life for humans very difficult.

⁶⁰ Champion, ‘The History of Temporalities’, 247.

⁶¹ For more on the imagination of clocks – human and non-human – see: Huebener, *Nature’s Broken Clocks*.

⁶² M. Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling*, (London: A. and C. Black, 1896), 67.

In the 1930's, Leeds Museum was occupied by similarly unconvincing taxidermy creatures. Ebony Andrews argues that 'the criticism levelled at the supposedly substandard appearance of the taxidermy mounts at LCM in the 1930s threatened to destabilise the authority of the objects as species representatives, and more broadly, the authority and therefore scientific credibility of the Museum itself.'⁶³ The museum, as a seat of education and knowledge, was unsettled and disrupted. It was not just criticism – grounded in very human ideas about science and respectability – that destabilised museums. It was the deteriorating, forwards-rush of specimens themselves. Their animal appearance was unconvincing, they did not look like themselves, and yet such changes partly depended on a latent animality – on an organic deadness. I have shown how animal skins continued to interact with other bodies and with space. They were touched by humans who desired to use their skins for telling stories; tales that reflected well on civilisation. However, specimens often continued to set their own times, tales, and futures.

Patching Time and Skins

Museum taxidermy was not only occupied by the quickening of time. I argue that skin-creatures continued to be visited by elements of their past (skin) lives, and times of return and repetition. To try to correct the corporeal changes that were brought about by time, and to restabilise specimen and space, human hands continued to physically shape animal skins. In 1899, under Bolton, Bristol Museum returned to their gorilla specimen:

the old gorilla, which was in a neglected state, has been touched up and thoroughly cleaned, and in a new case he will be looking towards the spectator in the centre of the front window, and will be seated upon a rock and leaning against the trunk of a tree, by which he will be holding on.⁶⁴

This old skin was 'touched up', made clean and presentable and more believably lively. His sorry state had left an impression on the curator; he drew Bolton back to him. Sian Jones explains that 'we need a means to understand the powerful, almost primordial, discourses that are invoked by the authenticity or 'aura' of old things.'⁶⁵ Here, the liveliness of the aging process, coupled with the unmet potential of the skin-creature, was transposed into the action of the human. The gorilla was *returned to* after a period of neglect. Bolton attempted to bring

⁶³ E. L. Andrews, 'Interpreting Nature: Shifts in the Presentation and Display of Taxidermy in Contemporary Museums in Northern England', Online PhD thesis: <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/6637/1/Thesis%20Hard%20Copy%20with%20Figures%2015-05-14.pdf> [Accessed 13/10/2020] 73. See also: T. Besterman, 'Disposals from Museum Collections Ethics and Practicalities', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 11 (1992), 29-44.

⁶⁴ 'August Bank Holiday', *Bristol Mercury*, 5 August 1899, 3.

⁶⁵ S. Jones, 'Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves: Beyond the Deconstruction of Authenticity', *Journal of Material Culture*, 15 (2010), 182-3. See also: S. Kenderdine, and A. Yip, 'The Proliferation of Aura: Facsimiles, Authenticity and Digital Objects', in K. Drotner, V. Dziekan, R. Parry and K. Christian Schrøder (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Museums, Media and Communication* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 274-89.

him back to a previously held state. He wanted the gorilla to be returned. This is an obsession with a state I think of as early death: when an animal supposedly looked freshly dead and temporally close to life. The forward momentum of human progress, hinged on (and was sometimes undermined by) temporal repetitions.

In addition to cleaning, museums sometimes went a step further: skins might be revisited by taxidermists. I argue that this was a return of the taxidermy present. Taxidermists did not only stay bound to their workshops; in 1933, Gerrard and Sons brought their studio space to the RAMM, to attend to Peel's collection, as the Peel hut was prepared for its reopening after the addition of new specimens from Ethel Peel. They had written ahead to ask: 'if you know of any material for repairs, either grass or moss, or skins that ought to be brought down, will you please let us know.'⁶⁶ This was the studio made mobile, an infiltration of workshop on museum space. An area of the museum was set aside for the taxidermist, Mr Cook, to work in, cordoned off from the public.

It was Gerrard and Sons who had originally taxidermied Peel's collection, so this was a revisit, a circling. The museum had requested:

With regard to necessary materials, the principal trouble I think, is the cracking of the skins necessitating filling in and colouring, but I think it will be desirable to send some fresh grasses and leaves for the lion, tiger and other groups, as the old material looks faded and shabby...We shall want a fresh fall of snow for the polar bears and reindeer, and the bears particularly will need a thoroughly good clean up.⁶⁷

These creatures had changed over time, they had faded and broken open. The taxidermist shampooed the polar bears – with a 'good soap-sud making soap' – and added colour to their tired coats. Edward Gerrard and the natural history curator, Frederick Rowley, exchanged letters about the progress: 'we are glad to learn that Mr. Cook is giving you satisfaction. I know that he will at any rate do his best, as he is very painstaking, - so much so that at times he appears to be rather slow, but he does not scamp his work, nor cover up faults just because they are troublesome.'⁶⁸ This return to the taxidermy present was viewed as productive but unhurried.

In addition to washing, and the sewing up of smaller holes, an antelope required patching by Mr Cook. 'As regards patching specimens, there is a mounted specimen of Klipspringer which could do with some renovation in this direction if you have any pieces of skin available.'⁶⁹ Patching is a replication of time and bodies past. A patch is new material that allows the

⁶⁶ Letter from Gerrard to Rowley, 26 January 1933, RAMM Archive.

⁶⁷ Letter from Rowley to Gerrard, 2 February 1933, RAMM Archive.

⁶⁸ Letter from Gerrard to Rowley, 14 March 1933, RAMM Archive.

⁶⁹ Letter from Rowley to Gerrard, 2 February 1933, RAMM Archive.

continuation of a semblance of wholeness. I argue that patching is useful for thinking, not only about the material repair of animal bodies, but the layering of different times in the museum.

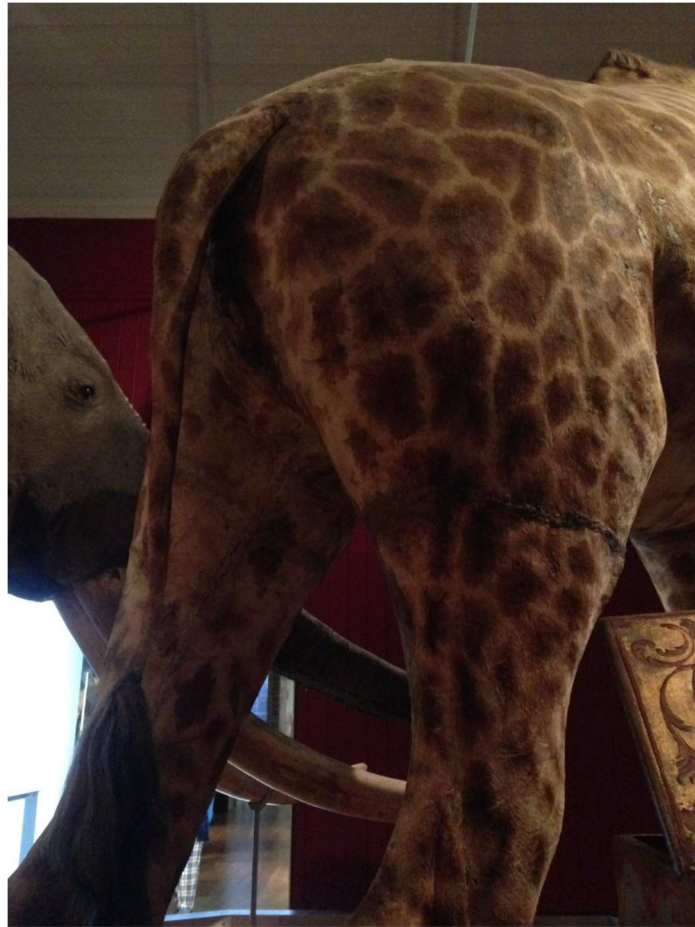


Figure 6.4: The backside of Gerald the Giraffe, Author's Photograph (2018).

In a recent guide to conservation, J. A. Dickinson describes how taxidermic patches are produced with 'bits of skin from the same species' and it is 'always useful to have a collection of aged skin from unwanted specimens.'⁷⁰ The patch comes from another body (another time), and then its past identity is stitched into a new place. A patch works to disguise a place of aging, but it is also where such processes are most noticeable. Dickinson adds that 'unlike furriers, taxidermists have never dyed skin so most old mounts have faded in various degrees, often unevenly, which makes matching in far from easy.' As I explored in Chapter 2, 'Moving', Gerald the giraffe was originally stitched together from six different bodily segments. Over the years, curators at the RAMM have also used cow hide to patch up his tail.⁷¹ He is now giraffe skin, and cow. His entire body is a patchwork, and the seams are increasingly visible through

⁷⁰ Dickinson, 'Taxidermy' in Kite and Thomson (eds.) *Conservation of Leather and Related Material*, 134.

⁷¹ Conversation with Holly Morgenroth, Collections Officer at the RAMM, January 2018.

his age-thinning fur (see figure 6.4). These patches are the traces of his journey to and within the museum.

I argue that skins were sites of both physical and temporal patching. A repair is always about trying to bring the creature back to a previously held state. On occasion, taxidermists were employed to completely unmake the animal mount, and then piece the creature back together. This was known as remounting. In 1899, the Bristol Museum removed its degrading taxidermy lions from display and had them cleaned and remounted. These lions had been occupants of Bristol Zoo, and they were well-known to Bristolians. Some had originally been created by the previous curator, Mr Crocker, and they were literally stuffed by hand.⁷²

Their mounts were taken down and treated at the museum, and then sent to the Brazenor brothers' studio in Brighton to be put back together. The *Bristol Mercury* described the rehabilitation process, for which the Mayor of Bristol paid:

The three lions, Hannibal, Ajax, and General, and the lioness and her cubs were taken down, and entirely remounted. The whole of the skins, which were in a frightfully dirty condition, and moth eaten, were washed and cleaned and thoroughly preserved. Hannibal was given new handpainted glass eyes, and the cubs were also provided with eyes – these organs having been absent before.⁷³

The animal skins were recycled. The museum report described how 'by dealing with valuable specimens in a thorough manner they have really saved the skins from destruction, as extensive injury had already been done.'⁷⁴ This language suggests return and repetition, as well as transformation. The cubs were given 'new' glass eye 'organs': simultaneously a novelty, and an echo of the living eye. Unstitching the mount was like a second skinning of the body. Frequently dipping into its store reserves to find skins to repurpose – to be sent back to the taxidermist's studio – Bristol Museum attempted to return the creatures to a state of stasis that never was, and never could be. I propose that, through remounting, Bolton patched over time. He overlaid the previous attempt at taxidermy with new interpretations of the animal's past life.

The anthropologist Titika Malkogeorgou explains how, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, conservators worked across time on a mantua: an eighteenth-century women's dress.⁷⁵ Every repair attempted to undo the work of previous repairers; to re-create an idealised original state. Every conservator looked to the object, peered under stitching and hems and folds, to

⁷² 'Local News', *Bristol Mercury*, 31 May 1878, 5.

⁷³ 'The Talk of Bristol', *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 1 April 1899, 4. For more on this lion display see the museum's 'Annual Reports' (Bristol: 1900, 1906), 6, 16; and 'Museums: Their Modern Development. Lecture by Mr Herbert Bolton', *Western Daily Press*, 26 May 1899, 3.

⁷⁴ 'The Talk of Bristol', 1 April 1899, 4.

⁷⁵ T. Malkogeorgou, 'Folding, Stitching, Turning', 441-55.

try to read its genuine form. The material ‘guided’ the recreation. The conservator believed that a greater level of authenticity – of return – was possible. They believed, or hoped, that they would be the person to discover it, as Malkogeorgou details, ‘conservation was based on the idea of tracing the original stitching and thread to ascertain the mantua’s original shape – just as had been done in the previous interventions.’ Yet with each repair, more time had passed since the object first came into being.

What authenticity meant depended on the hands and beliefs of each maker, and their interpretation of the material. In taxidermy, the patching of temporalities was even more complicated. The ideal for repair was not the first mount, but the living animal. The taxidermy ideal may never have been met with that dead skin before. The conservator or taxidermist must hold these different states – living creature, and past and future taxidermy – in mind as they worked. These different layers of time were stitched into the specimen: life, creation, repair, and projection. Yet despite the best efforts of humans, taxidermy can never be said to be finished, as it may always be returned to.

In 1899, in a public lecture in Bristol, Bolton described the relationship between animal remains, the natural history curator and the taxidermist – and how he judged whether the potential of his repurposed lions had been achieved. This lecture was reported in the *Western Daily Press*:

A taxidermist must be an artist, and must know how the skin would behave when stripped from the body. Yet the task of a curator had not ended when he had secured a first-class taxidermist; the curator must check him, and not merely from books, but also from nature as well. In this latter connection he had lately been studying the lions in the Zoo – they were poked up for him, and were most obliging animals - (laughter) - and he was pleased to say this: so far their newly-mounted lions had stood the test of comparison remarkably well.⁷⁶

Bolton saw it as his role – the natural history curator’s role – to police the taxidermist; to judge ‘him’ by his animal recreations. Bolton visited the lions in Bristol Zoo to study the rippling movements of the living animal, creatures with muscle, and sinew beneath their skins. This was another return. It was a return by Bolton to the living lion body, the ideal original state for taxidermy. It was also a return to his dead lions’ place of life. Jones argues that ‘authenticity haunts the practices of preservation, curation.’⁷⁷ Here, authenticity was measured against the shadow presence of the once-living lions, Bolton’s memory of their previous inadequate taxidermy form, and the energy of the zoo lions.⁷⁸ These were the different layers of time – the

⁷⁶ ‘Museums’, *Western Daily Press*, 26 May 1899, 3.

⁷⁷ Jones, ‘Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves’, 180.

⁷⁸ For more on the haunting tendencies of places and experiences, and ‘layers of time’, see A. Oram, ‘Going on An Outing: The Historic House and Queer Public History’, *Rethinking History*, 15 (2011), 189-207.

temporal patches – that shaped Bolton’s assessment of his taxidermy lions in the here and now.

Layered Time and Space

A creature’s past, in life and death, was stitched into the mount, and sometimes patched over. I also discovered elements of repeat and pastness in descriptions of museum display. The skin’s journey to the museum, the journey of this thesis, might be reproduced around the mount, as displayed. Historians argue that animals in natural history museums were positioned to represent their species as a collective. Steven Conn suggests that:

objects that constituted natural history were collected, organized, and displayed precisely because they were representative rather than singular. Their value came not because they were removed from the dynamic commodity sphere and put into the static sphere of museum but because of their typicality, because one such specimen, for the purposes of the museum, was largely indistinguishable from another.⁷⁹

This is an oversimplification, and there are numerous exceptions, including the significant supply of animals from zoos and menageries – many of whom were known to visitors as individuals, as well as representatives of their species.

This is something I know, personally. In Bristol Museum resides a famous taxidermy gorilla known as Alfred. Alfred has been the subject of academic scholarship; Hannah Paddon designates him as Bristol Museum’s ‘mascot.’⁸⁰ He was also famous in life, as a resident of Bristol Zoo.⁸¹ It was in the zoo, in the 1930s, that my great-grandmother encountered Alfred. As a servant in a large house in the Clifton area, one of her roles was to entertain the family’s children. According to family legend, my great-grandmother, the children, Alfred’s keeper, and Alfred himself, engaged in walks around the zoo gardens, something made possible by the household’s connections with the zoo director. Many Bristolians similarly have, or feel they have, a personal connection to Alfred. Many museum creatures, across Britain, came from captive lives, and Alfred is therefore not alone in his individuality.

Unusually, Peel cloaked his wild specimens with individuality. Peel’s museum in Oxford – from its opening in 1906 – was part personal trophy display and part serious natural history museum. It was both a place of science, and a setting for the hunter to wallow in memory and

⁷⁹ S. Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 49; Zoe Hughes similarly argues that: ‘we encounter museum-objects and trophies as types, sometimes abstractions, but never as individuals’: Z. Hughes, ‘Performing Taxidermy or the De-and Reconstruction of Animal Faces in Service of Animal Futures’, *Configurations*, 27 (2019), 175.

⁸⁰ Paddon, ‘Biological Objects and “Mascotism”’, in Alberti (ed.) *The Afterlives of Animals*, 134-50.

⁸¹ See: A. Flack, *The Wild Within: Histories of a Landmark British Zoo* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 43.

engage in storytelling.⁸² Peel's creatures had a past, and their skins continued to be visited by elements of this pastness. On the wall was a 'tree lizard.' There are clear allusions to the trophy room: the animal is pinned and objectified, it has become a wall ornament.

But the reader is also told, in the museum guide written by Peel, that this lizard 'lived in a thorn-tree under which my tent was pitched. I stood it for two nights, but expecting it might visit the interior of my tent for warmth at night, I thought it expedient to secure it beforehand with a charge of shot!'⁸³ In this description, the death of the animal is present, and so is a glimmer of its lived experience. The layers of time that made-up the animal were never discrete. In life this lizard was a thorn-tree dweller, a potential tent creeper, and a botherer of humans. This lizard had threatened to invade the canvas sanctity of Peel's tent, a mobile fragment of civilisation in the wild places, so it was killed and carried to Oxford.

If this lizard had seeing eyes (if they had not been replaced with painted rounds of glass), it would be able to peer across the museum and catch sight of this very tent (see figure 6.5). Peel recreated his East African campsite within Oxford: a return of hunting time.

Around the tent are strewn the cooking-pots—both native and European – tent-pegs, axes, a fly-whisk made from the tail of a zebra, Somali saddle and bridle, canvas water-buckets and an india-rubber bath (a tin bath being a very awkward thing to pack on a man's head or a camel's back). Two camels are represented kneeling to receive their burdens and to show the method of roping on the loads.⁸⁴

This was spatiotemporal replication. Taxidermied camels, pots and pans, zebra tail fly swats, elephant feet. The ephemera of the Somali hunting ground were patched onto Peel's Oxford museum. They were later erected, once again, in Exeter, after his collection was moved to the RAMM.⁸⁵ In this photograph, there is a riot of animal body parts. Skins are stretched vertically as rugs, and horizontally across the camp, emulating hides drying in the sun. Peel informed the reader that there were many rifles on show 'all of which have been used against big game.'⁸⁶ Within the display, the (taxidermied) camels were positioned, waiting patiently to continue the caravan-march, as the timeline of taxidermic life and death unfolded before the visitor.⁸⁷ I

⁸² For more on taxidermy and storytelling, see K. Jones, 'The Soul in the Skin: Taxidermy and the Reanimated Animal' in *Epiphany in the Wilderness: Hunting, Nature and Performance in the Nineteenth-Century American West* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015), 227-70.

⁸³ Peel, *Popular Guide*, 13.

⁸⁴ Peel, *Popular Guide*, 19-20.

⁸⁵ This is suggested in photographs in the RAMM archive, although it is sometimes unclear whether it is Peel's original museum, or the Peel Hut in the RAMM that is depicted.

⁸⁶ Peel, *Popular Guide*, 14-15.

⁸⁷ Akin to Peel's personal experiences, in Wakefield Museum the specimens of Charles Waterton are used to recreate his experiences: 'The Extraordinary World of Charles Waterton at Wakefield Museum', <http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/Documents/culture-museums/museums/charles-watertons-creations.pdf> [Accessed 16/10/2020].

am reminded of Serres's idea of pleated and crumpled time; the hunting ground left on repeat.⁸⁸

To me, this display space feels somewhat playful; Peel and the creatures pushed against the restraints of easily measured time. They were between times. However, Peel also obstinately homogenised African space. Many of the specimens were killed on his later journeys, in the proceeding decades – and not in Somaliland.⁸⁹ There does not seem to have been a clear demarcation in the display between places, and he lumped all of Africa together. This space therefore reflected the colonial time in which it was created; a top-down, homogenised, violent, and very British vision of the world.⁹⁰



Figure 6.5: Peel's Somali hunting scene, c.1920. RAMM Natural History Archive.

Near to the tent lay the looping body of a python. As if alive, it had been wrapped around a tree trunk, its dead skin placed to exhibit natural behaviour. It was a singular dead python representing all living pythons. Yet, when accompanied by the museum guide, the snakeskin told of another kind of liveliness. There was an energy in its death:

Coiled round a tree-stump is to be seen an African Python 15 feet in length, represented in the act of attacking a colobus monkey. This beautiful reptile I almost trod upon one early morning before sunrise, mistaking it at first for the stump of a fallen tree. I ran back for my shot-gun, and, standing well back so as not to spoil the skin, I killed it. Even when dead the muscles of

⁸⁸ Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, 60.

⁸⁹ See: C. Peel, *Through the Length of Africa* (London: Old Royalty Book Publishers, 1927).

⁹⁰ For more on colonial time, see: V. Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

this reptile continued to move, and it was all I could do, with the aid of my gun-bearer (the only man who dare touch it), to skin it... I could not lift it from the ground it was so heavy.’⁹¹

The material display was overlaid with the story of the snake’s very earthly death. The visitor, reading the guide, would have known that it was this very skin that had writhed and wriggled. Full of action and muscular contractions, this was a tale that the dead skin had inhabited in its previous *skin life*.⁹² I argued in Chapter 2, ‘Moving’, that animals could be occupied by different ways of being dead. This was death not as an ending, but as a repeating, energetic, event. Elsewhere, Peel describes how ‘as often as we turned him over, he turned back again as for a long while after death the muscles of snakes and eels keep moving.’⁹³

Throughout the years, Peel read extracts of his books detailing these hunts to museum visitors, surrounded by his animals. He used the power of the spoken word to stitch deadness back onto the creature’s skin. Patches in time are new, but they have meaning only through their resemblance of the past. Whilst within Peel’s displays the lives of the animals remained cloudy, their deaths – the dynamic ending of their lives – were more present than in the conventional natural history museum. These creatures were not lost in a collective sea of horns and fur and feathers. I have demonstrated that their past times were still on display. Nevertheless, they were made individual through their relationship with their killer.

Harmonious Nature

Dioramas also replicated space and time and could play with temporalities and realities. They could engage in trickery, in deception; something beyond the ever-present pretence of liveliness that defined taxidermy. In 1899 in Bristol Museum, Hannibal and the other lions were placed in a scene emulating South Africa. The diorama was described in the *Bristol Mercury*, in an article deriving from an interview with Bolton:

They have been grouped together in a large case, amongst real African scenery, so that the public may know, not only what a real lion looks like, but how and in what country it lives. A very fine boulder of imitation rock has been introduced, and the floor of the case is studded with real South African grasses. Altogether, the whole group is a magnificent specimen of the taxidermists’ art; in fact, in the curator’s opinion, there is not a finer group of its kind in Europe, the pose of the animals being so unusually natural.⁹⁴

The display reproduced the harmonious and fertile Africa of the popular imagination. It presented a vision of imperial nature as verdant and devoid of human life, in a period when the British were consolidating their control in South Africa. The article used the term ‘real’

⁹¹ Peel, *Popular Guide*, 13-14.

⁹² Ethel Peel also donated some of the collection to Ilfracombe Museum. I believe the python in Ilfracombe’s collection is this snake.

⁹³ Peel, *Through the Length of Africa*, 131.

⁹⁴ ‘The Talk of Bristol’, 1 April 1899, 4.

three times and ‘unusually natural’ once. However, as Bristol’s public might well have remembered, this was not Hannibal’s, or the other lions’, lived experience. Hannibal’s reality had been the travelling menagerie and Bristol Zoo – he was a lion of the cage not the luxuriant savannah. This was fakery: an artificial patch in time.

Historians have written about dioramas; about this theatricality and their romanticisation of the natural world. These scenes were created in an age when (Western) humans were destroying the environment at an accelerating speed, and Karen Wonders suggests that dioramas were consequently construed as timeless or exhibiting an idealised version of natural time.⁹⁵ Such time is often imagined as stable, cyclical, and harmonious. Nature is both spectacular and separate from the world of culture. In scenes, such as Bristol’s South-African lion display, humans are absent, and the animals are at rest. Such displays did little to capture the violence and energy of life on earth. At the opening of the RAMM, Channing Wills, the museum’s chairman, gave a speech that was reported in the local press:

He had always aimed at making a beautiful picture of the exhibits, which would convey its educational meaning to the simplest minds, and the popularity of the museum increased. He also wished to add a word of praise to their artist, Mr. Morrel, and to all the helpers. The artistic scenic backgrounds gave a realistic touch that made the fierce beasts almost seem alive. They aimed at making the museum the most interesting, attractive and instructive collection in the kingdom.⁹⁶

Wills spoke of using the ‘beautiful picture’ to ‘instruct’ the ‘simplest of minds’. A progressive linearity was created using idealised natural stills.

Nevertheless, I have identified that some dioramas did not fit this trope. Most scholarship on dioramas focusses on examples from the U.S., for instance Carl Akeley’s grand dioramas in the American Museum of Natural History.⁹⁷ Whilst these displays certainly influenced British museums, Britain also had its own history of naturalistic displays.⁹⁸ I looked beneath the skin surface of the displays in my case study museums and found a complex spatiotemporality. Bristol Museum displayed its prized mount of a tiger, shot by George V, in a diorama that depicted its death. The tiger is cowering, snarling; the King, painted onto the back of the case, advances astride an elephant. Death – at least impending death – and human hunter are

⁹⁵ K. Wonders, ‘Habitat Dioramas as Ecological Theatre’, *European Review*, 1 (1993), 285- 99. See also: M. Henning, ‘Display’, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), 37-69; Haraway, ‘Teddy Bear Patriarchy’, 20-64.

⁹⁶ ‘Peel Collection: Formal Opening of Exhibition at Exeter’, *Western Times*, 20 July 1920, 2.

⁹⁷ See: Haraway, ‘Teddy Bear Patriarchy’, 20–64; S. Quinn, *Windows on Nature: The Great Habitat Dioramas of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2006)

⁹⁸ For instance, the Wardian displays I discussed in ‘Exhibiting.’ For details of pioneering naturalistic displays in the British Museum, and the use of wax flowers, see: R. Shufeldt, *Scientific Taxidermy for Museums* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1894), 375.

supremely present.⁹⁹ This was a representation of the tiger's actual death at the hands of royalty, played out through imperial ritual. The importance of the monarch, and of the tiger as having belonged to the King, overrode the need for romantic timeless imagery.



Figure 6.6: The Arctic diorama, c.1920, RAMM Archive.

In the RAMM, Peel's polar bears were placed in a scene of arctic whiteness: 'there is a magnificent family party of polar bears—mother with two two-year-old cubs- seals, and birds from Franz Josef Land, in a realistic Arctic setting, with canvas background.'¹⁰⁰ Dioramas often included familial scenes, as moralistic expectations of home life shaped the presentation of animal bodies. All seems bucolic (see figure 6.6). However, the scene was painted from 'a photograph taken on the expedition', and it replicates – repeats – the exact site of the animals' slaughter. There is a minutia, an exactness, to this recreation. Bryony Onicul, with reference to displays relating to indigenous peoples in Canada, argues that 'exhibits are complex texts that are layered with meaning and can tell multiple, potentially contrary, stories.'¹⁰¹ In Peel's scene, the scene of idealised Arctic life, was overlaid with the impending reality of the creatures' deaths.

⁹⁹ For more on biological realism in display creation see: C. Kamcke and R. Huttener, 'History of Dioramas' in S. Dale Tunnicliffe and A. Scheerso (eds.), *Natural History Dioramas* (London: Springer, 2014), 7-22.

¹⁰⁰ 'Mr. Peel's Fine Collection in Exeter Museum: To Be Opened: To-Morrow', *Western Times*, 15 July 1920.

¹⁰¹ Onicul, *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice*, 128.

On the back canvas was ‘painted a scene of a steamer lying amid broken ice and snow.’ Peel included this photo in his 1928 book, *The Polar Bear Hunt*, in which the surrounding pages are filled with photographs of graphically dead bears.¹⁰² They hang, limp, from a whaling hook, as they are hoisted on board the very steamer that is depicted, lurking in the background of the diorama. In 1925, the story of the polar bear hunt was printed in the Exeter press, following a lecture Peel delivered at the museum.¹⁰³

Each party had its allotted hours in which to hunt, and when a bear, seal, or walrus was seen by an observer in the crow’s nest of the ship, a boat was launched and a landing made on the ice. By drawing lots each party decided which of its members should have the privilege of shooting first at the quarry. When the animal was shot, it was dragged to the water’s edge, placed in the boat, and rowed to the ship’s side, and then hoisted on board by a steam winch.¹⁰⁴

The traces of the mechanics and workings of the polar bear’s death were patched onto this museum display. I argue that the layers of time and experience that produced the lives and afterlives of taxidermy animals were still sometimes visible in such scenes. The visitor is likely to have encountered the ephemera – guidebooks, newspaper articles, or possibly attended a lecture – that accompanied such displays. They would have experienced this temporal layering. Even dioramas were not cut off from the reverberations of taxidermy time.

Spatial Contamination

I have shown how the temporalities of past lives continued to play with the museum specimen. Sometimes, these reminders of past times threatened to disrupt a museum’s identity as a place of safety. In Cardiff, a wapiti – another name for the North American Elk – was infested with moth larvae. This skin had been donated by the renowned Welsh industrialist and liberal MP, David Davies. The museum wrote to Rowland Ward, the creator of the mount, to complain. Ward suggested there was ‘no hope for it but to send the specimen to us: it will come by goods train, in a light crate, and we will put it in order, if it has not gone too far.’¹⁰⁵ Ward wanted to bring the creature back home to ‘the Jungle.’ The museum refused. So began a lengthy exchange of letters and materials – the Wapiti consumed a great deal of human energy.

Next, Ward suggested that the Museum should ‘dose’ the skin with Benzoline, and an assistant would be sent from London to ‘brush and overhaul’ the specimen.¹⁰⁶ The museum seemed

¹⁰² C. Peel, *The Polar Bear Hunt* (London: Old Royalty Book Publishers, 1928), 92.

¹⁰³ “Hunting the polar bear in the Arctic Seas’ was the title of a very interesting lecture delivered in Exeter, on Saturday evening, by Mr. C. V. A. Peel’: ‘Capturing a Cub’, *The Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 9 March 1925.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Capturing a Cub’, *The Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 9 March 1925.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from R. Ward to the museum, 29 October 1909, National Museum Cardiff, Natural History Archive.

¹⁰⁶ From R. Ward to J. Ward (curator at the museum), 4 November 1909.

suspicious of Ward's plan, as they wrote to a local naturalist for advice. J. Mountney & Sons, of Cardiff, suggested that a soaking in Benzoline would 'only affect the actual surface of the skin, and larvae and eggs lying under the surface would not be affected.'¹⁰⁷ Instead, the deep interior must be penetrated by syringe – and five or six gallons of spirit. The thick skin and fur of the Wapiti – adapted to freezing North American winters – resisted easy saturation. Moth and mount were as one. The skin was placed under examination; dosed or injected and then carefully watched.

Eventually, Ward's assistant visited the creature, and declared the issues were caused because 'the case is not air-tight.' There were holes 'where the base rests on the floor.' Furthermore, 'we understand the radiator which is so close to the case will be turned off, and this will help matters very much.'¹⁰⁸ Under the skin of this language, there is a sense of blame. The museum had failed to shut the creature away, to remove it from dangerous airflows. The specimen was not hermetically sealed. They had stimulated the hatching of eggs by placing the skin near a source of warmth. There is a mirroring between this museum display case, and the similarly precariously encased travelling skins in shipping boxes. Later in the letter, more directly, Ward suggested the infestation was caused by 'neglect' by the museum.

The museum responded with anger on the receipt of a bill from Ward's company:

I do not think it is quite fair however to charge the Museum with this expense. I have made careful enquiries and find that the specimen was put into the case the moment it arrived here and I have also examined the structure of the case and find that it is quite dust tight so that it is impossible that it should have become infected since its arrival here.¹⁰⁹

The museum implied that the specimen was safely entombed; the display case was good, so it was the body that must be bad.¹¹⁰ The eggs must therefore be stowaways: tiny remnants of the Wapiti's previous afterlives and times. They were carried with and within the creature as fragments of the taxidermy workshop. The National Museum told a tale of spatial contamination – of the outside world stealing into the museum, uninvited. Hoyle explained that: 'I feel little doubt myself that the moth eggs were in the specimen before it came to us but I am prepared to admit that the conditions under which it was kept were such as to facilitate hatching out and development of any eggs and moths which were present.'¹¹¹ This was an

¹⁰⁷ Letter from J. Mountney & Sons to J. Ward (curator), 8 November 1909.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from R. Ward to Hoyle (museum director), 27 November 1909.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Hoyle to R. Ward, 25 November 1909.

¹¹⁰ Hoyle suggested, employing the language of medicine and of entombment, 'when you operate on the Wapiti, please employ Howell h. to open the case... the screws were not designed for frequent opening': Letter from J. Ward to Hoyle, 15 November 1909.

¹¹¹ Letter from Hoyle to R. Ward, 29 November 1909.

unwanted obtrusion by the skin's past. The imagined security of museum space unravelled and fell away.

Ward argued that the creature had been on display for two years (its museum time) and that his company could therefore not be to blame.¹¹² Both parties eventually agreed that attention in the present, might work to secure the creature for the future. The specimen was pulled back to a time of making, poisoning, and putting together. It defied chronology. Ward chastised that 'once a specimen has been in that condition it is liable to require further attention from time to time.'¹¹³ Opening the specimen back up to the world revealed that the creature had never really been apart from it.

There was a seasonality to the rhythms of the museum. Pests are particularly prevalent in spring and autumn. As Huebener argues, 'nature is fast and slow, prompt and belated, cyclical and linear, desynchronized and beautifully coordinated, all in ways that shift and change each year.'¹¹⁴ It was agreed, in the National Museum of Wales, that specimens including the wapiti should be given a look over every two months.¹¹⁵ Ward sent timely reminders in the post, along with boxes of his preservative, *Taxidermine*. Visual contact between specimen and the natural history curator was extended to handling every six months, when specimens would be brushed and doused in fresh applications of spirits.

Conclusion

This return to the body by the natural history curator, the revisiting of the skin, is a reminder that *taxidermy time* was bound to the specimen, and not to taxidermist, hunter, or natural history curator. I have explored how museum specimens were makers and shapers of space, and history. Animal bodies were fitted to museums, but they also altered them from within. Even if encased, skins were not closed-off, and they remained the meeting places between species: animal specimen, human, and insect alike. I have shown how humans tried to still animal bodies and incorporate their malleable mounts into stories of linear progression. However, I argue that these bodies continued to make their own times. The imagined temporalities of the museum did not necessarily correlate with an animal's bodily time.

I propose that animal specimens were also visited by traces of their pasts – of previous *skin lives* – which I conceptualise as patches of time. Taxidermy might be literally repaired, a patch added, or the entire skin remounted. Layers of time met and combined, or sometimes patched over, previous temporalities. Taxidermy was a thing of coming apart, unravelling and repair and replication. Within Peel's Oxford exhibition, the spatiality of the hunting ground, and the

¹¹² Letter from R. Ward to Hoyle, 27 November 1909.

¹¹³ Letter from R. Ward to Hoyle, 24 November 1909.

¹¹⁴ Heubener, *Nature's Broken Clocks*, 66.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Hoyle to R. Ward, 2 December 1909.

material (and sometimes supremely energetic) deaths of animals were overlaid across the collection. In the National Museum of Wales, the return of making and insect times were seen as an intrusion on the imagined cultural sanctity of museum space. I learned from museum taxidermy that museums are places of constant movement, still lively, even though their inhabitants might be dead. I learned, too, that taxidermy time did not come to a halt in the museum because the museum was not an ending.

Conclusion: Muddled Times and Modern Times

Taxidermy is made from animal skin and the influence of that skin on other actors, of human yearnings and fears, and practising hands and ambition. Of the lifecycles of beetles and moths and bacteria. *Taxidermy time*, as a meeting of these temporalities and forms, is itself muddled and not straightforward. I have followed skins through their *skin lives*: the name I proposed to draw together these different and repeating times and forms. I started this story, and this thesis, at the moment an animal was designated as the taxidermy of the future; when a living creature was selected, shot, sliced, and worried over by hunters and naturalists in the imperial hunting grounds of India and eastern Africa. Despite the intense anxieties and efforts of the white British hunter – and the skilled labour of colonised peoples employed within the hunting party – these skins could not always be made secure. They continued to morph as they travelled across land and sea to Britain, and as preservatives and decay slipped in and out.

Animal skins both shaped, and were shaped by, human hands as they met with other materials to form the taxidermy mount. Their bodies were also influenced by the ephemerality, the quickening of taxidermy time, and the competition of Victorian exhibitions. On entering museums, far from settling in and becoming the stilled – and timeless – specimens so often depicted in scholarship, these creatures continued to enact multiple times and materialities. I asked a friend of mine, the researcher and artist Aurora Moxon, to create a diagram to represent these threads of taxidermy time. I roughly sketched an outline of lines and shapes, and muttered about repeats, circling, and intersections. I wanted the diagram to reflect the unexpected nature of taxidermy time; how the temporalities meandered, crossed, and came round again, and how the different stages of time and journeying were not predictable.

I was inspired by the diagrams of lifecycles that pepper biology textbooks. Aurora took these mutterings and musings and produced this beautiful illustration (see Figure 7.1). It gives a sense of how, in no definitive order, this time might include display cases, scalpels, *dermestes* beetles, arsenic soap, taxidermy craft and insect larvae. It was Aurora's idea to represent the lines of time as I described them to her: as looping threads. In this thesis, by exploring *taxidermy time*, I have shown how it is important to consider the nuisance causing things in the past, how history is produced through push and pull. How, within the known power structures of empire, colonial violence, science, museum collecting, and display, the tangle of bodies and time do not always conform to the expected, linear, or dominant narratives that humans like to tell.

Our current times are even more of a muddle. Time has become the defining measure in the catastrophic global happening known as climate change; change itself being a measure of time.



Figure 7.1: 'Taxidermy Time', by Aurora Moxon, commissioned for this thesis, 2021.

Humans have meddled with the very bedrock of our planet, and the oceans are awash with the miniscule fragments of our plastics. Biodiversity is being lost at an alarming and escalating rate. The Anthropocene measures the time since the atom bomb when warfare shaped the material essence of the earth and started the nuclear age.¹

Some scholars place the start of these troubled times further back, describing the Capitalocene.² This time is rooted within the rise of capitalism, the rush of colonialism, and the desire to harvest – to have – the animals of the world, a greed that catalysed the sixth mass extinction event. This is the cultural backdrop against which this thesis has unfolded. These ideas of planets, and reaping, and time, are intrinsically Western focussed. Whilst the Anthropocene reflects well the damage the progress-obsessed West has inflicted on everything and everyone, such ideas do nothing to stop this narrative of self-aggrandisement.³ This is why it is important to see the life and the liveliness in the past and present – and in death. If nature is viewed as utterly dominated, be it by colonialism, by the knife and intentions of the taxidermist, or under the thumb of the (Western) human-created Anthropocene, then there is no reason to change these things, if nature no longer has a capacity for dynamism. Instead, if within these timely ideas and unequal power structures it is recognised that nature still has the capability for nuisance making – the little instances of liveliness that I have uncovered and put into words – then the human is not indomitable.

Whilst I have been writing this thesis and thinking about the loss of animal life and the liveliness of loss, the humans of the planet have entered a new time. COVID-19, a pandemic likely caused by the ever-nearing closeness of animal and human lives and space, and the human desire for extraction, is a clear signal that people are not always in charge. Whilst humans are probably causal, they are certainly not in control. Alongside the massive and

¹ At least according to the ruling of the 34-member Anthropocene Working Group, in May 2019: M. Subramanian, 'Anthropocene Now: Influential Panel Votes to Recognize Earth's New Epoch' *Nature*, 21 May 2019 <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01641-5> [Accessed 21/04/2021].

² J. Moore (ed.) *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016); 'Roundtable: The Anthropocene in British History', *Journal of British Studies*, 57 (2018), 568-96.

³ Indeed Paul Crutzen, one of the namers of the Anthropocene, proposed an earlier start than the nuclear age: 'the Anthropocene could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watt's design of the steam engine in 1784': P. Crutzen, 'Geology of Mankind', *Nature*, 415 (2002), 23. Donna Haraway rejects the focus on 'Anthropos' and proposes the Chthulucene, named after the tentacle-like legs and influence of a spider; and specifically, a species found in northern California: D. Haraway 'Staying With the Trouble: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene' in Moore (ed.) *Anthropocene or Capitalocene*, 34-35; D. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

devastating loss of human life, the pandemic has on a different, smaller, scale restricted all our times to a perpetual waiting.

With all this playing in and on my mind, I returned to the sources I had encountered in the RAMM archive, and to Charles Peel's taxidermy collection. I scrolled through the documents I had thumbed and photographed two years previously. I wanted to get a sense for how these animal bodies had behaved on entering these, closer, turbulent times. Their bodies did not stop where my final chapter ended, in the early twentieth century.

However, I soon discovered that many of these creatures had, indeed, disappeared. In 1997, the RAMM invited staff from the Oxford Museum of Natural History to assess the value of the Peel collection. They reported that 'the list of Peel material provided by the staff at Exeter details 156 specimens of mammal. Of these we believe that we were able to identify only a small number of specimens in the collections at Exeter, suggesting that around 85% of the collection has been lost.'⁴ Despite the warnings from nineteenth-century taxidermists and natural history curators regarding the dangers of the insect – and indeed, even after writing the body of this thesis, and arguing fervently that taxidermy can never be stilled – I was still surprised at how high this percentage was.

It demonstrates both the susceptibility, and the vitality, of animal remains. It shows that humans could never entirely control and settle these bodies, even with time. The language used in the report is telling; 'we conclude that the low number of surviving specimens from the Peel Collection means that it is not possible to make an objective assessment of the "value" of the Collection itself, although it is clear that the main usage of the material is likely to be display rather than research.' The absent taxidermy animals had not 'survived'; in other words, they have finally succumbed to total death. Their remains are no longer present in the here and now.

A year earlier, the museum's natural history curator David Bolton described what had befallen these specimens, in a letter to an enquiring member of the public: 'Unfortunately much of the collection had to be destroyed through the ravages of Museum beetle and other pests.'⁵ For me, reading this statement, time seemed to contract. The taxidermist Rowland Ward, writing in the closes of the nineteenth century, had similarly described the 'ravages' of *dermestes* beetles.⁶ It is the (predicable) unpredictability revealed in this shared language, this potential to slip away, that unites and connects all taxidermy, and produces what I have called

⁴ C. Norris, Report by the Oxford University Museum of Natural History to Katherine Chant at the RAMM, 1997, RAMM Archive.

⁵ D. Bolton, Letter to Don Chapman at the Oxford theatre, 2 May 1996, RAMM Archive.

⁶ R. Ward, *The Sportsman's Handbook to Practical Collecting, Preserving, and Artistic Setting-up of Trophies and Specimens to which is Added a Synoptical Guide to the Hunting Grounds of the World* (London: Rowland Ward, 1880), 16-17.

taxidermy time. These creatures reached a turning point where they were no longer considered as valuable to the RAMM; a point where they lacked enough of the visual aesthetics of life to successfully embody the animal. Their dual presence as specimen and ecosystem was untenable with the vision that the museum staff held for their future.

In the 1970s, taxidermy became increasingly unpopular in British museums – animal specimens were often seen as dated relics of the colonial age, and sometimes their remains were discarded or even burnt.⁷ In 1992, the museum scholar Tristram Besterman suggested that the ‘starting point in UK is a strong presumption against disposal.’⁸ Nevertheless, he went on to explain, in most Ethical Codes and Collections Management Policies it is accepted that those that have ‘deteriorated badly through infestation or other degenerative processes’ should be disposed of. Writing in the previous decade, Adrian Norris, the curator of natural sciences at Leeds Museum, reported:

Many museums over the past decade or so have destroyed their large mammals for various reasons. The problems of storage, past neglect and the costs of cleaning and restoration are often cited as being major factors. The modern museum philosophy of only displaying local material has also added to the toil. Important historic material has been lost, and much more will be lost in the future, if care is not taken to research and document these irreplaceable specimens.⁹

In some sense, in disposing of these animals, museums did not pay the remains the respect they deserved. This is clearly how Norris saw things. These animals were already the product of numerous, little, and large, acts of violence by humans, and their disposal was yet another. However, writing this thesis has taught me to pay attention to the energy within skins, and to think within and against the persistent narratives of domination. These creatures could not be controlled, and perhaps, through their disposal, museums were simply acknowledging that not everything in the organic world could be owned and secured. They gave in to the tendencies of the skin. The remains were lost because they ‘degenerated’ and set their own time and being.

In 2001, another specimen in the Peel collection was the site of a more localised material loss. When displayed in Peel’s museum in Oxford, this (whole) rhinoceros mount had been positioned in the centre of the room.¹⁰ When moved to Exeter, he was placed, as one of the

⁷ R. Poliquin, ‘The Matter and Meaning of Museum Taxidermy’, *Museum and Society*, 6 (2008), 123-24.

⁸ T. Besterman, ‘Disposals from Museum Collections: Ethics and Practicalities’, *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 11 (1992), 30-32.

⁹ A. Norris, ‘Vanishing Herds - Large Mammals in Museum Collections?’, *Collections, Biology Curators Group Newsletter, NATSCA*, 4 (1987), 148-49.

¹⁰ C. Peel, *Popular Guide to MR. C. V. A. Peel’s Exhibition of Big-Game Trophies and Museum of Natural History and Anthropology* (Guildford: Billing & Sons, Ltd, 1906), 36-7.

‘grander’ animals, in the main museum building, on the ground floor.¹¹ I suspect he is the rhino in this photograph, taken after another relocation to the RAMM’s Peel hut on its second opening in 1933. (See figure 7.2).

In 2001, the museum reported that his back horn had been stolen whilst on display. Horn is a skin structure, a protrusion of keratin akin to fingernails and hooves, but one that (unlike fingernails and hooves) is highly valued in the markets of Asia. David Bolton carried out a valuation of the remaining, now hornless, specimen.¹² First, Bolton turned to history, and read up on the repair work completed by the taxidermists Gerrard and Sons in 1933 for the cost of £200. Next, he considered replacing the mount. He concluded that, with CITES trade ruling restrictions, and the fact that in local British zoos ‘there are not any dead rhinoceroses’, they would have to make do. The missing ‘secondary’ horn, and the still-present ‘frontlet’ horn were replaced with ‘prosthetics’ by a local taxidermist for £500.¹³ Bolton continued:

Whilst the theft of one horn is a sad loss it should be seen in the context not of an entire specimen lost, but as a temporary disfigurement which can be effectively remedied by a skilled taxidermist. The importance of the rhinoceros specimen derives from it being the static but physically genuine three-dimensional presence of a once living prime example of an African black rhinoceros male. The specimen has a history and that history is a part of the social history of Exeter along with those other exotic animals with which it is displayed. Theirs is a complex role, as examples of their kind, as physical reminders of our social history and our changing attitudes to wildlife and of the impact of humans on the global environment, posing a social and ethical challenge to new generations of visitors to the RAMM. The replacement of one horn will detract only in a small way to an otherwise imposing presence which has been part of Exeter’s heritage since 1919.¹⁴

It was the stark anxieties regarding the loss of animal mass, the chipping away of wholeness, that made me pause when reading this report. It mirrored the fear of corporeal breakdown I explored in Chapter 1, ‘Skinning’. Bolton, whilst reasoning that it was ‘not an entire specimen lost’, nevertheless researched replacement rhinoceroses, and described the loss as a ‘disfigurement.’ Margrit Shildrick argues that ‘prosthesis itself profoundly unsettles the conventional binaries that substantiate the clean and proper body of the psycho-social

¹¹ ‘Mr. Peel’s Fine Collection in Exeter Museum: To Be Opened: To-Morrow’, *Western Times*, 15 July 1920.

¹² D. Bolton, On Aspects of the Valuation of the Mounted Black Rhino, David Bolton, Curator of Natural History, 23 March 2001, Report in the RAMM archive.

¹³ An invoice for this work described the ‘conservation of mount of male African black rhinoceros. Remove existing frontlet horn replace this and also missing secondary horn with prosthetics. Carry out remedial work asocial with damaged area of head where cracking etc has occurred’: P. Rose, Invoice from Paul Rose Taxidermy, Atherington, Exeter, 4 July 2001, RAMM Archive.

¹⁴ Bolton, ‘On Aspects of the Valuation’, RAMM.

imaginary.¹⁵ Certainly, Bolton thought a prosthetic horn would ‘detract’, albeit only in ‘a small way’, from the animal ‘presence.’



Figure 7.2: The Peel Hut, date unknown. RAMM Natural History Archive.

This continued obsession with epidermic integrity, it seems to me, prevents new stories from being told about animal specimens – and from letting the animal body lead the way. The horn-loss *was* the story. It revealed that the creature was far from the ‘static’ mount Bolton described. A narrative of stillness, employed by museum professionals and taxidermy scholars, still encircles specimens, into and within our recent times. The horn-theft might have been used, instead, to demonstrate the material interconnectivity of animal and human lives, past and present. To show how a rhinoceros in Devon is a part of the web of global animal trade, and still has the potential to be reappropriated as a (different) commodity; the wider ‘social histories’ and the environmental ‘impact of humans’ that Bolton described.¹⁶ The rhinoceros’ skin (and skin projection) was a site of interlocking layers of loss: of patches of time and absence. His horn was stolen in 2001, just as his entire skin had been snatched and displaced from the East African Protectorate – now Kenya – by Peel at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁷ His body is just one of thousands of black rhinoceroses killed by human hunters

¹⁵ M. Shildrick ‘Re-imagining Embodiment: Prostheses, Supplements and Boundaries’, *Somatechnics*, 3 (2013), 277, 271.

¹⁶ This is a surprisingly common problem in museums, and there seems to have been a surge in the number of thefts in 2011. At the natural history museum in Tring, curators pre-empted thefts by replacing the horns, only to have the prosthetic horns stolen. See: ‘Rosie the Rhino’s Horn Stolen from Ipswich Museum’, BBC News, 28 July 2011 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-suffolk-14326670> [Accessed 21/04/21]; ‘Rhino Horn Raiders Steal Replicas from Tring Museum’, BBC News, 27 August 2011. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-14693144> [Accessed 21/04/21].

¹⁷ Peel, *Popular Guide*, 36-7.

across the century, resulting in the massive decline of a species now seen as critically endangered.

I have used this example to show why the physicality of animal remains matter and have always mattered, and to act as a reminder that taxidermy animals still have many potential futures, potent and waiting, that can undermine the sometimes-inflexible expectations of museums. I think that academic scholarship and museums alike should embrace the changeability of museum specimens; to let their bodies speak and lead. This is something I have aimed for when writing this thesis. To use and write about the processes of degeneration, and conservation, and return, and horn theft – the labours of insect and human – is to create a more nuanced presentation of the human place in our troubled planet.¹⁸ This does not undermine the important stories museums are beginning to tell, of extinction, colonialism, science, and greed. This uncertainty is a part of those stories.

Tales of the Future

Within museums, natural history curators and museum employees are beginning to use taxidermy to demonstrate ideas aligned with the Anthropocene. This has developed alongside the rise of extinction studies, and extinction focused scholarship.¹⁹ Taxidermy can tell stories about the destructive practices of the human in the past, and act as a warning to the watching-human in the present, with the aim of making things better for the future. In 2019, Bristol Museum veiled the endangered and vulnerable taxidermy animals in its World Wildlife Gallery for the *Extinction Voices* exhibition. Black fabric was draped either across display cabinets, or the specimens themselves, partially obscuring the visitor's view of the creatures within. This curatorial decision was fronted by the curator of natural sciences, Isla Gladstone, to draw attention to species loss in our current age, this pressing time of mass extinction. As literary scholar Dominic O'Key suggests, this was a highly visual act.²⁰ The visitor could not

¹⁸ Caitlin Desilvey proposes (in heritage sites, such as National Trust owned harbours) that humans should let the entropy of decay develop. I do not suggest museums let objects rot, but instead make visible the actions and labour of conservation, care, and change. See: C. DeSilvey, *Curated Decay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); R. Harrison, C. DeSilvey, C. Holtorf, S. Macdonald, N. Bartolini, E. Breithoff, H. Fredheim, A. Lyons, S. May, J. Morgan and S. Penrose, *Heritage Futures Comparative Approaches to Natural and Cultural Heritage Practices* (London: UCL press, 2020).

¹⁹ C. Freeman, 'Imaging Extinction: Disclosure and Revision in Photographs of the Thylacine (Tasmanian tiger)', *Society & Animals*, 14 (2007), 241-56; S. Swart, 'Zombie Zoology: History and Reanimating Extinct Animals' in S. Nance (ed.), *The Historical Animal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 54-72; D. Jørgensen, *Recovering Lost Species in the Modern Age: Histories of Longing and Belonging* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2019); D. Bird Rose, T. van Dooren and M. Chrulaw (eds.), *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death and Generations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Radin, J., and E. Kowal (eds.) *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

²⁰ D. O'Key, 'Why Look at Taxidermy Animals? Exhibiting, Curating and Mourning the Sixth Mass Extinction Event', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (Published fast-track online: November 2020). See also an essay I wrote on *Extinction Voices*: A. Would, *Museum Specimens Across Time*,

see the specimen clearly, the animal was nearly lost from view. I was also struck by the tactility of the process of veiling, of lifting fabric and allowing it drop and cover. As a visitor, my ability to see and feel and know the fur, the skin, the animal, was reduced.

The sorts of material loss that individual specimens embody (for instance, thefts and degenerations) could be usefully employed within these wider stories of grief and absence. A great deal of human labour goes into protecting the remains of endangered creatures within museums.²¹ There is a clear mirroring between the practices of species conservation in the wild places of the world, and the conservation of remains in museums. Some taxidermy animals are the last individual of their species and they are known as endlings.²² These creatures are particularly precious and precarious. I believe that the material processes of conservation – of keeping the animal mount going – would aid this wider scholarly discussion of endings, endlings and absence. However, these conversations are currently slowed. A few months on from the *Extinction Voices* exhibition, and the animals, whilst no longer veiled, were again obscured from view for the visiting public by the spread of COVID-19.

In December 2020, I started a virtual placement with Pest Partners, shortly before Britain went into lockdown for the third time. Pest Partners are supported by South West Museum Development (based in Bristol Museum) and were created to help museums with pest management during the COVID-19 pandemic. Museums in Britain have, for the majority of the last year, been closed to visitors. For many, particularly organisations run and staffed by elderly volunteers, the museum suddenly became an impossible place to work. It has been difficult for museums to maintain the usual levels of care and conservation. Pest Partners provide free trapping and insect identification kits, advice, and training, to enable volunteers and museum staff to continue to protect collections.

In this placement, I conducted interviews with representatives from museums in the South West. This provided a spatiotemporal connection to my own research into the historic collections of this rainy corner of England. I endeavoured to learn whether the programme was successful, if they viewed their specimens as safe and secure, and which insects they had

White Horse Press Blog, 11 December 2020 https://whitehorsepress.blog/2020/12/11/museum-specimens-across-time/?fbclid=IwARoOuPQ_oQgsBgcuZEcCtByde4mQjE05GtoWuw1JL8i2Q-7cF54Hx7_9zxE [Accessed 21/04/2021]

²¹ I have discussed extensively with Bonnie Griffin, the previous natural history curator at Bristol Museum, the tension between having an extinct/ endangered animal on display, and keeping it protected within the storeroom, where it is less likely to become faded or damaged, or 'jiggled' by the vibrations of music, footfall, and machinery. The museum employs both strategies: for example, the thylacine is on display, and a passenger pigeon specimen is kept stowed away beneath the museum.

²² D. Jørgensen, 'Endling, the Power of the Last in an Extinction-Prone World', *Environmental Philosophy*, 14 (2017), 119-138; S. Bezan, 'The Endling Taxidermy of Lonesome George: Iconographies of Extinction at the End of the Line', *Configurations*, 27 (2019), 211-38.

discovered. I heard about the worries caused by ‘firebrats’ appearing in unusual places, and the fears of overwhelming infestations. The language of contagion was used to describe both the perceived insect threat, and their own personal anxieties about entering the museum. This pandemic time was clearly not the right time to start a conversation about the mobility and vitality of museum specimens. Collections and objects are the lifeblood of museums, and many museums are struggling now more than ever. But when is the right time?

It is my hope that, in the wake of the pandemic, or when humans have found sustainable ways to live with COVID-19, there will be space for thinking about the shared vulnerabilities of humans and more-than-humans. Like the RAMM’s dead rhino, we have now experienced how we can be pulled into futures that we did not expect to meet. Humans do not always have control, but they certainly have great influence; this is the lived uncertainty of the past and present. My thesis has strived to demonstrate the interconnectivity of lives and bodies within taxidermy – a practice commonly seen as producing a dulling of the animal, and as something overwhelmed by violence and culture. It has followed these energetic dead things and looked within and beyond human power structures to find the life in history.

I have shown that journeys, and journeying, are just as important as the destination. That, through their deadness, taxidermy was a maker and shaper of history. I have forged a new approach in tracking the *skin lives* of taxidermy animals through their own muddled times. I encourage other scholars of animals and the environment to look beyond the known and the expected; be it institutions such as museums, or dominant narratives. It is through these unexpected places and relations that historians can learn about animal beings as they were encountered and embodied by the humans of the past.

Thinking with time, and particularly bodily time, has a lot to offer to future scholarship. I proposed *taxidermy time* to show how, even a creature killed by humans is not dependant on human temporalities; that they can make their own time. The importance of time is beginning to be recognised: in spring 2021 (in northern hemisphere time) I attended a virtual international conference on the *Material Life of Time*.²³ Time also has much potential with regards to our own bodies, and understandings and anxieties of death. Humans still have a very limited grasp on our own afterlives of decay and regeneration, our bodily contributions to the ecosystem, an area that environmental history could fruitfully uncover.

Through writing this thesis, I have tried to follow the lead of the skin. However, along the way, I have come across other skins and their stories; creatures that I could not offer my time and attention. In museums, many of the creatures have gone underground. Museum stores host

²³ The Material Life of Time was the second international conference organised by the AHRC funded Temporal Belongings Network, and was spearheaded by Michelle Bastian.

an array of specimens: from the rarest remains to study skins and duplicate bodies. These stored creatures can be associated with a sense of melancholy, a pastness, as well as a lack of use and visibility.²⁴ This narrative is as old as the store itself. In a quote that I included in Chapter 5, ‘Displaying’, the chairman of Bristol Museum described how, prior to an extension in 1905, ‘the cases and drawers were overfull, and the provision of store cabinets was found only to increase the evil by keeping out of sight things that should be seen by the public.’²⁵ These creatures are also engaged in a time of waiting, an anticipation of innovative technologies and science which might offer humans new ways of reading and knowing their animal bodies.²⁶ This is a stored potential.

However, these ways of seeing the skin do not account for the present. Within these tales of forgetting and invisibility and stored possibility – of past and future – these creatures are also a part of an active now. Skins and mounts lean against other specimens; some are stacked in piles, their skins touching. Their environment is carefully managed, and humidity controlled, to prevent dust from settling. Stored specimens are often creatures of near darkness, as electric lighting can hasten the fading of furs and feathers. Far from untouched by humans, their remains are handled by researchers, artists, scientists, school children.²⁷ Their bodies are sometimes mined for DNA; and strontium isotope analysis (on their accompanying skeletons) can reveal their past lives and environments.²⁸ In Bristol Museum, the collection is used in multiple ways: the skins and feathers of birds have been used by researchers to learn about dinosaur colouration.²⁹ Measurements of swift parrot specimens aided a re-introduction programme. Former natural history curator at Bristol Museum, Bonnie Griffin, estimated that

²⁴ This is a common narrative in art and in academia. The photographer Danielle Van Ark described her visit to a store as ‘moving’, and interpreted that a deer specimen she encountered as looking ‘like he wanted to go out!’: J. Singer, ‘The Mounted Life by Danielle Van Ark’, Interview, <http://www.sightunseen.com/2009/11/daniellevan-ark/> [Accessed 22/04/21]. Merle Patchett writes that ‘many taxidermy displays have been dismantled and mounts relegated to ‘backstores’ to gather dust’: ‘Putting Animals on Display: Geographies of Taxidermy Practice’ (Doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2010) <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/2348/1/2010patchettphd.pdf> [Accessed 22/04/21]. See also: S. Turner, ‘Relocating “Stuffed” Animals: Photographic Remediation of Natural History Taxidermy’, *Humanimalia*, 4 (2013), 1-32; M. Patchett, K. Foster and H. Lorimer, ‘The Biogeographies of a Hollow-Eyed Harrier’, in S. Alberti (ed.) *The Afterlives of Animals* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 110-33.

²⁵ W. Barker, *The Bristol Museum and Art Gallery: The Development of the Institution during a Hundred and Thirty-Four Years, 1772-1906* (Bristol: Bristol Museum, 1906), 60.

²⁶ A. Van Allen, ‘Folding Time: Practices of Preservation, Temporality and Care in Making Bird Specimens’ in R. Harrison and C. Sterling (eds.) *Deterritorializing the Future: Heritage in, of and after the Anthropocene* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2020), 120-54.

²⁷ I gleaned this from conversations with the (then) natural history curator at Bristol Museum, Bonnie Griffin, and a biologist who used the collection, Max Blake.

²⁸ See for example: M. Blake et al, ‘Multidisciplinary Investigation of a ‘British Big Cat’: A Lynx Killed in Southern England c. 1903’, *Historical Biology*, 26 (2014), 441-8.

²⁹ See: C. Sloan, ‘Dinosaur True Colors Revealed for First Time’, *National Geographic* <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/100127-dinosaur-feathers-colors-nature> [Accessed 22/04/21].

90% of her time was spent within the store (see Figure 7.3). I propose that the store – as a place of contradictions, and as embodying a dynamic stored present – has much to reveal.



Figure 7.3: Bristol Museum's Store, author's photograph, 2016.

Another underexplored taxidermy place is the home. How did taxidermy interact and mingle with furniture, homelives, pets? Could domestic taxidermy ever become domesticated? As I have shown, many environments are, or were, taxidermy places. The skin-based approach that I have established could reveal a great deal about wider animal and environmental histories. A recent short story by the Welsh writer Brennig Davies sticks in my mind. The tale is called 'Skinning', and it describes the meeting of a rabbit destined for the cooking pot, a young boy, and his father, as they stand around a kitchen table:

The boy wants to be sick. The rabbit lies splayed on the table. The scent of death mixes with kitchen spice. The eyes watch him- the rabbit's eyes, his father's. The room holds its breath.

His hand shakes. Do it, says his father. Don't be a girl.

His hand shakes. His father takes the knife and brings it swinging down. The feet come off; the head goes rolling.

Jesus Christ, says his father. Why couldn't you have done that?

He gives the knife back to the boy and guides the boy's hand to the carcass. Make the incisions. The blade glides through the game, like ribbon, like scissors through paper.

Can you see that? Pink flesh pokes out from beneath the fur. The colour feels rude.

Now, says his father, now grab hold of the fold. The boy's hands reach over and touch the body. It's still warm. His hands sink under the hair, where the cut was made.

His father shows him what to do. He begins to peel. The fur comes off in strips. Comes off easy.³⁰

In this excerpt, the reader can smell the boys' fear as the rabbit's deadness fills the kitchen. This is just a story, but so is this thesis, and so were the writings of hunters, taxidermists, and curators. Stories have their roots in bodies and flesh. In Davies' words I feel my own fears, and my reluctance to touch the rat, my attempt at taxidermy. The Victorians lived in a different time to me and this imaginary boy, one where death was not so distant. Yet, they also felt the twin pulls of fear and fascination when handling animal skins; their anxieties centred on the physical corruption of the animal body, of breakdown and massing invertebrates. Like me, and the boy in this tale, it was still deadness that caused this unsettling.

The past is full of the histories, stories, and whispers of lively animal matter, of the meeting of bodies and skins. Animal dissections, akin to the meeting imagined by Davies, occupied the hands and minds of humans throughout the centuries. There is much to be uncovered and written. Paying attention and respect to the animal remains of the past is to refuse to contribute to their further deadening through the written word. It provides a solidity, and a form, to the dead things of history. For me, this was a recognition of the restless and pressing influence of taxidermy animals on multiple lives: on the homes and habits of insects and bacteria, on the hungry vulture searching for fleshy sustenance, and on human fingers and fears.

³⁰ B. Davies, 'Skinning'
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/DjtPpxfMT3rJzfLL3BkonK/skinning> [Accessed 19/04/2021].

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