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Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis is a collection of material demonstrating and contextualising my performance practice-research in 'performing taxidermy'. In addition to this written document, the performance practice is documented through a series of photo, video, and sound media, accessible online at http://www.PerformingTaxidermy.org (password: fmmw2021).

The practice-research constitutes a critical consideration of the processes of taxidermy within a live art context. Emerging feminist-materialist philosophies aid in conceiving of taxidermy as body art, which in turn exposes both human and more-than-human bodies within taxidermy as being vulnerable materialities at-risk to each other, particularly in the context of the Anthropocene era. The body of work consists of five performance works that engage with the myriad phases of the taxidermy process: collecting dead animal bodies; working with Dermestid beetles to strip meat from skeletons; combining taxidermy materials with mass-produced consumer goods; threading wire through skin to pose bodies; and connecting dead and living bodies as live art diorama. These actions require approaching human/non-human animal relations and histories of animal representation, which are considered through additional lenses of cultural and art theories on taxidermy. Performing taxidermy focuses on the materials and the processes of taxidermy, rather than a commitment to representations of nature. The project's originality is in its approach to taxidermy both as a practice-based research methodology and as a body-based performance art. By approaching taxidermy as a body-based, live art practice and research methodology, performing taxidermy produces original contributions to practice-research in live art and in critical theories of taxidermy and culture, proving body human and animal bodies as vulnerable materialities at-risk to one another in ongoing material impact and exchange.

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Declaration of Originality

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

Francis Marion Moseley Wilson

Part One

Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy: Introduction

This document constitutes the written component of my thesis on *Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy*, a practical and theoretical exploration of my artistic practice-research. 'Performing taxidermy' as a methodology and body of work is defined and contextualised throughout this document, though this thesis and the major conceptual pillars reflected in the title (*bodies* and *boundaries*) are born out of an interest in examining the possibilities of taxidermy in live art. Taxidermy's etymology is Latin for 'arrangement of the skin'. At its most distilled, this project is motivated by a recognition of taxidermy and live art as distinctly different art histories with a commonality of bodies: the things they do and that are done to them. Thinking critically about bodies, particularly of both human and non-human animal, is a material present bound up in problematic pasts and speculative futures: violence, colonialism, subjugation, consumerism, fragmentation, representation, intimacy, risk, grief, extinction, ecological disaster, and death are all unavoidable in critical considerations of the bodies of taxidermy.

While the formal research process of this project began in January of 2017, my practice in performing taxidermy began earlier, with what felt like a double-life as an undergraduate at a small liberal arts conservatory and a part-time apprentice in a rural taxidermy shop. In 2012, animal death began to feature in my performance practice; during my MA course at Brunel University, I began to hone in on the possibility for new insights and valuable artistic research in the material processes of taxidermy in a performance context. Both taxidermy and performance are accompanied by a rich and extensive body of research. Taxidermy, in particular, shows up in humanities fields from geography to history to contemporary art. There is less research in the consideration of taxidermy specifically within live or performance art, despite their shared tendency to straddle or confuse lines between the 'real' and the theatrical. Indeed, a central theme to this thesis, along with the bodies already mentioned, is in boundaries — both material and conceptual. I position this practice-research specifically in relation to *live art* for its methodological and conceptual ties to live art as a field distinct from other performance fields; performing taxidermy is experimental, risk-aware, and concerned with 'ideas of process and presence over as much as the production of objects and things'.[1] LADA (Live Art Development Agency) additionally defines live art in part as a research engine;[2] performing taxidermy as a methodology is

1. 'What is Live Art?' (2021), Live Art Development Agency. Available at: https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/about-lada/what-is-live-art/ [Accessed 21st July 2021].
2. *Ibid.*

invested in exploring what taxidermy, as a process, *does* in a contemporary performance context, which drives the creative process and output.

In addition to establishing and defining a practice in performing taxidermy, this project necessarily holds a stake in the productive value of animal bodies in art. Valuing the inclusion of animal death in art does not mean that these inclusions are not without discomfort, ethical and personal challenges, inelegance, controversy, or second-guesses. As will become evident in this thesis, performing taxidermy requires, considers, and embraces risk. I propose that, under the mounting pressure of the 'Anthropocene',[3] taxidermy objects and processes working within a body-based performance art practice generate singular moments and modes for re/considering human/nonhuman animal relations, death rituals, animal ethics, and human and non-human animal vulnerability. Within the body of work contained in this thesis, these moments are not often shared with 'romantic', 'beloved', and 'grieved', 'far-away' wildlife species such as tigers, lions, and elephants — species that traditional[4] taxidermy, a practice born out of colonialist, European perspectives, values most. Performing taxidermy, instead, focuses on small, local, ordinary encounters: with pigeons, magpies, rabbits, and bugs. Thus, this research focuses on the following questions:

1. What might taxidermy objects and processes 'do' within a body-based live art practice, and how might these results contribute to considerations of other taxidermy contexts and human/animal relations more generally?

2. How can a methodology of performing taxidermy invite confrontations of human and non-human animal that disrupt the pre-established or assumed social/cultural boundaries between the two?

3. How can an artistic focus on taxidermy as a material process and exchange rather than a visual, sculptural object impact established artistic and cultural understandings of animal representation?

3. An increasingly popular term used by groups of scientists to describe the current geological era, beginning roughly at the start of the Industrial Revolution, and defined by significant environmental change due to human activity.

4. I use 'traditional' to refer to specific conventions and contexts of taxidermy practices and objects. In particular, those seen within Euro-American (Western) natural history museums, nature dioramas, or hunting trophies, where chemically preserved animal skin is manipulated over an anatomically precise mould or form of that animal and presented as a 'life-like' replica. Other styles of taxidermy, including those seen in a contemporary art context, are covered in 'Conceptual Frameworks'.

4. How can performing taxidermy facilitate moments of intimacy and risk between human and non-human animal that in turn create familiarity, rather than alienation, as bodies living and dying in the current geopolitical era?

This series of works in performing taxidermy examines and confronts these questions in two ways. The first is in considering myriad 'steps' of the taxidermy process: procuring animal bodies for taxidermy; cleaning skeletons and skulls; skinning, preserving, and re-forming the animal; and curating dioramas. The second is in seeking resonances and connections to other species and other contexts of both animal death and animal representation. It is in approaching taxidermy as a performance practice that marks the practice-research's originality. As will be detailed elsewhere in the thesis, there is an extensive body of critical work on taxidermy as a visual medium in contemporary art, and some that critically analyses taxidermy or animals in performance, but none that considers taxidermy processes as live art through artistic practice-research.

This written element of my thesis, along with the performance practice and the documentation that accompanies it, responds to the above questions. Beginning with 'Methodologies', I describe both 'performing taxidermy' as a methodology and the varied other 'minor' methodologies that will appear throughout the thesis. Following 'Methodologies' is 'Conceptual Frameworks', a chapter that serves as an introduction to the theorists and concepts I will be writing with in performing taxidermy. The critical frameworks of this practice-research build primarily on theorists primarily writing from perspectives of natural history, contemporary art, feminism, post-structuralism, and materialist and speculative philosophies. Before introducing the portfolio, I will additionally provide some analysis on the role of documentation. These chapters — the present 'Introduction', 'Methodologies', 'Conceptual Frameworks', and 'Documentation' — make up the first half of the written component.

The second half of this document, 'Portfolio of Works', opens with an introduction that will both explain the chapter order and direct the reader on where and how to view relevant documentation. Additional chapters feature photo-documentation and a critical reflection on performance experiments in performing taxidermy. In most cases, these will be ordered by 'Action' — which describes the artwork itself — followed by 'Context,' which expands the critical considerations within the work and their relation to performing taxidermy. Additionally, contextualisation of my creative practice alongside other art practitioners will largely happen in these chapters. Following *what to do with what remains*, the final chapter in 'Portfolio of Works', I conclude *Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy* by revisiting how this practice-research answers the above research questions. Supplementary material, including performance risk assessments and changes to the research timeline due to the Covid-19 pandemic, can be found in the appendices.

Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy: Methodologies

Given that my primary inquiry is on what taxidermy can 'do' in a live art context, 'doing' (as both taxidermy and performance) then becomes an appropriate and critical method of research. In locating my work as 'practice-research,' I draw primarily on Robin Nelson's notions of 'praxis,' or 'theory imbricated with practice,' and 'multi-modality' of practice-research in order to both explain the relationship between theory and practice in my research and discuss the various creative forms and methodologies present in the included portfolio.

'Performing taxidermy' as practice-research methodology

Explaining the research methods in this project requires both an evaluation and clarification of 'taxidermy' and how taxidermy objects and processes are developed throughout the research into my notion of 'performing taxidermy.' Taxidermy, in its most traditional approaches, is the removal and preservation of an animal's skin, skillfully re-assembled over a form[5] and manipulated into a 'realistic' or 'life-like' animal pose.[6] The term functions as a noun that describes these kinds of objects and has accepted adjective forms of 'taxidermic,' 'taxidermal,' or 'taxidermied.' Interestingly for my research's focus on taxidermy as a process and the act of 'doing' taxidermy, there is not a universally recognised verb form of taxidermy; most often the imprecise terminology 'to stuff' or 'to mount' are used, though 'taxidermise'[7] is seen occasionally (and will be used in this document). Etymologically, the word 'taxidermy' came to use in the English language in the early 19th century, derived from Greek roots *taxis* plus *dermis,* meaning 'arrangement of the skin'.[8] Both my own creative practice and other practitioners I discuss draw liberally from this Greek root; in interrogating bodies and boundaries both materially and culturally, 'arrangements of the skin' are not only arrangements of animal skin by human taxidermist, but also arrangements of human and animal bodies together in material relation and exchange. The conceptual frameworks offer a thorough background to human-animal relations specific to taxidermy in Western culture and history, though in considering live art and more contemporary scholarship on the various registers and cultural sites of humans and non-human animal other, my taxidermy practice-research explores other myriad 'relations of use'[9] in which we engage with animal bodies. For example, *Immaculate Confection* (2018) involves combining taxidermy with zoomorphic chocolates, or animal

5. Often made of Styrofoam, plaster, fibres, wires, or some combination of these.
6. Complications of taxidermy realism are expanded in 'Conceptual Frameworks'.
7. 'Taxidermy,' Anon, (2020). In: *Merriam-Webster* [online] Available at:https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/taxidermy#other-words[Accessed 10 April 2020].
8. 'Taxidermy,' Anon, (2020). In: *Etymology Online.* [online] Available at: https:// www.etymonline.com/word/taxidermy [Accessed 10 April 2020].
9. Haraway, D. (2008), *When Species Meet,* University of Minnesota Press.

bodies as food; in *bug studies* (2019), the focus of the work is on the live insect collaborators commonly found in taxidermy practices; in *Intersections: Animal Death* (2019-2020), I engage with 'roadkill' and other animals whose death is caused by human social and technological systems. In placing my practice in a lineage of artists, 'Conceptual Frameworks' will devote some focus to taxidermy in the visual arts from photography to sculpture, including artists such as Mark Dion, Angela Singer, and Roni Horn. When considering performance and live art, my work also resonates with artists working with non-taxidermic animal dead, as in works by Ana Mendieta,[10] Kira O'Reilly,[11] or Sheila Ghelani.[12] These diversions into other instances of animal death outside hunting or natural history narratives traditionally associated with taxidermy are reflected in the conceptual frameworks I draw from; these include work from theorists such as Donna Haraway and Jane Bennett, who provide critical analysis of human relationship to non-human animals not specific to taxidermy.[13] 'Performing taxidermy' becomes a method of using taxidermy in part to complicate the organised categories of animal bodies in contemporary Western culture, or engaging with an 'ontological mobility' of animal bodies as described by Giovanni Aloi in *Speculative Taxidermy.*[14] Indeed, one outcome of 'performing taxidermy' is the troubling of the ontology of taxidermy itself. However, as my work is grounded in taxidermy as a material practice, all of the portfolio works include at least one element crucial to the taxidermy process, however small, such as skinning, threading wire, stripping flesh from bone, preserving animal skin, or obtaining animal bodies for taxidermy. These actions are not only essential to the project's methodology and research questions but also are the craft in which I ground myself as a performer; I have been professionally trained in taxidermy and in performing taxidermy offer expertise in executing taxidermic processes. At times, some of these actions will also be turned to my own body. In the portfolio, much of the documentation in photographs and video serves to show these actions closely. This serves not only to demonstrate the taxidermic processes that shape the project itself but also as evidence that, in cases where a live event began with a taxidermic object (such as *Immaculate Confection* and *F.U.O.S*), concepts of material intimacy and bodily risk are already present in my relationship with the animal dead featured in each work. 'Performing taxidermy,' then, as evidenced by this portfolio, is a material-driven process that includes performing *through* taxidermy (by doing), performing *with* taxidermy (as objects), and performing *as* taxidermy (through incorporations of a performer's body in the taxidermy process).

Material conditions

10. *Death of a Chicken* (1972), in which Mendieta beheads a chicken.
11. *inthewrongplaceness* (2005-2009), in which O'Reilly 'dances' with a dead pig.
12. *Rat, Rose, Bird* (2013), in which Ghelani interacts with frozen dead mice.
13. In Bennett's case, in terms of 'matter' and 'materiality.'
14. Aloi, G. (2018), *Speculative Taxidermy*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 34.

Working with taxidermy as a self-funded research student in a practice-research PhD presents a set of material realities and challenges that I must outline in order to clarify the overall practice-research methodology in my work. Though I have previously worked in a fully functioning taxidermy shop with proper taxidermy tools and equipment, my process as a student in the UK requires a more 'DIY' or 'home taxidermy' approach. This limitation is one reason I primarily work with smaller animals; larger animals require more space and different equipment than what is available to me in a modest self-funded studio. This material limitation, along with my commitment to working primarily with 'found' animal bodies in and around Glasgow, is not a detriment to the overall research, but does narrow the scope of the research: my human-to-animal relations focus becomes one on urban ecologies humans share with pigeons, magpies, squirrels, and foxes, as well as animals we at times share our homes with, such as rats and mice.[15] In addition to the material realities presented by my studio limitations, doing taxidermy has other unique constraints in a performance context. Actions performed in the process of doing taxidermy cannot be un-done or re-done, and the 'found' animal bodies are a limited resource. This quality of my performance practice aligns my work with other live or performance art traditions, particularly within body art and action act, that are not or cannot be rehearsed. Rehearsal limitations and long periods of planning before carrying out any taxidermy actions do not mean that performance experiments are not open-ended, or that theory then becomes more significant than practice. I specifically refer to the portfolio works throughout this document as 'performance experiments' because this indicates that the creative work undertaken as part of the research is both artistic output of the described creative process and active part of the research itself. As a part of this thesis, many of these performance experiments are submitted through their documentation; further analysis on the documentation in these works is covered later in this chapter.

Theory and practice

Before giving more detailed examples of the specific practice methods chosen for individual portfolio works, I will summarise the relationship between theory and practice in my practice-research. As noted, the relationship between theory and practice is best aligned with Nelson's notion of 'praxis,' which involves 'an interplay between practical doing-thinking […] and more abstract conceptual thinking.'[16] Performance experiments and their planning serve as the 'doing-thinking' of my research. Scholarly reading and writing are integral parts of my research, and are involved both before practice experiments, in honing the ideas or questions at the forefront of periods of practice work, and after, within critical

15. Examining the significance of working with these particular species, many of which fall under a social categorisation of 'trash animals,' merits its own critical engagement, which will be expanded later in the chapter *Intersections: Animal Death.*
16. Nelson, R. (2013). *Practice-based Research in the Arts*, New York: Palgrave Macmillian, p. 29.

reflection. As expounded in 'Conceptual Frameworks', major theoretical frameworks I draw from include New Materialism,[17] feminism,[18] and cultural theory on multi-species relations, both historically and in the current geological era. These frameworks emerge as primary sources for my research due to their focus on bodies as interactive materials, relevance to taxidermy and performance studies, and influence on broader contemporary contexts of human-animal relations. As the thesis title suggests, my focus is on bodies and boundaries of taxidermy; this includes both physical, material boundaries and theoretical or conceptual boundaries. To reflect this, the conceptual frameworks are organised through taxidermy's complex relationship to certain dichotomies, including representation/presentation, science/art, animal/object, dead/life-like, and nature/culture. Theory informs practice both in the planning and reflection, meaning outputs of each process become inputs for the other. Nelson cites Barbara Bolt in describing this 'double articulation […] whereby theory emerges from a reflexive practice as the same time as practice is informed by theory'.[19] Practice is not simply a demonstration of this process, but a necessary form of creative thinking and creative action to synthesise these ideas in a configuration of 'performing taxidermy;' that is to say, it is in practice that 'performing taxidermy' actually happens, and varied theoretical frameworks influence how I define it as such and how it connects to other fields. As will be outlined in 'Conceptual Frameworks', my research reflects many concepts in Giovanni Aloi's recently published *Speculative Taxidermy*. I mention this book specifically because it most directly addresses my research inquiry; Aloi gives a thorough analysis of the value of (in particular, subversive) taxidermy practices in contemporary art and their relevance to human relationships to non-human animal bodies in the context of the Anthropocene. Aloi additionally acknowledges the value in a methodological approach that 'write[s] with the work, rather than about it, or engage[s] in a "shared flight" rather than a dissection'.[20] While writing about taxidermy is not new, practice-research as a methodology in this field is, and it is through this approach new insights may be achieved. Taxidermy and performance/live art histories and theories both become a part of this shared flight, as 'performing taxidermy' is additionally an experiment in finding synchronicities between both fields as art forms that are fundamentally *about bodies.*

Multi-modality, portfolio works, and documentation

Throughout *Practice-Based Research in the Arts,* Nelson reiterates the multi-modal approach of practice-research.[21] In many practice-research projects, these modes are the reading and writing involved in

17. Including Jane Bennett and Elizabeth Straughan.
18. Both corporeal feminism via Stacey Alaimos and feminist body art via Amelia Jones, Katherine O'dell, and Rebecca Schneider.
19. Nelson, R. (2013). *Practice-based Research in the Arts*, New York: Palgrave Macmillian, p. 29.
20. Aloi, G. (2018), *Speculative Taxidermy*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 27.
21. Nelson, R. (2013). *Practice-based Research in the Arts*, New York: Palgrave Macmillian, p. 29, 46.

theoretical or conceptual aspects of the research and the artistic practice. These modes of conducting research are reflected in the research output, which takes both written and other artistic or aesthetic form. For Nelson, these modes of conducting and disseminating research constitute different forms of 'knowledge', which include knowledges produced by more traditional methods, such as in a written document, but also include embodied and experiential knowledges produced in both doing or making of art practice and in the attendance or experience of an artwork.[22] For my project, this does not only mean modes of thinking and reading combined with creative practice, but also varied creative practice methods within each individual portfolio work submitted. Nelson addresses the necessary practicality of providing documentation of creative processes and creative outputs to the thoroughness of a completed practice-research project. Similar to how each portfolio work called for its own methodologies, each work has its own relationship to ontologies of 'artwork', 'performance', and/or 'documentation'. Though tensions in defining the ontology of performance are present in my practice-research, and function differently depending on the work, these tensions are not the primary research focus. Addressing the significance of an audience to witness a performance action in order to deem it performance as such is, additionally, not a primary concern of my research. The complicated temporality of taxidermy objects, taxidermy processes, and other aspects of my practice undoubtedly blurs the boundaries between 'doing' and 'performing' and 'performance' and 'documentation;' considerations of the ontologies of performance, such as Peggy Phelan's notion of performance 'disappearance',[23] aid in discovering resonances between taxidermy, ecology, and other artistic forms, but are not used to prove or disprove these theories. All materials submitted do function as documentation of a creative process, but the extent to which the submitted material is, in a sense 'the work itself' as opposed to *purely* documentation differs for each. Following 'Conceptual Frameworks' is a section on 'Documentation', wherein I provide a more critical engagement with these ideas.

22. Nelson, R. (2013). *Practice-based Research in the Arts*, New York: Palgrave Macmillian, p. 67.
23. Phelan, P. (1993). *Unmarked: the politics of performance.* New York: Routledge.

Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy: Conceptual Frameworks

Each of the works contained within the portfolio submitted as part of *Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy* have their own unique frameworks and considerations within the context of the entire thesis, and these are included in their respective chapters. Contextualisation of the artistic practice alongside other arts practitioners is also largely covered in these chapters, as the works align with a diverse field of artists. However, the portfolio taken in its entirety touches on a handful of the same foundational conceptual frameworks and relevant theorists. This chapter, 'Conceptual Frameworks', establishes existing literature that influences my notion of 'performing taxidermy' and outlines the key concepts that apply to the thesis as a whole.

Boundaries: ontological/epistemological 'betweeness'

As in the title of this thesis, two major concepts serve as the centre of my work in 'performing taxidermy:' *bodies* and *boundaries.* In this section of 'Conceptual Frameworks', I explore taxidermy's 'betweenness' of ontological and epistemological boundaries by addressing taxidermy's status as both presentation/representation, animal/object, and nature/culture, concluding with taxidermy's potential relationship to Haraway's 'becoming-with' and poststructuralist 'becomings.'

Presentation/Representation

One of taxidermy's most tense paradoxical qualities is its capacity to be both a representation and a presentation of an animal; it is this quality that has given taxidermy a unique power in being bound up with both science and art as both animal and object. In *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and Cultures of Longing*, Rachel Poliquin describes the human curiosity about animals that fuelled early taxidermy practices. Unlike other histories of bodily preservation, including those of the Egyptians, Maori, North American First Nations, and Western Christianity, which all have some spiritual or metaphysical motivator, taxidermy is 'uniquely secular,' fulfilling simply a desire 'to perpetuate the ability to look at animals'.[24] 17th century naturalists, such as Francis Bacon, used taxidermy precisely to absolve nature of the mythological. In *Speculative Taxidermy,* Giovanni Aloi writes on how natural history's epistemic strategies outside taxidermy, such as nature illustration, also contribute to constructing a 'real-register of nature.'[25] In nature illustration, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries, animals are reduced to their surfaces — to what is visible. Illustration of both plants and animals involves a literal flattening of the

24. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 25.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

image, often without its context on a white background. Aloi posits that nature illustration influenced taxidermy practices in this way: frozen, dried, and dead specimens 'provided the much-needed evidential truth necessary to begin a secular, taxonomical, and empirical cataloging project.'[26] The co-evolving fields of nature illustration and taxidermy as scientific practices led to taxidermy's reduction of an animal to its visible, morphological traits — in other words, taxidermy's presentation of an animal. Simultaneously, as will be repeated throughout this thesis through the work of myriad theorists, however organic and authentic an animal skin may be — its 'biological facticity' as Giovanni Aloi calls it — taxidermy's representational modes call its 'realism' into question and criticism.

Poliquin, in her chapter on 'Order',[27] similarly describes the primacy of the visual in taxidermy's epistemic value in the 18th and early 19th century. Animals are grouped by their morphological similarities in order to arrange and classify animal bodies, which becomes the museum collection. Through this practice, individual animal bodies begin to serve as generic stand-ins for a whole species; the 'typical' specimen — almost exclusively young and male — is established. Even in contemporary traditional taxidermy, truths are stretched in order to represent a specimen at its theoretical 'best:' bald patches are covered with fur from another part of the body, or another animal entirely; whiskers are replaced with synthetic threads; animals are never shown mating or defecating. For this reason, Jane Desmond calls taxidermy a 'Theatre of the Dead'. Animals are ostensibly staged to perform themselves, but only without evidence of death, illness, or imperfection. Traditional taxidermy, then, is a 'denaturalised vision of nature'.[28] Taxidermy is not only a single individual animal representing a collective, but a single individual animal representing human, abstract concepts of nature as a whole. As Poliquin argues in *Breathless Zoo*, this is as true of 18th century colonialists' world exhibitions depicting violent taxidermic scenes as it is 20th century peaceful natural history museum dioramas urging conservationist eco-consciousness. Taxidermy presents an 'authentic' animal body that represents not only its species but also all number of cultural values and ideologies.

Being in-between presentation and representation works in tandem with taxidermy's paradoxical status of being perceived both as an animal and an object. While taxidermy's representational power undermines any potential truth claims about animals its organicism may suggest, there is nonetheless a significance to biological facticity. Poliquin argues that even poorly done taxidermy is clearly not a simple human-made artefact.[29] While intention and artistic choice are evident in the experience of viewing a taxidermic work,

26. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
27. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, Chapter 5 "Order."
28. Desmond, J. (2008). 'Postmortem Exhibitions: Taxidermied Animals and Plastinated Corpses in the Theatres of the Dead,' *Configurations,* 14:3, p. 355.
29. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 107.

there is *something* about the authenticity of an animal's skin that makes taxidermy a distinctly different experience than other human-made objects, even those incorporating animal parts, such as a leather belt. From a practical standpoint, preserving an animal body, in the case of most animals, allows a viewer to get closer to an animal than would be possible if the animal were living. Taxidermy creates potential for intimacy with an animal body, and it is in this physical intimacy, which Steve Baker and Poliquin both call a confrontation or encounter with the animal, that an uneasy 'visceral knowing' occurs in the viewer.[30] Baker writes in *The Postmodern Animal*, 'The thing seen is recognised as an animal; the nature of the experience may be less recognizable'.[31] Poliquin states this similarly:

> Human-crafted objects are inherently endowed with meaning. They were made for particular purposes. They variously fulfil those purposes, fail, or are reimagined for other functions. In contrast, animals have no innate meaning: meaning is always a human intellectual imposition. When the obstinately unmeaningful presence of animals is purposefully manipulated through human craft, the resulting animal-thing is, predictably enough, disconcerting. All taxidermy provokes the recognition that this thing on display, at once animal and object, is neither fully animal nor fully object.[32]

Still, taxidermy relies on biology and anatomy to make a taxidermic animal look as 'alive' as possible, and, in Poliquin's words, 'simply because animals are animals' there is a sense of a facticity of nature. The natural history museum is not exactly nature, but it is also not exactly art. This quality is what leads Poliquin to claim that realistic, or life-like, taxidermy 'obliterates any division between the aesthetics of nature and the aesthetics of art'.[33] Donna Haraway, in 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936',[34] is deeply critical of truth claims told in taxidermy. Haraway reviews her visit to the African Hall of the American Museum of Natural History, and in particular the history of Carl Akeley's contribution to taxidermy and American natural history museums. Carl Akeley was a naturalist, hunter, and taxidermist of the late 19th and early 20th century with a particular interest in Africa and African animals. Haraway deconstructs the illusion of scientific truth behind taxidermy to reveal how the African Hall's dioramas are closer to romantic myths of nature, and of Akeley's life and explorations, than objective truths. Akeley's biographies suggest he hunted for 'perfection', meaning, he searched for strong bull elephants with symmetrical tusks; for groups of animals resembling nuclear human families; for animals without the undesirable trait of cowardice. There was a hierarchy to hunted

30. *Ibid.,* p. 39.
31. Baker, S. (2000). *The Postmodern Animal*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd., p. 98.
32. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 38-39.
33. *Ibid.,* p. 107.
34. Haraway, D. (1984). 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,' *Social Text*, No. 11, pp. 20-64.

game, Haraway notes, and even the layout of the museum reflects this with the young adult male gorilla as the central figure. 'Perfection', she writes, 'was known by natural kinship; type, kind, and kin mutually defined each other'.[35] Giovanni Aloi extends these theories on taxidermy realism, aligning taxidermy not only with scientific discourses but also classical and neoclassical art: '[R]ealism can be understood in classical terms as relentlessly engaging in the production of a beauty immortal in its perfection'.[36] He continues, '[Taxidermists], in pursuing these aesthetics, […] also blindly embraced the ideological values inscribed in classicism. It is thus important to acknowledge that, informed by the ideological discourses of virtue and moral value, neoclassical art deliberately aimed at ennobling nature in accordance with historical and iconographic truth[…]'[37] Engagements with bodily perfection and imperfection will appear throughout the portfolio works here in performing taxidermy; live, or performance, art, already has a complex relationship to art objects and body stasis. As an ideological representation, then, taxidermy fundamentally becomes a tool in storytelling.

Nature/Culture, or Naturecultures and 'Becomings-with'

In thinking of taxidermy as between art and science, art and nature, and animal and object, this path leads toward Haraway's notion of 'naturecultures', a term used to merge the socially formed delineations between 'nature' and 'culture.' As shown in the above paragraphs, taxidermy is riddled with small dualisms reflective of this broader concept. As wildlife in a museum, taxidermy works are, like Haraway's domesticated dogs,[38] a rich instance of this natureculture synthesis, and performing taxidermy aims to complicate, subvert, and interrogate the ways and places in which this synthesis can happen. In *When Species Meets,* Haraway refers to natureculture — where human meets non- or more-than human — meetings, intersections, and exchanges as 'becoming-with;' for Haraway, 'becoming-with' includes our relationships to pets, to the bacteria in our own bodies, to how we eat — though it is hardly limited to these.[39] The notion of 'becoming-with' functions as a way of identifying this meeting point of human and all non- and more-than-human[40] life, focusing on enmeshed ecologies over older socialised dichotomies: 'Natures, cultures, subjects, and objects do not pre-exist their intertwined worldings'.[41] She expands this in *Staying with the Trouble,* describing 'multi-species becomings-with' as a way of 'staying with the trouble' — a kind of being present with and attuned to material realities — of the current geological era, commonly known as the Anthropocene; Haraway reconfigures this era as the 'Cthulucene,' wherein

35. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
36. Aloi, G. (2018). *Speculative Taxidermy*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 122.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
38. Haraway, D. (2003). *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
39. Haraway, D. (2008). *When Species Meet,* University of Minnesota Press, p. 4.
40. The term 'more-than-human' is credited to ecologist David Abram; the term is used primarily to expand the connotations of 'nonhuman' to include all organic and inorganic matter and combined networks of matter.
41. Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, p. 13.

human beings may seek alternative, networked webs of relationships with more-than-human entities and ecologies. She refers to some of these relations as 'sympoiesis' with 'oddkin,' in other words, as 'making-with' 'unexpected collaborat[ors]'.[42] Re-thinking our entanglements with other life requires re-thinking histories, and uncovering what histories the present is built from. Haraway writes:

> It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.[43]

Taxidermy's capacity for storytelling, as outlined in the first sections of this chapter, gives performing taxidermy its potential to tell new, different, or alternate stories, particularly of human/non-human animal relations and interactions. It is in telling new and alternate stories that we find potential to undo taxidermy's previously established patriarchal, colonialist narratives, leading to new ways to understand and relate our human position alongside non-human animal others. In this, it is, further, an opportunity to make and make-with 'oddkin'. In earlier work, Haraway refers to many of the non-human animal lives we share spaces and ecologies with as 'companion species'; many of the animals seen throughout this portfolio are examples of this. My artistic practice, due to ethical commitments and material conditions, largely focuses on the birds and mammals seen commonly in more urbanised environments: pigeons, magpies, sparrows, and hares, to name a few. In *bug studies*, the 'oddkin' are Dermestid, or flesh-eating beetles — common, but often invisible, labourers in traditional taxidermy. Many of these species are known as 'trash animals' — species that have no sentimental or utilitarian domestic value, but also have no romantic value as nature or distant wildlife. Though the material organicism of these collaborators is significant in the work, so is the exploration of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic objects in consideration of contemporary naturecultures, as seen in *Immaculate Confection.* Similar to above, in considering how the symbolic and representational registers of taxidermy and animals contributes to telling stories and forming histories, anthropomorphism and zoomorphism are similarly human story-telling devices. All these registers will be considered in performing taxidermy, along with the human performer-taxidermist — myself— involved, visible, and often literally and materially a part of the process, rather than as the invisible taxidermist hand more commonly (un)seen in traditional taxidermy.

Haraway, in her concept of 'becoming-with', particularly in *When Species Meet*, is adamant in distancing her work from poststructuralist 'becomings' in her critique of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming-animal.' For her, in addition to claims of misogyny and ageism, Deleuze and Guatarri's focus

42. *Ibid.*, p. 4-5.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

on an 'exceptional individual' to bring about the process of 'becoming' is too grandiose and exclusively centred on the 'becoming' of the Oeudipal subject. The two authors also frequently disparage domesticated animals, in particular small dogs, in favour of a romantic notion of the wolf, and as is clear from much of Haraway's work over the last 20 years, she puts much significance on our daily, shared, ordinary lives with companion animals — referring to these exactly as 'significant otherness.' Of Deleuze and Guattari, she writes, 'This is a philosophy of the sublime, not the earthly, not the mud'.[44] I have chosen Haraway's 'becoming-with' as a major contribution to performing taxidermy both because of this notion of 'ordinariness', given the species who contribute to this portfolio, and because of Haraway's focus on *with*, given the focus on the corporeal contact of taxidermy processes.

Steve Baker draws connections between 'becoming-animal' and taxidermy in *The Postmodern Animal*. This text's focus on a postmodern reading of animals does not have notable resonance with performing taxidermy. With Haraway's critiques and distinctions in mind, there are, though, still aspects to Deleuze and Guatarri's postructuralist 'becomings' drawn on by Baker that aid in thinking about performing taxidermy as an art practice. One is in Deleuze and Guattarri's notion of 'bodies' in 'becoming-animal'; as Baker proposes, '[Deleuze and Guatarri] define bodies not in terms of their forms but in terms of what they can do';[45] This frames thinking about bodies, and here, bodies in taxidermy, then, not solely through their morphological traits but also in what actions they become a part of. This focus on bodies as what they 'do' also allows for 'becoming-animals' vacillation between form and formlessness — states both seen within the taxidermy process. Performing taxidermy, with its ties to live art and time-based artistic practices in addition to its consideration of these ontological dualisms, is a project in considering bodies not simply by their visual morphology but by their materiality. With this in mind, performing taxidermy works more closely with philosophies of New Materialism than Post-structuralism to examine what happens between bodies.

Bodies

Following the consideration of taxidermy's 'betweenness' above, I will continue on to the second pillar of 'conceptual frameworks': a consideration of bodies. This will draw largely from New Materialism and Corporeal Feminism to begin, after which I take some diversions into phenomenological and anthropological considerations of dead animal bodies. Finally, I will turn to theorists working specifically in the realm of performance and live art to consider risk and intimacy of performing taxidermy.

<u>New Materialism and Corporeal Feminism</u>

44. Haraway, D. (2008). *When Species Meet,* University of Minnesota Press, p. 28.
45. Baker, S. (2000). *The Postmodern Animal*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd., p. 136.

As an arts practitioner, regardless of particular medium, my process often begins with a consideration of the materials I am working with. This has remained true in working with taxidermy and in my live art practice. Performance art has a rich history of considering the performer's body as an artistic material; my practice-research's relationship to live art is expanded later in this chapter. As discussed above, Giovanni Aloi links taxidermy to other scientific practices that reduce animals to their 'surfaces': objects of an anthropocentric, patriarchal gaze. Aloi's 'natural history panopticon'[46] is similar to John Berger's theory on post-Industrial Revolution human/non-human animal relations, in which animals, stripped of mystery and curiosity by Cartesian dualism, industrialism, and scientific practices, are 'looked at' without the capacity to 'look back'.[47] Performing taxidermy seeks to move beyond the visual realm and consider what bodies do, what they are made of, and what happens when they intersect. For this reason, New Materialism and, by extension, Corporeal Feminism both serve as useful frameworks for considering bodies as materials in performing taxidermy.

In *Vibrant Matter,*[48] Jane Bennett sets out to describe the agency of nonhuman things, and how such agency may change our understanding of natural and/or political events (and indeed our distinctions between the two). 'Vitality,' for Bennett, is defined as 'the capacity of things […] not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own'.[49] All matter and materials in the world are referred to as 'actants,' working together in 'assemblages' (or groups or multiplicities of materials). A potent example given is food. The body is affected by the matter it consumes; eating is not an act of possession of eaten by eater, but of matter becoming one another[50]. This means food not only has a vitality, but impacts and influences our own as material bodies. In the case of taxidermy, the kind of vitality an animal has changes from living animal to preserved animal skin, but it maintains a vitality, nonetheless. Vital materialism then provides a framework for considering taxidermy that is not bound by the politics of looking; animal bodies, whether living, dead, or taxidermic, have agency and impact, though what that agency or impact is may differ in these different material states.

Bennett, who, like Baker, also draws on Deleuze and Guattari, subverts a 'hylomorphic model' of matter – one in which inert matter only takes an organic 'form' when enacted by some outside force – to one in which this matter already contains energies ('effervescences' or 'tendencies') that 'endeavour to express

46. Aloi, G. (2018). *Speculative Taxidermy*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 93.
47. Berger, J. (2009). 'Why Look at Animals?,' in *Why Look at Animals?*, New York: Penguin.
48. Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter*, Duke University Press.
49. *Ibid.*, p. vii.
50. *Ibid.*, Chapter 3, 'Edible Matter.'

themselves' through their contact with other forces or bodies.[51] Another example from *Vibrant Matter* that resonates with taxidermy is Bennett's description of metal workers learning the qualities of metals through working *with* metal as a creative practice rather than a more traditional scientific approach of observing what a metal *is.*[52] Besides metal's significance in taxidermy, as will be discussed in the portfolio chapters, a similar approach can be applied to taxidermy, as theorist Elizabeth Straughan exactly does in 'Entangled Corporeality: Taxidermy Practice and the Vibrancy of Dead Matter'.[53] Straughan describes taxidermy as 'a practice characterised by proximity and intimacy, whereby an in-depth understanding of the body of another is achieved via corporeal contact'.[54] As in Bennett's vital materialism, human body and dead animal body, in the process of taxidermy, become parts of an assemblage wherein both are impacted; for the human taxidermist, as with the metal workers, types of knowledge that are produced through this intimate proximity are notably *different* from those of visual, distanced observation. Further, approaching taxidermy processes as material assemblage resonates with practice-research as a form of knowing.

Performing taxidermy continues this path through its focus on the taxidermy process and on interrogating the intimacy in these material relationships. Corporeal feminism, as adjacent to New Materialism, also considers bodies-as-flesh and the vulnerabilities of bodies being materially open to and impacted by one another. Stacy Alaimo refers to a 'trans-corporeal subject,' who 'is generated through and entangled with biological, technological, economic, social, political, and other systems, processes, and events, at vastly different scales'.[55] The notion of the 'trans-corporeal subject' is helpful in contextualising performing taxidermy; early in my work between taxidermy and live art, considering ways of subverting traditional taxidermy caused me to focus on attempts at de-centring myself as the taxidermist and bringing focus specifically to the animal. I have no claims as to whether or not this is possible within a taxidermy practice, but I have come to realise that the more interesting elements of taxidermy as a live art practice were in considering the relational, considering myself and taxidermy material as a multiplicity. Trans-corporeality focuses on this intersection of bodies, rather than on either as individual, while 'begin[ning] with the human'.[56] As a performance art practice, performing taxidermy does not attempt to deny the role of myself as taxidermist-performer.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 55-56.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 55-57.
53. Straughan, E. (2015). 'Entangled Corporeality: Taxidermy Practice and the Vibrancy of Dead Matter.' *Geohumanities,* 1:2, p. 363-377.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 364.
55. Alaimo, S. (2018). 'Trans-corporeality,' in Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (eds) *Posthuman Glossary,* London: Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 338-339.
56. *Ibid.* p. 338.

In several of the portfolio works, I perform naked. This choice is in most cases two-fold: as a performer, it amplifies my consideration of myself as a body, of the materiality of flesh, which in turn impacts the sense of vulnerability and body-material intimacy with other materials of an assemblage within a specific performance work. Alaimo additionally writes specifically on nudity, particularly of women's bodies, within 'trans-corporeality'. Using examples of outdoor naked protests by environmental activists, she suggests that the nakedness in these contexts emphasise that 'humans are not only connected with each other, but with the material flows of substances and places.[57] The protest examples exist primarily as photographs of many nude bodies spelling out words such as 'No GMO'; bodies appear as a part of the landscape. She points to Webster's dictionary's definition of 'vulnerability' as 'capable of being physically wounded'. This means humans are not vulnerable by being human 'in some transient, contained sense' but by being 'flesh, substance, matter'.[58] 'Trans-corporeality' provides a mode of considering vulnerability within performing taxidermy, which, in turn, gestures toward the 'shared vulnerability' of speculative taxidermy that Aloi proposes, as discussed earlier.

Body Infecting/Affecting Body

In addition to materialist considerations of bodies, there are phenomenological and anthropological lenses that aid in considering performing taxidermy's sense of intimacy and risk. Peta Tait takes a phenomenological approach to the dead animal on stage in her review of performance works by Jill Orr and Nikki Heywood in 'Fleshing Dead Animals: Sensory Body Phenomenology in Performance'. The very opening of the chapter focuses on how smell affects her experience as an audience member for Jill Orr's work *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters — Goya.* The piece utilises animal remains from a nearby abattoir for a nine-hour durational performance. Tait describes how before even seeing Orr or the remains on stage, the smell 'assaulted [her] body,' requiring her to 'physically override a sensory imperative to flee'.[59] Over the course of her time in the performance, she became accustomed to the smell, and it was only then she was able to observe the visuals and attempt to unpack the semiotics of the work. Smell features frequently within the portfolio works as part of this thesis, particularly for myself as performer, but on occasion for a present audience. The smells are sometimes related to the animal body's decomposition itself, but also as part of a work's site-specificity, such as in *FUOS* or *Bug Studies.* Though the source of smell changes slightly based on the work, they are all typically considered unpleasant.

57. Alaimo, S. (2010). 'The naked word: The trans-corporeal ethics of the protesting body.' *Women and Performance: A journal of feminist history,* 20:1, p. 15.
58. *Ibid.,* p. 24.
59. Tait, P. (2015). 'Fleshing Dead Animals: Sensory Body Phenomenology in Performance,' in *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and Transformations*, New York: Routledge, p. 111-112.

A phenomenologist well suited to lend understanding to the power of smell, particularly like those described above, is Aurel Kolnai. In *On Disgust,* Kolnai attempts to specify what disgust is, and how it may differentiate itself from fear or a strong dislike, and, further, why disgust is a *bodily* phenomenon to a greater degree than other emotions such as anger or contempt. He also distinguishes disgust from other negative defensive emotions because it is a reaction specific to organic or biological material. For Kolnai, the sense of smell is the origin of disgust. Smell has the quality of entering the body: 'through the organ of smell, small particulars of the alien object become incorporated into the subject'.[60] Smell is the origin of disgust because of its intimacy and proximity to the subject. Disgust becomes interconnected with other bodily phenomena: 'putrescence, decay, secretion, […] nourishment'.[61] On the subject of 'something dead' as the disgusting object, Kolnai notes that it is 'never disgusting in its *mere non-functioning*', putting forth decomposition as a continued process or perhaps even 'just another manifestation of life'.[62] This phenomenological perspective echoes the New Materialist perspective above: sense of smell is a site of material bodies being open to one another, and even dead, decomposing animal bodies are full of life, or in New Materialist terms, 'vitality'. This idea of material bodies entering and impacting one another additionally evokes notions of infection and contagion, analogies that Deleuze and Guatarri use in their description of postructuralist 'becomings', of bodies being at risk to one another. As evidenced in the portfolio works, there is a tension of risk or danger in performing taxidermy, both in the small material intimacies and in the great implications of 'shared vulnerability' in the Anthropocene.

In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, anthropologist Mary Douglas sets out to show that human fear, beliefs and rituals around dirt, pollution, and uncleanliness are reflective of values around social order moreso than reflective of pure health regulations or strategies. Both in her 1966 work and in contemporary Western society, there are no better examples of this than our relationships to animal bodies. Some animals are acceptable to be eaten, but only in certain contexts: Euro-American cultures condone eating pigs, but not dogs; we eat butchered chicken, but not a chicken found already dead outside. Domesticated animals like cows and chickens are rarely found as taxidermy objects compared to 'wild,' hunted game like deer and coyotes. Roadkill, a common category of dead animal bodies, and one critically explored within performing taxidermy, embodies (quite literally) Douglas's notion of 'dirt' as 'matter out of place'.[63] Many animals featured in this thesis, and in particular, pigeons, are known as 'trash animals' precisely for their lack of utilitarian or aesthetic value to humans. Douglas, though writing from a different field than other authors like Haraway and Deleuze and Guatarri, sounds philosophically similar: 'Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to

60. Kolnai, A. et al (2004). *On Disgust,* Chicago: Open Court, p. 50.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.,* p. 53.
63. Douglas, M., (1984). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis on the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo,* London: Ark.

disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death'.[64] Like the ontological boundaries of taxidermy outlined toward the beginning of this chapter, performing taxidermy seeks to subvert and complicate these social boundaries of when, how, and why a particular animal body is considered disgusting, undesirable, or simply invisible.

Bodies, 'Becomings,' Animals, and Risk in Performance

My practice's focus on the body as flesh and material has prompted me to align it with body artists: my use of sharps and prevalence of nudity and blood shares these qualities with artists including Gina Pane, Marina Abromavic, Franko B, the Viennese Actionists, and, more recently, Kira O'Reilly. For these and other artists, cutting or harming the body in some way often engages with notions of audience complicity and consent, the body as subject/object, catharsis, ritual, and/or identity. While my practice-research is not directly most concerned with these specific topics, I am similarly interested in vulnerability, risk, and intimacy, as part of my consideration of body boundaries, as previously mentioned. Of the artists above, Kira O'Reilly is one who acknowledges her work as an exploration of the body as a boundary, and further, has included non-human animals/animal bodies in her work.[65] Dominic Johnson writes on intimacy and risk in live art, in an essay of that name, particularly as it relates to bodies being at risk to one another, claiming in his analyses of works by artists like Ron Athey and Franko B that intimacy and risk are inextricably linked to each other and to cultural politics more broadly. Intimacy for Johnson in this essay often strongly suggests sexual intimacy but not necessarily: ultimately, in considering body modification practices and one-to-one performance, the concern of intimacy is in bodily proximities, particularly in contexts of injured bodies or emotional traumas. Johnson writes, '…creative responses pose the challenge of rethinking intimacy, risk, identity, love, and difference in the context of difficult desires, embattled needs, and conflicting values'.[66] The kind of intimacy through bodily proximity shared in performing taxidermy is different from the intimacies in Operation Spanner[67] as described by Johnson, but in the context of the Anthropocene, there is a mounting pressure of extinction and ecological disaster that calls for a rethinking in how we relate to non-human or more-than-human others.

Body-based live art, according to Amelia Jones, challenges the notion of the essentialist 'Cartesian subject'; challenges to Cartesian dualism have been equally important in human-animal studies.[68] This

64. *Ibid.,* p. 5.
65. Specific works by O'Reilly, and specific works by relevant artists generally, will be expanded in some of the portfolio chapters.
66. Johnson, D. (2012). 'Intimacy and Risk in Live Art' in Deirdre Heddon and Jennie Klein (eds) *Histories and Practices of Live Art.* Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 131.
67. Operation Spanner, the primary example in Johnson's essay, is the name of a police investigation into same-sex male sadomasochism in the 1980s.
68. Warr, T. and Jones, A. (2000). *The Artist's Body.* London: Phaidon.

eschewing of the body/mind duality that has dominated much Western philosophy since the Enlightenment is in part why thinking of human and more-than-human others as bodies and materialities bound up with one another proves particularly useful. Theatre scholar Jennifer Parker-Starbuck writes on Deleuze and Guatarri's poststructuralist 'becoming-animal' through a lens of performance practice as 'becoming-animate.'[69] She evokes Donna Haraway's 1980s 'cyborg' to triangulate technology, human, and animal 'to explore how things nonhuman might get "under our skin"', a process she proposes is about 'breached boundaries'.[70] Parker-Starbuck focuses on the 'alliance' element of Deleuze and Guatarri's 'becoming-animal', reviewing the work of the theatrical equestrian group Thèâtre Zingaro, where performances are 'conceived between the riders and horses, with an equal balance between them'.[71] Her description of the choreography between human and horse in this company is reminiscent of Donna Haraway's account of agility training with dogs.[72] Parker-Starbuck warns against configurations of 'becoming-animal' that do not include a 'reciprocal becoming' for the animal, which relates Deleuze and Guatarri's 'becoming' more to Haraway's 'becoming-with' than Haraway's critiques suggest. In considering these 'alliances,' Parker-Starbuck notes how most representational animal entertainment and media is successful in evoking 'pity, fear, awe, [and] sadness,' but 'not alliance';[73] she also echoes the significance of the risk involved in reconsidering our relationship to non-human others. In performing taxidermy, I propose shared material vulnerability as a mode of human/non-human animal alliance.

Multi-species Relations in the 'Anthropocene'

Performing taxidermy is, ultimately, a practice-research that utilises the above frameworks and concepts alongside the processes and materials of taxidermy in order to interrogate multispecies relationality in the current geopolitical era. For clarity and consistency, I will largely refer to the current era by its most common name of Anthropocene; for performing taxidermy, wherein I (as human-performer-taxidermy) am in every work, this name not inaccurate. In later chapters, I will at points refer to this era by other names as they relate to the work being considered, such as Capitalocene[74] or Haraway's Cthulucene.[75] In *Staying with the Trouble,* Haraway proposes her term Cthulucene, but additionally acknowledges that multiple names for the current period are warranted. In considering multispecies relations within the

69. Parker-Starbuck, J. (2006). 'Becoming-Animate: On the Performed Limits of "Human,"' *Theatre Journal*, 58:4, p. 649-668.
70. *Ibid.,* p. 655
71. *Ibid.,* p. 662
72. Haraway, D. (2003). *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
73. Parker-Starbuck, J. (2006). 'Becoming-Animate: On the Performed Limits of "Human,"' *Theatre Journal*, 58:4, pp. 666.
74. A term from Andreas Malm and Jason Moore defining the current era by the impact of capitalism.
75. A term from Donna Haraway defining the current era by 'entagle[d] myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages — including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus' (*Staying with the Trouble,* 2016, p. 101). Cthulucene is based on Cthulu, referring to tentacular movements and webbed networks.

portfolio works, these relations are primarily material, but do not deny or ignore the myriad indexical qualities any animal, gesture, or image may have. The works in the portfolio are multispecies collaborations, though how these collaborations function change throughout: the beetles in *bug studies* have a very different role from the bunnies in *Immaculate Confection*, for example, though both works map a different network of relationships between human and more-than-human others. Returning to Haraway, she trades responsibility for 'response-ability', leaving open the possibility that these collaborations are not simply unidirectional (from human to other).[76] Human and more-than-human collaborators are simultaneously subjects and objects in 'ongoing intra-action'.[77] A major criticism of taxidermy, as touched on above, is its erasure of an animal as an individual in favour of representation of a species; performing taxidermy, however, in its pursuit of relationality, does not have an aim to bring singular attention to the individual. Rather, it mobilises taxidermy's capacity to move across time, indexes, and multiplicities/assemblages of more-than-human others, with an attunement to death, in order to find small intimacies that connect to a larger distant sense of the current geological era, whether thinking in terms of Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulucene, or otherwise.

'Botched,' 'Speculative,' 'Performative,' 'Performing'

Two authors mentioned already in this text are Steve Baker and Giovanni Aloi, both of whom have written seminal works on taxidermy in contemporary art, with their own terminology to describe certain instances of this kind of visual artwork. In Baker's *The Postmodern Animal* (2000), he utilises postmodern frameworks to configure his term 'botched taxidermy'; Aloi's *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene* (2018), as previously mentioned, uses the term 'speculative taxidermy' to describe contemporary taxidermy works that, in Aloi's reading of them, address or problematise human/animal relations. Performing taxidermy draws heavily on these two works, and in particular *Speculative Taxidermy*. This latter book was published during my PhD and has had a significant impact on my research. Here I will outline more clearly how performing taxidermy relates to botched and speculative taxidermy while clarifying how it differs from these two now established terms.

Baker's botched taxidermy is firmly rooted in postmodern philosophy and art, giving a unifying term for the aesthetic of the animal in postmodernism. Botched-ness, or 'wrongness', for Baker, describes taxidermy or taxidermy-adjacent animal representation that is somehow visually 'off' or unusual. Examples of how this happens in a work of art include: using mixed or non-traditional materials in

76. Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 2.
77. Haraway, D. (2008). *When Species Meet.* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 71.

taxidermy; using other forms of animal representation, such as toys, as a replacement for taxidermy animals, or vice versa; reworked or hybrid taxidermy objects; or deliberately incorrect anatomy.[78] What botched-ness achieves in the context of contemporary art is what Baker describes as a 'pressing thing-ness',[79] which allows a viewer an encounter with an animal-object that sits outside common or standard understandings or readings of an animal body. Baker offers botched taxidermy as a broad term that also includes other animal representation, such as in paintings or in films, or sculptural objects that do not actually include any organic material from an animal, so long as this strange visibility of animal form remains. Like much postmodern art, 'botched taxidermy' resists meaning; these works are 'questioning entities',[80] primarily defined by a visceral presence rather than an index of other concepts, symbols, ideas, politics, etc. Many of the animals featured in performing taxidermy do share qualities with the visual aesthetic of botched taxidermy, in particular those of *Immaculate Confection* and *FUOS:* they are taxidermy 'gone wrong'[81] or with non-traditional, mixed materials. These animal-objects, like botched taxidermy, are difficult to place within existing cultural categorisations of animal bodies. *The Postmodern Animal* has likewise served as a useful text in finding connections between poststructuralist 'becomings' and taxidermy. However, the 'botched' quality of the animals featured in performing taxidermy are wrong or unusual not in an attempt to evade meaning but to access multiple registers of meaning in order to disrupt the ontological and material boundaries described earlier in 'Conceptual Frameworks'; this applies to my own body in these works as much as it does the animal. This interest in multiple registers of taxidermy and taxidermy processes is what aligns performing taxidermy more closely to speculative taxidermy.

Early in *Speculative Taxidermy*, Aloi also devotes a section to distinguishing speculative taxidermy from Baker's botched taxidermy. Importantly, speculative taxidermy refers only to work that includes animal bodies as taxidermy or mediated forms of them, such as photographs of taxidermy. Rather than working with older postmodern frameworks for visual art, 'speculative taxidermy' works closely with philosophies on 'materiality, gender, ethics, and aesthetics emerging in the aftermath of postmodernism, while attempting to adequately address the eco political crises that characterise the current phase of the Anthropocene';[82] some of these include object-oriented ontology, New Materialism, Foucault's biopower, and re-considerations of taxidermy alongside older art movements such as classical and neoclassical. Along with a focus on materiality, indexicality is one other central concept that works characterises Aloi's speculative taxidermy. Aloi defines 'indexicality' largely through Morgan Marcyliena's definition, as '"incorporat[ing] all aspects of the social and political context in order to construct referential systems

78. Baker, S. (2000),.*The Postmodern Animal,* London: Reaktion Books Ltd., p. 53-61.
79. *Ibid.,* p. 82.
80. *Ibid.,* p. 76.
81. *Ibid.,* p. 74.
82. Aloi, G. (2018), *Speculative Taxidermy*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 22.

of signs and symbolism"'; Aloi calls indexicality the 'backbone of […] realism',[83] which — echoing a topic mentioned earlier in this chapter — aids in interrogating taxidermy realism. These two primary concepts — indexicality and materiality — are what lead 'speculative taxidermy's' 'devot[ion] to exploring shared and physical and ontological vulnerabilities concealed by the naturalisation of past human/animal institutionalised relationships'.[84] Aloi's idea of shared vulnerability has already shown its significance to 'performing taxidermy' in this thesis, and continues to be a thread through the portfolio works. Though performing taxidermy engages with materialist philosophies beyond what Aloi considers in *Speculative Taxidermy,* such as transcorporeal feminism, considerations of indexicality within performing taxidermy will be largely rooted in Aloi's speculative taxidermy. A term Aloi uses often in discussing indexicality is 'ontological mobility,' which refers to an object's resistance to being understood firmly within existing, accepted cultural categorisations. 'Ontological mobility' serves a method of complicating ontological boundaries — a major inquiry of performing taxidermy — and will likewise be referenced throughout this thesis.

With these ideas so foundational to performing taxidermy, performing taxidermy could be considered as extending or narrowing a subset of speculative taxidermy, or as being born out of it. I would argue that most of the artworks within this thesis are potential examples of speculative taxidermy themselves. There are, however, elements of performing taxidermy that are distinct: for all speculative taxidermy's focus on materiality and animal presence, and on how these works tell us something about animals *and humans*, the human body is rarely a part of these art assemblages. Aloi's shared vulnerability is typically found in the indexical, in particular how works gesture toward histories and biopolitics; material risk to the human is rarely a quality of the work itself. Performing taxidermy has a particular interest in where the human body and animal body 'meet' in taxidermy and engaging with the materiality of these meetings. This is where histories and traditions of live art, and in particular body art, become significant to performing taxidermy. By rooting my practice primarily in the medium of performance, performing taxidermy is then able to interrogate both *processes* (not only things) and human materiality; after all, without the human, there would be no taxidermy. 'Shared vulnerability' of performing taxidermy becomes not only something within a broader context of ecological crises and biopolitics, but that happens through material, bodily risk within the work itself.

Additionally, while there is an existing body of work on animals in performance, much of this focuses on live animals, animatronics, or animal-as-symbol, which are concepts adjacent to but just outside the scope of this thesis. Jennifer Parker-Starbuck is one of the few scholars who additionally writes specifically on taxidermy in performance works, particularly in the 'frozen' animal's relationship to a time-based

83. *Ibid.,* p. 23.
84. *Ibid.,* p. 24.

medium. Also referencing Poliquin, Parker-Starbuck notes that despite taxidermy's inherent 'theatricality,' it is not commonly seen in theatres. In 'Animal Pasts and Presents: Taxidermied Time Travelers,' she moves beyond Poliquin's theatricality of taxidermy to 'performative taxidermy,' which considers taxidermy in its 'relations with live bodies, other objects, and moments in time.' Two performance works that she analyses in this pursuit are Sheila Ghelani's *Rat, Rose, Bird,* in which Ghelani heavily features frozen baby mice sold as snake food, and Franko B's *Because of Love, Vol. 1*, which features both a collection of taxidermy fox heads and a large animatronic polar bear. In both performances, the 'taxidermy'[85] objects become the engine for memory and considerations of the animals themselves, both as taxidermic objects and as past living beings; this connection to memory and taxidermy's simultaneous past and present is what leads Parker-Starbuck to refer to taxidermy 'time-travellers.' While Parker-Starbuck's performative taxidermy shares qualities with my performing taxidermy, it does not focus on the taxidermy process or on the materiality between the animal and human performers in the work. In other words, her performative taxidermy particularly resonates with performing taxidermy in its configuration of performing *with* taxidermy, while performing taxidermy additionally expands into performing *by doing* and performing *as* taxidermy as an active arts practice rather than a framework for analysis.

85. Scare quotes used here because the extent to which some of these examples can be considered 'taxidermy' is debatable, which Parker-Starbuck acknowledges.

As mentioned in Methodologies, I rely on documentation of practice work and performance experiments to accompany the written work. At the same time, theoretical considers of documentation — particularly as it relates to taxidermy and live art — also offer relevant and enriching insights to the fundamental research questions of this thesis. For this reason, I cover here how documentation relates to taxidermy, performance, and performing taxidermy.

Taxidermy, Performance, & Documentation

The problem of performance documentation is, for artists, theorists, and audiences, both logistical ('how do we remember, recount, and document a live event?') and epistemological ('how can such evidence of a live event 'accurately' communicate the live event, to the extent that accuracy is achievable, or, even matters?'). In *Perform, Record, Repeat: Live Art in History,* Adrian Heathfield describes performance documentation's 'temporal paradox: it exists both now and then; it leaves and lasts'[…].[86] The experience of a piece of taxidermy is also its own 'temporal paradox,' with similar tensions of presentation versus re-presentation as those of live art documentation: it is a sense of 'aliveness' frozen in time, presenting an animal - or at least its surfaces - both *as* itself and as an indexical reference to itself as a species and whatever cultural associations it may additionally signify. Performance, photography, and taxidermy are media of presence and absence; performance documentation and taxidermy both ask not only 'what remains?', but also 'how do we read these remains?'

In order to establish links between performance, documentation, and taxidermy, I consider here taxidermy as a document itself, for while it is linked to the animal through its materiality, it, like performance and its documentation, shares a complex relationship to representation. Peggy Phelan writes, 'performance implicates the 'real' through the presence of living bodies'.[87] Though art theorists influenced by post-structuralism, such as Amelia Jones and Philip Auslander, continue to challenge and complicate this perspective, there remains a tendency to characterise performance due to the *presence* of the body. As Jones writes in *Perform, Record, Repeat,* 'The live event […] both exemplifies the iterative nature of all bodily enactment […] and the yearning for authenticity and presence that encourages us to privilege the "live" over the representational'.[88] This is similar to the allure of taxidermy: while it does not promise the authenticity of a living body (and, in fact, requires the opposite to achieve a similar experience), it does promise the authenticity of a dead animal body, or what I have referred to via Aloi as its 'biological facticity'. This separates and indeed privileges taxidermy over other forms of animal representation; as

86. Jones, A. And Heathfield, A. (2012). *Perform, Record, Repeat: Live Art in History.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 27.
87. Phelan, P. (1993). *Unmarked: the politics of performance.* New York: Routledge, p. 148.
88. Jones, A. And Heathfield, A. (2012). *Perform, Record, Repeat: Live Art in History.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 16.

previously established via Aloi, Poliquin, and Baker, the organicism of animal skin provokes some notable visceral 'queasiness' or 'there-ness.' Montagu Browne, a 19th century taxidermist and author of *Practical Taxidermy*, maintained that the ultimate goal of artistic taxidermy was to capture an animal's 'essence'.[89] For Browne, it was important to distinguish this pursuit of animal 'essence' as different from other *lesser* taxidermy styles, such as anthropomorphic taxidermy. In other words, the highest form of taxidermy was, ostensibly, to serve as a document of the animal as it lived.

In Conceptual Frameworks, drawing on Haraway, Poliquin, and Tait, I discuss the fallacy of taxidermy as a truth-telling 'document' and explain how this tactic of storytelling through organic animal skin contributed to taxidermy's power in affirming colonial and patriarchal historical narratives.[90] If we try to conceive of taxidermy as a document of a past live event (the past event being the animal's life, and, perhaps equally importantly, its death), this thinking aligns with that of Philip Auslander in 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation:' 'the authenticity of these pieces derives not from treating the document as an indexical access point to a past event but from perceiving the document itself as a performance that directly reflects an artist's aesthetic project or sensibility'.[91] This lens lends itself well to considering the taxidermy object, particularly in the context of having already established that taxidermy hardly reflects realism. The 'facticity' of the animal's skin is divorced from the 'real' effect produced by its final form. This idea further troubles taxidermy as a means of seeing, keeping, and 'knowing' non-human animal others.

Here, I interject with a story from my personal taxidermy history: when I worked as a taxidermist's apprentice, there was one year when a power outage caused the unexpected decay of an entire chest freezer of animal bodies. They were unable to be salvaged for taxidermy. Most of these animals were local species of ducks and fish, which the taxidermist replaced through hunting and fishing. Two, however, were South American Pacu fish caught by a woman on vacation. Rather than explain what had happened, the taxidermist created replicas of the fish through photographs and an array of craft materials, passing them off to the client as the 'real' fish; the woman, as far as I know, is still unaware of how her taxidermy pieces were made. The fish replicas still fulfil their role as documentation of the woman's fishing trip to South America and her experience with the living Pacus; they are considered taxidermy because they were declared as such by a taxidermist. For the client, the fish replicas perform her memory of their death despite having no connection to the fish's material body. It is worthwhile to note that executing this same trick with other common taxidermy species, particularly of birds and mammals,

89. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and Cultures of Longing.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 261.
90. See 'Presentation/Representation' in 'Conceptual Frameworks'.
91. Auslander, P. (2012). 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation' in *Perform, Record, Repeat: Live Art in History,* eds. Jones, A. and Heathfield, A., p. 9.

would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, because the element of taxidermy that produces the 'real' effect of a fish is paint airbrushing (not much to do with the 'biological facticity' of animal skin at all). In the case of fish taxidermy, it could be argued that biological facticity matters only in theory — at least, when considering purely the taxidermy object itself and not the taxidermy process.

What this example does, in addition to adding further complication to the relationship between taxidermy and 'truth' via the 'real' effect of animal surface, is again demonstrate the significance of time-based processes of taxidermy (a foundation of 'performing taxidermy'), particularly in considerations of materiality. The example additionally suggests that taxidermy can be taxidermy without any organic animal material through a process of 'fake' materials to 'real' animal. Both historically and in contemporary art, there are instances of an alternative approach: 'real' animal material to 'fake' animal. For example, this is seen in Thomas Grunfeld's late 1990's *Misfits*,[92] as series of hybrid, quasi-mythological animals in taxidermy form.[93] It is common in natural history museums to include a pseudo-taxidermic animal of the region's folklore: in the Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow, there is a haggis; in American museums, one would more likely to find a jackelope.[94] Even in the 19th century, before taxidermy's more recent resurgence in popularity, taxidermists and naturalists like Charles Watterton would purposefully create 'new' creatures or cryptids from animal skins and attempt pass them off as newly 'discovered' animals.[95] Taxidermy-as-document, then, resonates strongly with Auslander's theory of performance documentation: taxidermy objects offer not an 'indexical access point' to the animal itself but a performance of something more abstract. Though this might often include the taxidermist's aesthetic project, it is also at times a memory[96] (such as the case of the woman with the South American Pacu or any hunter's trophy), an ideology,[97] or cultural identity. The 'performing' of performing taxidermy, however, is not primarily concerned with the kind of isolated taxidermy-object 'performance,' which is why documentation provided within this thesis is documentation of the processes and actions undergone *with* taxidermic/dead animal other rather than offering the animal-object of the works themselves as documentation.

In this sense, the performance of performing taxidermy resonates with Peggy Phelan's notion of performance 'disappearance.' Though Phelan's approach to performance and documentation is often presented as oppositional to Auslander's, this thesis considers the two in conversation with one another in

92. Grunfeld, like some other contemporary artists working with taxidermy such as Damien Hirst, does not make his own taxidermic sculptures; he outsources this to a nameless expert taxidermist.
93. Frank, E. (2008). 'Misfits.' *Antennae: The Journal of Art and Nature,* Vol. 7:1.
94. A jackelope is a hare with antlers.
95. Grasseni, C. (1998). 'Taxidermy as Rhetoric of Self-Making: Charles Waterton (1782-1965), Wandering Naturalist,' *Studies in Historical, Biological, and Biomedical Sciences,* 29:2, p. 269-294.
96. This is similarly covered via Jennifer Parker Starbuck's notion of performative taxidermy in 'Conceptual Frameworks'.
97. This is similarly covered via Donna Haraway in 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden.'

thinking through taxidermy processes versus taxidermy objects. Phelan introduced the idea that performance's ontology is dependent on its ephemerality; any form of documentation of performance is something other than performance.[98] In her words, 'performance becomes itself through disappearance'.[99] Performance is lost in time, and attempts at preservation inevitably alter the performance event. Though typically Phelan and Auslander's theories are presented as oppositional, Phelan's line of reasoning may apply similarly to taxidermy if we consider how the taxidermy object fails to document the animal itself and even the taxidermy process. As has been previously established in 'Conceptual Frameworks', taxidermy does not document any 'truth' of nature so much as cultural values of nature at any given time, and the notion of disappearance additionally resonates with considerations of 'nature' in the Anthropocene, an era characterised by mass extinction. Taxidermy itself becomes less an act 'toward preservation' than 'toward disappearance,' in Phelan's terms,[100] by which I mean that taxidermy in the context of the Anthropocene signifies the absence of animal life, as opposed to animal presence, regardless of how 'life-like' any particular mount may be. Performing taxidermy, with interest in how we encounter animal death and animal bodies in the current geopolitical climate, considers Phelan's notion of disappearance in the actions and processes undergone between human performer-taxidermist and dead taxidermic animal. Taxidermy as an action, process, and material exchange of bodies, like much performance that helped shape Phelan's ontology of performance, cannot be repeated, rehearsed, undone, or redone (at least, not without an entirely new and different animal body).

As I discuss in Methodologies, engaging with performance theory on documentation in my practice-research is not done with the intent of making claims about the ontology of performance, but to utilise ways of thinking about performance and documentation to aid in continued distinction between taxidermy objects — as covered by many authors and artists included in this thesis — and taxidermy processes — a crucial component of performing taxidermy. There are inevitably elements of performing taxidermy that cannot be replicated through other media, such as sense of smell or other phenomenological sensory experiences of site-specific work and physical proximity to animal bodies, but there are additional considerations of bodies and mediated representation that contribute to the research inquiry of performing taxidermy. So far, I have used the work other theorists in order to thoroughly deconstruct false notions of 'truths' about animals presented/represented in taxidermy. Amelia Jones, writing on performance documentation and photography in particular, acknowledges that viewing a photograph is a *different* experience from watching a live performance, but neither of these experiences can be privileged as a historical 'truth' of the performance. Jones works often from a premise that even body art is a kind of 'mediated' experience because the body itself is a cultural, contextual object; she references Kathy

98. Phelan, P. (1993). *Unmarked: the politics of performance.* New York: Routledge, p. 146.
99. *Ibid.*
100. *Ibid.,* p. 148.

O'Dell as additionally supporting an argument that 'precisely by using their bodies as primary material, body or performance artists highlight its "representational status"'.[101] Further, to Jones, 'the photograph of the body art event or performance could […] expose the body itself as supplementary'.[102] In other words, body art, particularly when considered alongside its documentation, shows that the body is not 'known' in any unmediated sense that divorces it from the symbolic and culturally inscribed. In considering body art as a medium that exposes the body as something that is inherently representational through visual, social markers, we find echoes in previous discussions of animal bodies in taxidermy: that visual culture flattens bodies to their surfaces, and that the representational becomes inextricably linked to readings and perceptions of all bodies — not uniquely non-human animals. My intention here, in keeping with the inquiries of performing taxidermy, is not to eschew the significance thus far of materiality, but to continue to utilise connective threads of body/performance art and taxidermy that may assist in performing taxidermy's project of seeking familiarity rather than alienation between human and non-human animal bodies.

Live Events

Both *FUOS [Forgive Us Our Skins]* (2018) and *what to do with what remains* (2020) are works designed to be experienced as a live event by an audience, though they are included here as photo and video documentation intended to give an account of what transpired in the live event. *FUOS* contains both a 'video element' and documentation of a 'live element,' though it would be equally accurate to describe both as documentation of separate events. In the video, I am seen plucking the feathers off a magpie; the camera work is often changing focus between me and the bird. The actions are slow and meditative, and the framing of the video is extremely close up, showing only a section of my naked body at a time. Between the time the video was shot and the second event, referred to as the 'live' element, in part because of the attendance of a small audience, I taxidermied the magpie. The live event occurred in an unused barn on a property that was once a dairy farm; the space is now taken over by brooding pigeons. This former dairy farm is also the site where I found and taxidermised the magpie featured in the piece. The site-specificity of the work is a major component in the decision to have an audience for this specific work; in considering the different forms of knowledge my research may produce, sharing this barn space with the living birds, particularly with the included risk posed by the presence of bird faeces,[103] is significant both to the aesthetic experience and research inquiry of the work founded on exploring where and how we encounter living and dead non-human animals. These elements could not be accurately

101. Jones, A. (1997). '"Presence" in Absentia.' Art Journal, 56:4, p. 13.
102. *Ibid.,* p. 14.
103. The significance of risk and risk assessment in my work will be covered in both individual portfolio chapters and the Conceptual Frameworks.

represented in video or photo documentation of the work. Similarly, *what to do with what remains* features this same site-specificity and was created with the primary intention of being viewed by a public audience (and external examiner) rather than through documentation or another artistic medium. While it serves as a culmination of the research of the last three years, the decision was not a privileging of a live experience, but an incorporation of what Nelson articulates as these different ways of 'knowing;' the sensory, 'experiential knowledge'[104] of my work to an audience is important to a multi-modal dissemination of the potential insights through practice. However, once the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on live events was evident, the piece was reworked into a series of other media that attempts to provide a different but equivalent approximation of the originally intended live performance.[105] As noted, what is the primary content in all of these live events, and thus what is included in the documentation, is the actions, exchanges, and encounters between myself as performer-taxidermist and dead animal other.

Other media

Other forms of creative output included in this thesis, whether photographic or other mediated forms, were chosen as considerations of each work's individual methodologies and research questions. Though autoethnography is not specifically reflected in my research inquiry, there are instances in which I will draw on this methodology. The written component will occasionally include personal stories from working in a traditional taxidermy shop in rural Ohio; the intention here is in further drawing connections between 'doing' taxidermy in more traditional forms and 'performing taxidermy' as reflected in my current practice. In other words, taxidermy history is not only established through outside theorists, but also in my art practice and personal history. In looking at specific portfolio works, *bug studies,* for example, includes written journals alongside photo and video. Given that a fundamental aspect to that particular research undertaking is exploring my relationship to other living non-human collaborators in the taxidermy process, journal entries serve to give a first-hand account of my experience of working with these insects and my rationale for choices made during the process. Working with these insects was part of a daily practice that took place over the course of several weeks; this journal provides insights into this relationship that cannot be demonstrated through the photo and video documentation alone. This particular performance experiment never achieved a designated final creative form due to the death of the colony, but documentation of this research contributes to the overall thesis, nonetheless. As noted earlier in this chapter, taxidermy itself can be viewed as documentation, and photography, with its significance to both live art and taxidermy histories, provides a medium to explore further the temporal qualities of living, dead, and taxidermic bodies. This triangulation of bodies, site, and time is similarly present in

104. Nelson, R. (2013). *Practice-based Research in the Arts*, New York: Palgrave Macmillian,
105. The impact of the pandemic on my practice-research can be found both in the Appendix and in the chapter on *what to do with what remains*.

Immaculate Confection, which was performed in the West End of Glasgow but is presented in this thesis as a series of animated GIFs.[106] *Intersections: Animal Death,* which is an online archive of my and other contributors'[107] sightings of 'roadkill,' is a project that has no performance element of its own, but which contributes to the larger research goal of interrogating sites of human/dead animal other interaction in daily life and, in some cases, gives an account of how individual animals I work with in performance came to be a part of the work. Regardless of medium (whether live event or otherwise), what all the works share is a focus on action, encounter, or interaction between bodies. Though all of these works call for their own methodologies and ultimately take a variety of creative forms, all contribute to a thorough exploration and configuration of 'performing taxidermy.'

Ethics

My work not only incorporates animal death, it relies on it. Ethics around animal death, and particularly the extent to which animal death can be useful or productive in a research setting, are a contentious and sometimes highly emotional topic. At the onset of my practice-research project, I pursued a formal approval process with the College of Art's Ethics Committee. However, I discovered that given that I work with already-dead animals, my practice-research was outside the conditions that require formal project approval. Despite this, and though ethics is not a primary focus in my research enquiry, it is a subject that is considered and re-considered throughout the research process. By this, I mean that ethical considerations are an active part of the research process and not simply a pre-existing set of personal rules on which I build my art practice or practice-research. Despite this fluidity, I would like to make clear that no individual animal is killed directly with the intention to be taxidermised in my practice. However, even this statement is a deceptively complex and questionable claim; most animal bodies I work with are found already dead, but many have died due to human social structures that I, as well as most people, participate in daily: owning domesticated pets (such as cats or reptiles), driving or taking public transport, living in homes with windows, or using electricity driven by power lines. My position, then, is not in abdicating myself of implication in an animal's death, but in a belief that humans in an urban environment are already implicated. As Donna Haraway states in *When Species Meet,* and I will discuss further in later chapters, to 'nurture living' may require 'get[ting] better at facing killing'; the ethical considerations reflect this concern of 'facing killing', as opposed to denying or preventing animal death, or, as is more often the case in culture, rendering it invisible.[108] Whatever manipulations I decide for an animal's body, and regardless the extent these manipulations may gesture toward or away from human values around

106. The temporality of animated GIFs will be further discussed in the chapter on *Immaculate Confection.*
107. Via an open online submission form.
108. Haraway, D. (2008). *When Species Meet.* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 81.

death and death rituals, I hope that my work demonstrates that the practice is *about* the animal and/or our relationship to it.

Part Two

Boundaries and Bodies in Performing Taxidermy: Portfolio of Works

After giving an overview of the major conceptual frameworks and use of documentation in performing taxidermy, what follows is a series of chapters focusing on specific artistic works within this thesis. The portfolio displays a range of aesthetic and performance styles and media while remaining specifically and critically focused on developing a practice in performing taxidermy. As I describe in the Introduction, the works in this portfolio are critical considerations of steps in the taxidermy process, and thus the chapters are arranged conceptually rather than chronologically. I open with *Intersections: Animal Death,* a web archive of my and other participants' sightings of animal death in daily life, as many of the animal bodies seen in my practice are obtained in this way. Following *Intersections: Animal Death* is *bug studies,* a multispecies collaboration that includes a colony of Dermestid beetles. The next three works, *Immaculate Confection, FUOS,* and *what to do with what remains* all focus more directly on the taxidermy objects themselves and processes of taxidermy that include skinning, tanning, and re-building the animal form in mixed materials. *Immaculate Confection* is a series of actions on Easter day in Glasgow's Botanic Gardens, presented here in GIF form. This work engages with zoomorphic consumer goods, mixing taxidermy techniques with chocolate Easter candies. *FUOS,* a live performance with photo and video documentation, seeks points of intersection between my own body and taxidermic bird body, with particular consideration given to the risks bodies undertake in these exchanges. *what to do with what remains* utilises some of the techniques explored in earlier portfolio works to further expand how performing taxidermy re-considers taxidermy as an ongoing, material presence between vulnerable bodies. Within all these works are additional ties to and considerations of animal representation, anthropomorphism, and multispecies relations.

In addition to the photo stills presented within the written chapters, time-based and other forms of documentation are accessible at the online gallery of *Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy,* found at: http://www.PerformingTaxidermy.org (password: fmmw2021). The order of portfolio works reflects the order of written chapters, and the writing will at times direct to specific material in the online gallery. The online gallery is intended to be viewed alongside the written material.

***Intersections: Animal Death* (2019)**

Throughout the portfolio, many of the animal bodies featured will have been found dead in a combination of rural and urban sites around Glasgow. In viewing where the animal bodies of taxidermy objects originate, this chapter will focus on roadkill and other daily, ordinary animal death sightings. *Intersections: Animal Death* is a project within my practice-based research that exists as a submission form on my website[109] where I and others can report sightings of dead animals and fill out a brief reflection on this interaction. It serves as a document of moments of 'crossed paths' between human and animal death in daily life. The choice of organising this documentation as a website of images and text is both in creating an archive of animal death that includes audience participation and in providing the opportunity for this archive to continue beyond the present research. Given performing taxidermy's interest in human/dead non-human animal other intimacies, a web archive provides an ongoing potential to invite viewers to their own experience of these intimacies. In this chapter, I will describe the website's function and how it differs from other public records of roadkill sightings, articulating *Intersections: Animal Death*'s purpose within the broader research. In this section I will also address the most commonly seen species in these submissions, most of whom are urban animal life considered 'trash animals.' In the sections 'Context' and 'Responses', I will align the project with other art practitioners working with roadkill or other 'found' animal bodies and relate the project to conceptual frameworks of performing taxidermy. The project began as a web app exhibited in the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art in May 2019,[110] but all previously recorded submissions have subsequently been moved from the web app onto my personal website.

'Action,' or The Website

There are existing mobile apps for reporting 'roadkill', such as 'Roadkills',[111] an app for reporting road or railway-side animal deaths in India with the expressed goal of identifying and altering roadways that prove particularly dangerous for wildlife. There is also the more euphemistically named 'Wildlife Vehicle Collision Report', designed by a team of scientists at Utah State University with similar intentions. Though the 'Roadkills' app is intended to be used in India, I noticed while using the app myself that there were individuals reporting roadkill all over Europe, and even one individual reporting roadkill sightings on the motorways here in the Central Belt of Scotland, which is also my location. The 'Wildlife Vehicle

109. Available at https://www.fmmw.org/intersections, or via the online gallery at http://www.performingtaxidermy.org/work/iad (Password: fmmw2021).
110. More info about the festival can be found at https://bmoca.org/medialive
111. 'Road Kills: A Citizen Science Initiative.' Available at: https://www.roadkills.in/ [Accessed 5 April 2021].

Collision Report'[112] (which is not available in the Android market here in the UK) is restricted to Utah state employees. These apps show great potential and value in considering human impact on non-human lives and preventing both human and animal deaths due to man-made infrastructure; their purpose is collecting objective data that tracks non-human animal populations and their movement.

The *Intersections* website, at its most basic function, allows people to report sightings of dead animal bodies and provide an optional photo. These documents afford me the potential of sourcing dead animals for my project, but also serve as an archive of individuals' interactions with animal dead in daily life. Roadkill, according to Helen Molesworth, is 'the [forensic] evidence of our daily ecosystems';[113] this section of my research seeks to characterise this evidence not as broad movement patterns of species (including humans and automobile technologies), but as individual bodily encounters within a complex web of histories and interactions. The web interface for *Intersections: Animal Death* does this by incorporating less typically scientific language and more introspective and open-ended language for human/dead animal interaction. The intent of *Intersections: Animal Death* is not only to give a public forum to the section of my research that questions the relationship between taxidermy and death rituals during a time of changing human/non-human animal relations, but also to encourage users to adopt a heightened awareness to the intersections of human life and animal life *and death* on a day-to-day scale, focused on both individual human and individual animal. By providing a method of meditation on these moments of encountering animal death, particularly in urban environments, it contributes to performing taxidermy's interest in complicating the divide between nature and culture, or animal life and human life.

Context

'Roadkill' is a term meant to refer to specific animal life killed by a vehicle. As Jane Desmond notes, the term is used to describe an implicit, specific group of mammals and birds – bugs on a windshield are not considered 'roadkill,' and pets killed in this manner also fall slightly outside this general category.[114] Similar to public expressions on victims of seemingly-random violence or other fatal coincidences, death can be described as the animal simply 'being in the wrong place at the wrong time.' At times I have avoided the term 'roadkill' in favour of 'found dead animals' in order to broaden the category, though in this writing they are used somewhat interchangeably. Broadening the term 'roadkill' is done here to

112. Public of Library Science (2014). 'New app collects wildlife-vehicle collision data' *Phys Org*, 4 June. Available at: https://phys.org/news/2014-06-app-wildlife-vehicle-collision.html [Accessed 5 April 2021].

113. Molesworth, Helen (1996). 'This car stops for road kill,' in Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman (eds.), *Concrete Jungle: A Pop Media Investigation of Death and Survival in Urban Ecosystems,* New York: Juno Books, p. 177.
114. Desmond, J. (2016). 'Requiem for Roadkill: Death, Denial, and Mourning on America's Roads' in *Displaying Death and Animating Life: Human-Animal Relations in Art, Science, and Everyday Life.* University of Chicago Press. p. 3.

include other instances of non-human animal death by their intersections with human life: birds who have flown into windows; rats living in walls who have been poisoned or dragged out by the family cat; and squirrels on the sidewalk who have fallen from powerlines above our heads.

I strive to use found animal bodies in my practice, though this is not always possible, particularly in the case of performances that require international travel.[115] Found dead animals have some precedent in contemporary art, in some instances as roadkill, and others as discarded taxidermy mounts, such as in sculptures by Angela Singer. Singer, who approaches her work from an animal activist's position, views her re-purposed trophy mounts as a way of memorialising or 'honour[ing] the animals' life'.[116] While the ethical objections to killing for sport are understandable, Singer's works, as *recycled* mounts, are largely, in a sense, *re*-memorials. Rachel Poliquin argues in *Breathless Zoo* that to hunt an animal is to designate that animal worthy of attention; the animal is deemed 'special' by the desire to memorialise the human-animal interaction of hunting via the trophy mount. Within this, however, there is the irony (one of many ironies of taxidermy) that this recognition of the animal as an individual depends entirely on its death.[117] Ethical implications and questions of responsibility regarding animal death that occur through their (at times literal) collision with human life, technology, and infrastructure may feel less direct, yet these bodies may be uniquely useful in our consideration of how or which animals are, in Judith Butler's terms, 'grieveable', and further, how, in Donna Haraway's terms, we may come to cultivate 'response-ability' over responsibility. In this thesis, I am particularly interested in considering 'response-ability' to 'trash animal' species commonly seen as roadkill.

'Trash animals' is a term used to describe a relatively small, yet diverse, subset of animal species, particularly those we share our homes and cities with. In *Trash Animals: How We Live with Nature's Filthy, Feral, Invasive, and Unwanted Species* (2013), editors Kelsi Nagy and Philip Johnson describe trash animals as species that 'hav[e] little or no value,' whether this is because they are considered ugly, or simply common or uninteresting; they are invasive or 'non-native' species; or they spark fear or disgust. For the editors, this includes, but is not limited to, 'snakes, coyotes, carps, starlings, pigeons, prairie dogs, rats, mice, cockroaches, spiders, [and] locusts;' pigeons, rats, and mice will appear throughout the present thesis. In the United States, 'trash animals' would also include racoons, groundhogs, and possums; in the United Kingdom, it would include magpies and invasive grey squirrels. As Nagy and Johnson note, even scientists, naturalists, and nature preservationists share the tendency to

115. Another source of animal bodies in this research project is pet stores selling small frozen animals as reptile food.
116. Baker, S. (2006). '"You Kill Things to Look at Them:" Animal Death in Contemporary Art,' in The Animal Studies Group (eds) *Killing Animals*, University of Illinois, p. 85
117. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and Cultures of Longing,* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 152-153.

mark certain species as 'out of place' and even 'disposable'.[118] 'These attitudes', they write, 'reveal assumptions about what 'nature' ought to be or what 'nature' was at one time.'[119] The editors align the concept of 'trash animals' with Douglas's theory on 'dirt' in *Purity and Danger* because of this sense of being 'out-of-place'. Like 'dirt' and 'nature' and 'culture,' 'trash' does not exist outside human construct of such. These species are not domesticated, and thus not firmly within human lives and culture like pets, but also do not fit well into a category of 'wildlife'; trash animals 'transgress the boundary of domesticated or wild'.[120] The notion of boundary transgression, as previously discussed, aligns with performing taxidermy's complicating of body and conceptual boundaries; the animals featured in the included portfolio are often species *not* seen in traditional taxidermy precisely because of this categorisation of 'trash animals.' At the same time, it is in this classification, in part because of how many of these species are common in daily life, that they may provide productive insight into bodies, boundaries, and considerations of animal death in the Anthropocene.

I would like to present one, perhaps odd, example on the topic of mourning or memorialising a 'trash animal' death and how disruption makes animal death visible. In 2015, when a Toronto citizen fulfilled what might be commonly considered a 'civic duty' in an urban city of reporting a dead raccoon body on the sidewalk, the local government's failure to respond quickly to remove the body resulted in a 'viral' participatory internet event.[121] Passers-by began to leave notes and objects similar to those left at the site of a roadside collision, memorial, or vigil: roses, a photograph, candles. This was clearly done tongue-in-cheek by the participants, and I would argue the humour is in the incongruity of human death rituals applied to roadkill.[122] The role of humour in death rituals is outside the scope of this current thesis, but I bring this example up nonetheless because it demonstrates a collective attention paid to animal death via a disruption to the established norms around animal death. While the body was eventually removed, the raccoon became individualised and memorialised — made visible — through this event. This example may not serve as an act of marking this racoon as 'grieveable'; via Judith Butler, but demonstrates the possibility for new and different responses to occur through a disruption to current accepted practices around animal death, particularly of urban, 'trash' animals.

An example of contemporary art that deals with roadkill, one closer to performance than Singer's aforementioned sculptural work, is Shaun Gladwell's *Apology to Roadkill 1-6* (2007-09), in which he

118. Nagy, K. And Johnson, P. (eds) (2013). *Trash Animals: How We Live with Nature's Filthy, Feral, Invasive, and Unwanted Species,* University of Minnesota Press, p. 2.
119. *Ibid.,* p. 2.
120. *Ibid.,* p. 3.
121. Kirkpatrick, N. (2015). 'How a dead raccoon got a sidewalk memorial and a hashtag,' The Washington Post, 10 July. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/07/10/how-a-dead-raccoon-got-a-sidewalk-memorial-and-became-a-hashtag/?utm_term=.09ad3d16d019. [Accessed 15 April 2019].
122. Discussions on humor theory are outside the scope of this thesis, though it is worth noting that the 'incongruity theory of humor' is described by Arthur Koestler in *The Act of Creation* (1964).

drove around Australia, pulling over to grieve found roadkill. In the video documentation,[123] the artist, dressed in all black motorcycle gear and a motorcycle helmet, holds the bloody body of a kangaroo in his arms, walking in small, repetitive circles. In 'Touching Animals,' an essay by Helena Reckitt, she compares this work to Joseph Beuy's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*: 'where Beuy's symbol-laden performance seemed convinced of its redemptive potential, Gladwell implicates himself in this indigenous animal's fate'.[124] Reckitt observes Gladwell's face is hidden in the documentation of the work, which she associates with shame, leading her to interpret Gladwell's implication in the animal's death. Steve Baker gives an interview on his own photograph collection *Northfolk Roadkill, Mainly,* in which he posits that an artist, or any person who intentionally engages with a found animal body, becomes, even if trivially, complicit or implicated in the animal's death.[125] Not looking or not engaging become a means of *feeling* un-complicit, or un-implicated, despite our daily individual participation with the systems that are the cause of death. Roadkill becomes bound up in a politics of how and when we look at animal bodies, almost as an inverse of Damien Hirst's explanation of the appeal of taxidermy, 'You kill things to look at them'.[126] We kill things, and by *not* looking, deny our participation in animal death. One aspect of performing taxidermy and its inclusion of taxidermy processes and subverted taxidermy forms is in making the invisibility of animal death visible.

Only in making these deaths visible can considerations of grieveability happen. In reconsidering ideas of mourning non-domestic companion species, I draw from both Haraway and Butler. Butler's work is concerned with understanding 'grieveability', or how we decide whose and what lives are mourned. She focuses on grief as an always-embodied experience that demonstrates our relationality and interdependence with other lives.[127] For Butler, this means grieveability is necessary in establishing an individual as subject and in thinking through the ethics of our interactions; by reconsidering 'grieveability', we may also reconsider the anthropocentric, normative structures that that connect grief to human identity. As covered in 'Conceptual Frameworks', Donna Haraway posits that humans and other animals are simultaneously subjects and objects in 'ongoing intra-action',[128] and later asks how we may be 'response-able' to one another as such. She posits that the 'capacity to respond […] should not be expected to take on symmetrical shapes and textures for all the parties'.[129] This leaves open the possibility that these interactions are as much about the animal's activity as the human (or human systems), and that

123. Excerpt can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xnK9goIEAM
124. Reckitt, H. (2010). 'Touching Animals.' *C Magazine*: 107, pp. 34.39.
125. McHugh, S. (2011). 'Stains, Drains, and Automobiles: An Interview with Steve Baker about *Norfolk Roadkill, Mainly*', p. 6.
126. Baker, S. (2006). '"You Kill Things to Look at Them:" Animal Death in Contemporary Art,' in The Animal Studies Group (eds) *Killing Animals*, University of Illinois, p. 69.
127. Redmalm, D. (2015). 'Pet Grief: When is Non-human Life Grieveable?'. *The Sociological Review:* 63:1, p. 22-23.
128. Haraway, D. (2008). *When Species Meet.* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 71.
129. *Ibid.*

the ethics of how we 'respond' may, in fact, look different across species or contexts. This means to mourn, grieve, or memorialise animal life may not look the same as the rituals we practice or assume for human beings. To some degree, by encouraging users to look, dwell, consider, remember, describe, imagine, and document encounters with animal dead, users may feel implicated. Further embracing Haraway's methods of 'staying with the trouble', the questions I pose are fundamentally speculative: the user is making guesses about the animal; the guesses are what demonstrate the networks involved in the animal's life and death. Responses are an archive of 'response-ability'; providing a platform in which one is simply able to respond, these might serve to re-consider the ethical implications of taxidermy.

Responses

The project is one that is ongoing, and currently most of the submissions on the blog are my own, serving as documentation of my own encounters with animal death, and many of them were instances where I could not collect the animal, either because it was too deteriorated to be usable for taxidermy or because I was traveling away from home. Insights into my own meditations on these encounters are covered throughout the work in this thesis; there are two entries of animals that later became a part of other portfolio work: 'Pigeon' dated 31/7/2019 and 'Pigeon' dated 23/2/2020. My own experience of documenting these moments as a practice from 2018-2020 gave me a sense of awareness of my own often un-attentive subjectivity; on my own street, where most of my own recorded encounters are found and where I would pass often multiple times a day, I wonder in some of my submissions if the decay I am seeing has been happening in my path for some time without my observation. These moments are like Haraway's 'partial connections'[130] of *Staying with the Trouble*; my own subjectivity gives me limited scope to the registers of life, death, and vibrancy in the time and space I share with them, and these encounters are material, embodied sites of connectivity.

As mentioned above, however, the purpose of the *Intersections* project is not in producing objective data but in providing a space to document and consider these animal death encounters. In this section I will provide some observations and examples of the small pool of responses I received anonymously from others. In continuing interrogation of visibility and invisibility of animal death, the project renders these often ignored, forgotten, and quickly-removed evidences of death visible. One user who gave multiple submissions is based in Australia, and their submissions demonstrate the ways in which constitutions of animals as 'companion species', 'trash animals', or common roadkill change geographically and culturally. A kangaroo and cockatoo are two of their submissions; entries from the United Kingdom are nearly entirely pigeons. As the Australian submitter describes working in a desert location near a road,

130. Haraway, D. (2016), *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press.

'We are always surrounded by wildlife and death'.[131] In response to questions on how the user felt or what they remembered in these encounters, there are, as there were in mine, themes of curiosity with a self-consciousness of how attention to the animal may be perceived by other (human) onlookers. Echoing some of performing taxidermy's interest in relating bodies of humans to nonhuman animals, a couple of users mention how viewing animal bone reminds them of their own skeleton. The response to the question of what happens 'next' is where the speculation on these encounters calls to networks of both human and animal; users wonder whether it will be human or non-human animal who next interacts with this body. These responses (my own included) also show the wide range of attitudes toward this kind of animal death: one user wishes a bird skeleton will remain intact; another user takes a kangaroo skull for their own art; and authors of other submissions are unsure whether the roadkill will be taken by an animal scavenger or a human cleaner, or which they find preferable. In my own submissions, I lament the ones I cannot take.

In the introduction to *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett writes on her own encounter with a dead rat as part of an assemblage of trash; the quality that draws her to this trash assemblage and the material within and around it is what she calls 'thing-power'. 'Thing-power' is a significant part of Bennett's vital materialism; it is an ability to produce effect or response that mobilises vital materialism's reconfiguration of what constitutes 'living'. For Bennett, in this particular assemblage, it is not significant whether the rat is sleeping or dead; further, she reminds that all vital materiality — which is all matter and things — participates in activity even after being 'thrown away'.[132] Considering these encounters with animal death through Bennett's political ecology, considerations of animal bodies, animal life, and animal materiality do not end with animal death. Unlike other apps, *Intersections* considers sites of animal death not as a method for prevention, but to prompt consideration of what happens to the materialities of these bodies *next*, remaining open to futures for these bodies that are not rooted in rendering them discarded or invisible. While *Intersections* is not itself a mode of 'performing taxidermy,' it is where 'performing taxidermy' literally begins, with the pressing 'thing-power' of animal death and the continued, changing vibrancy of its materiality.

131. Anonymous, 'Kangaroo,' under *Intersections*: *view submissions*. Available at: http://www.fmmw.org/interesections-view-submissions.
132. Bennett, J. (2010), *Vibrant Matter*, Duke University Press, p. 3-6.

Intersections: Animal Death considers the origins of the bodies of performing taxidermy and establishes an observance of animal death in daily life. The next work in this portfolio, *bug studies*, focuses on a common but lesser-known part of the taxidermy process.

***bug studies* (2019)**

> *'I am afraid to start writing what I have been thinking about all this, because I will get it wrong - emotionally, intellectually, and morally - and the issue is consequential. Haltingly, I will try.'* - Donna Haraway, 'Sharing Suffering,' *When Species Meet*

For this project *bug studies*, I purchased a small colony of Dermestid beetles, known for stripping flesh off of animal carcasses. Dermestid beetles are sometimes used in taxidermy practice for European mounts[133] and in natural history museums for skeleton re-articulation. My practice has usually involved working exclusively with dead animal bodies, and working with living animal collaborators provided a new and different methodology for me. This chapter will take a different form from the Action/Context format of other chapters due to its differing methodologies and unexpected outcomes. Due to the outcome of this project, the documentation I have is limited and was initially intended to be supplemental to the resulting creative output. Writing about this project has proven difficult because I cannot ignore emotional components and unanswerable questions on the value of life and research. For this reason, I will use my journal entries written during the project within the critical reflection and theoretical frameworks presented here. I will outline how New Materialist approaches influenced my process in working with the beetles and ground ethical and reflective considerations of the project with Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet* and *Staying with the Trouble*. Finally, I will draw from other animal or art theorists, such as Rachel Poliquin and Chloe Taylor, for discussing grief in animal death and taxidermy.

Working with Dermestid beetles has a long history in taxidermy, but additionally, there is some human/insect collaboration work already in the field of contemporary art. Tomas Saraceno's research studio, Spider/Web Department, focuses on multispecies collaborations with spiders. As an example, in the work *How to entangle the universe in a spider web?* (2018), a red laser slowly moves over different sections of a spider web. Stefanie Hessler of *Flash Art* writes that the resulting image draws connections between human and arachnid architecture. Saraceno's studio states an interest in creating collaborative work influenced by contemporary more-than-human philosophies, particularly those of Anna Tsing, as part of their research in non-anthropocentric ecosystems. In an interview with Hessler, Saraceno reports a desire to 'tak[e] back experiments from the 'high' realm of science,' which for Saraceno 'free[s] them of

133. European mounts are bare skulls, typically of horned mammals, intended to feature the horns.

their imperative to serve specific ends'.[134] This approach to experimentation resonates with performing taxidermy and my own use of the term 'performance experiments' to describe works within this thesis. Further, the concept of process for the sake of process (rather than as a means to a desired end result) is the approach to performing taxidermy that distinguishes it from other forms of taxidermy. Saraceno's work may be playful and experimental in its approach, but it also works within scientific fields — the studio has a number of scientists as collaborators, and has received recognition for their contributions to science, particularly for technology used in their digital scans of spider webs. Taxidermy has largely lost all relevance to scientific communities since the 19th century, and for taxidermists, Dermestid beetles are rarely of interest themselves. They are a tool in the process of taxidermy that is focused on the resulting taxidermy object. In approaching *bug studies*, and in shifting the focus of taxidermy to the processes of taxidermy, I make the bugs themselves the primary focus of the work.

Thinking of Dermestid beetles as part of the service offered by a taxidermist, and in an attempt to frame this within performance practice, I am reminded of the work of Oslo Aviary and Apiary. Under a banner of 'dark ecology,' the two use practices such as beekeeping and raising butterflies as 'services,' which they refer to as performance 'ecoventions,' that 'delve into the topic of life in the end times'.[135] They appear in documentation in skull makeup; they embrace the topic of death, particularly of other species, as inevitable to a consideration of contemporary life. In one video recorded ritual entitled *Goth Beekeeping* (2019), they burn the nesting structure of one of their beehives that died over a particularly harsh winter.[136] I will return to this work later in my consideration of death rituals for animal dead. In the realm of body art, a major influence on the body in performing taxidermy, is Kira O'Reilly. In *Bad Humours/Affected* (1998), O'Reilly uses bloodletting and leeches as a response to the AIDS/HIV crisis and the shifting attitudes toward blood as a contagion.[137] The leeches in this work largely serve as a reference to older medical practices, though in contemporary times what they share with flesh-eating beetles are a common response of disgust or 'ickiness' in humans. Though performing taxidermy has no explicit stake in some of the political themes of body art made in the AIDS era, it undoubtedly shares approaches and materials; further, what they share conceptually is an interest in disgust or fear around contagion in 'opening' the flesh. I mention O'Reilly's work here in the context of artists working with insect/arachnid/leech more-than-human others; later in this chapter I address the subject of blood more explicitly.

134. Hessler, S. (2020). 'Tomás Saraceno: *How to Entangle the Universe in a Spider W*eb.' *Flash Art,* 24 August. Available at: https://flash---art.com/article/tomas-saraceno/ [Accessed 5 April 2021].
135. Presturud, M. 'Oslo Aviary and Apiary: About' Available at: https://osloapiaryandaviary.cargo.site/About [Accessed 4 December 2019].
136. 'Goth Beekeeping' (2019). Oslo Aviary and Apiary. Available at: https://osloapiaryandaviary.cargo.site/Goth-Beekeeping [Accessed 4 December 2019].
137. (2014) The Art of Kira O'Reilly, *Performance Research,* 19:4, p. 85-87.

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They arrived in a plastic container inside a brown cardboard box. It is an unusually warm day – and week – in Glasgow. The smell from their small shipping container was strong and putrid, and though I don't wear gloves I feel a hesitation around touching them. Despite knowing they will not bite (though in rare cases they can cause an allergic reaction), this does nothing to keep my hands from jerking away from them when I feel I'm too close. I dump the plastic container, including the small bit of cardboard egg crate that came with them, into the glass tank I'd prepared for them. I fashioned a piece of white fabric netting with Velcro as a lid; the worry is less that they will escape, and more that flies or other outside species similarly interested in dead stuff will try to get in. Some of them do crawl up the corners of the glass tank, but a small smear of Vasoline in each corner appears to keep them from getting to the top. I know they prefer warmer temperatures, so there are 2 small heating pads underneath the tank. I covered the floor of the tank with Aspen shavings and put two small cubes of Styrofoam inside for them to burrow into.

I had already skinned two small mice for them and put the skins in my tanning solution. When I put the remaining carcasses in the tank, those of them who did seem to be searching for the exit of the tank pulled a quick about-face and made their way to food. Once they are settled, I sit and watch them scurry about and bury their faces in mouse muscle. I am already completely infatuated with them. After leaving them for the day, I continue to watch over-and-over the same 20-second video of their movement around the mice. I send the video to any friend who I feel will humour me in my excitement, or at the very least not be bothered by the images.

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In researching how to care for Dermestid beetles, I primarily followed a guide on a Wordpress blog run by two Americans, father and daughter Brian and Kerry Anderson, titled 'Meat the Beetles'.[138] I fashioned the bugs' tank per their suggestions, keeping the beetles in a closed-off room in a barn in a glass tank with under-tank heaters. I was aware that keeping them adequately warm in Scotland's climate would likely be my biggest challenge, and that I was limited in my resources with what I could provide as far as an ideal habitat. I began initially giving them small animal bodies - house mice - to eat. They took to these very quickly, and usually overnight I would return to the tank to find a small, bare skeleton.

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138. Anderson, B. and Anderson, K. 'Meat the Beetles.' https://dermestidbeetles.wordpress.com/about/ [Accessed 4 December 2019].

Their eating is quick and 'as advertised' – a small mouse is a thin outline of bones by the next morning. Finding decent estimates for eating time is difficult – most research shows the same line – 'a colony of 2000-3000 can clean a deer skull in around 3 days.' My colony is much smaller than this, but also, so are the bodies I am able to give them. My limited resources mean I can only keep them reasonably warm in a reasonably dark space.

bugs Fig. 1: 'Cleaned' skeletons

I begin to accept that I was over-confident in my ability to hold and handle them with my bare hands without any repulsion or fear. This becomes a part of my learning experience with them, taking small steps to get comfortable. I find the larva easier than the adults. The larva are the ones who do most of the eating, anyway, and this phase is the longest in their life cycle. During this phase, they go from being about the size of a head of a pin to the length of one segment of a finger. They are fuzzy with chubby, wormy bodies and a few sets of tiny legs.

It is also becoming clear they are no more comfortable with me than I am with them. When I touch them, they move quickly away from my direction; when I scoop them up into my hand, they speed up as they look for a surface, any surface, to move to that is not my skin. They are so fragile they are difficult to pick up; I could squish one between my fingers with even slight carelessness. I do my best not to, and though I've clearly lost a few one way or another, I have not killed one this way yet.

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Experimenting with ways in which I can incorporate a performer's body into the other processes of my art practice, or alongside the other (animal) bodies, my initial explorations involved trying to touch the bugs or to allow them the opportunity to touch me. Even if I was very still, the bugs would stay far away from my hand in the tank; if I attempted to pick one up with my bare fingers or a plastic spoon, they would speed up to find another surface. In *Staying with the Trouble,* Donna Haraway describes Vinciane Despret's research approaches, particularly in observing scientific research and research with other

species, as valuing 'politeness';[139] impolite is the best word to describe my sense when trying to interact with the beetles in this way. My intentions in working with the beetles was not only to explore what they are to me, but other ways I may be with them.

In other portfolio chapters,[140] I reference either commodified animal-objects or representations of animals in pop culture with the intent of questioning how these representations impact our cultural understanding of animal bodies. Similarly, memories of animal representation come up in my working with the Dermestid beetles and in my attempts to understand our relationship with and our occupation of the same environment. In an episode of the cartoon series *Doug*, which I watched often as a child, the titular character is on a road trip with his family when he sees a billboard advertisement for a 'Bug Ranch' roadside attraction.[141] In a cut to Doug's imagination, he and his family are enthusiastically cheering each other on as they ride horse-sized bugs and lasso other bugs. Upon arrival at the 'Bug Ranch,' they are presented with a tank decorated in miniature farm equipment, similar to a fish tank, filled with common insects crawling in the tank. This is declared 'boring' by his older sister, and Doug is embarrassed and defensive at his own foolish expectations. The bugs are doing exactly as bugs do, operating in a seemingly other plane of existence to the humans, and Doug's hopes of accessing these bugs in an anthropocentric way - one that is relatable to his own sensory and phenomenological experience of the world - are dashed. Of course, observing animals in their 'natural habitat' is a common human leisure activity and way of learning about other life, but in this television snippet, the excitement comes in the suggestion that there could be something different, a relationship that involves shared interaction over distant observation. In working with the Dermestid beetles, the ideas I initially had about how I could interact with them quickly shifted upon actually experiencing our interactions. I consider this scene when thinking of Haraway's notion of non-human-exceptionalist 'worldings' and 'becomings-with'; nature and culture have served as structures that allow imagining being with other beings only in limited, usually anthropocentric ways, and rather than seeking how the beetles exist in my world, I may need to consider how *I* am in *theirs.*[142] As is a common caveat to many post humanist and/or New Materialist philosophies, it may be impossible for me to conceive of the experience of other species outside anthropocentrism. There is a degree of anthropomorphism in my interpretation of their actions as communicating a fear of, or at least an aversion to, me. This kind of anthropomorphism is slightly different from putting bugs on a miniature ranch; it is more akin to Darwin's anthropomorphising of his

139. Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 127.
140. See *FUOS* (2018) and *Immaculate Confection* (2018)
141. 'Doug's Bad Trip,' Season 4, Episode 13. *Doug.* Nickelodeon, 1994. Available at: https://youtu.be/3kpgGd-O5UU?t=251 [Accessed 4 December 2019].
142. Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 110.

worm subjects as outlined by Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter*.[143] Darwin used anthropomorphism through attempting to relate to the worms he was observing; it was one of many tools used to draw reasonable conclusions about worm behaviour. Relating to the beetles came up frequently in my journaling.

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> *I still feel love and attachment for them. I can get distracted and simply watch them for long periods of time. I want to be closer to them somehow. Tricking them into walking on my hands, or shoving my fingers in the bedding to see them move, feels inconsiderate. They are kind-of like a pet, and kind of not. I decide the conditions they live under, just as I have my dogs. It's difficult to escape the feeling that domesticated dogs are human baby analogues when I get up in the morning, feed them, take them out to go to the bathroom, watch them jump with excitement when I or my human partner comes home. I feel most 'dog pack'-like when we're wrestling, or piled under covers on a cold night. With the bugs, it's different - there's no neoteny or baby-talk or sense of a nuclear family unit, but even despite my best attempts not to evoke an anthropocentric hierarchy, my role with them feels matriarchal, like a queen bee. Without me, they die. Though I'll never be snuggling with them, which my best guess tells me is as much their preference, so I should consider other ways to interact.*

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Considering a way of 'interacting with', which in the context of my practice-research means finding some point of bodily contact or exchange without resorting to handling them the way I have frequently handled other non-human animals (and, I suppose, human too), creates the question of what it is about my body, or what does or can my body do, that provides alternative ways of interacting. This is where thinking of my body as *material* is significant. In other portfolio works, (my own) blood in my art practice via piercing needles or syringes, and given that one of the beetle's primary sites of interacting in the world is with dead flesh - bodily material not of a living body - this became the main experiment with them.

143. Bennett, J. (2010), *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.* Duke University Press, p. 95-100.

bugs Fig. 2: First blood test

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I get a small gauge needle from my body-modificaton-hobbyist kit and drive it into one of the bigger veins on the top of my wrist. I let a large drop of blood fall into the tank next to the dry rat carcass. Within a minute, several of them had rushed quickly over and put their faces in the droplet.

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I harvested the blood from my most recent period, keeping it in a small jar in my purse throughout the few days. Towards the end, when I'd collected as much as I could, I opened the jar and smelled the contents – the smell was unpleasant but familiar. It took me a few minutes to realise the smell was so familiar because it was identical to that of the insides of warm roadkill that had a little decay time on it. After keeping the jar in the fridge overnight, I put it on a heater to warm it up slightly. It coagulated into a jam-like consistency.

bugs Fig. 3: Blood droplet

They've continued to eat the dry rat carcass – cleaning its skull entirely and exposing almost every rib – though there's still untouched meat in places. I use a spoon to scoop out the contents of the jar and smear it onto the remaining meaty patches on the rat carcass. I leave them alone for about an hour, and upon returning they have again swarmed the rat carcass.

Thinking about the bugs consuming my menstrual blood as a substitute to dead flesh conjures associations between the contents of and processes that create period blood - I tend to loathe lines of thinking that seem to establish my body's capacity to make babies as somehow integral to some essence of me, but I can't help thinking about producing death out of my own body monthly, of the abortion I had several years ago in Ohio, one of the more anti-abortion leaning states in the USA. I remember the doctor asking if I'd like to see the tissue afterwards, which, of course, I did - I think I asked if I could keep it, but wasn't allowed.

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bugs Fig. 4: Menstrual blood on rat skeleton

As mentioned above in considering other art practices with insect (or leech) others, the subject of blood arises in discussing Kira O'Reilly's work. Blood, like other elements of body art, has a history in feminist performance art, including comparisons of non-human animal and female human body in works by Suzanne Lacy and Ana Mendieta. Lacy's work in particular incorporates skinned lambs, such as in *There are Voices in the Desert* (1977) and the film and photo series *Anatomy Lessons* (1976-77), as visceral, aggressive commentary on sexual violence against women and the male gaze's reduction of women's bodies to meat.[144] In *Death of a Chicken (*1972), Mendieta cuts the head off a chicken and holds it by its feet in front of her naked body as blood falls from the neck, again using animal body to allude to blood of women's bodies.[145] Lacy's work used animal bodies as criticism of a reduction of women to meat; *Death of a Chicken* draws on ritual animal sacrifice to draw connections between material of bodies and Mendieta's identity as a Latin American woman. In 'Painting Blood: Visualising Mentrual Blood in Art,' Ruth Green-Cole cites French philosopher Luce Irigaray's observation that 'fluids' and body 'leakiness' are associated with femininity, and, importantly to performing taxidermy, vulnerability.[146] *bug studies,* in its use of menstrual blood and replacement of animal flesh with my own, also works from this lineage, but to a different end: I use the vulnerability of my body precisely to seek familiarity or similarity with animal death, seeing both bug and myself as subject and object in this material exchange. In *Immaculate Confection,* I act as the consumer, eating the taxidermy-chocolate objects; in this work, I shift this relationship by presenting my own flesh for consumption.

144. Schneider, R. (1997), *The Explicit Body in Performance,* London: Routledge, p. 131.
145. Camnitzer, L. (1989), 'Ana Mendieta,' *Third Text*, 3:7, p. 49.
146. Green-Cole, R. (2020) 'Painting Blood: Visualising Menstrual Blood in Art' in Bobel, Winkler, et al. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies.* Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 56.

Immaculate Confection, which chronologically preceded *bug studies* as a performance but is seen in the following chapter, features *my* eating of other materials, particularly goods made from animal bodies (chocolate), and how eating creates an assemblage of both human and non-human elements in which the 'eaten' becomes a part of the 'eater'. In Bennett's chapter 'Edible Matter',[147] the focus is on human eating and human 'foods' and their political relevance as a material actants in issues of diet, obesity, and food security. From a New Materialist perspective, eating is a 'series of mutual transformations'; humans are not the only life that requires and pursues nourishment, and the eaten and eater 'recorporealise in response to each other.'[148] In this way, not only am I able to find new sites of interaction between myself and the bugs by feeding them my own material body but also share material qualities of the dead animals I have worked with for so long. I am, for the bugs, 'matter to be acted upon';[149] this performance experiment suggests how materiality provides lines of thinking outside anthropocentrism. Eating served not only as a pathway to blurring body boundaries, but also as my only means of evaluating how my colony is living.

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> *I've noticed they are eating less and less. My best guess to this is that it's due to the cold. My research has told me that they don't die in cold weather, provided it is above-freezing, and the under-tank heaters are always on, but the bugs do become less active. It is much colder than their 'ideal' temperatures for fast eating, which is around 70-80F/23-26C. I don't have any options for a warmer room for them – even if I thought I could manage sharing my one-bedroom flat with them, cooking chilli in a small room as they eat decaying flesh, or even convince my domestic partners (one human, two canine) to tolerate this, I don't even heat my own home regularly.*

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> *I travel to the US for two weeks with food prepared for the bugs, which simply needs putting in the tank by a friend. Upon my return, their eating has still been slowing; this is when I first notice that eating has been slowing in part because bugs are dying off. I don't know what to do.*

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147. Bennett, J. (2010), *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.* Duke University Press, p. 39-51.
148. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
149. *Ibid.,* p. 48

After another week has passed, I believe my colony is past reviving; there are more dead bugs than moving ones in the tank, and I am unable to diagnose the problem. I know that Dermestid beetles only survive in a colony – a few individuals are unlikely to live very long. The lifespan of one beetle is only around 4 months, but the lifespan of a colony is dependent on the size of the colony, the availability of food, and active reproduction.

My best theories for the death of the colony:

It was infested with mites, as they were in a closed barn, but still mostly vulnerable to outside elements.

They did not reproduce in the cold – Dermestid beetles will hibernate to avoid cold spells – and adult bugs have been slowly dying off. It's possible some of the bugs are even still hibernating, and not dead. 'Is it dead or is it sleeping' sounds related to taxidermy.

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I have a combination of grief and guilt upon realizing they are past a point of no return. Because I genuinely did love them, because I was supposed to take care of them, because my research has failed. I was looking forward to a longer collaboration.
After a couple months 'together', I was only just at the point of feeling as if I was getting into a rhythm with them.

I've compartmentalised their death a fair bit in the last couple weeks – facing figuring out how to write about it seems painful to dig into.

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Given that my project with these beetles is within the context of academic research, I turn to Donna Haraway's chapter on lab animals in *When Species Meet* (2008) in my theoretical framework. In 'Sharing Suffering', Haraway ultimately defends the use of lab animals for scientific research while attempting to find more nuanced ethical and philosophical considerations for these practices that do not solely operate from a position that *human* greater good alone is a satisfactory ethical justification. For Haraway, 'companion species' interactions are founded on their 'relations of use,' though these relations are rarely

equal or 'symmetrical'.[150] With regard to morality or ethics of killing, she distinguishes between 'killing' and 'making killable'; this distinction is necessary to first accept that no living being - human or otherwise - exists outside killing, which in turn brings our concern not to a moral binary of kill or do not kill, but rather, a more complicated ethics under which death and killing happen and how to make this as considered and responsible as possible. She states, 'I do not think we can nurture living until we get better at facing killing'.[151] A willingness to embrace and encourage acknowledgement of my, and others', inevitable complicity in animal death and killing has long been a theme of my work; I have always been aware in my art practice that despite the ethical considerations I give, my work owns its own, in Haraway's words, 'permanent refusal of innocence' to death and dying.[152] My dealings with my bugs have been as much affective as otherwise knowledge-producing, and interrogating my own sense of emotional attachment to the beetles came to the forefront after their death.

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> *It feels like a tricky question to dig into why I had the affectionate feelings for them that I had – love is just something that exists and persists without reason or justification, but I wonder what I could understand further about myself and them through thinking through it. My practice is generally a pretty solitary one; maybe it says something about the quality of being alive versus being dead that it was, perhaps, exciting to work with these collaborators and participants. Doing taxidermy can be a bit lonely.*
>
> *Maybe it is in part because what they do seems almost magical to me – the scale they work on, hundreds of them taking bites out of dead flesh so small there's no way I could isolate one action from one bug, from my distance it all seems like a disappearing act.*
>
> *Maybe my experience with living with animals gives an inherent gush of attached feelings to any other species that feels as if its stepped into a role of being my pet.*
>
> *There's also the guilt, both as someone who has failed in caring for another life, and as a researcher. I have spent years walking the line of ethically-minded taxidermist, who does not deny my own inevitable participation in the death of other life but does not actively kill the bodies I use in my work. The first time I undertake an artistic endeavor with the goal of keeping something alive, I feel I've failed.*

150. Haraway, D. (2008). *When Species Meet.* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 74.
151. *Ibid.,* p. 81.
152. *Ibid.,* p. 92

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Throughout her chapter on 'Sharing Suffering', Haraway invokes 'forgiveness' and 'wickedness:' affective terms with religious undertones that she laments as not quite the language she desires. My beetle colony has not survived, and I identify with these words in my response to the colony's death. However, I am notably treating the colony as if it is one life; a single Dermestid beetle life is no more than four months, and a single Dermestid beetle cannot survive without a colony. Individual deaths are occurring within the colony often, and my investment has been in the overall thriving of the colony itself. The beetles I purchased were marketed as reptile food - returning again to eating as central to this multi-species, material network - though speculating on whether or not I provided 'more' or 'better' life to the beetles in my experiment does not feel to be a satisfactory justification to assuage my sense of responsibility in their death. This is in line with the tensions Haraway suggests: I have no adequate rational justification for their death; I can engage with the affective consequences and own my part in their killing; and that neither of these necessarily equates to a clear, moral path for what I 'should' or 'should not' have done, or what good this project did or did not do for whom. Risk in this work has an additional register than what is seen in other works of performing taxidermy, in that it is not only the material vulnerabilities of bodies (though that is present here) but also the risk, in Haraway's words, of 'doing something wicked because it may also be good'.[153] This is an example of how ethical considerations are active in the practice-research of performing taxidermy. Haraway references biologist Marc Bekoff's insistence that all scientific research should ask to what extent the research benefits the animals in question; I am not sure I can answer whether my artistic research in this project benefits, or benefitted, the beetles, though the research was certainly *about* the beetles, or, at the very least, about 'us' as a multi species relationship. They are an 'oddkin'[154] in that, for me, they are simultaneously pets, labourers, and subjects of an experiment, all while provoking a sense of attachment and repulsion. I grieved their death both as a perceived failure of an experiment and as something I cared for.

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> *Death rituals are in place to designate some kind of meaning or importance to the life that's lost. It is a way of saying that some being was 'special.' This is, somewhat ironically, also what traditional hunting trophy taxidermy does, though I suppose the criticism with that practice is that it is not exactly the animal itself that is designated as special, but rather the hunting prowess of*

153. *Ibid.*
154. Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 2.

the human being who does the killing. Is there any way to reframe this? If I put their bodies onto a taxidermy display, what makes this different, if it indeed it is? Is it just love, or just intention? That doesn't seem very easy to navigate in the context of academic research. Maybe it is too precious to be useful.

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Oslo Apiary and Aviary's burning of a beehive transformed from a discarding of a nest no longer needed to a death ritual through elements of its performativity: they wore the make-up and costumes of their performance alter-egos; they watched closely from beginning to end of the burning; and they video-recorded the event. In my practice, and given our relationship, incorporating the beetles into a taxidermy mount seems an appropriate similar ritual for the death of my beetles. Taxidermy, however, has not historically been aligned with death rituals, particularly in Euro-American cultures. Pet taxidermy has seen a rise in popularity in the last few decades, but this remains contentious, even for taxidermists. Emily Mayer, taxidermist for Damien Hirst, often refuses pet taxidermy work on the basis that 'most of them don't really want a piece of taxidermy, they want their animal back, and that's not something I can give them.'[155] The taxidermy shop I worked for also had a no-pet policy, which seemed due to the taxidermist's aversion to dealing with the grief of the potential clients. It seems there is no place for grief in a taxidermy shop. As Chloe Taylor outlines in 'Respect for (animal) dead', what is considered 'respectful' for animals, barring pets, is not 'wasting' the animal body, whether this means eating or otherwise making use of the body. Treatment of human dead is deontological rather than utilitarian, meaning it is based on Western morality and the wishes of the human as described before death. It is only utilitarian with consent, such as with organ donation.[156] Taxidermy, while it involves 'using' the animal body, is not exactly utilitarian given that its resulting object is aesthetic. It is also not considered to be morally compatible with grieving. The tension between grieving an animal and using that animal for taxidermy comes in this complication of death rituals and limited notions of respect for animal dead. As Poliquin notes in *Breathless Zoo,* to taxidermy an animal, particularly from a hunt, is to designate that animal as 'special' in some way. For hunters, these are commonly known as 'trophies', which display the skills of the hunter; it is rarely about the animal itself. When I speak of my beetles as being special to me, it is something more akin to Judith Butler's notion of 'grieveable'.[157] She uses grieveability to argue that how we die, and what we do with our dead, matters in acknowledging that life matters. This still does not quite answer whether or not taxidermy undoes or negates grieveability. I have often defended that my

155. Aloi, G. (2008). 'Rescuing What Had Become a Dying Art' *Antennae: The Journal of Art and Nature.* Vol. 5, p. 47
156. Talor, Chole (2013). 'Respect for the (animal) dead.' In Jay Johnson and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey (eds) *Animal Death*. Sydney: Sydney University Press, p. 85-102.
157. *Ibid.,* p. 97.

work may open questions of rituals around animal dead. As most of the animals I work with are roadkill or otherwise 'made killable' (in Haraway's terms) as reptile food, it is a misstep to presume that, at the very least, these bodies would have otherwise been 'grieveable' outside my art practice. Nonetheless, I had a direct impact on the lives of the beetles, rather than a more distant participation in animal-killing human structures such as agriculture and transportation. In Haraway's words, this reveals a potent trouble to 'stay with' regarding the risks we take with our bodies and others: where 'grieveability' and killing intersect.

bug studies, despite its unexpected outcome, has provided uniquely valuable considerations for performing taxidermy because of its singular use of living more-than-human collaborators alongside to the animal bodies commonly seen in other portfolio works. The work offers an interrogation into human/non-human animal material exchanges, a concept central to performing taxidermy, through a focus on living rather than dead non-human animal others. Additionally, the experiment engages with animal visibility not in its focus on the dead animal but in rendering visible the invisible processes in taxidermy and other bodies — and vulnerabilities — that emerge when considering animal materiality beyond death. This multispecies quality of *bug studies,* meaning beyond myself and animal dead other, will continue in other portfolio works, particularly in the site-specific work *FUOS.*

Intersections: Animal Death and *bug studies* both deal with early phases of the taxidermy process, and are not primarily concerned with the resulting taxidermy objects. The next three portfolio works, *Immaculate Confection, FUOS,* and *what to do with what remains,* are works in performing taxidermy that more directly approach animal bodies as taxidermy objects. These works engage with materials commonly seen in other taxidermy practices: feathers, fur, metal wires, salt water, and Styrofoam. Often, I work with these materials in my small taxidermy studio. However, these works also embrace other materials, sites, and methods not commonly seen in taxidermy: eating chocolate, piercing human skin, and singing in an old barn, to name a few. I progress from *bug studies* to *Immaculate Confection* because both works engage with eating as a process of material, bodily exchange.

***Immaculate Confection* (2018)**

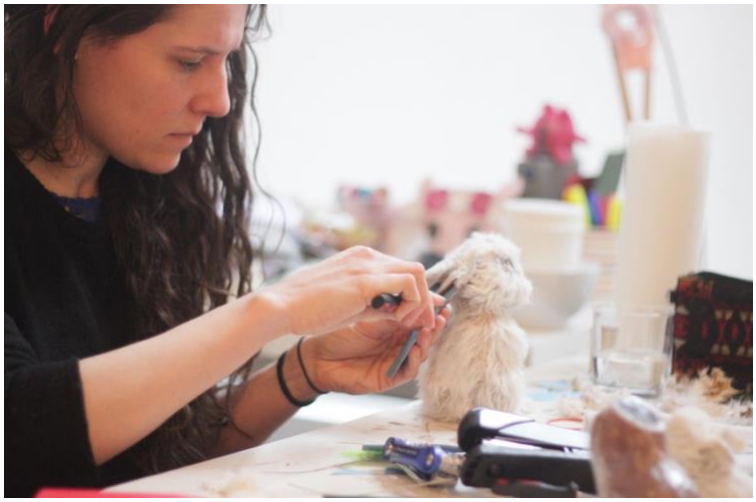
Immaculate Confection was created at Easter 2018, and involves seasonal chocolate bunnies and rabbit bodies. My interest in human/animal/object boundaries and relations within my research project has prompts me to observe where and how 'the animal' appears in Anglo/European contemporary daily life, whether as products made from animal bodies — in this case, chocolate — or as human-made zoomorphic or anthropomorphic form of an animal, such as the chocolate Easter bunny. As John Berger theorises in 'Why Look at Animals?',[158] the Industrial Revolution marginalised animals, as real animals disappeared from daily life. Related, it saw the rise the popularity of animal-shaped toys and characters. As discussed in 'Conceptual Frameworks', this disappearance of animals from daily life and emergence of animals in consumer goods, zoos, and wildlife photography contributed to a delineation between 'nature' and 'culture'. Today, animal bodies and lives are compartmentalised, whether by species (dogs versus cows), body (packaged meat versus a hunting trophy), or place (abattoir versus zoo). Taxidermy's already complicated status as both object and animal may disrupt how meaning is made of other human-made animal objects, which was a motivation in choosing to work with rabbit bodies and the iconic seasonal chocolate bunny.

Immaculate Confection exists across media; it was a live, though unpublicised, action in a public place (the Glasgow Botanic Gardens), a series of GIFs viewable on my website, and an Easter Facebook post sharing the GIFs. These forms of documentation was chosen in part to reflect the tensions of working with taxidermy – a process that attempts to make the impermanent permanent – alongside a seasonal, ephemeral consumable – Easter chocolate. GIFs replicate a moment in time in order to extend the moment beyond its temporal constraints; social media is an interface designed to give a chronology or temporal quality to static images. As additional documentation of the taxidermy processes that help

158. Berger, J. (2009). 'Why Look at Animals?,' in *Why Look at Animals?*, New York: Penguin.

inform the research questions, there are photos of the taxidermised chocolate rabbits that show the process of making them, and a photograph of one of the taxidermised chocolate rabbits on a shelf alongside Lindt chocolate bunnies in the West End's Waitrose. This chapter begins with an explanation of the objects themselves, the process of making them, and the recorded actions, followed by a section on theoretical considerations of *Immaculate Confection* that weave Easter animal representation and materialities of eating into performing taxidermy.

Action



Imm. Con. Fig 1: Finishing taxidermy-chocolates

In the days leading up to the live action, I collected chocolate bunnies from local shops and four frozen dead rabbits from a supplier of reptile food. I skinned and tanned the rabbits as is typical in taxidermy, but instead of stretching the skin over a Styrofoam mould of a rabbit body, chocolate Easter candies were used as the internal 'form'. On Easter day, I took these hybrid rabbit-chocolates Glasgow's Botanic Gardens, where I set them in the grass, collected them, opened them, and bit into the chocolate. As a performance work, it was executed akin to a 60s-style 'happening' than a publicised performance with an expecting audience; I went only with the documentarian, who stayed some distance away with a zoom lens. It was a busy day in the park due to good weather, and there were lots of people and dogs nearby, though none came particularly close. The decision not to publicise the action was to avoid the obvious framing of it as performance, but rather to execute it more akin to other Easter rituals that may or may not have been happening in the Botanic Gardens that day (such as an Easter egg hunt).

Imm. Con. Fig 2: Hybrid bunny in box

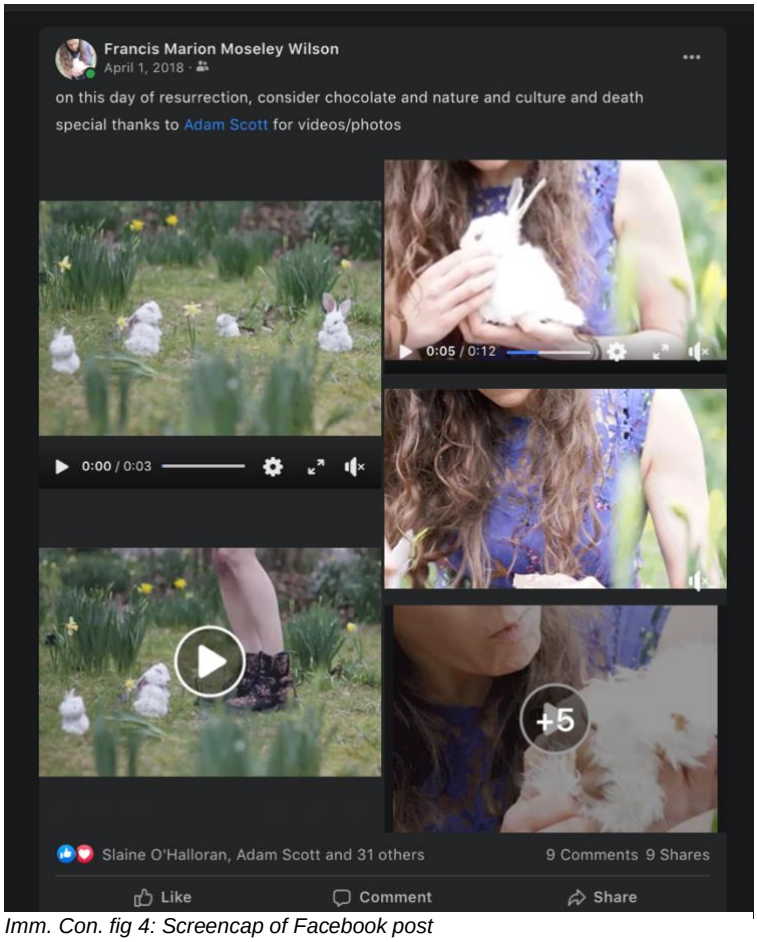
Consistent with my view of performing taxidermy as an experimental process, creating these taxidermy-chocolate bunnies required some adaptations of taxidermy techniques. Instead of keeping the tanned rabbit skin (otherwise known as the cape) intact and stretched over the chocolate form, the cape was pieced on in more of a patchwork style, though these seams were mostly hidden in fur. This also allowed for an easier 'unwrapping' of the altered chocolate rabbits. No glass eyes were used, as I

wanted the chocolate to show through subtly in the eye sockets. In order to use the wires and pins necessary to hold a cape in place as it dries over a form, these had to be heated in boiling water in order to push smoothly through the chocolate, not crack or break it. I used four different styles of chocolate bunny along with four different individual rabbit bodies roughly of the same size, resulting in a range of appearances of the hybrid taxidermy-chocolate bunnies.

The reason for experimenting with varying shapes of chocolate bunnies was two-fold: it gave me a variety of rabbit 'poses' to work with, and allowed me to compare more popular or iconic chocolate bunny shapes (such as the Lindt chocolate) with less identifiable brands. The analysis of chocolate bunny 'anatomy' that comes with the taxidermy process shows both the striking, real differences between 'real' rabbit bodies and chocolate ones, despite the acceptance of these zoomorphic forms as representations of 'real' bunnies. One came out surprisingly believable as a taxidermic 'real' rabbit, which I attribute not only to a combination of skill and luck, but also to the influence of the chocolate bunny as an contemporary visual of what a bunny 'looks like', or how our understanding of animal form is potentially influenced by the ubiquity of the chocolate bunny form in contemporary Western society – I do not think it is merely coincidence that the internal chocolate bunny form in this particular bunny was a Lindt chocolate bunny, a more popular and iconic brand than other chocolate bunnies used. This aspect of the work as performing taxidermy will be further expanded in the following section on 'Context'.

Imm. Con. fig 3: 'Lindt' bunnies with taxidermy-chocolate hybrid

Context



Imm. Con. fig 4: Screencap of Facebook post

In my practice, I am often drawn to working with taxidermy processes alongside other materials or contexts in which animal form is commonly seen or utilised, such as plush animals and other children's toys. The intent here is in both problematising how we experience and make meaning of animal bodies and exploring how materiality of animal bodies may affect our sentimentality toward human-made zoomorphic objects. Looking from a process and material perspective, there are similarities between a taxidermy rabbit and a chocolate bunny; identifying these may point to how mixing these as materials and signifiers may complicate not only how we make meaning of each but also what role materials have – particularly in the case of animal bodies – in how we make distinctions between objects and animals as resources for use, or, in Bennett's terms, 'actants' with 'agency'.[159] Some of these similarities will be outlined and considered alongside Aloi's speculative taxidermy and Bennett's vital materialism.

In considering the similarities between a traditional taxidermy rabbit and a chocolate bunny-shaped candy, both are representations of animal form; both are made from a mass-produced mould; both are ascribed monetary value based partially on size; and both are treated with preservatives in order to extend their material 'life'. A chocolate bunny is typically hollow; a taxidermy rabbit is hollow in the sense that the rabbit's insides have been removed. They are both, then, defined by their surfaces. Both involve animal bodies: taxidermy is characterised by its visibility of an animal body, while it is much more easily forgotten or ignored that a typical chocolate bunny requires animal milk. Visibility is a major concept in Aloi's configuration of speculative taxidermy. In *Speculative Taxidermy,* Aloi argues that any attempts to find a commonality of all things, such as Bennett does with vital materialism or, as Aloi outlines, in object-oriented ontology, must find ways to confront the human primacy of the visual, particularly in art objects. To think through this problem, Aloi provides thorough analysis of Maria Papadimitriou's *Agrimiká: Why Look at Animals?,* an installation work that is a re-creation of a long-standing Greek shop

159. Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter*, Duke University Press.

that includes a myriad of tools, vintage objects, books, and animal skins, both fragmented and as three-dimensional taxidermy objects. Aloi, who is fundamentally arguing the productive value of animal surfaces, skins, and bodies in contemporary art for re-considering human/animal relations, is seeking to understand what he calls the resounding 'vibration' (from Bennett's 'vibrancy') of animal skins within the installation as different from other kinds of objects. To Aloi, art 'overmines' visible animal death while simultaneously 'undermining' those 'rendered materially invisible,' and he proposes that this should not equate to the ethical considerations of such a work of art: 'it would be erroneous to ethically overmine the animal skins in [*Agrimiká*'s] assemblage without perceiving the animal deaths included in glue pots, wooden furniture, books [etc]'.[160] In *Immaculate Confection*, the same kind of ethical visibility/invisibility is at play in the animal bodies included in the work: most viewers recognise the ethical discomfort in the visibility of rabbit skins, with the animal death pervasive in the dairy industry being a lesser immediate consideration in chocolate bunnies. The visible animal deaths in *Immaculate Confection* leads to, via assemblage, considerations of the invisible.

As covered in 'Conceptual Frameworks', studying the history of taxidermy reveals how it is tied specifically to Euro-American values, even as these values change over time. With this comes the inescapable fact of taxidermy's deep roots in colonialism; as Poliquin discusses,[161] early taxidermy was born out of the desire to somehow capture, collect, and bring the animal and plant life from distant expeditions back home to Europe. Death and resurrection are central to Christianity's Easter. Working with taxidermy on Easter was a way to emphasise what Poliquin establishes as the main difference between taxidermy and other death rituals or bodily preservations: 'the distinction between the palpable world of materials and the spiritual otherworld of invisible forces'.[162] *Immaculate Confection*'s title is play on words that serves to both make connections between taxidermy's idealised animal and secularity and conceptually weave these material objects into stories of Western values around Easter and, via the Virgin Mary, women. While working with the cultural associations of images like rabbits and Easter bunnies may be secondary to a more materialistic approach generally in my practice, images, objects, and bodies are frequently read through symbolic or allegorical registers; performing taxidermy seeks to work *with* these registers rather than attempt to discount or ignore them. Through my research on the history of the Easter bunny, it has become clear that the history of how exactly the rabbit became associated with the Christian holiday is largely speculative; like many examples of Pagan symbols and rituals making their way into Christian ideology, the rabbit-symbol's history is lost like a poorly preserved exotic animal pelt rotting away at sea. There's some suggestion that early scientists believed the rabbit was self-

160. Aloi, G. (2018). *Speculative Taxidermy*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 199.
161. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, Chapters 2, 3.
162. *Ibid.,* p. 23.

reproducing, leading to an association of rabbits with virgin birth. Other sources, such as George Ferguson's book *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (1954), are more aligned with contemporary associations of rabbits to fertility and reproduction, and he suggests depictions of the Virgin Mary with a white rabbit at her feet is a symbol of her triumph over lust. I have found very few credible sources explaining the origins of the Easter bunny. The lost, vague backstory of the Easter bunny may help destabilise the rabbit/bunny symbolism. Like many old conventions that have crossed oceans and cultures, the Easter bunny no longer offers a clear allegory or a fable. As a material, it is what is readily present and available to me at a particular time in the year; as a story, the Easter bunny is less stable, and potentially open to re-telling and re-contextualising, accompanied by new material forms that may include both, or neither, chocolate and dead rabbit.

The taxidermy-chocolate objects serve as examples of what Aloi means by 'ontologically mobile:' they are taxidermy, while being candies; rabbits, while being made of dairy milk; and they simultaneously gesture toward colonialist violence, religious belief, consumer goods, food, and industrial agriculture. These objects' indexical registers then become bound up in telling histories, or stories. *Immaculate Confection* can be approached through Haraway's multi-species storytelling and 'what stories tell stories'.[163] Throughout *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway discusses 'tentacular thinking',[164] her proposed form of thinking that eschews accepted hierarchies and orders of knowledges in favour of experimental, web-like, messy, new connections. Thinking of performing taxidermy as a method of multispecies storytelling positions 'multispecies' not only in the sense of different biological species, but in all contexts, instances, and representations of species: connecting the rabbit to reptile food, zoomorphic candy, wild game, domesticated pet. *Immaculate Confection* connects representational bunnies to real rabbit death, and animal death as food to animal death as taxidermy, with human as materially and historically bound up in both, pointing toward how these connections impact the human as they do the animal.

While much of the theoretical framework supporting *Immaculate Confection* is focused on the taxidermy-chocolate objects and the actions I undertook with them as a performance, there are two instances of the work to consider: the 'live' experience in the park and the larger, longer experience of the work in the form of photos and animated gifs on social media. The choice of animated gifs and social media was partially a pragmatic one for documenting a performance, editing the documentation, and releasing it all on the same day. While an important element in my work is the shared physical space by dead animal and audience, there are ways the animated gif uniquely contributes to *Immaculate Confection*. Animated GIFs

163. Haraway, D. (2016), *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, p. 12.
164. Haraway, D. (2016), *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, p. 31-32.

have a technically limited duration of around 500 frames, and are most often presented as a loop. If taxidermy is a means of making an animated animal frozen in time, the animated gif may come closest to capturing and 'freezing' an action in time. A series of animated gifs presents a disjointed narrative of short actions happening repeatedly. In considering taxidermy's use of a single animal as a 'stand-in' for a multiplicity, the GIFs infinite looping may then gesture toward the multiplicity of rabbit deaths, or the industrial, repetitive production of identical consumer goods in the form of the chocolate Easter bunny.

A potential reading of this work may be a simple one of making a political statement calling for an awareness of, or perhaps even an end to, violence toward animals and the use of animal bodies. Indeed, industrialised modern dairy farming practices are continually criticised for violence and cruelty to cows; in the United States, for example, cows are legally considered property, meaning the treatment of cattle is exempt from general animal cruelty laws; many states have what is called an 'exemption of animal husbandry'.[165] While animal activism is not a primary motivator of performing taxidermy, ethical considerations of bodies is an inevitable aspect of my research, given performing taxidermy's exploration of sites and contexts of animal death. For Haraway, 'becoming-with' other beings is as much about dying as it is living, and this is especially the case in the politics of eating: 'In eating we are most inside the differential relationalities that make us who and what we are . . . There is no way to eat and not to kill, no way to eat and not to become with other mortal beings to whom we are accountable, no way to pretend innocence and transcendence or a final peace'.[166] The adorable chocolate bunny is perhaps a manifestation of this pretended innocence, and re-thinking the bunny may involve disrupting this. Chocolate as a material for interrogating corporeality in performance art has been seen in work by Janine Antoni. Antoni's works in particular, especially *Gnaw* (1992) and *Lick and Lather* (1993), both involve eating and performance as a balance between action and the resulting, transformed object. The 600-lb block of chocolate in *Gnaw* is covered in tooth marks from Antoni's eating away of the block: the evidence of this gesture is often interpreted as showing the brutal violence to the act of eating, sometimes with comparison to animality, while the bits of eaten chocolates are re-made as sweet-heart candies in another part of the installation, gesturing toward expectations of femininity.[167] In *Immaculate Confection*, the eating may similarly be interpreted as a brutal act, particularly in ripping off rabbit skin to eat the chocolate. Simultaneously, eating is the source of my own bodily, material vulnerability in the work. It is through the act of eating that my body is physically open and materially affected by the other materialities present in the taxidermy-bunnies: chocolate, rabbit fur and skin, and the salt, water, and acids involved in the tanning process.

165. Turk, D. (2007), 'Detailed Discussion of Cattle Laws' from Michigan State University College of Law's Animal Legal and Historical Centre. Accessible at: https://www.animallaw.info/article/detailed-discussion-cattle-laws.
166. Haraway, D. (2008). *When Species Meet.* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 295
167. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1999), 'Playing to the Sense: Food as Performance Medium.' *Performance Research,* 4:1, p. 5-6.

In looking at these performance actions and materials through the lens of vital materialism, the chocolate is as important to the action of the work as human and rabbit. In *Vibrant Matter*, eating is 'a series of mutual transformations in which the border between inside and outside becomes blurry'.[168] Wet animal cape, treated with salts and acids, seeps into chocolate and in eating chocolate I am affected, just as I have affected it. In performing taxidermy's consideration of the human/taxidermist, and in thinking about these materials as an assemblage, eating becomes the method of material connection between myself and the taxidermy-chocolate bunnies. Bennett suggests that chocolate, a processed food, is 'rendered more passive, less vital, and more predictable'[169] than the raw sugar cane or cocoa seeds used to create it. In the similar way, the animal form as found in daily life is also more passive: a chocolate bunny is viscerally and intellectually more palatable than a rabbit suffering (or having suffered) by our own doing. Performing taxidermy, in its interest in shared vulnerability, seeks to find ways of being at risk to animal death and animal materiality; in *Immaculate Confection*, eating is essential to my body's vulnerability in the work, whether through the risk of eating the chemicals involved in tanning rabbit skins or simply eating a food like chocolate that is low in nutritional value. In *Immaculate Confection*, I merge chocolate and animal fur as a means of making the chocolate bunny less passive; it becomes less appetising, less understandable as food, and, to invoke Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*[170], more dangerous, placed at a questionable limit of what we think of as safe and edible.

168. Bennett, J. (2010), *Vibrant Matter*, Duke University Press, p. 49.
169. *Ibid.,* p. 46.
170. Douglas, M (1984). *Purity and Danger.* London: Ark.

The final two portfolio works in this thesis will focus on more live, performative elements and site-specificity within performing taxidermy, particularly as it pertains to performing *as* taxidermy. *FUOS* and *what to do with what remains* are interrelated works, in that *FUOS* was initially conceived as an early experiment in what would become the (at that time, untitled) final performance work. The Covid-19 pandemic made my staging of that final planned work impossible. However, the output of *FUOS* stands as a significant component of my practice-research.

***FUOS [Forgive Us Our Skins]* (2018)**

Action

FUOS (forgive us our skins) is a short performance experiment conceived and realised over late summer/early fall 2018. For the purposes of this writing, I will begin with an overview of the most recent iteration of the work itself, including documentation. The work contains both a 'video element' and documentation of a 'live element,' though it would be equally accurate to describe both as documentation of separate events. Given that the focus of the work is on my interactions with the featherless taxidermic magpie, the live event (wherein there was an audience present) was structured around these actions; the process of removing the feathers was offered to the audience prior to their arrival to the live event. In the video, titled 'part one' in the online gallery, I am seen plucking the feathers off a magpie; the camera work often changes focus between me and the bird. My actions are slow and meditative, and the framing of the video is extremely close up, showing only a section of my naked body at a time. Between the time the video was shot and the second event, referred to as the 'live' element, in part because of the attendance of a small audience, I taxidermied the magpie. This process was not completed by the start of this live event, as I left the stabilising pins and metal wires in the bird. The live event occurred in an unused barn on a property that was once a dairy farm; the space is now taken over by brooding pigeons. I performed naked with twelve 12-gauge piercing needles positioned down my left arm. In front of me was a pile of the bird's feathers, which I picked up one at a time and inserted in the needles down my arm. During this action, I began to hum and whistle, keeping my focus both on the bird and the action I was carrying out. Once the feathers were in, I began singing to the magpie, slowly standing up in the chair with the bird on my arm and repositioning its wings into a flying pose. When all the way on my toes and with arms outstretched, I paused in this position for a short

FUOS Fig. 1: Still from video

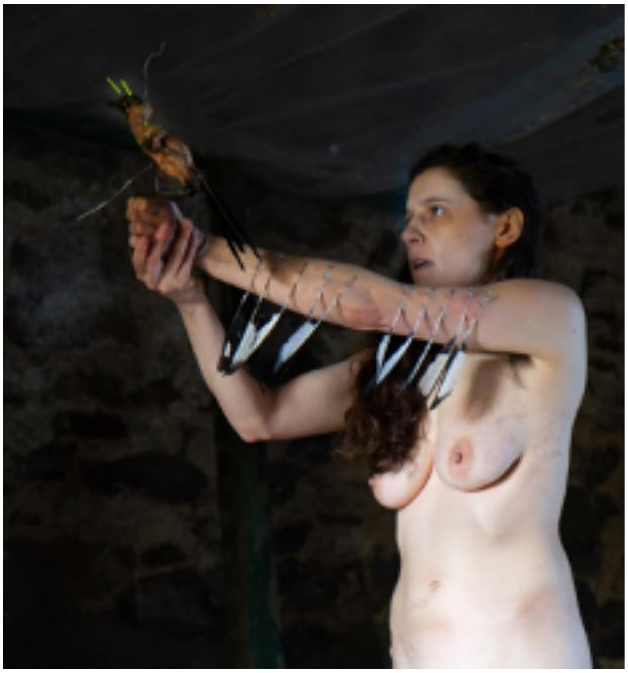
while, before slowly removing the needles from my arms. I then sat again in the chair, removed the pins and clipped the metal wires from the bird. I exited the barn, leaving the magpie in the space. Given that the crux of my research question is in the intersection of live art and taxidermy, *FUOS*, along with this reflection, is an experiment in finding overlapping theories or histories of each that may inform both in the development of my practice, particularly within the context of the Anthropocene. I follow this description of the work with further details of its conception, before turning to a theoretical and historical context overview of live art and 'speculative taxidermy'. This leads me to specific considerations of both animal body and human body through lenses of cultural theory, animal studies, and media theory. These lenses will provide context to *FUOS* as a work of performing taxidermy that explores bodies as material, vulnerable, and at ongoing risk and exchange with one another.

FUOS Fig. 2: Still from live event

In establishing a contemporary performance practice that is concerned with using animal bodies in a live art context, one of the primary lines of inquiry in the conception of *FUOS* was how to incorporate or address my body and physical presence in a work involving taxidermy. In considering the cutting open of animal bodies for taxidermy, and the metal tools that at first glance seem so materially different from the organic animal skin, organs, and feathers, I chose to work with piercing needles as a means of 'getting under' my own skin's surface. Included in the *FUOS* documentation is a still from a video excerpt of this early experiment. At this time, I was working with a pigeon, and my studio was adjacent to the performance site. This site, which consists of a farmhouse and a series of barns, is also where both the magpie and the pigeon were found. As I worked with a dead pigeon body, the sounds of active, living pigeons could be heard outside my studio window. Often, a red-and-white pile of pigeon body, destroyed by a nearby fox or bird of prey, would be right outside.[171] These material results of interactions between human and animal life, and the notion that the space I was working in was not only a shared site of these interactions, but one, as a former dairy farm, with a history of these interactions, influenced my engagement with the space and materials. How I choose to obtain animals for my work, and thus the kinds of animals I work often with, contributes to this idea of 'site-specificity' in my work – they are local species with whom I have literally 'crossed paths'.

171. One of these sightings is included in the online archive of *Intersections: Animal Death*, from October 2018.

Context



FUOS Fig. 4: Still from live event

I return first to Aloi's speculative taxidermy, which has a grounding concern with a biopolitical register in the Anthropocene. One potential of *speculative* taxidermy – borrowed in part from speculative realism – is in using materiality and indexicality as a means of 'exploring shared physical and ontological vulnerabilities concealed by the naturalization of past human/animal institutionalised relationships.'[172] Aloi primarily touches on human/non-human animal vulnerability as *shared* through his references to biopolitics, but gives particular consideration to vulnerability in his analysis of one work by Nandipha Mntambo, *Umfanekiso wesibuko (Mirror Image)* (2013). *Umfanekiso wesibuko (Mirror Image)* shows two cow hides shaped loosely as if they are the garments worn by people kneeling on the floor on all fours, alluding to themes of domestication, subjugation, exploitation, and consumption, both of animal bodies and (in this work, specifically black, female) human bodies.[173] Though this notion of shared vulnerability plays only a small part of Aloi's overall text, shared vulnerability is not only reflected in contemporary biopolitics, but is especially relevant in light of impending consequences of climate change. It is a facet of speculative taxidermy that I will work with repeatedly here in establishing the relationships between that of human and animal in my work and, more broadly, of live art and taxidermy. Further, as mentioned in 'Conceptual Frameworks', performing taxidermy seeks shared vulnerability as a material condition of the work itself in addition to its resonances outward to more global, ecological considerations.

FUOS Fig. 3: Studio test of feathers & needles

In the chapter *Immaculate Confection*, I discuss John Berger's theories on post-Industrial Revolution animal marginalisation. In that piece, I explore, via chocolate Easter candies, the extent to which our understanding of what an animal is, does, or looks like is influenced by the images of animals we

172. Aloi, G. (2018). *Speculative Taxidermy*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 24.
173. *Ibid.,* p. 213-214.

consume through media and culture, and how taxidermy may complicate this. Building on from Berger, film theorist Akira Mizuta Lippit proposes that depictions of animals in film serve as a cultural mourning for animal disappearance: 'technology and ultimately cinema came to determine a vast mausoleum for animal being'.[174] Taking this perspective into account, there are conceptual links to be made between filmic animal representations and the dead animal as taxidermy. In approaching the magpie of *FUOS*, one consideration was the cartoons of my childhood in which fur or feathers are treated as an animal's clothing. In many cases, characters are even wearing pants or briefs under their fur. The *Looney Tunes* character Daffy Duck provides some of the richest examples of this. In an episode featuring this character titled 'Suppressed Duck',[175] Daffy's feathers are blown off in an explosion, and he wears a barrel around his body in order to cover his nudity. In an even more bizarre example of this, in the 1943 animation 'The Wise Cracking Duck',[176] Daffy performs a strip-tease in order to distract and escape a hunter. Largely assumed to be a male character, in this sequence, Daffy is clearly meant to present and behave more 'female' or feminine: he bats his suddenly-lengthened eyelashes and swings his hips as he reaches his hands behind his back to 'undo' his feathers. The connection between animal body and feminine body as objects of consumption is obvious; Daffy even ends his performance standing in an oven tray, using leafy greens in place of the iconic burlesque feather fans. I considered this example of animal representation in the creation of *FUOS* and how I may think of my own body in relation to the magpie's body. A featherless taxidermied bird is an animal body that has been ontologically displaced: a plucked bird is to be consumed, and a taxidermied bird is to be preserved. As Rachel Poliquin notes in *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and Cultures of Longing*, the desire to preserve a bird body is born directly out of a desire to own and keep the beauty of its plumage.[177] Additionally, the perception of a bird without feathers as 'nude' is the product of anthropomorphism, as is seen with Daffy Duck. This connects the magpie of *FUOS* with anthropomorphic taxidermy, a genre of taxidermy popular in the Victorian era that shows animals in doll clothing or doing human activities, such as having tea. The magpie, however, without the context of a cartoon or the 'cute' aesthetic of Walter Potter's *The Kitten's Wedding,*[178] offers an unstable, and more uncomfortable kind of anthropomorphism. I argue that this qualifies the magpie in *FUOS* as consistent with Aloi's speculative taxidermy in that it is an ontologically mobile bird body with ties to human-animal relations and taxidermy histories made uneasy.

174. Lippit, A.(2000). *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 187.
175. 'Suppressed Duck', Episode 107 (1965). *Looney Tunes*. Warner Brothers. Available at: https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5h54um [Accessed 15 February 2019].
176. 'The Wise Quacking Duck', (1943). *Looney Tunes*. Warner Brothers. Available at: https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x331aq2. Clip referenced occurs at 4:30. [Accessed 15 February 2019].
177. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and Cultures of Longing.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
178. Connelly, L. (2016). 'In love and taxidermy: Brooklyn's Morbid Anatomy Museum holds Kittens' Wedding,' *Creative Boom*, 31 Oct. Available at: https://www.creativeboom.com/inspiration/in-love-and-taxidermy-brooklyns-morbid-anatomy-museum-holds-kittens-wedding/

Like other artworks included in this thesis, such as *bug studies*, performance approaches and materials in *FUOS* echo a lineage of feminist performance art in its use of nudity, blood, adornment, and open wounds. In *FUOS* is where some of the theorists covered in 'Conceptual Frameworks', particularly those writing on body art, are significant to performing taxidermy. Stacey Alaimo's transcorporeality considers vulnerability a material state; *FUOS* works literally with my body's capacity to be physically wounded. Considering the definition of vulnerability that transcorporeal feminism provides, being capable of injury implies being at risk. In Conceptual Frameworks, I discuss an essay by Dominic Johnson in which he ties risk inherently to intimacy, or whenever bodies encounter other bodies. Even in his brief analysis of O'Reilly's *Inthewrongplaceness* (which is somewhat oddly characterised as a 'one-to-one performance' featuring her 'duet' with a dead pig performed for a single audience member), the pig's body is treated as an augmentation to her own body and subjectivity.[179] Nonetheless, his claim that intimacy and risk are inextricably linked to each other and to cultural politics more broadly has significance to human-animal intimacies and (via Donna Haraway) 'natureculture' politics. There is no intimacy without risk, and in *FUOS*, intimacy is dependent on the material vulnerabilities of my body and animal body. Returning to Mary Douglas's seminal 1966 work *Purity and Danger*, she argues that taboos around cleanliness and danger were constructs in the establishment of social and cultural values, including the demarcations of home and domestic spaces and human/animal relations. 'Dirt' was dangerous not only because of bodily risk but also social order.[180] If we consider this alongside John Berger's assertions about animal disappearance, then the risk involved in *FUOS* becomes necessary to the work as a renegotiation of human-animal boundaries and intimacies. In other words, in order for animals to 're-appear' (to use Berger's terms) we may need to risk – to make ourselves vulnerable to – a disruption of normative social order through an opening of our bodies to the site and bodies of the other-than-human. The risks involved in *FUOS* are not only in the wounds in my skin: the piece was performed in an abandoned barn in which the smell of dried bird faeces is palpable, and breathing in this matter can result in a deadly fungal infection[181] - the fungus being yet another player in this complex multispecies interaction. The human audience was exposed to this same risk, though dust masks were offered and recommended. This negotiation between risk, vulnerability, intimacy, and materiality may provide moments of the 'shared vulnerability', as Aloi proposes. There are, of course, looming risks and dangers of climate change in the Anthropocene, and live art is a medium in which risk in human/animal relations may be conceived of in a more localized, embodied way. In the same way, 'wildlife' is often treated as separate from humans, as a distant 'over-there' that, as Berger has noted, exists primarily as a value concept, so the larger, global,

179. Johnson, D. (2012). 'Intimacy and Risk in Live Art' in Deirdre Heddon and Jennie Klein (eds) *Histories and Practices of Live Art.* Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 128.
180. Douglas, M (1984). *Purity and Danger.* London: Ark.
181. Murphy, S. and Connett, D. (2019). 'Two dead after pigeon droppings infection at Glasgow hospital'. 19 January. *The Guardian.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jan/19/two-dead-after-pigeon-droppings-infection-at-glasgow-hospital [Accessed 5 April 2021].

distant repercussions of human life on earth feel abstract and untouchable. Donna Haraway's phrase 'staying with the trouble' implies a present (both in time and space) engagement with the vulnerabilities and anxieties of humanity's – and other species' – futures. Performing taxidermy provides a material presence for these human/animal vulnerable interactions.

In thinking with materials, a vital materialist perspective considers the metal of the wires and needles alongside other corporeal bodies. Bennett specifically uses metal as the material through which to argue the vitality of nonorganic matter, as I cover in Conceptual Frameworks. The notion of metal as active rather than passive may provide new readings of seminal live art works, for example, Gina Pane's razorblades or the knife and gun in Abromavic's *Rhythm 0.* As I and other cultural theorists working with taxidermy have established, taxidermy objects have a similarly unstable or paradoxical relationship to life and death; though the metal wires running through the magpie's body, or the needles threatening my body's mortality, may allude to death, they are simultaneously the 'actant'[182] that allows the magpie to achieve a status of taxidermy's lifelikeness by holding the bird to form. After removing the needles from my body, the metal remains 'hazardous' through its union with my blood, a still-active threat to life. For Alaimo, vulnerability has a material register; our (both mine and the magpie's) bodies as flesh are vulnerable *to* other materialities. Elizabeth Straughan makes a case for taxidermy similar to Bennett's observations about metal workers: taxidermy is characterised by its material 'proximity and intimacy', where the taxidermist pursues an 'in-depth understanding of the body of another' via 'corporeal contact'.[183] If *doing* taxidermy has potential to cultivate this material, bodily understanding, then an art practice founded on performing taxidermy, and my human/bodily/taxidermy presence in the work, has potentially varying perspectives on human/other-than-human relations compared to taxidermy sculptural objects associated with the visual arts. Taxidermy as a process, an 'assemblage' that requires a corporeal contact, becomes the site of material understanding, changes, and interactions. Opposing Berger's primacy of the visual (how animals 'disappear' or 'no longer look back'),[184] materiality and corporeality become means of renegotiating ways of thinking about other-than-human matter.

In addition to these considerations of intimacy and materiality, and before I draw connections between these small, material impacts and larger ecological concerns, I offer the lyrics of the song chosen for the live event: a crooner-style pop song from late 1950s American teen idol Frankie Avalon entitled 'Birds of a Feather'.[185] I sung the following in the live event:

182. Bennett, J. (2010), *Vibrant Matter*, Duke University Press, p. 8.
183. Straughan, E. (2015). 'Entangled Corporeality: Taxidermy Practice and the Vibrancy of Dead Matter.' *Geohumanities,* 1:2, p. 365.
184. Berger, J. (1980). 'Why Look at Animals?' in *Why Look at Animals?,* New York: Penguin.
185. Caiola, A. (1959). 'Birds of a Feather', performed by Frankie Avalon. *Swinging on a Rainbow,* Canada: Chancellor Records.

I took a walk in the park with a lark
I tried it again with a wren
Went off on a spree with a cute chickadee
But then you came along singing your song

I once had a crush on a thrush
Went into a clench with a finch
A trim little quail took me out for a sail
But I didn't stay long 'cause I still heard your song
And if you'll accept my request,
I'll built you the best little nest

Although I once fell in love with a dove
Stayed out until dawn with a swan
It was only a fling
Now I have the real thing
They'll be no more canaries and bluebirds, blackbirds, green birds, red birds and such
We're birds of a feather now[186]

The song is an extended metaphor of women as birds, and the hetero-male narrator expresses his newfound commitment to the 'bird' at whom the song is directed. It is an expression of antiquated, gendered relationship dynamics that conflate love with ownership. The conflation of admiration and ownership may also apply to taxidermy and human desire to possess life-like recreations of nature. According to Poliquin, all taxidermy is a fusing of animal form and human longing, and in its '[refusal] to be bodily parted by death, this longing is the ultimate proof of ownership'.[187] The lyrics' references to the 'real thing' evoke the material significance of taxidermy's ontological instability of 'real' versus representation. Reading even further into 'Birds of a Feather' in a contemporary context, lines like 'they'll be no more canaries and blackbirds…' sung to a dead bird surrounded by live birds in an abandoned dairy farm barn has a ghostly connection to animal disappearance of the Anthropocene. When I sing to the bird, 'we're birds of a feather now,' I reference this shared vulnerability as oppressed bodies under patriarchy and biopower as well as the shared materiality via metal and the bird's feathers.

186. Transcribed by me.
187. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and Cultures of Longing.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 216.

None of this is without some ambivalence or contradiction: It is inescapable that, despite some shared vulnerabilities and qualities, I am in the role of the human-taxidermist-manipulator. Similarly, discoveries of familiarity, vulnerability, and intimacy with animal death do not attempt to downplay the role or impact of humans ecologically and globally. As I have noted already, I am not interested in presenting a moralising political message of animal activism, but rather in dealing with the complexities, precarities, and ambivalence of our relationships to other bodies, in particular dead animal bodies in the current geological and political era. While identity is not a primary focus of my work or of *FUOS*, as a white cis-woman, American via descendance from European colonising nations, my body is one tied to histories as both the recipient and perpetrator of violence and trauma. On a more personal level, as I move through the world every day, I confront the fear that globally my existence will be more destructive than constructive to the earth. Yet locally, performing taxidermy may still create moments that complicate these ontological and physical boundaries exactly through embracing these kinds of contradictions and confronting shared risk via material vulnerabilities directly in the work.

***what to do with what remains* (2020)**

The final portfolio work of this multi-year project in performing taxidermy was conceived as a live event, attended by audience members, including external examiners and supervisors. After crafting a body of work in this portfolio that largely exists in a wide range of other mediated forms - photography, video, animated GIFs, a website - this piece was intended to be experienced as a live event specifically for the sensory, site-specific qualities unique to live performance. The performance was scheduled for May 29th, 2020. Once Covid-19 reached pandemic status, the 'lockdown' in Scotland was announced on March 23rd, 2020. Though performance plans had been long in process by this point, with eight weeks remaining before the date of the performance event, much of the logistical work in executing the final performance was still underway and had to be largely abandoned. This included the building of kit for staging the performance, preparing animal bodies to be used in the performance, and curating and preparing the intended performance space (an abandoned barn just outside Glasgow, also seen in *FUOS*). Following discussions with my supervisory team, it was ultimately decided that given the ongoing uncertainty around the Covid-19 restrictions, forgoing live performance plans would bring the least disruption to completing my thesis. In lieu of a live performance, it was agreed that I would pursue different practice modes for the final portfolio work.[188]

My background in integrated media art is already evident in the portfolio included in this thesis and the extended use of mediated forms, both as documentation and creative output, and how these delineations and relationships weave into 'performing taxidermy' as well as taxidermy and live art scholarship more broadly. The previously scheduled performance was to be one of the only instances of practice in which an audience, including examiners, was invited to attend, and that the live element was the primary focus of the research practice. As noted in Methodologies, it was designed as a live event because significant sensory elements of the work cannot be adequately articulated or experienced through other media - the physical presence of being in the space, and the smell of the site of the performance along with that of aspects of the taxidermy process. For this reason, making a video recording of the original performance did not offer a sufficient analogue for the live event. Moreover, following a risk assessment for the video work, particularly given that it required assistance from friends and collaborators, it became apparent that it would be exceedingly difficult to execute the original performance, even for video, while maintaining required social distancing. Given these circumstances, what follows is not a reflection of a past live event but a series of writing alongside other media that aims to serve a dual purpose. First, it will gesture toward what 'would have happened' in the live event. Short snippets of video demonstrate some of the intended actions of the performance, albeit without the context of the performance site and

188. Additional information regarding the timeline and changes in performance plans due to Covid-19 can be found in the Appendix A.

preceding/following actions. Photographs will give a visual approximation of the original performance site. At times I refer to this collection of media as 'fragments' because of this lack of framing within a longer, durational, site-specific performance context. Because the photo and video elements best reflect the performance as a facet of my practice-research, they will be the primary focus of the critical reflection and contextualisation within the thesis and conceptual frameworks. In addition to this, I have included a work of composed audio arranged from several sources, including the intended performance space, which will give the listener a sense of time, space, and pacing of the originally-conceived work, particularly as they relate to the aesthetic experience of the performance. The second purpose of this work, beyond offering a sense of 'what would have happened', is in establishing these fragmented mediated forms as a foundation for, or notes toward, a future performance. Drawing from my music education, *what to do with what remains* is then akin to a non-traditional music score. For a composer, a completed score designates the work as, in a sense, 'complete', despite not yet existing in the medium, site, and time it is intended for (generally, a live musical performance). In the critical reflection alongside this new work, the intention will not be to treat these as the performance itself, as if the original event *had* occurred. It is an attempt to contextualise these fragments as parts of single work of performance that has not yet happened, applying the same rigour of analysis and relationship of the work to relevant scholarship as presented throughout the thesis. I begin by offering an account of the performance-making logistics during Covid-19 restrictions, as there are the material conditions of making which inevitably set limits on processes and outcomes.

Summary changes in material conditions/logistics for performance actions

- Limited access to equipment and space: Most of the video of the taxidermy process was recorded alone in my small studio, on a mix of equipment (mobile phones and video camera), with constraints on positioning of camera and duration of video recorded. Segments of the 'body interactions' video was recorded immediately upon re-opening of the University's performance studio; in these I was assisted by my live-in partner (thus social distancing was not required). The 'pull up' video ('intra/action #4') was recorded outdoors and socially distanced at a location chosen for the access to the pull-up bar.

- Limited transport options: One trip via taxi was taken to the originally intended performance space (an abandoned barn outside Glasgow) where audio was recorded entirely outdoors. This limited practicality of transporting equipment (particularly related to taxidermy) to the performance space.

- ‘Reduced risk’ approach to performance actions: Conditions around using sharps/needles in performance were altered in order to reduce risk. Original performance plans included using sharps that required outside assistance from collaborators/friends with experience and knowledge in working with piercing, and on parts of the body considered ‘higher risk’ (hands, face). Maintaining social distancing, particularly in the case of unintended harm or accident, would not have been possible. I used a limited number of sharps in ‘lower risk’ parts of the body (thigh, arm) that could be performed entirely solo.

what remains Fig. 1: Intended performance site

Action/Context: documentation and critical reflection

This writing references specific media files contained of the full documentation of *what to do with what remains* and provides critical reflection on the moments contained within them while contextualising these as part of an intended whole — but unrealised — performance work. As with previous portfolio chapters, still photography will be included within the writing, and time-based media can be found in the *what to do with what remains* online gallery. In order to best articulate links between the *what to do with what remains* media, the original performance plans, and the research of this thesis, I discuss the Actions and Context together.

The short video excerpts all demonstrate performance actions originally intended to be performed in the space. 'rigor mortis' shows the first step to any taxidermy: working the rigor mortis out of the body before skinning. During this process, which is done gently and with the natural joints in the body, there is also a mental visualisation beyond the skin of the animal: learning the shape of its body, where arms and legs connect to the solar plexus, if there is any damage from cause of death. It is the beginning of the kind of material bodily intimacy of the taxidermy process. 'process bird 1' and 'process bird 2' demonstrate the material processes of taxidermy in order to deconstruct and reconstruct the birds into a preserved form. The fleshy, meaty body of the birds and the eyes are replaced with other non-living materials: Styrofoam (carefully filed into the shape and size of the bird's body), metal wire, glass eyes, and Borax to chemically preserve the skin. The two birds seen in the video documentation were found at this former dairy farm, and though they stayed in my freezer for many months, the intention was to perform the taxidermy actions seen in the video in this space. More traditional approaches to taxidermy follow these processes for the precise purpose of removing the animal from its habitat to be placed into more antiseptic human-dominated spaces: museums, galleries, collectors' living rooms. I argue that traditional taxidermy is an example of Mary Douglas's theory on dirt in *Purity and Danger* because it is a method of removing organic messes and decaying matter — and therefore chaos, dirt, and danger — from nature, so that it may be indexed and ordered, whether as hunters' trophies or historical or scientific documents. In *what to do with what remains*, the messier parts of animal death and taxidermy processes become the content of the work, rather than the pristine sculptural, resultant object of traditional taxidermy. By performing in a space linked to that bird's history, and more broadly connected to intersections of human and non-human animal life through the site of an abandoned dairy farm and its barns' more recent multispecies tenants, embracing the dirt and mess as integral parts of this process, experience, and exchange. Performing these actions with an audience in a performance context brings the audience/spectator into this multispecies assemblage, both through sharing the space where the process occurs and, to return to Kolnai's phenomenology of smell in Conceptual Frameworks, more literally and materially through sense of smell.

The 'body intra/actions' video included in the work documentation shows performing taxidermy in its configuration of performing *as* taxidermy, or finding bodily/material exchange or intersection between myself as human performer and the taxidermy-animal. The approach to this in *what to do with what remains* is similar to that taken in *FUOS* with some expansions on what performing *as* taxidermy may be. In *FUOS*, the material links between myself and the magpie are focused entirely on the metal wires that hold taxidermy bodies in place. In *what to do with what remains*, I explore other possibilities of this through common steps in the taxidermy process. In 'intra/actions #1: hair/hare,' I cut my own hair to glue onto bald patches of a partially-taxidermised rabbit rug. Borrowing fur from elsewhere on the body, or sometimes from another animal entirely, is a common tactic in traditional taxidermy to hide undesirable or un-aesthetically pleasing bald spots on an animal. These bald patches are often a result of something

from the animal's life (stress, fighting), the conditions of its death, or the results of decay or rot after death. This small act of replacing a bald spot on an animal shows the pinnacle of taxidermy's storytelling as an idealised nature construct: not showing it animal as it was, but as humans desire it to be, whether for scientific or aesthetic ends. In 'hair/hare,' I still carry out this similar act, 'fixing' the hare by covering its missing fur, but with my own hair, complete with a hair dryer (a common taxidermy tool). I lie on top of the hare — it is a rug, after all — without refusal of the hare's status as an 'object,' but one that still provides site of bodily intimacy, not only through a material exchange but also multiple registers through which such an act can be read: symbolic (myself as a part of the rabbit, as both subject and object), romantic (an act of love, like gifting a lover a lock of hair), and utilitarian (repairing a damaged animal hide). Similar to Giovanni Aloi's speculative taxidermy, and in other portfolio works within this thesis such as *Immaculate Confection*, performing taxidermy in *what to do with what remains* attempts to work with symbolic registers rather than rejecting them outright, or treating them as oppositional to material or other critical considerations of the animal.

The title 'intra/action #2: morphological approximation' refers to a term used by anthropologist Petra Kalshoven to describe traditional taxidermists' use of their own body's movement in order to understand placements of animal bodies in their taxidermic work. From my and other authors' experiences at taxidermy conferences, and in my own history working with a professional taxidermist, it is common for taxidermists to demonstrate the desired final poses for taxidermy mounts, or point and refer to their own bodies to understand minute details of another species' body. Kalshoven's article 'Gestures of taxidermy: morphological approximation as interspecies affinity'[189] reads as tacitly invested in linking morality to abstract nature values of 'beauty' or 'perfection,' concepts that much of this thesis and other authors referenced herein have criticised. She implies that the 'most' ethical taxidermy is a more traditional taxidermy practice wherein 'nature' is defined largely by anatomical precision, and criticises some other taxidermy styles (such as 'rogue,' anthropomorphic, or amateur taxidermy) as disrespectful to animal life because of a lack of craftsmanship. I argue not that there is anything inherently more or less ethical about any particular taxidermy practice per se, but that valuable insights about taxidermy, human/animal relations, and culture more broadly can be found in subversive taxidermy practices.[190] Nonetheless, Kalshoven's considerations of 'kinaesthetic empathy'[191] and 'morphological approximation'[192] within the taxidermy process resonate with qualities of performing taxidermy. She defines 'morphological approximation' as a taxidermist's use of their own body as reference material for their taxidermy object:

189. Kalshoven, P. (2018). 'Gestures of taxidermy: Morphological approximation as interspecies affinity.' American Ethnologist, 45:1, pp. 34-47.
190. I use 'subversive' here to mean any taxidermy practice that deviate from what I have in this thesis been referring to as 'traditional' taxidermy.
191. Kalshoven, P. (2018). 'Gestures of taxidermy: Morphological approximation as interspecies affinity.' American Ethnologist, 45:1, p. 43.
192. *Ibid.,* p. 42.

it 'requires an awareness not just of a specimen's morphology but of interspecies morphology.'[193] She continues, 'bodily analogies are not a matter of tacit assumption, but one of sensing and acting out'.[194] 'Kinaesthetic empathy', a term borrowed from Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason's work on empathy in dance performance, is 'an affective state of empathy with another person that occurs through imitative movement.'[195] Kalshoven suggests a similar bond, or what she calls 'morphological kinship' emerges from taxidermy practice, and in particular this relating of a taxidermist's own body to another's. The taxidermic processes seen in the 'rigor mortis' and 'process bird' videos utilise the same morphological reference Kalshoven describes, though in 'intra/action #2', I take this a step further by then using the taxidermic bird as a morphological reference for my own body and imitating the animal-object itself. Metal wires — in the form of medical staples — pin feathers to my arm, holding this imitation together, similar to metal wires holding the bird itself together. I stay perched on toes, though the degree of stillness of a taxidermic bird is inimitable by a living human. This form of thinking about the taxidermic bird, or performing taxidermy by performing *as* taxidermy, does not simply consider traditional taxidermy of the bird into something it once was, but in considering what this bird is now, as morphologically and materially both similar and dissimilar to my own body. 'intra/action #4: heads' follows a similar approach to 'intra/action #2' by considering the morphology of the traditional taxidermy deer head, and in particular its disembodiment, through performing *with* taxidermy. The deer head is one of the most commonly seen taxidermy objects. In the 'heads' action, I use this object as something to relate to my own body, considering 'what would it be like to have a deer's head?' Kinaesthetic empathy here is found in acting out these bodily approximations; though, as similarly seen in 'intra/action #2', it is impossible for a living, breathing human performer to truly mimic the dead stillness of any taxidermy.

'intra/action #3: diorama' utilises a similar approach to the first two 'intra/action' works by incorporating my own material body into the taxidermy process through pierced skin and metal wires, but additionally expands on the site-specificity of the work though considerations of the natural history diorama, a genre intended to show a taxidermic animal's 'natural habitat' through other material as scenery. The diorama, as seen in natural history museums today, is the scenographic extension of the isolated taxidermy animal in that what distinguishes the diorama from other sculptural-installation artistic forms is its relationship to 'realism' and biological facticity — both of the animal but also at times of foliage, grass, or trees. As Claudia Kamcke and Rainer Hutterer have written on the history of the diorama, the diorama originated in the late 1700s as a means of representing movement, and thus were originally a time-based medium. They were typically landscape paintings with additional lighting effects demonstrated for an audience.[196]

193. *Ibid.*
194. *Ibid.*
195. *Ibid.,* p. 43.
196. Kamcke, C. And Hutterer, R. (2015). 'History of Dioramas,' in Sue Dale Tunnicliffe and Annette Scheersoi (eds) *Natural History Dioramas: History, Construction, and Educational Role,* London: Springer, p. 10.

The connection with today's natural history or habitat dioramas is largely subject matter — nature landscapes — and the use of optical illusion. In *Habitat Dioramas: Illusions of Wilderness*, Karen Wonders refers to dioramas as an 'ecological theatre' wherein 'animal actors star in an evolutionary play.'[197] Habitat dioramas typically have clearly delineated spaces distinct from the areas of the gallery where the (human) visitors view the work; as Donna Haraway has pointed out, alongside other observations about the construct of 'nature' in the natural history museum, this distinction amplifies the social conceptual distinction between 'culture' and 'nature.' In the original performance plans of *what to do with what remains*, I planned to set up this merging of my body and taxidermy bird body via wires (as seen in the video) and remain still for a period of time in the space. By bringing my body into the taxidermy mount, particularly within the abandoned barn that is/was a site of both human and non-human animal life and activity, I use diorama techniques to serve as a natureculture symbiosis that does not divorce the taxidermist-performer-human from the non-human taxidermy animal (materially or conceptually). Without any curated delineation between performer and audience within the space, the audience additionally becomes included in the performing taxidermy diorama. The framing of these actions as a performance gestures toward the diorama's past as a time-based media, but further, by existing in time, frames the human/non-human animal relations present in the work — both materially and indexically — as ongoing present negotiations rather than a historically or geographically distant 'elsewhere.'

The Sonic Document

Along with the photos and videos that give a visual reference to the original performance, and are the most relevant to the theoretical framework of the work, I have included additional aural documentation as auxiliary material to the rest of the documentation. The sonic work, composed in collaboration with Eastman Presser, attempts to further link the actions shown in the video documents with the performance space by using recordings of taxidermy processes alongside a field recording of the performance site. This achieves a similar merging of separate spaces and histories, albeit through a different medium than above in the intra/action videos: doing taxidermy becomes an activity within the abandoned barn rather than as a means of recreating an illusionary 'habitat' within the confines of a museum or taxidermy shop. What the audio work also does is provide a sense of pacing. The original performance was durational, intended to be performed over the course of several hours. Many of the actions, as seen in the 'taxidermy process' and 'intra/action' videos, are slow, small, and methodical. Given the significance of the performance site to the research, the time-based nature of the field recordings is intended to give a stronger sense of the experience of being in the space that cannot be demonstrated through photos alone,

197. Wonders, K. (1993), 'Habitat dioramas as ecological theatre,' *European Review,* 1:3, p. 285.

particularly the activity of pigeons that would have likely shared the performance space with me. The sonic document contains a short section of text intended to be spoken in the space as part of the performance, in which I describe a kind of visceral knowing of bodies, experienced through touch, that I began to observe after some time of doing taxidermy. Both Steve Baker and Rachel Poliquin ascribe a 'visceral knowledge' inherent to experiencing taxidermy; for both of them, this comes with a purely visual encounter with a taxidermy work: 'a knowing that blurs emotion with materiality and may even defy reason, logic, and explanatory language'.[198] The visceral knowledge I describe in the audio piece is similar, in that it is based entirely in the body, and has little direct relationship to more scientific ways of knowing. However, this is not purely visual, but entirely related to touch, drawing on memory and personal experience of skinning hundreds of animals. Included in the *what to do with what remains* folder is a PDF musical score that links some of the taxidermy process sound elements to what can be seen in the videos. This score is literally a musical score that simply explains what actions, particularly in the 'taxidermy process' videos, are heard at different points of the aural work. It is additionally distinct from my more figurative use of 'score' in the introduction to describe the collection of *what to do with what remains* as a score to the overall performance.

Performing taxidermy in *what to do with what remains* is in part a performing by doing taxidermy, but in an attempt to use that process of doing to find material, bodily, and storied intimacies with the animal and site of its death and taxidermic 'doing.' It is a practice in taxidermy that attempts to consider the human in negotiations with non-human animal others, as a nature/culture synthesis, rather than as ontologically distinct. The taxidermy process involves both the morphological approximation of bodies, as outlined by Petra Kalshoven, and as a material intimacy, as seen via Elizabeth Straughan in Conceptual Frameworks. In particular, when these actions are taken out of the taxidermy shop or back room of a natural history museum and into a performance context in spaces that share human/non-human animal histories and presents, performing taxidermy subverts the distinct social-cultural ontological boundaries that taxidermy has historically reinforced. *what to do with what remains* does this without attempting outright to 'decentre' or draw away focus on the human, or even the taxidermist. For Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble*, 'becomings-with' imply a significance not to individual bodies but in what they do together. What materialist becomings-with between taxidermy animal and human taxidermist do in performing taxidermy is draw attention to the material vulnerability of the human as a body alongside dead animal body: bodies as always in ongoing exchange with other materials and bodies — whether pushing metal through skin or breathing in a dusty barn. The use of diorama, additionally, such as in 'intra/action #3', reframes the diorama not as an indexical site re-created within the curated bounds of a museum, but as a material assemblage that impacts and is impacted by human as much as more-than-human others. In *what*

198. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and Cultures of Longing,* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 39.

to do with what remains, human/more-than-human relations are conceived of as an ongoing material present rather than an ideological past.

Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy: Conclusion

At this opening of this thesis, I proposed that taxidermy objects and processes, as moments of human/non-human animal corporeal contact, offer modes for re/considering human/nonhuman animal relations, and in particular, human and non-human animal vulnerability in the 'Anthropocene'. Approaching non-human animal vulnerability requires approaching non-human animal dying and difficult ethics bound up in animal death; this is apparent in interrogating daily animal death as roadkill, working with non-human animal others as collaborators, and manipulating of dead animal bodies as taxidermy. Performing taxidermy practically examines and confronts animal death via taxidermy in two ways. The first is in considering myriad 'steps' of the taxidermy process: procuring animal bodies for taxidermy (*Intersections: Animal Death*); cleaning skeletons and skulls (*bug studies*); skinning, preserving, and re-forming the animal (*Immaculate Confection, FUOS,* and *what to do with what remains*); and curating dioramas (*what to do with what remains*). The second is in seeking resonances and connections to other species (the beetles of *bug studies,* or the fungi of *FUOS*) and other contexts of both animal death and animal representation (*Immaculate Confection's* animal husbandry and consumer goods, the cartoon references of *FUOS*). The critical frameworks of this practice, as covered in Conceptual Frameworks, is built on theorists primarily writing from perspectives of natural history, contemporary art, feminism, and materialist and speculative philosophies.

Within each of these works, performing taxidermy seeks connections, both as bodies and across conceptual and ontological boundaries. *Intersections: Animal Death* does this through encouraging participants to consider how their own bodies' movement connects to animal death, whether on foot or by car. It is an archive of moments where these material animal deaths meet daily human life. In *bug studies,* living non-human animal other is brought into this exchange of bodies, connecting living human to animal dead as bodies eaten by bugs. In *Immaculate Confection,* taxidermy-chocolate bunny hybrids offer a network of human/animal relations: the Easter bunny, dairy cows, and rabbits sold as reptile food are all materially present in human consumption of zoomorphic consumer goods. In *FUOS* and *what to do with what remains,* metal wires literally connect taxidermist and taxidermy. Additionally, though, the works within the portfolio, as the product of cumulative, iterative research, address the research inquiries through their connections and similarities to one another. For example, eating connects bugs and humans across *bug studies* and *Immaculate Confection,* and *Intersections: Animal Death* shows the origins of bodies in *bug studies, FUOS,* and *what to do with what remains.* Risk, whether ethical, physical/material, and creative — informs each portfolio work. Risk, then, is essential to performing taxidermy's capacity to address not only the vulnerability of bodies and the subversion of ontological boundaries, but also how the two function in examining multispecies relations in the Anthropocene.

In concluding this thesis, I return to the questions posed in the introduction. In considering what taxidermy 'does' in a body-based live art practice, materialist thinking aids in examining what happens when dead animal body and living human body become vulnerable materialities open to one another: they impact one another by eating and being eaten; they hold together through open wounds; and they share physical space that puts one or both bodies at risk. These results, in their myriad registers of interpretation, subvert categories of animal bodies and animal death, complicating when they are consumed or when they are looked at; when they are welcome or when they are abject; and when they are grieved or when they are invisible. By focusing on the materials and the processes of taxidermy, rather than a commitment to representations of nature, performing taxidermy is a live art practice that tells different stories: in particular, ones that include the human, both as a participant in objectification and violence, and as a vulnerable body in an assemblage of other materials and actants. By taking seriously the risk of being vulnerable to one another as assemblage, and considering materiality of bodies beyond death, performing taxidermy facilitates intimacy as a material present of both living and dying. Rachel Poliquin writes that '[taxidermy] is a construction of cultural and political agendas.'[199] With this in mind, performing taxidermy does not pretend to be somehow outside cultural and political agenda, but suggests that the kinds of nature/culture politics of performing taxidermy may be slightly different: not less complicit in animal death in any inherent sense, but perhaps more attuned to death, to the intersections of human and more-than-human life, and to the 'stuff' bodies are made of, thinking toward a mutual vulnerability in the Anthropocene.

199. Poliquin, R. (2012). *Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and Cultures of Longing,* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 9.

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Appendix A: Impact of Covid-19 on Final Performance

COVID-19 Extension request
Application form

Student Name:	Francis Marion Moseley Wilson
GUID/student number:	
Supervisor(s):	Deirdre Heddon and Minty Donald
School/Institute:	College of Arts, Theatre Studies
Project Title:	PGR 'Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy'
Are you an international student on a Tier 4 student?	Yes
Funder Name, if you have received funding during your research degree for a stipend:	N/A
Research degree being undertaken: (e.g. PhD/EngD/MRes)	PhD
Current Funding End Date: (if self-funding, write "self-funding")	Self-funding
Start Date:	January 2017
Full time or Part time?	Full time
Dates of disruption:	March 23rd, 2020 – June 5th, 2020
What period of extension are you requesting?	2 months

NOTES ON COMPLETING THE FORM
Bear in mind that many PhD-related activities are possible during lockdown. These include reading, writing, data analysis, planning, preparation of images, building a template for the thesis/reading list, writing a solid draft of your thesis introduction, writing thesis chapters for which you have already completed the work, and online training. Describe what alternative approaches have been considered to completing required research where there has been lack of access to resources for planned activities, experiments or data collection. You may want to use the matrix at the end of this document to facilitate discussion and planning with your supervisor.

Students may apply for up to 6 months funded extension of their research programme; however, funds are limited so PGRs are expected to have made every effort to avoid the need for an extension through mitigation. No funded extension will be longer than the period of funding remaining at the time that disruption began, and the length of extensions might be limited by demand.

1. What is the justification for your request (tick one or more options from the list below, or delete those not applicable)?

☑ **Postponement of critical research activities (such as experimental work or data collection):** Where alternatives are not available, and impact cannot be mitigated

☑ **Other:** Please specify any other circumstance that has impacted your ability to work on your research:

Inability to execute a live performance with an audience as a part of practice-research under social distancing/'lockdown' restrictions.

2. A short description of the impact of the disruption on your studies, using headings (a)–(d) below. Please limit your response to a maximum of 350 words.

a. Impact of disruption on your studies:

As a practice-based researcher in performance studies, my original proposal included a live performance, to be open to the public and viewed by an external examiner, in May; in implementing social distancing guidelines, this is unable to go forward as expected due to the following reasons:

- Though my work falls largely under 'solo performance,' rarely do live works happen without the assistance of collaborators and friends who assist with technical components, documentation, transportation of equipment and materials, and 'stage' assistance. The nature of my practice also makes testing and/or rehearsing some of these elements extremely difficult, if not impossible, virtually or without close physical proximity.
- Shop closures, postal service delays, and disruptions to public transportation has made acquiring tools and materials necessary for my work difficult.
- Additionally, disruptions to public transportation, and the uncertainty of the duration of social distancing guidelines, has made attempts to re-schedule an in-person visit from the external examiner inconclusive.

In accordance with the matrix below, holding a live performance as a part of thesis completion falls under 'high impact;' while there are modes of sharing performance work virtually or in otherwise mediated forms (and will be covered below as mitigation), these are distinctly different from a live performance attended by an in-person audience. Initially, after discussion with my supervisors, we allotted approximately 7-8 weeks in order to gauge if the possibility of holding a rescheduled live performance would be possible; after this period, we determined that when this would be viable is still inconclusive, and alternate plans in lieu of the original performance were necessary.

b. Dates of disruption: **March 23rd, 2020 – June 5th, 2020**

c. Actions that have you undertaken to mitigate the disruption to your studies and the effect of these actions on reducing the impact of the disruption. It might be useful to refer to the matrix on the following pages.

While waiting to gauge the viability of a rescheduled live performance, I postponed continued work on the performance itself and began writing sections of my thesis that did not require reflection on the postponed live performance. The intention here was to both stay engaged with my research, and ideally decrease the time period needed to complete the written thesis between completing the final performance work and thesis submission.

In April, I agreed with my supervisors that if, in early June, holding a live performance was not clearly viable sometime in June or early July, alternative plans would be made in order to limit the delay to my thesis completion. In lieu of a live performance, I will be submitting mixed materials (photos, audio, video, text) that attempt to give an overall impression of what the live performance would have consisted of. This process, including its material challenges under the phased exit from lockdown, is distinctly different from holding a live performance itself, so while it will require its own period of planning and execution, it will allow me to complete the arts practice portion of my PhD research, thus mitigating continual delay to my thesis completion.

d. Assessment of the overall disruption to your studies after mitigation (including duration). Where extra support is being requested, please justify why re-organisation of planned work to favour these activities has <u>not</u> been sufficient to ensure timely completion.

As mentioned above, re-formulating a work intended for live performance into a series of mediated forms requires a great deal of work in re-considering, re-configuring, and executing these alternate plans. For that reasons, despite the mitigation via abandoning live performance plans, additional time is needed to complete these new plans, leaving sufficient time to complete the written thesis afterward.

In regards to the material challenges of the alternate plans and delayed timeline, delaying my thesis submission requires a delay to pursuing employment opportunities and extended time on a private studio rental wherein the practice work takes place. The alternate performance plans are being pursued without the use of University facilities, as these are currently under review. As a self-funded international student, the financial burden of a PhD is already high, so the additional financial impact of this delay is considerable. For this reason, I am requesting stipend support for the overall two month delay to mitigate the increased financial burden as a self-funded student.

Appendix B: Risk Assessment, *FUOS* (2018)

University of Glasgow

General Risk Assessment

Management Unit		**Location (Site / Building / Room)**	Off-campus
Assessment Date		**Review Date**	
Assessor's Name	Francis Wilson	**Job Title**	
Description of Task	Performance, *FUOS*, October 2018		

Description of the hazard (or hazardous event)	Who might be harmed?	How might people be harmed?	What risk controls are currently in place?	Current risk rating*			Identify any additional controls that may be needed	Timescale for additional controls and responsible person	Residual risk rating*		
				L	**C**	**R**			**L**	**C**	**R**
Old bird faeces	Audience, performance	Risk of illness for compromised immune systems	Area will be swept to minimise dust kick-up. P3 rated dusk masks available for concerned audience members. Performer is in good health.	1	4	4					
Needles/sharps	Performer	Wound infection	Both perfomer and assisting person are experienced with piercing needles. Skin has been sanitised prior to insertion, and needles are sterile. First aid is on site and wounds will be cleaned and dressed immediately following.	2	3	6					
Animals	Performer	Risk on contamination from birds present	Tarp has been installed so as to keep any birds from being directly above performer. If	2	3	6					

			present, pigeons are unlikely to come near humans in the space.								

*Likelihood x Consequence = Risk

Risk Rating Calculator

Likelihood that hazardous event will occur		Consequence of hazardous event	
1	Very unlikely	1	Insignificant (no injury)
2	Unlikely	2	Minor (minor injury requiring first aid only)
3	Fairly likely	3	Moderate (Up to three days absence)
4	Likely	4	Major (More than seven days absence)
5	Very likely	5	Catastrophic (Permanent injury or death)

Action Level Table

Risk Rating	Risk Level	Actions to be taken
20 – 25	Very High Risk	**STOP!** Stop the activity and take immediate action to reduce the risk, a detailed plan should be developed and implemented before work commences or continues. Senior management should monitor the plan.
15 – 16	High Risk	**Urgent Action!** Take immediate action and stop the activity if necessary, maintain existing controls rigorously. The continued effectiveness of control measures should be monitored periodically.
8 – 12	Moderate Risk	**Action** Moderate risks may be tolerated for short periods only while further control measures to reduce the risk are being planned and implemented. Improvements should be made within the specified timescale.
3 – 6	Low Risk	**Monitor** Look to improve at the next review or if there is a significant change. Monitor the situation periodically to determine if new control measures are required.
1 – 2	Very Low Risk	**No Action** No further action is usually required, but ensure that existing controls are maintained and reviewed regularly.

Some example hazards that may apply to the activity (not exhaustive)

Working at height	**Noise**	**Lighting (including strobe lighting)**	**Fire and explosion**
Falling objects	**Vibration**	**Compressed air**	**Hazardous chemicals**
Slippery, uneven or worn floors	**Hand tools**	**Magnetic fields**	**Biological risks / disease**
Obstructions and projections	**Repetitive hand / arm movement**	**Pressure systems**	**Animals**
Confined spaces	**Machine operation**	**Needles and sharps**	**Compressed Air**
Mechanical Lifting	**Manual Handling**	**Lasers**	**Hydraulic systems**
Poor housekeeping	**Vehicle movements**	**Ionising and non-ionising radiation**	**Other (please specify on assessment)**