musée
de la chasse et
de la nature

**FONDATION
FRANÇOIS SOMMER**
RECONNUE D'UTILITÉ PUBLIQUE
DÉCRET DU 30-11-1966

**MUSÉE DE LA CHASSE
ET DE LA NATURE**
62, RUE DES ARCHIVES
75003 PARIS, FRANCE
WWW.CHASSENATURE.ORG

ACTES DE COLLOQUE
SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS
19 & 20 MARS 2015

EXPOSER LA CHASSE ?

EXHIBITING HUNTING?

INTRODUCTION: STAGING AND EXHIBITING HUNTING IN NON-EUROPEAN CULTURES

NÉLIA DIAS

The idea of holding a session on how hunting is staged and exhibited in non-European cultures arose from a two-fold observation: firstly, the fact that hunting trophies held in museums in Europe are predominantly from Asia and Africa; secondly, although there are few studies on the fate of the mortal remains of animals hunted in these two continents, it would seem that there is a kind of fascination in Europe for exhibiting so-called "exotic" hunting. This fascination takes on a particularly special meaning given the difficulties and obstacles–largely of a moral nature–to exhibiting hunting in Europe, as Claude d'Anthenaise pointed out at the opening of the Symposium's first session. This makes it all the more crucial to examine, from a comparative perspective, what happens to animal cadavers and the status given to animal remains not only in museums, but also in the private sphere. A comparative approach will shed light on the various ways in which the bodies of animals are preserved and displayed, thus permitting an examination of the underlying assumptions of the museographical model.

The near-absence of research on animal remains outside Europe is all the more surprising given the plethora of hunting tales from the so-called "exotic" countries, with one of the most famous and at the same time most controversial being George Orwell's essay, "Shooting an Elephant" (1934). In this short story, set in Burma, the British writer explains how the narrator came to kill an elephant at the behest of the villagers. As a representative of British power, the narrator had no choice but to kill the beast, which had frightened the villagers beforehand and caused the death of a coolie. Orwell portrays, with remarkable lucidity, the mechanism of colonial authority, which is supposed to protect the locals from "vermin"[1] and other wild beasts. While describing in painstaking detail the slow, agonising death of the elephant, the British writer only makes a fleeting mention of the way that the animal was cut up by the villagers, and fails to offer even the slightest hint as to what happened to the elephant's bones and tusks.

What value is attributed, in various cultural contexts, to different animal body parts? Which parts of the animal corpse are deemed worthy of preservation and acquire the status of trophies? To what extent is there a parallel between keeping animal remains and exhibiting them? Apart from museum displays, where else are they exhibited? Such are the questions that this session seeks to explore.

HUNTING AS A PERFORMANCE

The killing of an animal in the hunt entails, implicitly or explicitly, a performative and spectacular dimension. In his magnificent film, *Hunting the Lion with Bow and Arrow*, Jean Rouch[2] deftly portrayed the close connection between hunting and dramatization and/or stunning arrays. It is hardly a coincidence that hunting is associated–regardless of geographical context–with several components of enactment: specific costumes, the central role of music and singing, ceremonial presentation of the hunted animals, preparation of the animal's mortal remains, and the display of animal heads, to cite but a few examples. Moreover, as Garry Marvin has pointed out, hunting is first and foremost a "complex ritual performance", implying a whole series of codified steps, and "personal hunting trophies" are the logical culmination of this ritual process[3]. While the violent dimension is an integral part of the rituals, this violence needs to be aestheticized, or even dramatized, to underscore

its inherent brutality, a trait pointed out by Maurice Bloch regarding Merina rituals in Madagascar[4]. This dramatization of the ritual of hunting is central to Denis Lemaistre's work on the place of hunting in Huichol rituals (Mexico) and to the work by Dany Leriche and Jean-Michel Fickinger focused on a brotherhood of hunters in Mali, and more particularly on the photographic portraits of initiated members.

For the Huichol people, collective hunting is connected to rituals aimed both at ensuring protection and offering an apology to the animal. The animal's remains, especially in the case of deer, take central stage in the ensuing dramatization, namely in ceremonial rituals, and are then conserved in specific locations, such as in caves, which are both accessible (since people can go there) and inaccessible (because they are difficult to reach). Denis Lemaistre highlights the way in which deer body parts are used for medicinal, therapeutic and ritual purposes. Skin from the head is cut up so that it can be used by Huichol dancers in farming rituals; the tail is kept as a trophy, the still-warm heart is offered to an elderly shaman and the limbs most often to a singer-shaman, while the remainder of the meat is made into broth for consumption.

With the photographic portraits of hunters from Mali, Leriche and Fickinger deliberately adopt the register of representation; the photographs were taken against a plain white background so as to deliberately erase any reference to any given cultural "context", as if to further emphasise the underlying work of representation in the photograph.

It is because hunting is inextricably intertwined with social life that the figure of the hunter is, very often, associated with the shaman among the Huichol (Lemaistre), with the healer-soothsayer (Leriche and Fickinger) and endowed with political power (Bondaz). It should therefore come as no surprise when hunters are presented with the most prestigious animal parts.

Julien Bondaz quite rightly notes that 'bringing meat or the remains of wild animals into the home is not without significance' in West Africa. Above and beyond the dictates governing the consumption of the meat, various parts of the animal's body are distributed in accordance with codified principles; the tail of a giraffe or elephant are prestigious prizes, considered to be a trophy. Bondaz's observations follow along the same lines as the articles by Z. Ligers of hippopotamus hunting (1957) and elephant hunting (1960) among the Bozo people of Niger[5]. Ligers' meticulous writings, although somewhat lacking theoretical considerations, provide an extremely detailed description of how the hunted animals are cut up, the order in which each step in the butchering process is conducted and the uses to which each of the various body parts are put. In the case of the hippopotamus, it is the prerogative of the hunter who killed it to cut off and set aside the animal's two ears, four legs and tail, to be later taken to his hut as a trophy (1954, 58); in some villages, the head, once duly prepared, is presented at the hunter's hut, or at any other especially designated place and the tibias of the hippopotamus are placed in the vestibule (1954, 59). Regarding the mortal remains of the elephant, it is up to the hunter who killed the animal to first cut off the two ears and the tail. The ears are dried in the sun and then used as mats for the hunter to sit upon (1960, 97-98).

Regardless of specific geographical contexts, the manner in which the various parts of an animal's corpse are used and the conservation of animal remains can only be understood if due consideration is given to human/non-human relationships. These relationships are embedded in specific systems of representations of the world. It should be noticed, on the one hand, that only certain animals, depending on their connection with humans, are treated in a special way; in the case of the Huichol people, deer are considered the elder brothers of humans. In other words, only some dead animals (domesticated and/or wild),

and not all animals, are given special treatment according to culturally specific systems of thought. On the other hand, while the primary purpose of hunting is to procure food, the hunted animal is nonetheless very often displayed, exhibited and shared; it is therefore, as Jean-Pierre Digard judiciously points out, necessary to distinguish between praxis and representation: the *material facts* show that societies that practice hunting whilst ascribing humanity to wild animals, kill and eat those wild animals through actions that only differ from those of hunters elsewhere in terms of the representations that each society makes of its respective actions[6].

Over and above cultural specificities, however, some animal remains are given a special status, such as the head of large mammals in some African countries. For the Huichol people, deer antlers are initially an effigy worn with pride by each household during the ritual, to be later placed in the grottoes, located high in the mountains, and described by Lemaistre as "Huichol-style museums". To what extent does the conservation of certain animal body parts lead necessarily to their subsequent display?

EXHIBITING THE HUNTED ANIMAL

The exhibition of animal remains, regardless of the display's location (in public and/or private places), constitutes one of the memorial tools associated with hunting. The act of putting something on display amounts to showing it off, and yet it is important to bear in mind the 'potential viewers' as well as the boundaries between what can be displayed and what cannot be exhibited. Garry Marvin underscored the way in which the taxidermic "trophy does not begin its cultural life in a public space but rather in the home, the private space, of the hunter[7]". The same is true, in some ways, in West Africa, where trophies are kept, especially by hunters, in a specific room of the house, near the associated weaponry and clothing. In this particular case, there is not necessarily a connection between keeping trophies and displaying them to a wider public. With the shift from the private sphere to the public realm, trophies in some ways lose their memory-preserving function, becoming, at the same time, in the words of Susan Stewart, "the most intensely *potential* souvenirs and the most potent anti-souvenirs"[8].

Furthermore, the fact that there are no museums specifically dedicated to hunting in West Africa does not mean that there are no animal trophies on display in national museums alongside weapons and traps. To put on display involves assigning a status to the bodies of dead animals, even though this is not without challenges. One of these challenges is how to determine the extent to which the animal remains are simply a corpse and the extent to which they are an artefact. Another challenge concerns the problematic distinction between artefacts, sacred objects, animal relics, trophies and works of art. As Julien Bondaz remarks, the presence or the absence of animals in the West African museographical sphere may be understood if we take into account the ambivalence surrounding the transformation of animals either into trophies or into 'powerful objects', to use the author's terms. From this point of view, Bondaz's example of hunters' shirts exhibited as transnational symbols in several West African museums and reclassified as works of art today, attests to the blurring of the boundaries between artefacts, relics and objects. To what extent can the practice of displaying the animal as a hunting trophy be considered a strictly Western cultural practice? Which are the ways of display hunting outside the European world? If there is a need to put the transcultural scope of trophies into cultural perspective, then the same must be true for the practice of taxidermy.

Julie Hughes explores the Indo-Persian and perhaps Turko-Mongolian roots of taxidermy, a preservation technique that was initially used on human remains between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries in the princely states of Rajput under the British Empire and was later applied to the mortal remains of animals. Given the deliberately "anti-aesthetic" character of the stuffed skins and the procedures utilised (designed to last only a limited

time), these skins were not deemed to be examples of real taxidermy in the Western sense of the term. The absence or near-absence of animal carcass preservation, or at least animal trophy (in the Western sense of the word) preservation in the princely courts until the nineteenth century might be understood by the fact that there were myriad other hunting memory-preserving devices in use, such as paintings and miniatures. Hughes seeks to revisit the underlying Eurocentric assumptions regarding taxidermy and the constitution of trophies, focusing on the relations and connections, both peaceful and violent, between India and the British Empire. To examine taxidermy in Northern India paves the way for questioning the museum display as a mode, among others, of exhibiting and conserving the body of the animal.

TURNING HUNTING INTO HERITAGE

While there are no hunting museums in the specific case of Mali or in West Africa more generally, steps have nonetheless been taken to give value to hunting as a cultural practice and to reclassify the hunting brotherhoods of Mali as national heritage (Bondaz). At a time when hunting museums, especially in Europe, are facing challenges stemming largely from the changing attitudes to animal suffering, it might appear at first glance somewhat surprising to learn that hunting is being promoted to the rank of national heritage, and, in the specific case of falconry, to the rank of heritage of humanity.

Gary Timbrell's presentation deals with the inscription of falconry (the nomination for which was supported by European, Asian and Arab countries) on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO) in 2012. Classified by UNESCO as a "living human heritage", falconry has, according to Timbrell, an ambivalent status that blurs the boundaries between sport and hunting on the one hand, and of recreational hunting and artistic hunting on the other. Such an ambivalent status may explain its inscription as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), in accordance with the terms of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. It is worth noting the criteria for inscribing falconry on the UNESCO List: first, falconry is presented as a "social tradition respecting nature and the environment"[9]. Then, falconry is identified as both a transcultural and age-old practice, a "social tradition", "passed on from generation to generation, and providing them with a sense of belonging, continuity and identity". Finally, since the nomination was a transnational one, and despite the diversity of cultural contexts, there is an assumption that falconers share "common values, traditions and practices". In other words, emphasis is placed, on the one hand, on the bond between falconers and falcons, and on the other, on the spirit of "camaraderie and sharing" among falconers. The game that is caught barely gets a mention, as if it did not play a central role in the practice of falconry; moreover, and according to the terminology used by UNESCO, falconry is no longer practised for subsistence.

Despite the numerous falconry museums in Europe (museums exhibiting photographs, archival documents, objects), few of them have any trophies on display (Timbrell). The relative absence of trophies relating to the practice of falconry deserves some exploration. Similarly, why is it that the bird, which serves as an intermediary between the falconer and the prey, has greater pride of place than the prey itself? In the planned Zayed National Museum (to be located on Abu Dhabi's island of museums) the falcon is promoted to the rank of national symbol. In her article on this museum, Sarina Wakefield offers a detailed analysis of both the architecture of the museum's premises and the content of the exhibition galleries. The building, designed by Norman Foster, is deemed to represent the wingtips of the falcon. The topic of the exhibiting galleries is "falconry and the conservation of falcon species" and explores the various techniques associated with falconry, by means of objects and audio-visual materials. In addition, visitors will be able to experience this "living human heritage" through live demonstrations in the museum's outdoor area. Everything is geared to present falconry as though it could be completely dissociated from hunting, and it is this dissociation that was the key condition to its inscription as intangible cultural heritage. By

placing the emphasis on the techniques of training and preparing falcons–in other words on the underlying expertise and technical aspects of falconry–UNESCO has subtly side-lined one of the objectives of falconry, namely catching game.

Hunting, whether focused on its performative, museological or heritage dimensions, is shaped by the ambiguous and contradictory relationships that humans sustain with the killing of animals. This session is going to explore those ambiguities and absences.

NOTES

1. For more on the topic of the "war against vermin" and the eradication of animal species as a manifestation of colonial power, see M. Rangarajan, "The Raj and the Natural World: the war against dangerous beasts in colonial India", *Studies in History*, 1998, 14 (2), p. 265-299 and E. Rashkow, "Resistance to Hunting in Pre-independence India: Religious Environmentalism, Ecological Nationalism or Cultural Conservation?", *Modern Asian Studies*, 2014, p. 1-32.
2. Filmed between 1957 and 1962, Jean Rouch's film depicts the hunting practices of the Gows.
3. G. Marvin, "Enlivened through Memory: Hunters and Hunting Trophies", *in* S. Alberti ed., *The Afterlives of Animals*, Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press, 2011, p. 202-217.
4. M. Bloch, *From Blessing to Violence: History and Ideology in the Circumcision Ritual of the Merina of Madagascar*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.
5. Z. Ligers, a student of Marcel Griaule, published two articles in the *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* (Journal of the Africanist Community): "La chasse à l'hippopotame chez les Bozo" (Hippopotamus Hunting among the Bozo), JSA, 1954, 27, p. 37-66, and "La chasse à l'éléphant chez les Bozo" (Elephant Hunting among the Bozo), JSA, 1960, 30, p. 95-99.
6. J.-P. Digard, "Le tournant obscurantiste en anthropologie. De la zoomanie à l'animalisme occidentaux" (The Obscurantist Turn in Anthropology. From Zoomania to Animalism in the West), *L'Homme* (Man), 2012, 203/204, p. 555-578.
7. Garry Marvin, *op.cit*.
8. S. Stewart, *On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1993, p. 140.
9. www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00732
10. S. Wakefield, "Falconry as Heritage in the United Arab Emirates", *World Archaeology*, 2012, 44 (2), p. 280-290.