

Ghosts, Silences, Hidden Things – Taxidermic Cinema Workshop

_workshop

Cinema and taxidermy have much in common: both bring subjects to life for viewing pleasure, for preservation and/or as research. In this workshop, participants explored these intersections by preparing short, audiovisual stories. Filming the museum's taxidermed animals, we explored how to be taxidermic in our filmic approach: what stories do we preserve, reanimate, communicate? Which images, sounds and text do we research and collect in order to do so? And what other entrails might we set aside in the process?

_guest

Debbie Onuoha is a Ghanaian-Nigerian with a passion for words and moving images. She currently works as a visual anthropologist at the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH). With backgrounds in history, documentary and anthropology, her work focuses on filming ghosts, silences and hidden things in museums, archives and heritage spaces.

_activities

SHARING memories about natural history museums and zoos

ENCOUNTERING some of the taxidermies in the 'Evolution in Action' gallery.

READING some of the book 'Displaying Death and Animating Life. Human-animal relations in Art, Science, and Everyday Life' by Jane Desmond (2016)

DISCUSSING criticalities and questions concerning such museum practice.

FILMING a chosen taxidermy in the gallery (or not)

WATCHING & RESPONDING to each others' visual questions

LISTENING to some of the participants' written or spoken words

REFLECTING on the workshop format

ODDKIN°labs are experimental workshops exploring unexpected relations for more-than-human worlds.

The first labs series was situated in the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, questioning objects, spaces and narratives with a trans-disciplinary approach.

In each session, a new ensemble of practitioners from different fields - including from the Museum itself - critically engaged with the themes of coevolution, taxidermy, and stone (hi)stories.

Each theme was set by a host through her art & science practice.

Multispecies Storytelling – Constanza Mendoza
Taxidermic Cinema – Debbie Onuoha
Stratigraphic Storytelling – Sybille Neumeyer

This poster is a curated partial re-elaboration of the ODDKIN°-lab 0.1, which was held on June 4th 2019 in the Experimentierfeld at the Museum.

»Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin;
that is, we require each other in unexpected
collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles.
We become-with each other or not at all.«

Donna Haraway
Staying with the troubles

_encounters

Fayçal Bibi
paleontologist

Hayden Fowler
artist

Chiara Garbellotto
PhD student (socio-cultural anthropology of museums)

Lisa Jahn
cultural studies postgraduate and museum
practitioner (participation and public engagement)

Susanne Krämann
artist and professor for Media Art and Photography (HTG)

Tamara Masri
writer and researcher in food sustainability and film production

This Nepomceno
audio-visual producer and journalist

Sybille Neumeyer
artist

Debbie Onuoha
visual anthropologist & filmmaker

Hagar Ophir
performance artist and choreographer

Jan Panniger
taxidermist

Rhea Ramjohn
writer and poet

Sina Ribak
researcher for ecology & the arts

Stephanie Scheubek
dancer, choreographer and filmmaker

Nine Yamamoto
artist, researcher in history of art and film theory, activist

_collective reading

ODDKIN°labs

Unexpected relations for more-than-human worlds

Co-designed by Chiara Garbellotto and Sina Ribak in cooperation with the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin and Humboldt Universität.

Chiara Garbellotto is a doctoral researcher on the *Making Differences* Project at the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH). Her research focuses on how 'bio-diversity' and 'participation' are co-produced and how knowing and caring are mobilised in museum public engagement.

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Sina Ribak – researcher for ecologies and the arts – is an engineer in environmental management and nature conservation working at the interface of nature and culture. With her socio-ecological focus she engages in international collaborative projects contributing to transdisciplinary research. Since 2017 she is co-director of the Berlin based *'Between Us and Nature'* Reading Club.

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excerpt #02

[...]
This representation of activity and interaction, including predation, allows taxidermic scenes to do what zoos cannot: make activity visible on demand and without risk (the price of life has already been paid) to the animal, the audience, or the institution that owns it. Zoo designs have grappled with the problem of what to show and thus what people can see: many animals spend a great deal of their time sleeping, which isn't kinesthetically intriguing, and mixed-species habitats cannot include those predators and prey who would normally live within the same ecosystem.²⁸ Taxidermic scenes extract, value, and validate key experiences of animal life and freeze them forever for our contemplation, a privileged form of vision usually unavailable in the wild. We gain a sense of physical connection made possible only because the animal is dead. Its death, and the domination implied, is the price of our pleasure in physical proximity and the imagined connection that such closeness indexes. But even though this moment is preserved or created, it is the palpable, three-dimensional, bodily presence that dominates the technophilizing spectacle over narration. The more invisible the technologies that make this preservation and presentation possible, the more spectacular the spectacle.

Jane Desmond. » Displaying Death and Animating Life: Human-Animal Relations in Art, Science, and Everyday Life « p.108
University of Chicago Press, Chicago
2016

_collective reading

[...]
The illusion of realism in taxidermy, as I have argued elsewhere, depends on a fundamentally ironic epistemological structure:¹⁸ death is the absolute and always indispensable prerequisite to the process of creating lifelikeness. For the fiction of realism to work, though, this fact (the necessary killing that precedes the fictional resurrection) must be so masked that it doesn't interrupt the viewing pleasure. The relationship between viewer and object is fundamentally theatrical. This is clearest, of course, for the natural history museumgoer, who peers into a lighted proscenium-like diorama whose theatrical subjects cannot return the spectator's gaze.

Jane Desmond. » Displaying Death and Animating Life: Human-Animal Relations in Art, Science, and Everyday Life « p.96
University of Chicago Press, Chicago
2016

excerpt #01



04-06-2019

°labs0.1

- o Quotes
- x Questions
- > Feedback

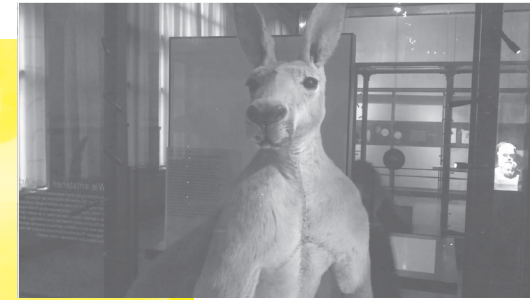
o » Taxidermy preserves moments and holds them as knowledge. «
Unknown

o » I felt overwhelmed by the entire gallery, it's hard to express such mood of suspension. «
Rhea Ramjohn

x Which stories about movement, technical processes, and changes in time can the taxidermies tell us?

x

> » How did you go about the representativeness of the participants you invited? In scientific practice we use championing. «
Faysal Bibi



x Publics' as statistics, 'publics' as emergent: how to think accountability for public engagement projects?

o » I'm in favour of opening museums to encounters and readings but also to a deconstruction against the grain. It can quickly turn into intellectual criticism and a bourgeois class judgment of how things should be done. «
Nine Yamamoto

x How many different positions can you take in the Evolution in Action gallery? How many different actions can you do?

x How would an emotional map of the Museum für Naturkunde look like?

o » I felt the need to feel the posture of that ape and that funny walk. «
Stephanie Scheubeck

> » Galleries invigilators were not informed about the event. Women of colour were particularly addressed by the them and asked to leave. «
Debbie Onuoha

> » We don't want to make critiques on the museum on our own, from our perspective only. We need all perspectives and views and want to learn. «
Debbie Onuoha

o » The display itself, with its depths and mirror effects, is staging a scene. Should we be only the observers? «
Hagar Ophir

x When do collaborative projects become a way of outsourcing labour?

o » The mutated animals from the wet collection are displayed at a low level, a child level. Why this choice was made? «
Lisa Jahn

o » Snowflakes appear in magnifying photographs as perfect. In reality they seldom are. The abstract ideal of creating perfection where it doesn't exist is very violent. «
Rhea Ramjohn



> » I have found myself during workshops - this and other - in the culture and arts field in the situation where participants are asked to elaborate on possible solutions to museum problematic issues even if they are not in the position to give such answers. «
Rhea Ramjohn



Q U E S T I O N S

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F E E D B A C K