Animal Magic: Sculpting Queer Encounters through Rogue Taxidermy Art

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Abstract:
Rogue taxidermy is a form of pop-surrealist art that fuses elements of traditional taxidermy with mixed media design. What differentiates this current pop-surrealist art movement from more traditional approaches to taxidermy are the ways in which these artists produce nonrealist and unconventional representations, while following an ethical mandate to never kill animals for the purposes of art. Analyzing Sarina Brewer's sculpture "Something Up My Sleeve" (2012) that displays a taxidermy monkey-bird hybrid pulling an artificial phallus from a magician's hat while facing a rabbit, this article looks at the political potential of rogue taxidermy to playfully disrupt normative structures of sexuality, gender, race, and species. I analyze Brewer's sculpture for its ability to queer our affective engagements with taxidermy and, in doing so, argue that rogue taxidermy has the potential to disrupt the colonial encounter between spectator and (animal) art object.

1 Taxidermy is produced in many forms, most notably in the context of sport hunting, where animal bodies are acquired for the purposes of creating trophies for display, which are meant to replicate the 'authentic' and 'natural' pose of the respective animal prior to death. As a complex set of practices historically founded on and rooted in colonial and imperial projects, the traditional profession of taxidermy is not devoid of criticisms that these scientifically and aesthetically produced 'objects' serve to perpetuate the domination and destruction of animals. This method of body preservation, however, is socially and culturally relative, often ambivalent in its ethics and politics and thus in need of a closer intersectional analysis. A number of scholars have addressed the thorny relationship the practice of taxidermy and the display of taxidermied animals have with cultural or racial(ized) (mis)representations of different marginalized groups and bodies (Haraway; Wakeham; Desmond; Tobing-Rony). In addition to the various scholarly responses to this peculiar and arguably violent cultural phenomenon, the contemporary pop-surrealist art movement known as *rogue taxidermy* has blossomed throughout North American urban spaces. Rogue taxidermy artists produce environmentally conscious and ethically sustainable art, while simultaneously counteracting or subverting the dominant narratives and traditions of western science and philosophy, which have historically produced and perpetuated a distorted image of animal/human difference.

2 The North American branch of rogue taxidermy art first manifested itself in Minneapolis, when artists Sarina Brewer, Scott Bibus and Robert Marbury founded the Minnesota Association

of Rogue Taxidermy (MART), coining the name rogue taxidermy in 2004 (Brewer, "Introduction"; Marbury 7). Brewer, Bibus and Marbury collectively founded this association after realizing the many interconnections between their art practices and politics. Rogue taxidermy, as a pop-surrealist art movement, fuses elements of traditional taxidermy with mixed media design. What differentiates rogue taxidermy from more traditional approaches are the ways in which these artists produce nonrealist and unconventional representations, while also following an ethical mandate to never kill animals for the purposes of art. According to MART, rogue taxidermists should partake in art that uses animal bodies only if these bodies are acquired through ethical means, and so their animal art mostly relies on "roadkill, discarded livestock remnants, casualties of the pet trade, animals that die of natural causes, and destroyed nuisance animals that are donated to them" (Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermy, "Primary Directive of MART"). Employing a surrealist technique, these artists create fantastical, monstrous, and abstract figures fusing together multiple animal body parts and popularly recognizable (often kitsch) objects, in order to produce curiously innovative and atypical sculptures. This alternative art movement is, however, not simply an offshoot of traditional or realist taxidermy, as it both transforms and transgresses these practices by re-creating sculptures through alternative materials, objects, and dyes.

3 Outlining a survey of the rogue taxidermy movement is no easy feat, given that rogue taxidermy sculptures encompass a diverse and broad set of aesthetic media and styles, spread across a number of geographical and cultural borders. Each rogue taxidermy artist employs a unique, idiosyncratic technique when adapting this method into her or his practice. This remodeled art movement also moves taxidermy away from a solely masculine endeavor and is spearheaded by, and prevalently practiced among, female artists. In what follows my paper focuses primarily on artist and MART co-founder Sarina Brewer and the way her peculiar art style unconventionally recreates taxidermy by mixing fantastical and mythological creatures with historical freak show abnormalities. More specifically, my paper discusses Brewer's 2012 sculpture "Something Up My Sleeve" and, in doing so, attempts to grapple with the political capacities of Brewer's rogue taxidermy (beyond her political decision to create sustainable art) to playfully disrupt normative structures and discourses of sexuality, gender, race, and species.

IMAGE: Sarina Brewer, "Something Up My Sleeve" (Brewer1).

Sarina Brewer, “Something Up My Sleeve” (Brewer1)

4 Displaying an amalgamated monkey body with a halo and (bird) angel wings, Brewer’s sculpture captures an enchanted and transfixing encounter between an angelic simian hybrid pulling an artificial phallus from a magician’s hat, while facing a small taxidermied rabbit. By means of its playfully queer aesthetics and its taunting elements, her sculpture distorts traditional taxidermy, breaking the established and strictly policed borders of ‘proper’ interspecies intimacy. Discussing how art operates as a space to perform and articulate critiques of the violation of animals’ bodily rights, I analyze Brewer’s sculpture for its ability to queer our affective engagements with taxidermy. I also expand on the role of animals in queer scholarship and activism, which – through experimental art forms – resists normative representations that reproduce sanitized displays of animal (and human) sexual desire as inherently heterosexual. Looking closely at the potential of Brewer’s sculpture to disrupt heteronormative narratives and

to subvert the essentially colonial encounter between spectator and animal (art) object, I unravel the many ways that Brewer's sculpture embodies a form of "haunting back" (Goddu), which implicitly criticizes the ongoing colonization of animal bodies.

5 The historical display of taxidermy is part of a "fetishistic colonial gaze" (4), Pauline Wakeham argues in *Taxidermic Signs*. Wakeham highlights a genealogy of taxidermy methods that were "linked to the rise of colonial exploration and the related desire to collect and study specimens from distant lands" (10). In imperial and colonial contexts, the collection and subsequent display of exotic animals and objects staged alterity in order to inform longstanding narratives of human exceptionalism and white superiority. Discussing how animals and animal encounters are integral to the colonial logic of Victorian adventure fiction, John Miller writes that "[e]mpire's racial project thrives through a hierarchy of engagements with animals, but not without irony" (92). As I discuss in more detail below, it is in relation to ironic slippages and the ways in which animal bodies do not conform to the meanings and representations imposed upon them that rogue taxidermy sculptures have the potential of troubling the power dynamics of display. Situating rogue taxidermy in relation to the oppressive racist, sexist and speciesist past of traditional taxidermy works to show how the practices of rogue taxidermy do not simply aim to preserve animal bodies as 'trophies' or 'specimens.' Rather, I argue here, it is through rogue taxidermy's aesthetics and the way it confronts the principles of traditional taxidermy (in part through techniques of ironic intensification) that a spectator's attention is turned back on the peculiarity of preservation itself.

Women's Interventions in a Masculine Tradition

6 Beginning in the early 2000s, female artists have reinvented the taxidermy art movement that was traditionally practiced by men. In his book *Taxidermy*, Alexis Turner provides a comprehensive history of this cultural phenomenon from the nineteenth century to its current popular revival. Turner writes that the contemporary reappraisal of taxidermy is largely female, even though, with the exception of Martha Maxwell[1], taxidermy "was once a largely male preserve" (25, 28), centered on the capture and display of impressive 'specimens' as a reflection and measurement of "masculine prowess and status" (26). The works of female rogue taxidermy artists, however, not only deviate from the realist forms and masculinist politics of traditional

[1] Martha Maxwell was a nineteenth-century female taxidermist in Colorado who exhibited her work at the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia.

taxidermy, they also seem to contradict historically entrenched notions of a 'peaceful' and sentimental connection between women and nature. While, as numerous scholars have shown, historically women were assumed to have a closer connection to animals and nature than men, this connection was, and to some extent continues to be, more or less strictly circumscribed. In this light, women's participation in (rogue) taxidermy – similar to women's involvement in international game hunting – goes against habitual norms of 'proper' female behaviour and 'woman-nature' relations more specifically. While these practices are, of course, strikingly opposite – given the political stakes of rogue taxidermy art to institute no harm on living animals – there are many similarities between the reception of and responses to both forms of women's involvement with dead animal bodies.

7 Despite their political mandate not to kill for art, female taxidermists Lisa Black and Sarina Brewer have stated that they have received violently sexist online harassment and even death threats due to their involvement in taxidermy (Voon). In contrast, and, at least from a feminist perspective, somewhat unsurprisingly, MART co-founder Robert Marbury explains in a 2014 article that men usually do not receive sexually aggressive responses to their involvement in the art movement in the way that women do (Voon). These responses seem to demonstrate that there are insidious cultural beliefs surrounding gender that elicit such aggressive reactions to women's role in the contemporary rogue taxidermy movement – reactions which arguably address, and attempt to sanction, an unwanted female 'intrusion' in traditionally masculine trades such as taxidermy and hunting.

8 One can hardly ignore the online media coverage of then nineteen-year-old Kendall Jones' photographs in 2014 that displayed the young cheerleader posing with the "Big Five" game (including the at risk white rhino) or Rebecca Francis' photographs in which she is featured next to a slain giraffe that received widespread criticism on social media, spurred by a Twitter post from popular English comedian Ricky Gervais (Saul; Leopold). In the examples of Jones' and Francis' photos on social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter, both these women received sexually explicit, violent harassment directed at their gender, testimony to a persistent and harmful patriarchal culture that deems women exploitable and as targetable objects. Philosopher Kelly Oliver argues that women in hunting culture – especially those who fit the norms of Western standards of feminine beauty – stand out negatively in contrast to the typical male hunter, who is rarely criticized for photographing his hunts (Oliver; Kwong). In contrast,

Oliver argues, women figure paradoxically as both hunter and prey. This is also made evident by the online responses to Minnesota dentist Walter Palmer, who hunted and killed the well-known South African Lion 'Cecil' in June 2015. Palmer's hunt of Cecil has spawned international outrage about 'canned hunting' practices and has resulted in calls for Palmer's extradition to Zimbabwe to face charges for carrying out an illegal hunt (Reuters). International outrage about this story, however, has not been sexually charged and directed at Palmer's gender in the ways that Jones and Francis have been targeted.

9 While my analysis does by no means condone the actions of hunters (female or male) and their exploitation and killing of endangered animals or equate the practices of rogue taxidermy artists with those of sport hunters, it does attempt to highlight the ways in which human relationships with animals are structured and complicated by a hierarchical system that celebrates masculinity and whiteness and reduces 'other' bodies to an inferior status. Reactions to women's involvement in taxidermy or sport hunting not only show how sexist beliefs and sexual violence against women is normalized more generally but also how women's specific participation in these male preserves is perceived as a threat to masculine power. Rogue taxidermy art challenges these historically entrenched systems of hierarchy and also illustrates the violence animals are subjected to daily and routinely. Unlike sport hunting, self-reflexivity and questions of animal rights are integral to the rogue taxidermy art movement. And yet, rogue taxidermy cannot easily be separated from traditional taxidermy's oppressive and colonial past. It is thus important to analyze the ethical implications and intricacies of using animal bodies as objects of political art and, more specifically, the seeming contradiction that rogue taxidermy artists are simultaneously politically conscientious and necessarily implicated in a tradition of violence against animals.

Taxidermy and Historical Spectacle

10 Today, taxidermy is often considered a controversial art form, as historically it has involved the capture and death of (often 'exotic') animals used as objects in a range of body exhibitions, such as discovery exhibits, freak shows and circuses, and natural history museums. Brewer, among many rogue taxidermy artists, has received numerous criticisms for her taxidermy art. These criticisms extend beyond online forums and also include academic texts, such as Mark Hawthorne's *Bleating Hearts: The Hidden World of Animal Suffering*. Hawthorne argues that Brewer's sculptures destroy animal dignity and constitute a violation of animals'

bodily rights after death; he writes that, "[animals'] dignity as beings is utterly destroyed when they become mere displays, their bodies transformed into surreal mutations to please patrons of the macabre. Would we tolerate such disrespect if the animals used were human beings? Not very likely" (412). While Hawthorne's criticism may reflect a common reaction to the preservation and exhibition of dead animal bodies, it disregards the ways in which Brewer's pieces articulate a critique of and provoke a reflection on the narratives of exoticism inherent to traditional preservation practices and how rogue taxidermy more generally also highlights the underlying anthropocentrism and violence of exhibition practices. The specific debate involving bodily rights of animals after death is indeed a contentious one and no easy answer can be offered. However, it is the unsettling character of Brewer's sculptures and the way in which they encourage a mindful response that might shed new light on harmful social and cultural practices that inflict violence on animal bodies. Moreover, Hawthorne's argument that violations of *human* bodily rights after death would not be tolerated in the same way tellingly fails to mention the colonial history of human body preservation in Western European culture, especially the preservation – and concomitant racist devaluation – of African bodies.

11 The practice of taxidermy cannot be separated from its historical involvement in the representation of bodies constructed as 'other' in traditional Western discourses of alterity. First, taxidermy must be situated within the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century exhibitions involving the display of deceased bodies in order to show their alleged monstrousness with regard to their gender, race, sex, class, ability, and/or species classification. For example, a number of human rights violations are recorded in response to the preservation of postmortem human bodies, including the ongoing debates on the treatment of Indigenous remains as 'artifacts' in archaeological research (Sillar et al.; Watkins), the display of Mr. Charles O'Brien's (otherwise known as 'The Irish Giant') skeletal remains at the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow (Asma), but also, and more specifically, the display of African bodies in the cases of Saartjie Baartman (otherwise known as the 'Hottentot Venus') and the man known only as the 'Negro of Banyoles.' The remains of Baartman and 'El Negro' were placed on display to convey notions of gender and racial difference and hierarchy to white European spectators and their bodies were not repatriated to their homelands until the early 2000s (Parsons and Kelo Segobye; Rapoo). These examples point to a complex and problematic social history that involves the collection

and preservation of both animal and human bodies, especially bodies constructed as 'other' or 'abnormal' in European and Euro-American discourses and cultural imaginaries.

12 Looking specifically at the ways in which taxidermy is informed by colonial projects, scholars like Donna Haraway, Fatimah Tobing-Rony and Pauline Wakeham argue that taxidermy is heavily bound up with dominant norms of gender, race, sexuality, and species. They argue that the historical practice of collecting specimens and preserving bodies sought to interpret, create and (re)produce images of otherness. Donna Haraway writes that "[t]axidermy fulfills the fatal desire to represent, to be whole; it is a politics of reproduction" (30). Depictions of 'otherness' in taxidermy representations contribute to the ways in which bodies are repeatedly understood as ontologically different in the context of Western normative frameworks. Rethinking the semiotic and symbolic system of taxidermy beyond the confines of the practice, Wakeham argues that taxidermy is "a mode of representation, a way of reconstructing corporeal forms, that is immediately bound up with the colonial disciplining of both animal and aboriginal bodies" (5). For Wakeham, the functions of taxidermy are similar to those of other forms of cultural representation such as ethnographic texts and discovery exhibits, which are, in turn, inseparable from colonial discourses that continually adapt to reproduce a fundamental alterity in contrast to and in service of white western norms. Likewise, cultural representations of otherness often intersect with depictions of 'animality' in colonial narratives in which particular racialized human bodies figure as models of the 'beastly' and 'savage.' Finally, Fatimah Tobing-Rony illuminates the ways in which representations of otherness (both human and animal, or a hybrid of the two) are created and produced through ethnographic spectacles in museums, films, and popular culture (e.g. *King Kong*). Arguing that these narratives are part and parcel of racist discourses and inform the ways racialized bodies are constructed and perceived in the intersubjective relations of the everyday, Tobing-Rony conceptualizes this production of racist images as a form of "fascinating cannibalism" in that Western culture's obsession with alterity allows for a consumption of the other through techniques of display and spectacle (10).

13 Examples of postmortem human bodies placed on display thus cannot be separated from animal taxidermy, given that animals have always been heavily implicated in and exploited by the projects of colonialism and imperialism. Whether physically transported across geographical borders or symbolically used to define groups of humans as 'inferior' to white settlers, animals have figured prominently in the conquest of peoples, the appropriation of 'exotic' lands, and the

exploitation of natural resources. According to Philip Armstrong, the longstanding resistance to bringing animal and human colonization into conversation is the result of a fear of "trivializing the suffering of human beings under colonialism" (413). However, as Rebecca Tuvel argues, these fears merely tend to reproduce narratives of animal alterity that are made not only at the expense of *nonhuman* animals, but also fail to question the extent to which racist discourses work with and are reliant on notions of animal inferiority (223). Tuvel conveys how animal oppression and the exploitative imprisonment of South African Khosian woman Saartjie Baartmann are implicitly related, arguing that the colonization of racialized bodies would look very different were it not first informed by our cultural understanding of *animal* alterity. This alterity, Tuvel argues, is informed by tropes of 'beastliness' and 'savagery,' shaping Baartman's supposedly wild, unabashed sexuality (223).

Rogue Taxidermy's Haunting Interventions

14 While the above criticisms of the preservation of bodies for display complicate the altruistic drive to produce ethical forms of taxidermy art, it is in the ways that rogue taxidermy artists rechart and refashion preservation that allows for what might be termed a queer politics of the macabre. Rogue taxidermy that creates hybrid 'monsters' from numerous animal bodies is one method among many to break taxidermy from its aesthetic traditions, a method which also reveals realism as an aggressive Enlightenment norm. When rogue taxidermy artists use traditional practices – altered through experimental forms – their art sculptures constitute an interactive display that resists traditions and transgresses restrictive boundaries. Experimental aesthetics work to exhaust the techniques and strategies of representation and, in doing so, make visible the acts and politics of representation itself. To "experiment" is to create phenomena or "make visible the invisible," write Paul Basu and Sharon Macdonald (2) and it is in this sense that taxidermy sculptures which engage in social criticism can work to unmask what usually remains unseen in traditional forms of realist display.

15 Similarly, Indigenous and postcolonial scholars have engaged in conversation over the deconstructive potential mimesis harbors as a tool of "writing back" or "speaking back" to the colonizer (Ashcroft et al.; Tiffin). Writing back can take the form of challenging the canonical texts of empire while writing in a "counter-discursive" format that allows for a critical "encounter [with the] former colonizer" (Thieme 81). In other words, anti- and postcolonial

scholars attempt to re-present colonial languages, grammars, aesthetics, and narratives in order to parody, subvert or unsettle hegemonic cultural discourses that continually reproduce inequalities and are often a legacy of colonialism. By using techniques of 'writing back,' feminist Indigenous scholars have critically employed colonial epistemologies and styles of writing *against* colonizing institutions such as Western academia and, as a result, produced new, Indigenous forms of knowledge not created by and for the *already knowing* western researcher and reader (Acoose 36; LaRocque 21-22). In the case of rogue taxidermy, it is thus important to ask what potential this art practice has for, to use Teresa Goddu's term, "haunting back" hegemonic narratives and practices of body preservation and their oppressive and destructive representational history. Writing/talking/haunting back is done through strategical inversions, mimicry, repetitions, and exaggerations of dominant norms; it employs recurring tropes, such as racist stereotypes of Blackness as 'monstrous,' in order to refigure, mock, and satirize these tropes and the normalizing, dominative knowledges that have been crucial to the subordination of various groups (including animals). Specifically discussing the notion of haunting back, Goddu writes that American gothic stories produce histories of horror that must be repressed in order to create an ideal national identity (Bodziock 96). By evoking these horror stories in the form of satire and humor, these narratives can be retold as resistance strategies to the colonial narratives that normalize and reproduce discrimination, fear, and hatred towards different racial groups (Young 11).

16 In a similar sense, rogue taxidermy's aesthetics of monstrosity may also be understood as a political strategy that serves to highlight the ways in which these sculptures 'haunt back' colonial imaginaries and articulate a critique of the ongoing colonization of animals. There are significant ties of the 'bestial' to cultural understandings of the monster, as Pramod Nayar argues in *Posthumanism.* He writes that the human expulses the 'animal within' and that, in turn, the very "presence of the animal makes the human monstrous" (Nayar 85). Monsters (as liminal beings, neither fully animal nor fully human) threaten to puncture the borders of the inside that is considered 'civilized,' 'natural' and 'normal.' It is through their ability to transgress borders that monsters often embody human qualities that must be "repudiated" and "exorcised" by civil society (Dendle 196). Accordingly, as Margrit Shildrick explains in "Monsters, Marvels, and Metaphysics," it is this transgressive and transformative potential that makes monsters productive figures to question established boundaries. Because the monster is grotesque and

abject and signifies the leakiness of boundaries, it provokes anxieties about the collapse of a supposedly whole or clearly bounded body (304).

17 While the style and aesthetic of each rogue taxidermy sculpture is unique to the vision of the artist, many pieces seemingly confront and expose the traditional and ongoing violence done to animal bodies. Rogue taxidermy employs the very tools of 'objectivity' and 'authenticity' which lie at the heart of the dominant Western epistemologies of science; however, it is through unconventional forms and ironic slippages that Brewer's sculptures in particular are able to articulate criticisms of science's historical obsession with the display and mastery of the 'unnatural' and unknown. Using traditional tools and methods of display (such as bell jars) to exhibit barnyard curiosities[2] or using graphic patchwork to create Frankenstein-like creatures, her sculptures expose a history of exhibition shows which displayed nonhumans as monsters and freaks in order to define the (gendered and racialized) normality and normativity of the human.

[2] Brewer's sculptures "A Bad Egg" (2004) and "Barnyard Bastard" (2004) depict barnyard curiosities and attempt to visualize notions of alterity popular in twentieth-century cabinets of curiosities. Images of both sculptures can be found in the artist's "Carnival Curiosa" collection on her website. See http://www.sarina-brewer.com/image-galleries/carnival-curiosa.html

IMAGE: Sarina Brewer, "Frankensquirrel" (Brewer2)

18 In less subtle ways, artist and MART co-founder Scott Bibus uses blood, guts and gore to depict present-day forms of animal violence through his 'zombie taxidermy.' Bibus' sculptures illustrate the overt and yet often hidden violence of factory farming, environmental destruction and disease as well as the casualties of roadkill. His unique aesthetic speaks back to the violent effects of modern technologies of capitalism, while also attributing a kind of retributional agency to animals through their own consumption of human flesh (e.g. "Toe-Eating Frog" or "Snapping Turtle Eating a Human Eye"[3]). Monstrosity (zombies and freak abnormalities included) does not belong to the realms of either 'the animal' or 'the human;' rather, it is found within the scene of recognition, the display or the encounter that produces the "traditional human colonizing impulse" to either assimilate or differentiate (Nayar 98). In what follows, I engage in a closer

[3] Images of Bibus' art can be found on the artist's website. "Toe-Eating Frog" (2006) can be found under http://deadanimalart.com/pages/toefrog.html and "Snapping Turtle Eating a Human Eye" (2007) under http://deadanimalart.com/pages/snapper.html

analysis of this encounter and the aesthetic forms that enable rogue taxidermy to unravel and decolonize these traditions.

Encounters with Rogue Taxidermy

19 The scene where (living) human and (dead) animal meet is predetermined and mediated by a representational system, which is no different in the case of the taxidermy diorama; and yet, such an encounter also allows for a number of ontological disruptions. Similar to Jacques Derrida's well-known discussion of an encounter with his cat in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, I approach the encounter with taxidermied animals in general and with Brewer's sculpture in particular as a space where ontological beliefs can become disoriented under the gaze (real or imagined) of 'the animal' (living or dead). In order to unravel this disorienting affect, in what follows, I engage in a theoretical discussion of the encounter between (human) spectator and (animal) art object and look to Brewer's monkey sculpture and its potential to produce a critical spectator, aware of the violence involved in the preservation and display of animal bodies.

20 Discussing encounters with animal art, Rob Broglio writes that any encounter with an animal can take place only on a surface level given the long history of Western thought in which animals are constructed as lacking all capacities to think, reflect or communicate like humans (xvii). However, Broglio argues, it is through art that a different type of encounter has the potential to occur, since "[a]rt brings something back from this limit and horizon of the unknowable; it bears witness to encounters without falling into a language that assimilates or trivializes the world of the animal" (xxiii). Broglio's argument is heavily influenced by Derrida's aforementioned encounter with his cat, Logos, a "real" cat characterized by her "unsubstitutable singularity" (Derrida 9). When caught naked in a *contretemps* with his pet cat, Derrida reflects on the power of his cat's gaze to disorient his previous perceptions of and assumptions about human-animal difference as well as nonhuman (and human) animals more generally. As Matthew Calarco argues, the "contretemps*"* of this encounter is a "time out of joint, prior to and outside of knowledge and identification," similar to "madness" (125), an affective moment unable to be effectively captured in language or reduced by and to the usual narrative conventions. It is the moment when the thinking human subject cannot put into words the impact of this encounter, when it finds itself face-to-face with what Derrida describes as an "existence that refuses to be conceptualized" (Derrida 9).

21 Because any encounter with an art piece is unpredictable and dependent on the viewer who comes into contact with the piece, it is difficult to conceptualize the multiplicity of possibilities or affective capacities inherent in an encounter with the art sculptures discussed here. In fact, any attempt at encapsulating the encounter between viewer and art object must ultimately lead to a failed endeavor, as Sara Ahmed argues. Like Derrida who highlights that there are experiences and forms of being that cannot be conceptualized, Ahmed argues that any discussion of an encounter fundamentally negates space and time in order to function as an "event" (*Strange Encounters* 7). In other words, the very perception of an encounter – or the coming together of "*at least two elements"* (7, emphasis in original) – involves a magnified reading of time and space in order for it to be linguistically articulated. Building on and complicating further the Levansian argument that intersubjectivity is at the core of human experience and that the self has a fundamental ethical responsibility to the other, Ahmed goes on to argue that the "encounter itself is ontologically prior to the question of ontology" (7) or, put simply, the self does not come into being without (encountering) the other. And yet, as she also explains, face-to-face encounters are "mediated precisely by that which allows the face to appear in the present" (7), the norms, conventions and modes of seeing which make it possible for the face to be recognized in moments of encounter. Encounters are thus always shaped and accompanied by this mediation, by social norms, culture and history, by "other faces, other encounters of facing, other bodies, other spaces, and other times" (7).

22 Calarco extends the Levinasian discussion of the face-to-face encounter to include animal bodies. He shows that the dividing line determining who and what can be understood as (not) having a 'face' in Levinas' philosophy is based on an implicit anthropocentrism regarding the kinds of beings that may enter the sphere of moral and ethical consideration (68). As Calarco argues, we need to expand this line to include other, nonhuman beings and their potentials to "shatter our ontology" (71). As he goes on to explain,

> If it is the case that we do not know where the face begins and ends, where moral considerability begins and ends, then we are obliged to proceed from the possibility that *anything* might take on a face. And we are further obliged to hold this possibility permanently open. (71, emphasis in original)

From different perspectives, both Ahmed and Calarco thus highlight that encounters are always significantly predetermined by norms of the human face or faces that are already shaped by linguistic and cultural norms and a subject's experiences. This argument is further fleshed out in

Ahmed's analysis of perception in *Queer Phenomenology,* where she argues that norms come to formation through the social lines that are drawn prior to, and are necessary for, subject formation. She writes that "[t]he social depends in part on agreement about how we measure space and time" (13) and groups do not necessarily make this 'agreement' at one singular time or space, but through an ongoing set of social norms that are reproduced through the systems of gendered, racial and sexual difference and privilege.

The Queer Affect of Rogue Taxidermy

23 In order to discuss the queer aesthetics and politics of Brewer's sculpture and to show how an encounter with rogue taxidermy art can unsettle both heteronormative and anthropocentric ontologies and notions of the 'natural,' I follow the definitions of queer(ness) in the writings of Ahmed and Mel Y. Chen. Ahmed discusses the ways in which we are situated in specific sociocultural and political environments that contextually *straighten* our perception of the world. Ahmed's use of queer is twofold: on the one hand, it stands for a body that is oriented toward the 'wrong' object: "[q]ueer in this sense would refer to those who practice nonnormative sexualities, which as we know involves a personal and social commitment to living in an oblique world" (*Queer Phenomenology* 161). On the other hand, queer also stands for a form of perception that is itself "oblique" or "off line" and seeks to "disturb the order of things" (161). It is only when we are disoriented, when we have a queer, strange or off-kilter sensation or experience that we are able to realize that the straight orientation to the world is the result of hegemonic norms. Straight lines, alignment, and heterosexuality come to dominate our ways of thinking through a repetition of the norms of body and space and, as a result, disorientation (the moment of queer perception or 'epiphany') must forever be reiterated, reoriented, and redirected on the 'proper' path.

24 The queer subject (/object) is deviant from society, given that it runs counter to straight lines and is oriented toward the *wrong* object (i.e. the same sex). Cultural consensus in the West has historically normalized heterosexuality and pathologized homosexuality. As Chen shows, the term 'queer' has traveled through various "linguistic economies" (57) that render it an animate term both through its circulation and its slippery history. Chen provokes an interesting dialogue about the use of the term and how it has been institutionally and academically solidified, even though the term itself works to refuse any form of stagnation and sedimentation. This 'stagnant'

academic use becomes evident when the term itself is made into an *object*. Cautious of the misuse of the term, I thus reject queer(ness) in the sense of a monolithic object, while also arguing that we should be receptive to the ways in which material, worldly objects – in this case Brewer's taxidermy sculpture – may give rise to or embody a political aesthetics of queerness. A complex, entangled social history involving taxidermy may also offer us a possibility to bridge the reoccurring divides of animal studies scholarship and queer-feminist anti-oppressive politics by emphasizing how both acknowledge – albeit differently – the multiple ways in which bodies (including nonhuman animal bodies) are colonized.

25 Brewer's use of the monkey figure is particularly interesting given that monkeys are not native to North America. Historically, the monkey has figured as a powerful symbol and placeholder for notions of a prehistoric or semi-humanity in contrast to notions of 'civilization' and 'progress' associated with European and Euro-American societies. In *Primate Visions*, Haraway writes that "[m]onkeys and apes have a privileged relation to nature and culture for western people: simians occupy the border zones between those potent mythic poles" (1). Similarly, Chen points out that the image of the primate is a "powerfully loaded trope" (98) informed by a number of racist norms that are shaped through

> pseudo-Darwinian evolutionary discourses tied to colonist strategy and pedagogy that superimpose phylogenetic maps onto synchronic human racial typologies, yielding simplistic promulgating equations of "primitive" peoples with prehuman stages of evolution. (101-102)

Primates not only stand in as symbols for racialized groups, but are the polarized model of uncontrollable and unrestrained animal sexual behaviour (Haraway 12). In this sense, the monkey figure often embodies different forms of racial and sexual deviations in Western discourses and cultural imaginaries; mainly though, primates are a symbol for the "almost human" (2).

26 Animals – in their own unique ways – step outside conventional frameworks of human cultural norms, never truly fulfilling the restrictive categories imposed on their behaviours and expressions. As Elisabeth Lloyd points out, heteronormative discourses of evolutionary reproduction have shaped our perceptions and interpretations of animal bodies engaged in sexual activity. Criticizing previous scientific discoveries that argue female macaques never experience orgasms, Lloyd exposes the ways in which these studies were informed by a strong heterosexual bias. In the context of her discussion of a study conducted by zoologist Desmond Morris, Lloyd

notes that his observations of primate sexual behaviour focus primarily on copulation with the opposite sex and ignore the pervasive examples of same-sex sexual activity. Highlighting two studies that observe same-sex sexual behaviour among female primates, Lloyd writes that "researchers found clear electronically measured evidence of orgasms only when females mounted other females, but not when females were engaged in heterosexual intercourse" (55). And yet, as Susan McHugh argues, "[r]evered as the goal of all sex acts, reproduction provides scientists with the conceptual means of avoiding these very questions about the social and other purposes of physical intimacies that do not so clearly result in progeny" (154). Such assumptions involving the sexual acts of primates further inform the ways in which heterosexual norms – the *straight lines that we follow* – infect and police our perceptions of what is 'proper' animal and, indeed, human behaviour.

27 Criticizing scientific norms of gender and sexuality involving primates, HIV/AIDS activist and scholar John Greyson uses the natural history museum as the setting for his film *Zero Patience*. In this musical satire about Canadian flight attendant Gaétan Dugas, who was accused of transmitting HIV to Canadian men, Greyson playfully reinterprets Dugas' story in the form of a new queer reimagining. His film includes talking taxidermy sculptures, AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) activists and a romance between historical (yet fictionalized) characters Sir Richard Francis Burton, a famous Victorian explorer, author and ethnologist with a particular interest in sexuality, and Dugas, the so-called 'Patient Zero' of HIV/AIDS in North America. After being magically reborn into the land of the living, 'Zero'meets the scientist and sexologist Burton, who is working on the taxidermied specimens to be exhibited in the natural history museum's 'Hall of Contagion.' Burton farcically embodies the persona of a scientist who is so blinded by his own bias that his search for scientific 'truths' involves reinterpreting his data and discoveries to conform to his own preestablished conclusions (including a manipulated and violent representation of Zero through documentary video). As the film moves forward, Zero makes Burton realize his prejudices (as well as his sexual desires), thus resulting in a filmic critique of the anxiety-ridden narratives that pathologize bodies based on hegemonic norms of sexuality, species, gender, and race.

28 In one significant scene of the film, Zero initiates a conversation with the taxidermied African green monkey in the exhibit, another body accused of hosting and transmitting HIV. As Zero addresses the motionless simian – "lucky thing - you cannot feel guilty like me" – the

taxidermied animal suddenly and magically turns into a woman. After this transformation, the female human-monkey character criticizes the problematic policies of preservation, informed as they are by racist, sexist and homophobic scientific discourses. Throughout this encounter between Zero, Burton, and the African Green Monkey, the audience learns that the monkey is actually a lesbian. In response to Burton's assumption that she should be naturally attracted to male primates, she jerks with disgust: "Yuck" is her response to the idea of heterosexual intercourse. That the sex, the personified gender and the sexual orientation of the African monkey remains unknown prior to her transformation into a human further underlines the ways in which scientific constructions and evaluations of animal behaviour are inevitably skewed not only by dominant norms of race, sex or gender as such, but also by the implicit anthropocentrism underpinning these norms. It is through constructions of animal bodies as 'sexless' or without any form of sexual subjectivity that the representation of taxidermied animals has what might be termed a 'neutering affect' on the human observer.

29 Linking this discussion back to Brewer's sculpture, I argue that the taxidermy monkey that grasps onto a white phallus embodies a queer aesthetics by satirically pointing to the neutering affects of traditional taxidermy and their asexual(ized) animals. Pulling an artificial phallus from a magician's hat, Brewer's monkey sculpture offers a tongue-in-cheek gesture at the peculiar lack of genitalia in traditional taxidermy exhibits (including the sculpture itself). Like the monkey, the accompanying taxidermy rabbit also lacks any sign of genitalia. Moreover, Brewer's careful staging of the rabbit, monkey, and phallus magnifies the queer erotics of the encounter. Similar to the ways representations of primate sexual behaviour are shaped and complicated by Western cultural norms, rabbit sexuality is represented in ways that are antithetical. While rabbits are depicted as 'innocent' asexual creatures, particularly in their role as domesticated pets, other representations highlight the relentless, 'crazed' sexual appetite supposedly evident in their mating behaviour (including rapid reproductive cycles). Observing the monkey's magic trick and facing the artificial phallus, the rabbit functions to address the contradictions and ambivalences of such popular representations of animal sexual behaviour and invites the viewer to reconsider human understandings of animal sexuality more generally.

30 Brewer's other sculptures, such as her 2007 piece "Forever Yours,"[4] elicit similar affects in their portrayal of animal sexual intimacy. The piece displays a taxidermy rabbit with two heads (one blue, one pink) which share the same body. Brewer's sculpture portrays two rabbit heads positioned in a kissing gesture with their hands and arms in an embrace. The sculpture lacks any visual markers of the animal's sexual anatomy and highlights cultural norms of gender placed onto bodies through the coloured signifiers of pink and blue. What is most striking about these pieces is the way in which the boundaries of intimacy are stretched (between heads, hands and interspecies touching), how these depictions of animal desire trouble the boundaries of the body, but also how gender is an operative norm inevitably marking not only human but also nonhuman animal bodies. At the same time, Brewer's sculptures point to the broader *failure* of such human representations of animals with their attempts to impose human norms of gender on animal bodies (especially pets) and their implicit desire for a mastery or regulation of animal sexual expressivity, autonomy and freedom. Her rogue taxidermy serves to highlight that interpretations of animal sexuality are funneled through anthropocentric and anthropomorphic norms – norms that are restrictive and rigorous in their adherence to an ideal (read: straight) behavioural system. Following Jane Desmond, we might thus argue that taxidermy reproduces a narrative of normative and sanitary behaviour, in that it "presents specimens performing specific behaviours from a limited repertoire of approved activities" (359). This repertoire all too often does not include representations of sexual behaviour: "the moment of coitus," as Desmond puts it, is "apparently tacitly forbidden" (359).

31 Moreover, human perception of animals, animality and animal behaviour are fragmented parts of a larger structure – sown together by philosophical, scientific, aesthetic, and literary discourses. It is through contact and encounters with animals (dead or alive) that humans come to realize that their epistemic and imaginary access to animals is pre-shaped by specific norms. This is the queer affect of animal art: to shed light on our inability to grasp the unconventional, unpredictable and perhaps ultimately unknowable being of 'the animal' with the limited means of human language and perception. The queer affects of animal art emphasize animals in their refusal to be conceptualized – to again evoke the words of Derrida – and it is this potential of queer animal art – to disorient and thus *humble* the spectator, which also underpins its ethical and

[4] An image of "Forever Yours" (2007) can be found in Brewer's "Designer" collection on her website. See http://www.sarina-brewer.com/image-galleries/designer-.html

political relevance. Nonhuman animal bodies remain queer through their uncompromising nature, their resistance to impositions of human meaning and their subversion of human knowledges. For Chen, queer is what offers "exceptions to the conventional ordering of sex, reproduction, and intimacy," but, perhaps even more importantly, queer potentialities are also, and always already, inherent in "animacy's veering-away from dominant ontologies and the normativities they promulgate" (11). In this sense, taxidermy sculptures that produce animating affects – especially affects that deviate from conventional norms of animal sexuality – go beyond simply 'tricking' the viewer into a simulation of liveliness. More specifically, taxidermy sculptures such as Brewer's monkey violate the viewer's capacity to translate norms. In other words, Brewer's monkey, having angelic wings and a halo (and holding a dildo), mocks the very enterprise of a normative scientific policing of species (including the supposed bodily threat of contagion), the blurring of corporeal boundaries and, in particular, of the religious and social taboo status of interspecies sexuality. Her sculpture provokes a queering affect of 'proper' touch of flesh on flesh with its display of white, human (genital) skin coming into contact with 'improper' animal skin (or 'inferior' species and races more generally).

32 Similarly, Chen's discussion of the cover of the DVD *The Adventures of Fu Manchu* (an American TV series which aired in 1956) goes on to show that "queering is imminent to animate transgressions, violating proper intimacies (including between humans and nonhuman things)" (11). Regarding the cover's depiction of Fu Manchu, who holds his pet monkey, Peko, on his lap, Chen writes that there is a tension between animal/human touching, especially when represented on the cover beside an eroticized woman figure (120). The queer embrace in Brewer's sculpture produces a very similar tension. The monkey clasping onto (stylized) human flesh – not to mention human genitalia – skews normative perceptions of 'proper' and 'appropriate' interspecies touch and relationality – a queer embrace that playfully but effectively addresses dominant taboos about animal and human sexualities, interspecies sexual encounters, and Western anxieties surrounding bestiality. As Wendy Pearson and Susan Knabe write regarding Greyson's aforementioned film, "[w]hile the green monkey hypothesis secured (however erroneously) a foreign origin for AIDS, the means of transmission between the green monkey and humans was haunted by the specter of bestiality and an anal primate primal scene" (124). Anxieties involving animal sexuality and animal flesh speak loudly to the longstanding

and deeply entrenched narratives of bodily contagion, represented here by the origin stories linked to HIV transmission.

33 Indeed, there is much more going on in the rogue taxidermy movement than our initial reactions to animal art might convey. This includes the aesthetically compelling ways in which artists transgress, play, and destabilize bodily norms of gender, sexuality, race, and species – norms that inform the 'neutering affect' and its sanitization of animal representations. Brewer's sculpture exposes the ways in which gender and sexuality are often skewed in representations of animality, but it also articulates a more specific criticism of the sexual politics of traditional taxidermy. The queer aesthetics of her sculptures mock both the *over*representation of racialized and gendered sexuality as testimony to deviant 'bestial desires,' but also the *under*representation of animal sexual behaviours, especially those not conforming to the normative framework of reproductive heterosexuality. Lastly, Brewer's sculpture lightens the load of the animal to carry the burden of representation, allowing for the beautiful taxidermy beast to push this representational weight back to the spectator. In doing so, human spectators are induced to think and imagine otherwise, to question historical discourses of animals and animality, and to allow themselves to be challenged by animal art's unpredictable ability to queer human thought.

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