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The Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature
Naturalized fox, Salon Bleu (Blue Salon), 2007 © Sylvie Durand © MCN

Hunting in the Contact Zone

Denaturalizing the museum institution's foundational dualisms, the Hunting and Nature Museum in Paris becomes a naturalcultural contact zone for, as Donna Haraway would have it, keeping up with the trouble. Joshua de Paiva and Anne de Malleray explore how the museum unfolds a relational narrative that invites visitors to stand in the hunter's boots and follow animal tracks into an ambivalent, experiential contact zone. Questions of reversibility lead us to think anew about the human relationship to wild fauna today at a time of unprecedented environmental crisis.

text by **Joshua de Paiva and Anne de Malleray**

Prepare for trouble, and make it double!
Team Rocket (Jesse, James, and Meowth) in the anime series *Pokémon*

As we stand outside the entrance of the Hunting and Nature Museum, an elderly lady passing by stops in front of us. She asks: "This is the museum of macabre pleasures, right?" After exchanging confused smiles, we encourage her to find out for herself. She admits never to have set foot inside, and "never will". The combination of the words *hunting*, *nature*, and *art*, and their associated imageries, often trigger immediate misunderstandings and uncontrolled feelings of suspicion, irony or even outrage. What appear as merely amusing anecdotes or occasional outbreaks of social media anger underscore the troubled identity and essential idiosyncrasies of the museum, the contradiction being encapsulated in the name of the institution itself. Between 2002 and 2007, the now outgoing director, Claude d'Anthenaise, has rehabilitated the entire museum, reinterpreting the founder's ambition of bringing the experience of nature into an urban cultural institutional context in the light of recent transformations of our sensibilities in an era of ecological upheaval. Instead of mitigating the complications imbedded in its identity, the museum chose to address those issues, albeit by museographical and curatorial design, rather than through direct or didactic statement, becoming what we propose to describe as a *naturalcultural contact zone* (using Donna Haraway's concept)¹ which offers an anthropozoological perspective on hunting that obliges us to *stay with* the trouble and explore a-moral stories that allow for renewed explorations of our representations of nature.

Visiting the museum, one is simultaneously confronted with a cultural history of representations and phantom imageries of wild fauna pervading hunting mythologies; and invited to *exercise* an ambivalent type of attention towards the animal, which is also that of the hunter. The Hunting and Nature Museum's unique perspective on "Nature" and wilderness is twofold, building both on hunting myths and the sensible experience of the hunter, two dimensions that are consistently questioned, hijacked or re-invested through Claude d'Anthenaise's daring curatorial practice. We explore how the museum, engaging with ever unstable equilibria, has consistently invited the visitors to stand in the hunter's boots, following animal tracks *into* an experiential, liminal contact zone that raises questions of reversibility, and reciprocity, and leads us to think anew about the human relationship to wild fauna. In doing so, we emphasise the museum's role as less a cabinet of *curiosities*, where the visitor is presented with a series of curious, but still inert, *objects*, than an apparatus for encouraging a form of active curiosity to non-human worlds. An intensified, dynamic attention, a continued state of suspense that renders one available for the encounter, rather than a collection of de-animated objects.

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The Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature

Salle du Sanglier (Wild Boar Room), 2007 © Erwan Lemarchand ©MCN

Double Trouble

Hunting *and* nature?

Any museum threshold — a passage from the public space to that of the modern cultural institution — is not only spatial but also symbolic and contractual.² However, the “threshold effect” of the Hunting and Nature Museum could be considered quite unique: considering the eco-socio-historical context and the widespread extinction of wildlife driven by human activities, it seems that visitors feel confronted with a quite impossible “contract” before entering the lion’s den.

We argue that the visitor’s moral trouble — triggered by the uncomfortable intersection of hunting and nature — might never have been as heightened as it is today because hunting has been reduced, in contemporary non-hunter and urban sensibilities, to the very act of *killing* a wild animal, in a society that has, precisely, not only repressed death but also come to consider that the deaths of other-than-human species also *matter*. Until quite recently, being *mortal* — that is conscious of one’s own death — was a human prerogative, in the context of a prevailing Western worldview that grants humans a superiority in terms of individuality and dignity over other species. But in the context of the Sixth Mass Extinction and the rise of anti-speciesist movements, and more generally of sensibilities that tend to expand the range of what is granted to other-than-human species — an individuality, a sensibility, personhood — the killing of animal-prey by the hunter-super-predator has not only become incomprehensible — it is unrepresentable and unwatchable. According to adjunct curator Raphaël Abrille, these shifts explain why the act of *exhibiting* death through hunting trophies — the hunter embodying a “profoundly original and paradoxical cultural attitude towards death” — can prompt such reactions of rejection.³

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Historicizing Nature: a cultural history of hunting and human-animal relationships

Yet, far from taking sides in the lively French debate, nor delivering any direct justification of contemporary hunting, the museum is committed to charting a cultural history of hunting, while situating and recontextualizing this practice against a wider historical background of multiple — often ambivalent — relations to nature and its inhabitants. This is key to understanding the museum’s anthropological perspective on hunting practices and their associated representations, including the eventual critique or ironic distancing.

As such, the works presented retrace both a history of techniques and a history of representations. The museum displays an immense collection of hunting trophies, tools and weapons of multiple styles and epochs, and a great diversity of objects related to the history of hunting — such as a collection of 18th century zoomorphic terrines or a series of precious dog collars. Added to (and often intertwined with) this cultural history of the evolution of hunting practices and the folklore surrounding them is an itinerary through hunting mythology, starting with the intimate “Cabinet de Diane”, that pays special tribute to the hunting and nature goddess Diana, housing two paintings by Pierre Paul Rubens and Jan I Brueghel.⁴



The Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature

Salle des Trophées (Trophies Room), 2007 © Sophie Lloyd © MCN

This cultural history unfolds through the centuries to present times, the museum displaying contemporary works of art — in temporary exhibitions or included in the permanent collections. Some of them involve a degree of questioning hunting practices, in tune with contemporary concerns and cultural, environmental, socio-historical contexts; notably — Ghislain Bertholon’s *Troché de face*,⁵ a reversed trophy showing a lion’s naturalised hindquarters, visibly trying to escape the wall; a (fake) right-angled corner twisted gun,⁶ or Christian Gonzenbach’s *Safari* series of fine earthenware childlike animals showing wide shotgun bullet holes.⁷ Invited contemporary artists have often chosen to explore matters of life and death, responsibility and culpability. These interventions have not necessarily blamed hunting as a practice *per se*, rather opened up disconcerting dialogues, with, among others, a buffalo’s crocheted head in a fake-blood puddle⁸ in the Weapons Room, a wallpaper populated with cartoonish beheaded deers,⁹ or more recently, Théo Mercier’s apocalyptic horse, a three-dimensional *écorché*.¹⁰

But more importantly, the museum situates the human-animal predator-prey relationship — constitutive of hunting — against a more general canvas of multiple and historicized representations of animality, which have and continue to catalyse



Art Orienté Objet

Les Pieds dans le plat, in *Le Jardin des délices*, exhibition view. 2013 © Nicolas Hoffmann © MCN

the relations we nurture. The Wolf and Deer Room is a wonderful example of how the museum invites us to reconsider our ever ambivalent relations to other species, and their evolution, from the Middle Ages — with the Christian symbolic opposition between the glorified, Christic Deer that appeared to Saint Hubertus with a crucifix between its antlers, a symbol of Resurrection, and the demonised wolf, an incarnation of evil — to contemporary imaginaries and eco-socio-political issues. The wolf, eradicated in France in the 1930s, is here literally *embodied* by one of the first individuals legally killed by French wildlife services (in 2005) after the animal's return to the Alps in the 1990s. Protected since 1979 by Berne's convention, the wolf raises questions about cohabitation and diplomacy,¹¹ a subject of intense debate between politicians, ecologists, and especially farmers. Rather small, this individual is not very impressive in his summery fur, not quite matching our inherited imaginaries about the species; it could almost be mistaken for a harmless dog, waiting to be patted.

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Protected since 1979 by Berne's convention, the wolf raises questions about cohabitation and diplomacy, a subject of intense debate between politicians, ecologists, and especially farmers.

The museum, with its many rooms dedicated to specific animals, continuously brings into perspective our contemporary sensibilities and the different statuses we grant animals — wild; companion or domestic, with hunters' closest adjutants such as dogs, horses, and birds of prey; but also pest, such as the fox who has a history of troubled relations with hunters; or protected, the wolf. As we move through the museum, we come to realize that animals assume different kinds of roles, depending on their (sometimes bumpy) relationships with humans throughout history. Recounting these contrasted stories cannot go without mentioning humanity's role in the current extinction event, be it through the presence of Victor the polar bear, an icon of climate change, or on a very subversive mode with Toffe's tin cans, said to contain extinct or endangered species meat: crocodile, rhino, elephant, tiger...¹² many emblematic of safari hunting. There is no Animal with a capital A, rather multiple types of relationships with them — including that of hunting — *relational* and historical stories that begin to question from within our unifying concept of *Nature* and of an idealised wilderness.

Denaturalizing the museum institution

This unique exploration of our representations of hunting, nature, and animality has implications for the museum as an institution, disrupting its founding principles, ontological premises, and metaphysics of subjectivity, all rooted in a specifically *modern* worldview. As Fiona R. Cameron recalls, the first museums were established, in the 18th century,

at a formative point in the development of the natural and human sciences [...] when nature and culture became organised into distinct, independent realms, and the modern humanist Human subject/object distinction and a reliance on vision set up new relations with the world. The Natural History Museum is an example of the ongoing operation of these doxas. [...] [T]he human subject and object dualism continues to operate where specimens are collected, studied [...], classified according to their physical attributes and presented as objective facts.¹³

The modern ontology indeed pervades the museum's foundational



Jessy Deshais

Les fonds de placard, Wallpaper. 2014
 © Sophie Lloyd ©MCN



The Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature
Salle du Cerf et du Loup (Wolf and Deer Room), 2007 © Sophie Lloyd © MCN

gestures: 1° the Nature and Culture Great Divide — which dictated the division between the Fine Arts and cultural-historical museums on the one hand; the natural history museum on the other — 2° the Object/Subject ontological cut — the collected and exhibited objects; the human visitor — and 3° the primacy of vision in a hierarchy of the senses. Art historian Vincent Normand builds on the same analysis of the exhibition regime as a “generic object of modernity”,¹⁴ historically coded by “positivist and objectivist forms of rationality”.¹⁵ This genre embodied and naturalised what he calls the modern *scopic regime*, after Martin Jay:¹⁶

[t]he public museum, the modern space of exhibition of scientific objects or artworks *par excellence*, is inscribed in a series of anthropological determinations shared by many modern technologies of the gaze and cultural practices that, together, define modernity as a reformation of vision. [...] The museum is defined by the “dialectical reversal” it imprints on the “life” of objects: [...] it de-animates previously animated entities by uprooting them from their “milieu” and re-animates “dead” objects by over-determining their signification and projecting them in a restricted field of attention.¹⁷

.....
The general spirit of accumulation and unusual juxtapositions makes it difficult for visitors to identify what type of cultural institution this is, as many exhibition genres are combined, and the usual distinctions between educational purposes, scientific knowledge of the natural world and the aesthetic representations no longer prevail.

Normand proposes to root the museum’s dissection and de-animation gestures in the anatomical theatre, where the dramatised observation of nature created a clinical distance between the spectators and the dissected bodies, which “guarantees” the emergence of scientific facts. This new scientific representation of nature goes with the emergence of the modern *spectator*, abstracted from nature: subjects and objects are co-produced, subject and world opposed.

In the Hunting and Nature Museum, the Subject/Object, Nature/Culture, Truth/Fiction dualisms are destabilised, as the museography has been imagined as a succession of rooms in a grand familial mansion: its chairs, a couch arranged in front of a coffee table, and other domestic furniture instantly reconfigure the visitor’s attitude. In this context, the artworks seem to re-assume what might have been their original functions — which intermingle decorative, social, aesthetic and sometimes utilitarian dimensions — before they were displaced and *cut off* by traditional museographic sacralising, clinical, and de-contextualising gestures. Is it a museum at all? Is this Jeff Koon’s *Puppie* porcelain sculpture¹⁸, casually placed on an 18th-century ceramic stove in the corner, a merely decorative, kitschy vase found in a flea market? The usual distinctions between craftsmanship and art, the high and low genres in art history, and even the aesthetic and the utilitarian, no longer prevail. This has the effect of defusing any spirit of seriousness that usually underscores a visit to a museum institution. We are freed from the imperative to pay attention to every object; visiting the museum becomes more of a wandering, where attention can be caught at any time by a singular object, or a strange assemblage.

The relative absence of texts plays a crucial role in rendering possible this kind of non-prescriptive experience. The artwork’s descriptions are not displayed alongside the objects but assembled in general leaflets for each room. The distance between the objects and the visitors is reduced, or even, suppressed; on both the phy-



Jan Fabre

La Nuit de Diane, Cabinet de Diane (Diana's Cabinet), 2007 © Erwan Lemarchand © MCN

sical and discursive levels: there seems to be no evident, imposed interpretation of what should be understood or felt.

The general spirit of accumulation and unusual juxtapositions makes it difficult for visitors to identify what type of cultural institution this is, as many exhibition genres are combined, and the usual distinctions between educational purposes, scientific knowledge of the natural world and the aesthetic representations no longer prevail. Not only does the museography combine various historical styles and atmospheres, from an alchemist cabinet to an Ancien Regime society Salon, but it also blurs every museographic principle: hunting trophies and guns meet taxidermy specimens, ancient engravings, naturalist “cabinets”, and art historical masterpieces. The *nature* and *culture* divide thus becomes obsolete in a site that lies at a crossroads between the *Wunderkammer*, the Natural History Museum, the Heritage Museum, the Art Gallery, and the Museum of traditions and human technique, or the Museum of Design.

The museum’s stuffed and mounted animals endorse an ambiguous, if not radically subversive, status, blurring the boundaries between science and art, reality and fiction. Examples include a narwhal-unicorn sculpture¹⁹ — accompanied by Joan



Fontcuberta's real-fake 1954 newspapers attesting to the unicorn's existence²⁰ — or Julien Salaud's *Faisanglier*,²¹ a *fictional* naturalised wild boar/pheasant hybrid. Conversely, one can also encounter a rooster with a crooked horn on its head, a *true* specimen that originally belongs to the scientific collections of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle. These remind us that all taxidermy specimens — the classic example of the aforementioned de-animating gesture and heritage of colonial violence that pervade the ambivalent act of "naturalisation" — are, on different levels, products of some degree of fiction, as they give away a certain state not only of scientific knowledge but of cultural conceptions, often crystallising our (mis) conceptions of the living animal. In Donna Haraway's words: what might "appear effortlessly, spontaneously found", is in fact "painfully constructed".²²

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[S]taying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.
.....

-- Donna Haraway

Creating bridges between the zoological, scientific and technical dimensions and that of fine arts, and exploring the past and present relations between the animal world and human societies, the museum can be thought of as a sort of *anthropozoological* museum that deconstructs museographic gestures and foundational ontologies by *historicising* Nature, or, in other words, *denaturalizing* the museum.

Dealing with the trouble: towards a-moral stories

The entire museum becomes a threshold, a liminal space, or, rather than a border to cross, what we propose to call a *naturalcultural* "contact zone" that invites the visitors to deal with their inaugural discomfort and immerse themselves in a broader kind of *trouble*, in the Harawayian sense.

The aforementioned iconoclastic museographic principles operate a broadening of the trouble, which comes to qualify not only the experience of the visitor but what he is confronted to, *i.e.* our relationship to what we used to call Nature. As Donna Haraway underlines, "[t]rouble is an interesting word. It derives from a thirteenth-century French verb meaning "to stir up", "to make cloudy", "to disturb". We — all of us on Terra — live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times".²³ Further, she calls for *staying with* this trouble:

[o]ur task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places. [...] [S]taying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.²⁴

Having chosen to stay with the trouble of our representations of nature, the museum proposes a unique way to take seriously contemporary ecological issues, distanced from any kind of clear and moral statement about what should be done; rather, building on and emphasizing ever-unstable equilibria. Théo Mercier's show *Every Stone Should Cry*²⁵ and its series of unstable sculptures was a masterful exercise in staging these permanent tensions — those of the "instant before" when everything is at risk of complete collapse. Returning to the museum's name, we might come to sense that the word which

ought to prompt reactions of suspicion should be “Nature”, maybe more, or at least as much as “Hunting”: *double trouble*.

A *contact zone* emerges as a shared space where things and beings are entangled, and where encounters of different sorts might happen. In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway borrows this concept from Mary Pratt, who adapted it from its original use in sociolinguistics “where the term “contact language” refers to improvised languages that develop among speakers of different native languages who need to communicate with each other consistently”.²⁶ A *contact perspective* “emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other [...]. It treats the relations [...] in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings, and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power”.²⁷ Moreover, Haraway also thinks of contact zones as ecotones, which refer to transitional zones between two ecosystems, and their *edge effects*: where “assemblages of biological species form outside their comfort zones. These interdigitating edges are the richest places to look for ecological, evolutionary, and historical diversity”.²⁸

A naturalcultural contact zone, the Hunting and Nature Museum is indeed a space where cultures, epochs, symbolic universes and competing or coexisting lifeworlds meet and collide with each other. There, the aim is not to erase nor merge the differences, but to open up a space for taking them seriously, and examining them. This requires a suspension of the moral judgment that allows for a-moral, or, as Vinciane Despret once put it commenting on Anna Tsing’s work, “de-moralizing” stories to be told.²⁹ These, indeed, following anthropologist Anna Tsing who herself followed matsutake mushrooms and their pickers, allow us to *slow down* and to avoid excessive and premature abstraction and generalisation.³⁰ These are situated stories based on minute descriptions that are freed from any paralysing and guilt-inducing moral injunctions. A singular way of *holding on to* things, beings and, most importantly, their relationships — which the museum attempts to elicit in the visitors’ experience of trailing their way through this contact zone.

As a matter of fact, the museum not only explores our cultural representations of nature but was founded on the original claim of rendering the very *experience* of an encounter with wildlife. This experience is based on that of the hunter, namely of François and Jacqueline Sommer, collectors and patrons, who created the Hunting and Nature Foundation in 1964 and the Museum in 1967. But, as the former President of the Hunting and Nature Foundation Christian de Longevialle wondered, “[i]s it simply possible to convey the experience of nature? [...] Can culture translate what has not been transformed by humans, this periphery of civilisation that we call the wild? The Hunting and Nature Museum has been committed to handling this irreducible paradox”.³¹ However, since its reopening in 2007, the museum has proposed to its public an unsettling way of facing what can be described as a “crisis of sensibility”³² towards non-human living beings, in a large part due to what Robert Michael Pyle described in 1993 as an “extinction of the experience”³³ of nature. The visitor is invited to follow the hunter’s or huntress’ tracks, him or herself following the animals’ trails into the hunting *experiential* contact zone.³⁴

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Théo Mercier

Peau de chagrin, in *Every Stone Should Cry*, exhibition view,
2019 © Erwan Fichou © MCN

Experiencing the contact zone

The art of tracking: tracking, and being tracked

Making one's own way through the uncanny museography, as a tracker in unfamiliar woods, requires that we collect information, but also follow our intuition. Along the way, we find ourselves confronted with contradictory signs. This creates the ground for developing what Anna Tsing calls an *art of noticing*: renewed forms of attention, that of the gatherer, but also, indeed, of the hunter — as an important and significant phase of hunting consists of following, deciphering and gathering the animal's tracks. Elicited by the general atmosphere and the systematic reduction of any kind of distance between the visitor and the objects, this form of attention is also triggered by a set of specific details along one's path, from artist Saint Clair Cemin's bronze bas-reliefs that guide the visitor through the floors, with their animal figures, footprints and vegetation, to literal dog footprints left in the terracotta tiled floor of the Horse Cabinet, just as they would appear in the muddy ground of a forest. The pieces of information are there but need to be *looked for*. The naturalists' cabinets that provide ethological data about the animal hosts can be thought of as a guide for tracking; they even display tracking markers such as animal footprints and feces cast in bronze. As Claude d'Anthenaise puts it, all the elements "prompt the visitor to be alert, just as the hunter after its quarry has to be attentive to keep following the trail".³⁵ Tracking informs us of the hunter's affective and relational experience to the animal that is an embodied, in-corporated kind of *curious* attention, the opposite of a clinical, disembodied observation.³⁶ As anthropologist Pierre du Plessis has proposed, studying *tracking after hunting* with San hunters in the Kalahari, tracking, as a relational practice, is primarily "about being ready and available for encounters with nonhuman others in a shared environment made possible by an attention to material signs and traces revealed by the landscape".³⁷

But there is more to this *art of tracking*. Visiting the museum, we come to sense that we might ourselves be tracked. As architects Frédérique Paoletti and Catherine Rouland claim, "[s]urprise comes from everywhere; animals are watching you".³⁸ In the small Diana Cabinet, an eerie reversal of roles — observer/observed, human/animal, subject/object — takes place: looking up, we realise we are being vigilantly observed by Jan Fabre's six owls and their fake human eyes.³⁹ Comparably, Nicolas Darrot's animatronic albino wild boar,⁴⁰ displayed among the hundred of hunting trophies, quietly follows the visitor with his red eyes, before grunting in a bizarre and otherworldly language. As philosopher Baptiste Morizot recounts about his experiences of tracking wolves in the South East of France, when he realised he was himself being tracked:

they are around [...] and almost as curious about us than we are about them. This reversal of roles may indicate that tracking doesn't establish a transcendent position of the human among other living beings, as if he were a reader that wasn't read [...]. *Tracking always implies the possibility of being tracked at the same time.* Often, while bent over a track, a

As Claude d'Anthenaise puts it, all the elements "prompt the visitor to be alert, just as the hunter after its quarry has to be attentive to keep following the trail".



Bruce Sargeant

Bathing at camp (1932-1933), Oil on canvas, 2016 © Benjamin Soligny © MCN

hawk's call draws the tracker's attention to the skies. He examines the borders, in vain, prisoner of the circular paradox of tracking: who is watching you while you are deciphering a footprint? Whose amused gaze are you the carefree object of, that is, the prey?⁴¹

What he calls the "discreet art of tracking" not only demands that the tracker adopt the perspective of the animal, seeing through its eyes, but is always somehow reciprocal: "the objectifying attitude towards the living is surreptitiously reversed in the forest".⁴² Analogous dynamics of symmetrization seem to be at play here, as the objectifying attitude towards the *artworks* and objects is surreptitiously reversed *in the museum*. We cannot help but wonder: to whom are we becoming prey?

The art of lure and deception: luring, and being lured

Putting ourselves in the hunter's boots and following the animal's tracks requires avoiding the *wrong* tracks, as Claude d'Anthenaise says.⁴³ He has become a master in the art of trapping the hunter-hunted visitors of what he likes to call the "Fake museum".⁴⁴ As the architects state: "all the details of the trap have been thought of very carefully",⁴⁵ to radically destabilise the visitor's position, blur the line between truth and fiction and elicit critical thinking.

In 2007, artist Jean-Luc Bichaud was invited to create *The Cabinet for decoys*. Faking the scientific codes of collection — the labels were counterfeited by hand to imitate old scientific labels — and fooling not birds or other animals, but the visitor with a series of hijacked, everyday objects without acoustic qualities, this installation (*Souffler n'est pas jouer*) best embodies the reversal processes at work in the museum. Generally unfamiliar with the art of decoys that are used for hunting, the average visitor is lured into taking these objects seriously. As Claude d'Anthenaise mischievously puts it, "[a]ll the artworks, whatever the artist, are presented on an equal level. The visitors are [...] left with the responsibility of uncovering *who's playing possum* to separate fact and fiction".⁴⁶ Maybe the most radical trap, *Safaris/Safarix*, an entire group exhibition, showed a selection of works depicting the tradition of safari hunting, and the colonial histories of man-the-heroic-hunter in a fantasied Africa.⁴⁷ We must be very attentive to details if we are to uncover the masquerade — even though it was contained in the inaugural recounting of the archetypical, fictional, hunting heroic story of Eugène Pertuiset, who claimed to have killed a black lion. Most of the paintings were attributed to five "historical" artists ignored by the general public: Hippolyte-Alexandre Michallon (1849-1930), Bruce Sargeant (1898-1938), Edith Thayer Cromwell (1893-1962), Brechtolt Streeruwitz (1890-1973) and Peter Coulter (1948-), each with an entirely fictional biography. These works were all created by a single contemporary artist, Mark Beard. The homo-erotic imagery that infiltrated these paintings might have been the key to unveiling the travesty, inducing sarcastic distancing *vis-à-vis* a certain state of manhood and the dynamics of race, sex and class at work in the safari. Yet, almost everyone fell into the trap.

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As historian Jérôme Buridant explains, following the trail during the hunt is not a stroll in the woods. Sometimes, deer, roe deer or hare mislead the dogs into following the tracks of another animal (in French: *donner le change*). At other times, the animal performs what is called a "hourvari": turning back in one's tracks to trick the dogs, by doubling one's trail.⁴⁸ Deers are well known for their ability to deceive both hunting dogs and hunter, following humid paths and streams to entangle their trails. But as José Ortega y Gasset underlined in his *Meditations on hunting*, it is important not to forget that essentially, "hunting is *not* [a] reciprocal [relation]".⁴⁹ Strictly speaking, hunting is asymmetrical: prey cannot then prey upon its own predator. This doesn't mean that hunting is devoid of any possible reversal processes, insofar as luring implies the possibility of being lured. As he puts it, "the critical inequality between prey and hunter still allows, on some occasions, the hunted animal to surpass the hunter. She can be faster, stronger or smarter". Moreover, the hunted animal "does not necessarily become possessed. Success is far from being essential to hunting".⁵⁰

Some have argued that the observation of animals exercising the art of lure can help create a sense of *common* intelligence between animals and humans. Encyclopédiste and lieutenant of royal hunts Charles-George Leroy's (1723-1789) *Letters on the intelligence of animals* are full of tales of luring and being lured. Opposed to the Cartesian theory of the animal-machine, Leroy proposed that animals were possessed with and capable of memory, strategy, learning, and sensibility. According to him, hunting was the perfect site for observing these behaviors, as the animal is in a situation where he has to "invent" and plan a strategy to lure the hunter.

What can we learn from the dialectics of luring and being lured? Commenting on ethological studies about lies and deception amongst non-humans since the end of the 1970s, Despret remarks that luring has been associated with the capacity of knowing how others behave, and, further, granting them with a certain degree of *intentionality*. Putting oneself mentally in the perspective of others requires attributing them beliefs, desires, and intentions — which some animals exercise not only among themselves but also towards humans. Getting interested in the arts of deceiving others in the animal world has indeed led scientists to grant them with cognitive, social and even political abilities they were deprived of until then.⁵¹

Following Despret, something here demands that we *slow down*. Lying, as an object of study, destabilizes the questions we ask to animals, and leads to blurring the boundaries of what is deemed moral or immoral: "[b]ecause lying is based on the possibility of understanding the intentions of others", it has ended up being correlated with social cooperation: "[a]ltruism and deception are two sides of the same aptitude, social subtlety. The world demoralizes and remoralizes itself [...]".⁵² Taking seriously the arts of lure requires being ready to tell a-moral stories.

Acknowledging that luring entails the possibility of being lured opens up new possible areas of commonality, insofar as we realize that in the forest — just as in the museum — everything and everyone becomes an *agent*, an active part of the *drama*. Transposed to the curatorial practice, and drawing on the experience of the lured hunter, luring causes a consistent jeopardising of the traditional experience of the subject-visitor, nurturing a pervasive state of confusion: outside of its specific meaning in hunting treaties, in every-

day language, a *hourvari* refers to an uproar, a troubling tumult. The traps to the visitor are never gratuitous, and Claude d'Anthenaise rarely gives away his tricks. In the museum, the hunted visitors do not necessarily realize they have been trapped, remaining ignorant of the *hourvari* at play. We can begin to wonder what conditions the success of the lure; and if visitors, *at some point*, should understand that they have been trapped. What if everyone takes it all seriously?

**Into the contact zone:
a liminal, embodied and risky experience**

A third level of potential reversal is sometimes alluded to in the museum. The ultimate reversal, that of being killed by the animal, calls for a reflexive perspective on our own position of master-predator over what we have called Nature. This liminal experience is present in Western myths — that of Diana and Actaeon in particular. Not only is it explored through ancient and modern representations, but it was also reinterpreted by Gérard Garouste in his 2018 solo show within the museum: an exploration of metamorphosis, sexual inversions, and the fatal reversal that leads to Actaeon being devoured by his own dogs. Liminality and risk have always been part of the experience of the hunter, as recounted and emphasized in many hunting stories. These constitutive dimensions of hunting are ambivalent as they have been key ingredients of *heroic* hunting stories while also being present in other kinds of stories, closer to pagan cults and non-western cosmologies, where the risk of not coming back from the hunt — being killed, or metamorphosing into an animal — takes on different meanings.

If the arts of tracking and luring can be considered two guiding curatorial principles that shape the visitor's experience, the animal's death and the reflexive attitude towards the human's role in its killing, are never absent. In the museum, it seems the animal's death is often mirrored by or contemplated with the possibility of human death, as was evident in Théo Mercier and Erik Nussbicker's shows in 2019, just before the museum closed for renovation work. Mercier had filled the Unicorn Cabinet with tens of miniature human skeletons carved in real bones, staging an apocalyptic Kamasutra of sorts, an installation maliciously entitled *Happy Ending*.⁵³ These sexual relations of bodies without organs raised questions about living in catastrophic times, and disturbingly resonated with the kinds of affects at play in hunting, and the ever ambivalent relationship between the preyed upon animal and the hunter that ends with a deadly embrace.

The embodied *contact* zone opened by the Hunting and Nature Museum is one where risky, curious, shared and desiring forms of attention are elicited and demanded. In this specific context, we borrow from Despret's analyses about animal deaths and zoophilia to propose *hunting* as a *site for the magnification of boundaries*. Despret refers to Catherine Rémy's text, *La fin des bêtes*, where, according to the sociologist, "[t]he killing of animals, as an act, [...] "magnifies" the existence and production of "humanity's boundaries". The individuals ceaselessly carry out a work of categorization that tells us about the practical accomplishments of the boundary between humans and animals".⁵⁴



Jean-Luc Bichaud

Souffler n'est pas jouer, wood, metal, leather, 2007 © Sophie Lloyd © MCN

The situated museum and the world as "fox"

*"Am I the only one to see how obscenely sick the Hunting and Nature Museum actually is?"*⁵⁵

The museum's shifting and unsettling associations are precisely a response to the apparent "hunting/nature" paradox that is becoming ever more challenging in the context of the current ecological catastrophe. The museum founder's initial ambition of conveying an "experience of nature" has indeed, in recent years, taken a dramatized meaning, in the context of over-domestication and a crisis of sensibility towards non-human beings that resulted from the loss or even "extinction of the experience of nature".⁵⁶ This led the museum to explore new ways of engaging visitors on sensible and discursive levels, drawing on constitutive dimensions of the hunter's experience to do so. Far from relaying any kind of preexisting ready-made "ecological" discourse, the curatorial principles and engagement with contemporary art allow the museum to unfold amoral stories that bring together multiple and

often contradictory perspectives and re-explore the affects at play in embodied kinds of *sensible* encounters with wildlife. In this context, we are brought to question not only the ontology and epistemology on which the museum institution and its scientific, educational and artistic distinct purposes were grounded, but also the position of the human in relation to “Nature”: no longer standing outside, *facing* natural landscapes, but *within* “Nature”, in shared, common and contrasted territories, as Bruno Latour argued in the introductory text of the group exhibition *Animating landscapes. Following the tracks*, in 2017.

Keeping up with the trouble is a tricky, serious game; a practice that takes some nerve. It might require *not* saying what you do *nor* doing what you say. This might be rule number one of Claude d’Anthenaise’s cunning curatorial practice. Irony, unlike a joke, cannot give itself away. The irony at play here is, paradoxically, not one of cold distance. We propose to think of the museum’s ironic posture as a way of dealing with the ambivalence in the world itself: an embodied, passionate irony that works from within the contact zone.

At first glance, and before passing through the museum’s threshold, it may seem inappropriate to summon feminist theory in our discussions here. However, as we delved into the ironic dynamics at play in the museum, we came to realise that feminist ecotheory might help us better describe what staying with the trouble means and entails in this context. The Hunting and Nature Museum might offer up a site for exploring forms of *situated* knowledge, representational practices and experiences, in the sense called for by *feminist “embodied” objectivity* theories, as opposed to “ideological doctrines of disembodied scientific objectivity”.⁵⁷

Being *situated*, according to sociologist Benedikte Zitouni, means, in a minimal sense, to acknowledge *where* and *when* one is talking from, from which kind of *experience*, while accounting for this very experience.⁵⁸ It is thus, firstly, an imperative of reporting on what mediates our access to the world — the social context and personal and collective histories that shape one’s own discourse and position. But moreover, to be situated is to acknowledge that it is the world itself which demands that we situate ourselves within it, by becoming an active part of it: it is a manifesto, or perhaps something like a bet, a risky gamble that chooses to take seriously how open to risk the world actually is. In the Hunting and Nature Museum, the bet is constantly replayed, questioned and outbid. As Zitouni exposes, being situated, in this sense, means 1° recovering our capacity to refer to “real worlds” — through an ability to explore, to be “insatiably curious” towards the world, in Haraway’s own terms — 2° cultivating a “passionate detachment”,⁵⁹ learning how to make some hidden or offbeat dimensions or versions of the world matter and, 3° regarding these real worlds as “*treacherous coyotes*”. Summoned by Haraway in her *Situated Knowledges*⁶⁰ text, the coyote figure, can “define the world which we are dealing with. The world is coyote. He is tricky and full of humour”.⁶¹

We propose to think of the Hunting and Nature Museum as a *situated* and *situating* structure, which deals with the world *as coyote*, or, as we propose here, as *fox*; to make a transposition to a species present in France, more “familiar” to European hunters, and a close relative on a symbolic level. Victor the polar bear has long been considered the mascot of the Hunting and Nature Museum,

yet, we begin to wonder if this house is not, in fact, the trickster-fox’s home. Seemingly unconcerned, coiled in his bourgeois armchair, he is always alert, never missing a moment with his eyes perpetually half-open. We become transformed by the world as coyote/fox: “bound by a double rational exigence: the coyote demands that we learn how to trick, lure, invent, *to keep up with his own forces*; conversely, we demand that he is active, enigmatic, surprising, that he lives up to our own longings-for-the-world”.⁶² Perhaps more than ever, the world itself is ambivalent and foxy and demands the same of us in return if we are to invent paths for surviving the catastrophe. Following Benedikte Zitouni’s analyses,

[a]mbivalence means: that shows at least two traits [...], opposed or not. [...] [F]abricating situated knowledges only is relevant for those who believe that the sides of friends and foes are never so clearly identified, that the divide between good and evil can never be determined in absolute terms but that the line needs to be drawn in and from a situation always practical and problematic. No one can escape the current devastation unharmed. No one is innocent. [...] [S]ituated knowledges are relevant only for those who feel the need [...] for reconfiguring the landmarks, reshuffling the cards, moving fronts and experimenting several positions, connections, shifted perspectives, in and for these ambivalent realities.⁶³

Inside the museum, suspending the moral trouble in order to tell amoral stories allows us to de-incarcerate (*désincarcérer*) hunting practices (plural and diversified) from the moral debate and infernal alternative in which they are caught and recognise, through this situated practice, the ever-ambivalent nature of things, beings, places, and relations. This allows us to explore the arts of tracking and luring, and the kinds of attention they elicit toward other, non-human living beings; while always being reminded of the possibilities of being tracked and lured at the same time.

Doing so also demands consistent questioning of the figure of the hunter itself. In French, *désincarcérer* literally means extracting someone from a wrecked vehicle.⁶⁴ The museum complexifies the heroic story of man-the-hunter through the presence of huntress figures, through subverting the status and meaning of hunting trophies, and most importantly, through the multiple processes of reversal and inversion at play, which inform the *foxy* museographic choices, and in turn, the experience of the hunter-hunted, luring-lured, tracker-tracked visitor. On numerous occasions, the man-the-hunter trope has been criticized and debunked, through the contemporary artistic curations and the use of irony.⁶⁵ There is no longer a single, unique story of hunting, but multiple stories, themselves reintegrated into broader, sometimes *sick*,⁶⁶ stories.

.....
*Seemingly unconcerned, coiled
 in his bourgeois armchair, he is
 always alert, never missing a mo-
 ment with his eyes perpetually
 half-open.*

Endnotes

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- [2] See Schall, Céline. " De l'espace public au musée. Le seuil comme espace de médiation " in *Culture & Musées* [online], 25 | 2015. DOI : 10.4000/culturemusees.560.
- [3] Abrille, Raphaël. " La mise en scène du sacrifice " in *Le Chasseur et la mort*. Actes du colloque " La chasse, une exception culturelle dans la vision contemporaine de la mort " organisé par le Conseil international de la chasse et de la conservation du gibier, à Rambouillet en 2004. La Table Ronde, Paris. 2005, pp.111-112.
- [4] Rubens, Pierre-Paul and Brueghel, Jan. *Diane et ses nymphes s'apprêtant à partir pour la chasse; Diane et ses nymphes observées par des satyres*. Oil on wood. 57 x 98 cm and 61 x 98 cm. Circa 1623-1624.
- [5] Bertholon, Ghislain. *Troché de face, lion*. Taxidermy and lacquered wood. 130 x 100 x 48,5 cm. 2015.
- [6] Pii. *Suhl Shotgun en angle droit*. Wood and metal. 83 x 49 x 5 cm. 2009.
- [7] Gonzenbach, Christian. *Safari*. Fine earthenware. 17 cm x 15 x 12 cm. 2007.
- [8] Art Orienté Objet. *Les Pieds dans le plat*. Resin sculpture, buffalo wool, glass, wax. 120 x 200 x 250 cm. 2013.
- [9] Deshais, Jessy. *Les fonds de placard*. Wallpaper. 2014.
- [10] Mercier, Théo. *Peau de chagrin*. Polyurethane, silicone, horse hooves, teeth, and hair. 220 x 80 x 180 cm. Collection of Stéphane Corréard. 2012.
- [11] See Morizot, Baptiste. *Les Diplomates. Cohabiter avec les loups sur une autre carte du vivant*. France: Wildproject. 2016.
- [12] Jacquet, Christophe (Toffe). *Standard conserve*. 42 tin cans. 2012.
- [13] Cameron, Fiona R. " Theorising more-than human collectives for climate change action in museums " in *Ecologising museums*. L'Internationale Online. eBook publication. Ed Aikens, Nick et al. 2016. pp.26-27.
- [14] Normand, Vincent. " The eclipse of the witness: natural anatomy and the scopic regime of modern exhibition-machines ", in *Ecologising museums*. 2016. p.91.
- [15] Normand, V. 2016. p.93.
- [16] The term was used by Martin Jay (1999) who borrowed it from the French film theorist Christian Metz (*Le signifiant imaginaire: psychanalyse et cinéma*, Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1977).
- [17] Normand, V. 2016. p.93.
- [18] Koons, Jeff. *Puppie*. Porcelain. 1998.
- [19] Cemin, Saint Clair. *Tête de licorne*. Bronze and narwhal tusk. 2005.
- [20] Fontcuberta, Joan. *La Licorne*. Newspapers. 2006.
- [21] Salaud, Julien. *Faisanglier*. Naturalised wild boar, pheasant feathers. 160 x 35 cm. 2015.
- [22] Haraway, D. 1984-1985. p.34.
- [23] Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2016. p.1.
- [24] Haraway, D. 2016, p.1.
- [25] Mercier, T. *Every Stone Should Cry*. Solo show. Hunting and Nature Museum, Paris. April 23rd -June 30th 2019.
- [26] Haraway, D. 2008. p.216.
- [27] Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge. 1992. pp.6-7.
- [28] Haraway, D. 2008. p.217.
- [29] Tsing, Anna, Despret, Vinciane and Loup. " Cohabiter : Assemblages terrestres ", Ce qui dépend de nous. Talks at la Gaîté Lyrique (Paris). May, 28th, 2019.
- [30] See Tsing, Anna. *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2015.
- [31] de Longevialle, Christian. in *Le Cabinet de Diane au Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature*. Paris: Citadelles et Mazenod. 2007. p.6. All quotes from French publications are translated by the authors.
- [32] Zhong Mengual, Estelle and Morizot, Baptiste. " L'illisibilité du paysage. Enquête sur la crise écologique comme crise de la sensibilité " in *Nouvelle revue d'esthétique*, 2018/2 (n° 22). pp. 87-96. DOI : 10.3917/nre.022.0087.
- [33] Pyle, Robert M. *The Thunder Tree: Lessons from an Urban Wildland*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press. 1993. Reprint 2011.
- [34] In the following developments, we voluntarily refer to "hunting" and the "hunter" or "huntress" in a generic anthropological sense.
- [35] Hunting and Nature Museum." Parcours muséographique ". Internal document.
- [36] As Pierre du Plessis rightly suggested, *tracking* is also, maybe more importantly, *a relational experience to the animal's own relations to its environs, with which the tracker too is entangled*. Personal communication.

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[38] Hunting and Nature Museum." Parcours muséographique ". Internal document.

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[41] Morizot, B. *Sur la piste animale*. France: Actes Sud. Mondes Sauvages. 2018. p.126.

[42] Morizot, B. 2018. p.126.

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[44] d'Anthenaise, Claude. " Fake rhinoceros, Fake museum ". Talk at École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs. February, 13th, 2019.

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[46] Quoted in " Musée de la chasse. Quel tableau au Fhel ! " in *Le Télégramme*. June, 13th, 2019. https://www.letelegramme.fr/finistere/landerneau/musee-de-la-chasse-quel-tableau-au-fhel-13-06-2019-12309610.php?fbclid=IwAR0dU6gxC5wiyal_HXSJlGjPxFEBTrbOk8gT5h1AnhbLVnmbEq_b0180c#uQZAKLUm4qvH8b1f.99

[47] *Safaris/Safarix*. Group exhibition. Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris. March 30th - July 17th 2016.

[48] Buridant, Jérôme. " La gestion des forêts de vénerie au XVIIe siècle. " in *Dix-septième siècle*, 226(1). 2005. pp.17-27. doi:10.3917/dss.051.0017.

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[50] Ortega y Gasset, J. 2006. p.67.

[51] Especially in the behaviorist tradition and its rule of Morgan canon. See Despret, V. 2016. p.7.

[52] Despret, V. 2016. p.128.

[53] Mercier, T. *Happy Ending*. Carved and assembled bones. 2019.

[54] Despret, V. 2016. p.280.

[55] Reddit comment. Online. June, 12th, 2019. Translation by the authors.

[56] See Pyle, Robert M. 1993.

[57] Haraway, D. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective " in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3. Autumn, 1988. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066>. p.576.

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[59] Donna Haraway borrows this idea to Annette Kuhn, in *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*. London: Routledge and KeganPaul, 1982.

[60] Haraway, D. 1988.

[61] Zitouni, B. p.1.

[62] Zitouni, B. p.4.

[63] Zitouni, B. p.5.

[64] Baptiste Morizot used the word *désincarcérer* to describe what he has proposed to do with tracking, namely extracting or dislocating this practice from predation, which allows us to think of it as a form of attention and a geopolitical practice. See Morizot, B. 2018. p.142.

[65] About the man-the-hunter trope, and its critique in anthropology, see Lee, Richard Barry, and Irven DeVore. *Man the Hunter*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co. 1966. See also Haraway D, " Sowing worlds ", in *Staying with the Trouble*, 2016. pp.117-119.

[66] *Sick*: macabre, in bad taste, offensive or disgusting, physically or mentally ill ; *Sick* (slang): amazing, very good, excellent. (Source : Cambridge dictionary and Collins English dictionary).

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