MULTISPECIES INTERFERENCES
Taxidermy and the Return of Wolves

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As in other countries in Central and Western Europe, the return of wolves to Switzerland since the mid-1990s has generated intense debates and has taken place in various fields in which material and immaterial entities come together in new multispecies networks. This paper focuses on one of those fields: wolf taxidermy. Based on interviews and fieldwork in taxidermy workshops and Swiss nature museums, the main question here is whether there are moments of wolfish agency in this unquestionably human-dominated process of taxidermy. A praxeological, performative and relational understanding of agency is laid out to explore this question. The selective and restricted agentic capacities wolves perform – mostly as a sort of offstage agents absent from the workshop itself – within the sociomaterial networks of wolf taxidermy is captured with the term *interference*.

Keywords: wolves, taxidermy, agency, multispecies ethnography, Switzerland

Wolves have been back in Switzerland for more than twenty years and in the minds and lives of many Swiss people, leading to a variety of positions towards and practical ways of dealing with these newly arrived nonhuman beings. The wolves in Switzerland, currently about fifty in numbers (KORA 2019), generate intense debates: Where do they come from? Where do they belong? In the wild? Or are wolves a synanthropic species that does not need something like wilderness? Is there anything like wilderness at all in small and densely populated Switzerland? Furthermore, how close wolves should be allowed to approach humans and their settlements is discussed and what we need to know about them. The question of who has to deal with the returned wolves in everyday life is contrasted with the question of who has the power to decide about how to deal with them. Debates about the measures that can be expected to be taken by farmers are also considering the acceptance of these measures (e.g. livestock guardian dogs) by the general public and the necessary financial resources. Not least, the future of the Alpine regions is at issue: Do wolves signify the end of Alpine sheep-farming, leading to bush encroachment, and increase the depopulation of the Alps? Or do wolves, by their preying on red and roe deer, reduce browsing damage and, thus, balance ecosystems, such as forests important for absorbing the impact of avalanches and other forces of nature in Alpine regions in a time of climate change?

The country's main focus on the wolf presence so far has been its mountain regions, as the returning wolves are moving from the neighbouring Italian and French Alps to Switzerland. That is why the current role of and future visions for the Alpine regions form an important part in the discussions on wolves

in Switzerland. The debates and controversies are intense, since the wolves in the Alps come upon a terrain that is sensitive in not only an ecological but also a social and ideological way: modern societies have been projecting hopes and longings into the Alps for decades and they play a specific role in Swiss cultural memory, politics and self-conception (Risi 2011; Tschofen 2017). However, in many other aspects, the debates and discussions on wolves in Switzerland resemble those in other countries in Western and Central Europe where wolves have been returning or spreading in larger numbers in the last few decades. They involve identity and tradition, heteronomy and autonomy, biosecurity and biodiversity, the relationships between peripheral regions and urban centres of power, between local people and state authorities and the question of an up-to-date way of dealing with and relating to nature. Various researchers from the humanities, anthropology or social sciences have shown, in the last few years (e.g. Mauz 2005; Marvin 2010; Sjölander-Lindqvist & Cinque 2013; Stokland 2015; Skogen, Krange & Figari 2017), that societies negotiate questions of a much larger range in the wolves' slipstream than one might think at first sight. The return of wolves, therefore, is always not only an ecological but also a cultural and social process exceeding the mere conflict of interests between nature conservation and agriculture and moving the minds and lives of various people whose positions can barely be reduced to a simple pro- or contra-schema.

The fields in which the return of wolves takes place are numerous and multilayered: the institutionalized and professional management of wolves by official actors and less obvious areas, such as tourism, waste management or – the focus of this article – taxidermy. There are also a large number of individual, popular and everyday dealings with wolves, including those by people who come into contact with wolves and their presence in a more indirect way than, for example, sheep breeders or hunters. In all these fields, material and immaterial elements – such as humans, animals, plants, things, values, policies, discourses – come together in hybrid networks in which they keep on assembling, entangling and arranging in mutual dependencies. Donna Haraway, in her introduction to *When Species Meet*, outlines this sociomaterial network for one of those, probably the most obvious, wolfish fields that the return of the large carnivores opens up when describing the dynamics and processes going on in the French Alps:

> We are in the midst of reinvented pastoral–tourist economies linking foot-traveling humans, meat and fiber niche markets that are complexly both local and global, restoration ecology and heritage culture projects of the European Union, shepherds, flocks, dogs, wolves, bears, and lynxes. (Haraway 2008: 40)

The interdisciplinary approach of *multispecies ethnography*, for which Haraway is a crucial reference, turns its attention to the active role animals and other living beings play within such sociomaterial assemblages (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010; van Dooren, Kirksey & Münster 2016). It analyses the situational co-constitution – the *becoming with* (Haraway 2008) – of humans and other living beings in mutual relations. Regarding the context of the wolves' return, this means asking the question not only what humans do with wolves but also what the returning wolves do with humans – a question that can be raised in various fields and that will be discussed here for the case of museum taxidermy.

Wolf Taxidermy

The wolf presence in Switzerland (and in many other countries in Central and Western Europe) is a new and challenging situation, thus, informing the general public about these newly arrived nonhuman beings is seen as a key issue. One central institution of environmental education are natural history or nature museums for which mounted animals – as "material knowledge" (Alberti 2011b: 4) – are a primary way of imparting nature to their visitors. According to historian of science Samuel Alberti, taxidermy specimens were – and still are (as I would argue) – one of the principal sites "for their [humans'] encounter with the material animal" (2011b: 2).

Taxidermy mounts are a specific form of preserving dead animal bodies by putting the animal's actual skin with fur, feathers or scales on an artificial body sculpture made from synthetic or natural materials. What stands out in this way of three-dimensional preserving is the "liveness" (Desmond 2002) aimed at in taxidermy "to capture the form, expression and attitude of the living animal" (Wonders 1993: 411). This "liveness" can be problematic, as it may suppress the "deadness" and the circumstances of this "deadness" behind it: taxidermy "requires the death of the animal in order to resurrect it as nearly as possible to a 'lifelike' state", anthropologist Jane Desmond notes (2002: 160). Haraway has exemplified this problematic for the case of the dioramas in the African Hall at the American Museum of Natural History (Haraway 1984–1985). Apart from its potential to be problematic in concrete cases, "liveness" points basically to the one paradox that is specific about taxidermy preparations: "Whereas skeletal mounts, wet specimens, and study skins […] are clearly dead, taxidermy is intended to give the illusion of life" (Alberti 2011b: 6). With this chimeric characteristic to be "lifelike yet dead" (Poliquin 2008: 127), taxidermy specimens resist easy definition and unambiguous classification: between life and death, but also between subject and object, between art/culture and nature they challenge the viewers to deepen their gaze. That is why Rachel Poliquin (2008), referring to a concept developed by historian of science Lorraine Daston (2004), describes them as "talkative things".

These ambiguities and paradoxes (including their problematic potential) might be a reason for the relatively broad interest in taxidermy in recent years in a variety of disciplines from museum studies, geography and environmental studies to ethnography and history. The "afterlives" (Alberti 2011a) of iconic and unknown animals and the mounts themselves are employed as rich sources for the history of knowledge, science, human–animal and human–environment relationships, colonialism, etc. (e.g. the contributions in Alberti 2011a). Changes in taxidermy techniques and the status of the profession of taxidermy are examined in their mutual interaction with the development of natural history museums and the science of biology (e.g. Star 1992; Wonders 1993; Andrews 2018). Nature museums are not the only contexts in which mounted animals play a role and there is also research on taxidermy in connection with for example art (e.g. Murai 2017) and hunting (e.g. Marvin 2011). Little research has been conducted so far on today's practice of the actual craft of taxidermy. Recent exceptions are the works of cultural-historical geographer Merle Patchett (2010: esp. 92–150), who makes – with reference to Tim Ingold (2006) – an embodied account of the skilled procedure of taxidermy, or of social anthropologist Petra Tjitske Kalshoven (2018), who introduces the term *morphological approximation* to capture the interspecies affinity in taxidermy.

The specific focus in this article is that I reflect on taxidermy practices in a tense social context – the return of wolves to Switzerland – and, following a multispecies approach, I ask about wolfish agency within the sociomaterial networks of wolf taxidermy that the returning predators open up.

Animal Agency

Is it not cynic or euphemistic to ask about the "active, world-producing" (Fudge 2017: 260) role of animals in a field as unquestionably human-dominated as taxidermy, where the animal seems to "become […] little more than a human-sculpted object in which the animal's glass eye merely reflects our own projections" (Daston & Mitman 2005: 5)? This is a legitimate question. Sociologist Markus Kurth (2016), who works on animals breaking out of slaughterhouses, discusses this problematic as well. According to him, even though stories about animals breaking out never question the slaughterhouse in the way of an ultimatum and are "not to be read as success stories, but as practices being based on the slaughterhouse routine"[1] (Kurth 2016: 197–198), he thinks it crucial to include them. These stories are traces of "what is intended to be suppressed [in the slaughter process]: the manifestation of a resistant agency" (Kurth 2016: 195). Asking about animal agency, even in very human-dominated processes, is, for Kurth and many others, a matter of not leaving the stories to the "human triumphalists" (Tsing 2012: 141), that

is, "not reducing the presence of nonhuman animals in human societies and stories to victimization narratives, but bringing out their active, co-constitutive role" (Ohrem 2016: 70). In doing so, constant weighing up needs to be undertaken, as the editors of the (German) anthology *Das Handeln der Tiere* (Animal Agency) underline: "the danger to overestimate animal possibilities is always virulently present" (Kurth, Dornenzweig & Wirth 2016: 34). Nevertheless, they claim "to counter the under-emphasis of animal agency and to discover in defiance of unequal power and force conditions resisting animal subjectivities" (Kurth, Dornenzweig & Wirth 2016: 35). What these scholars postulate – and what I try to fulfil in my article – is to not exclude animal agency from the start but to have a close and open look for its traces even in extremely human-dominated settings without unilaterally overrating the animals' possibilities and without losing sight of the power relations determining those settings.

The controversy on animal agency in settings with fundamentally unequal power relations is also set out around Haraway's "animals as workers in labs" (2008: 71). Sven Wirth (2016) demonstrates that this debate is, to a large extent, rooted in different conceptions of agency and different positionings towards the subject–object dualism of Haraway and her critics. The critics start from a classic, subject-concentrated model of agency, whereas Haraway situates agency in a distributive way within networks in which "neither humans nor nonhuman animals are unambiguously only subjects or only objects" (Wirth 2016: 121). Thus, in Haraway's understanding, rats do not influence laboratory experiments by somehow acting intentionally out of a subject position. Their agentic capacity "is rather a result of a network of actants, in which so-called laboratory animals and the laboratory conditions, the human experimenters and the materiality of the equipment and substances used play a role" (Wirth 2016: 123). One must never lose sight of the fact that the agency of the animals is clearly constricted by the asymmetrical power relations of the laboratory setting: the rats "do not have the power to break out of the setting or to sabotage it" (Wirth 2016: 126).

This and other controversies make clear that it is necessary to clarify my theoretical understanding of (animal) agency in the run-up to asking about wolfish agency in taxidermy processes. Kurth, Dornenzweig and Wirth (2016: 16) explain in the introduction to *Das Handeln der Tiere* that the crucial question is – in general, not only concerning animal agency – what characterizes agency: is it intentionality, the performance and capacity of acting, or the effects of an action? In contrast to classical subject-concentrated models of agency that focus on intentionality, I understand agency "less as the capability of an individual than as a network of effects and interactions" (Kurth, Dornenzweig & Wirth 2016: 9). I use – as many others before – the concept of agency in a more open, performative, distributive and relational way. Against the backdrop of such an understanding of agency, I summon up the selective and restricted agentic capacities that wolves perform within the sociomaterial networks of taxidermy – and I will demonstrate that in concrete examples in what follows – with the term *interference*.

The foundations for such a notion of agency can be found in praxeological approaches and actor-network theory. The former situates the social in the sphere of practices and focuses on the performance and the effects of action (Reckwitz 2003). With that, praxeology tries to overcome the dichotomies of structure and agency, macro and micro, society and individual, and it also allows the introduction of new actor groups, such as animals (Steinbrecher 2014: 42; Roscher 2016: 56). From a praxeological perspective, everything that makes a difference in a situation is an integral part of it, and it becomes possible to include animals in actions. Actor-network theory supports such an understanding; Bruno Latour states, that "*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor" (2007: 71, emphasis in the original). Whereas Latour does not specifically reflect on animals, such a counterfactual reason for agency is also given regarding animals by historian David Gary Shaw (2013: 148): "an agent or actor is minimally someone without whom things, especially a particular doing, might have been significantly different". In such an under-

standing of agency, animals become more than mere (symbolic) representatives of human ideas: "They do not just stand for something […] they do something" (Daston & Mitman 2005: 12). It is crucial, however, never to lose sight of the network in which animals are embedded, otherwise one runs the risk of overestimating their possibilities. Latour points this out when stating that

> ANT [actor-network theory] is not the empty claim that objects [or animals, E.F.] do things "instead" of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for lack of a better term, we would call *non-humans*. (Latour 2007: 72, emphasis in the original)

Referring to the controversies on animal agency, for example in slaughterhouses or laboratories, outlined above, this stresses the importance of not leaving out the asymmetrical power relations in such settings, while, at the same time, having an open sensorium for all a setting's elements whose effects are to be studied and analysed in detail.

What follows is, thus, based on an understanding of agency not as something that someone possesses *per se* by means of his/her/its position as an individual, subject or human being. I agree with human geographer Jamie Lorimer who thinks of agency more "as an achievement that is temporarily gained through interaction within a heterogeneous assemblage" (2007: 913). To use the words of philosopher of science Vinciane Despret (2013: 44): "There is no agency that is not interagency." The methodological consequence of such a concept of agency is to focus on concrete situations, practices and interactions in sociomaterial networks (per)formed by heterogeneous entities. In my case, these assemblages are the taxidermy workshops of nature museums. Based on interviews with taxidermists, curators and museum directors as well as on fieldwork in a taxidermy workshop and in Swiss natural history museums, I will, thus, in what follows, look at wolf taxidermy taking place in the context of the return of wolves in Switzerland as a multispecies process, that is, to ask whether there are moments of wolfish agency in this unquestionably very human-dominated process of taxidermy.

Returning Wolves

The most obvious way in which returning wolves take part in the wolf taxidermy network is probably by their mere presence and, due to the fact that this presence has become a public issue, they are a trigger for (natural history) museums to display taxidermied wolves and, therefore, to start to manufacture new specimens. The taxidermist of the Lucerne Nature Museum exemplifies this when talking about a wolf who[2] lived in a nearby zoo and whose body – after the wolf had to be euthanized – was stored in the freezer of his workshop for quite some time:

> The cause [to bring her out of the freezer and mount her] was that the wolves were also slowly appearing here in central Switzerland. And so, they [the museum staff] thought, now we should somehow introduce something topical. We still had a display case left up there we could use for that. And so, we thought, OK, let's do it. (Interview December 5, 2016)

A similar reasoning is given by a taxidermist of the Natural History Museum of Basel. This museum opened a new permanent exhibition about the local fauna in June 2016, which also displays a wolf. The taxidermist who prepared the specimen justifies this in the interview as follows:

> It's going to be an issue again or it is once more an issue in Switzerland and that's why I just think it's nice to show it. The scholars [of the museum staff] also hold the opinion that we should display it in the exhibition. That's why we also show a bear. (Interview August 31, 2016)

Whereas in the case of Lucerne, wolves in the immediate surroundings were decisive, the taxidermist of the Natural History Museum of Basel, which is

located in a canton almost exclusively consisting of urban areas and where no wolf evidence has yet been found (KORA undated a), argues on a nationwide scale, and not only with the physical presence of wolves but especially the fact that the returning wolves are "an issue". The director of the Natural History Museum of the Grisons underlines too that in addition to their physical presence in the canton, the facts that "the wolf is a highly emotional issue" and "there are always questions from people" concerning the return of the large carnivores are also motivations to display mounted wolves in the museum (Interview September 8, 2017).

Although the museums not least fulfil their official mission to document the regional fauna by displaying wolves, this new wave of wolf taxidermy (in the museal context) cannot be explained without considering the wolves as *doing* something and, thus, being more "than only human tools or ideas" (Fudge 2017: 261). They cover long distances, they spread in search of new, unoccupied territories, which, as soon as they cross a political-administrative border, may then, in human perception, be a return of wolves to Switzerland (or any other region) and lead to wolf taxidermy in Swiss museums. Regarding intention(ality), it is certainly a human decision to mount a wolf, but this decision is taken in the context of the return of wolves and cannot be entirely explained without the wandering wolves. Displaying wolves in museums in the form of new specimens is, in the examples mentioned, bound to wolves being on-site outside in the Swiss terrain.[3] To use the counterfactual actor definition outlined in the introduction, it is exactly in this sense that the returning wolves achieve agentic capacity in these settings: without them, these wolf taxidermy processes would not be started – neither would they, of course, without the museum staff and the taxidermists. This is clearly a wolfish agency that "does not emerge out of the nonhuman animal itself, but out of the relationships and connections in which this animal is embedded" (Kurth, Dornenzweig & Wirth 2016: 14).

This potential of wolfish agency becomes very illustrative in the following example from the Natural History Museum of St. Gallen.[4] The newly (November 2016) reopened museum shows the local fauna, *inter alia*, in its central room "From Lake Constance to the Ringelspitz".[5] The centre of the room is occupied by a big plastic relief model of the canton, and various mounted animals are displayed along the walls, ordered according to different local habitats (Inspection record November 29, 2016). In 2012, the first wolf pups were born in Switzerland since the extinction of the species at the end of the nineteenth century. The territory of this first Swiss wolf pack extends over the cantons of St. Gallen and the Grisons. When I visited the new museum shortly after its opening, no wolf was to be seen in this panorama of the endemic fauna in the Natural History Museum of St. Gallen – not *yet*, as I learned some weeks later in an interview with the museum director. During the interview, the director showed me the place that has been saved especially for the wolf in this regional panorama: the wolf will one day find its place here between the ibex, mountain hare and Alpine marmot in the habitat entitled "Mountains and peaks" (figure 1). As the director explained to me, they are waiting to display here a free-living local wolf, that is, a wolf who was born and/or lived in the region in the wild, thus, a "proper" wolf of St. Gallen:

> That's arranged with the head of the [cantonal hunting] authorities. If a wolf is shot or if an animal dies who may still be mounted later, it will have its little place here. (Interview January 20, 2017)

Therefore, the museum is waiting for a wolf to perish on cantonal soil one day, whose body is in a condition that still allows taxidermy of the animal.[6] This must not be misinterpreted as the museum really waiting and actually hoping for a wolf to be killed in their canton. But the museum thinks it is realistic that it will happen sooner or later (as licences for shooting wolves can be issued for several, legally regulated reasons in Switzerland; see BAFU 2016: 11–12) and took that in consideration when planning the new exhibition.

Figure 1: Natural History Museum of St. Gallen: the place saved for a wolf of St. Gallen behind hares and Alpine marmots (January 20, 2017). (Photo: Elisa Frank)

This example is illustrative of my argument as it materializes it in a nutshell in two ways: firstly, in this St. Gall example the returning wolves play a role not only in the decision-making process to manufacture a new wolf specimen by their mere presence, but they even deliver the raw material for this taxidermy. The second materialization is the one square metre kept free for a "St. Gall" wolf, for which the wolves returned to the canton of St. Gallen are just as responsible as the museum staff.

Preying Wolves

In 2016, the Museum of Nature in Olten (canton of Solothurn) showed a temporary exhibition entitled "Living with Big Predators" that was produced by the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE)[7] and translated and completed with some Swiss additions by the Natural History Museum Bern and KORA.[8] The Museum of Nature in Olten took care of the *mise-en-scène* on-site when it took over the exhibition, displaying it during several months. Specimens of an adult and a young brown bear, a lynx and a wolverine in habitat displays and a scene with wolves and a red deer were installed. Whereas the bears, the wolverine and the lynx specimens were borrowed from other museums or taxidermists, the director of the museum ordered the taxidermy of two wolves and a red deer for the museum's internal collection on the occasion of this temporary exhibition. That he decided to order only the wolves and the red deer has to do with the use he sees for them in the new museum in planning, where he intends to also integrate this wolf and red deer scene in the permanent exhibition. It is supposed to document

the (medium-term expected) return of both species to the region:

> When you look at the return of these top predators, then the return of the wolf is surely an issue that is going to be of relevance here [in the surroundings of Olten]. And that's why I didn't want to make a bear installation, because bears won't be returning to our region either today or tomorrow. But wolves will. And the red deer is an issue here too. They are pressing from the southwest. […] Yes, they come, they too are on their return here. […] That's why it came to this installation of wolf and red deer. That is also the two forms, the predator and the prey, typical. (Interview October 14, 2016)

As I have showed in the previous chapter, when following a praxeological conception of agency in sociomaterial networks, the returning wolves take part in launching such a wolf taxidermy process by their recent presence in Switzerland. In what follows, I focus, however, on another way in which the returned wolves become a difference-making element in this Olten example of taxidermy. Their preying behaviour is politicized by their return to Switzerland, consequently, taxidermists and museum officials have to negotiate it when deciding about the exact pose of the animals to be prepared and the staging of the finished mounts.

My first contact with the taxidermied wolves of Olten was that of a normal visitor to the temporary exhibition. The wolves' room was located at the end of the first room of the exhibition, next to a staircase, hidden behind a black curtain with an A4-sheet of paper pinned on it that read: "To the wolves":

> What is hidden behind this curtain, I ask myself, while pushing it aside curiously without hesitating. I enter a relatively small square room (ca. 13 m^2). It's quite dark in here; there is only one source of light in the upper left-hand corner to illuminate four panels in the entrance area informing the visitor about wolves in Switzerland, the wolf of Hägendorf,[9] the preying behaviour of wolves and some kind of profile poster of the species. In the opposite corner to the spotlight, to my right, I spot an installation with two wolves and a red deer in the dark, behind a knee-high cordon [figure 2]. The red deer stands in the middle, his head and antlers bowed to the ground. He is beset on both sides by a wolf. The wolf on the right (from my point of view) is in a position that reminds me of a barking dog. Its mouth is slightly open. The other wolf, on the left, is running, has its mouth open and shows its teeth. "Wow, these are vicious wolves", I think to myself, almost pleased to finally see some mounted wolves who look different than all the others I have encountered until now. The scene is situated in a forest: foliage, branches and a tree stump serve as *faux terrain*, the walls in the background are covered by a photograph showing a forest in black and white, apparently taken at dawn or in the night. It's only now that I realize that the whole scene is situated in the night. Therefore, the curtain. About every two minutes, the howling of wolves comes from some hidden loudspeakers. (Inspection record May 8, 2016)

In the interview, the taxidermist told me how he started to inform himself about the preying behaviour of wolves after having received the task of realizing a hunting scene with two wolves and a red deer:

> So, I had a look at some videos showing how the wolf hunts. Actually, it is a perfidious hunter. Is not like a cat, who simply creeps up, grabs and kills, as fast as possible. The wolf just bites it [the prey] in the bottom and then it waits until it gets weak and then it bites into its leg at the front and … it [the wolf] is not the one who kills the victim as fast as possible. But it tries to … actually it [the wolf] begins eating it [the prey] while it's still alive, until it is dead. And that is the mean thing about the wolf which I don't really like [he smiles quietly]. And that's why … I didn't want to … I couldn't show that in taxidermy; that's why in Olten I then showed the situation that the red deer is facing the wolf, has his antlers bowed and tries to defend himself. And one of them [the

Figure 2: Museum of Nature, Olten: two wolves hunting a red deer (May 8, 2016). (Photo: Elisa Frank)

> wolves] distracts him and the other one tries to bite him somewhere in the back. […] so that the red deer tries to defend himself, and there is a wolf in the front who threatens him a little bit and then the other one who tries to bite out a piece to start weakening him. (Interview September 1, 2017)

As the taxidermist explains, after having acquired detailed knowledge about the preying of wolves, he thought precisely about the specific moment of this wolfish red deer hunt he wanted to realize:

> So, a hunting scene, that's clear, those are the orders; I cannot say I'm doing a sleeping one when he [the museum director] wants a hunting scene. And he wanted that red deer. And so, I just said, I want to bring in a bit of another tension. And I don't want to have any blood. Simply because people don't like to see that. Some do, but there's no need. And I want to have the beginning of a hunting scene, so to speak. The moment at which the red deer can no longer escape but confronts the wolf. (Interview September 1, 2017)

Therefore, the taxidermist decided to choose the particular moment in the preying event when the red deer and wolves confront each other and the roles of hunter and hunted are not yet that obvious.

Representing preying wolves was, apparently, a quite delicate challenge for the taxidermist and led to some extra work for him to be able to decide on the exact poses in which he was going to mount the animals. Preying is a wolfish behaviour that the taxidermist, as he describes, had to tackle carefully when carrying out this order. The way wolves hunt is, he classifies, "perfidious" and he thinks that museum visitors do not want to see that too clearly. Similarly, it seems that he personally did not want to give priority to this perfidiousness. In what way he establishes a connection here between his taxidermy work and the ongoing debates in the course of the wolves' return to Switzerland does not become completely clear in this quote. It is conceivable though that he addresses these debates here (maybe also unconsciously) and in his taxidermy work as it is almost impossible to evade them. With the wolves' return to Switzerland, one could say, everything

wolfish stopped being innocent as it became potentially political. This also and especially applies to the preying that wolves do, as I will show based on statements by the Olten museum director, who connects his wolf and red deer installation more explicitly to the wolves' return to Switzerland.

When I met the museum director for an interview some weeks after my visit to the exhibition, I told him about my first thoughts when encountering the wolves behind the black curtain: "Wow, these are vicious wolves." He reacted as follows:

> In the past, predators were often mounted in hunting scenes. […] Later, this was banned from museums. They started to display animals in neutral positions, as one can perhaps see them also […] in a species field guide. But I already displayed predators in action some time ago in other exhibitions too. […] for one exhibition, I once ordered a fox in the position of mousing. (Interview October 14, 2016)

The reason the director ordered that fox is that he wants taxidermied animals to tell something about the everyday life of their species, as he continued to explain:

> I mean, displaying a fox simply standing on its four legs while it's looking, that's nice, but actually it's also interesting when what you display tells a story and says something about the behaviour of the animal. It was very well received [by the public] […] And I think this is a good thing. If you just don't do it in a cheap way, in a sensation-seeking way. Because, I mean, attacking, following the prey, making a kill, eating the prey, these are absolutely normal things that are part of what a predator does. And it is my firm opinion that it must be possible to show that. Next to both installations [in the exhibition], the lynx and the wolf, we also have a graphic showing, for example, how these animals carry out killing bites. I don't see any reason for not displaying that. What I would fight against, what I would not support and what I would never do is to use such a scene as cheap showmanship and, thus, to actually also misuse these animals. I would not approve of that. […] it would be a simple thing to display these wolves, this scene, more dramatically. But that is exactly what wasn't wanted. (Interview October 14, 2016)

The museum director here explains why these specimens are not vicious wolves in his eyes, since they depict, as he says, a biological "normality": wolves are predators and they hunt, for example, red deer. To him, this ecosystemic logic of predator and prey is an important principle of nature and its functioning that should be imparted to museum visitors. However, he is aware of the challenge to depict preying simply as preying, that is, as a normal, natural process. Representations of preying animals may quickly become "sensational", he warns. He tries to overcome this balancing act by paying attention to an appropriate contextualization – a panel explaining the preying behaviour of wolves has been placed next to the taxidermy installation – and a careful *mise-en-scène* of the mounted animals. Concretely, the latter has been a challenge in lighting, since the scene takes place in the night:

> When you work with lights and then you see the flashing teeth and so on, then it appears completely different. And that is really, that is reduced a little bit [by the scanty lighting now installed]. By all means – also in the other installations – I wanted to avoid anything sensational. Because, of course, our task as the Museum of Nature of the city of Olten is to impart the subject objectively, so that someone who's maybe more critical towards these animals than others and vice versa can identify [with the exhibition] […] We want to present facts. We want to demonstrate the biological backgrounds. What one knows from wildlife biology and what one knows about the problems arising from humans and big predators living together […] that these things are actually presented objectively, not on an emotional level, and yes, that's why I really paid a lot of attention so that it wouldn't become somehow sensational. (Interview October 14, 2016)

What becomes clear in this statement is that the museum director understands his act of staging the wolf (and red deer) specimens as something that he does within a heated debate that began with the return of wolves to Switzerland. Showing this awareness is certainly partially owing to the museum director using the occasion of the interview to position himself and the institution he represents (Meyer 2014): his detailed remarks about the negotiating work he had to do stress his own and the museum's doing and saying as neutral, objective and committed to biological facts. Objectivity and neutrality are valuable currencies within a context such as the return of wolves, in which – in order to delegitimize the others' positions – reproaches are made by all sides about other actors not sticking to facts but spreading demonizing, respectively romanticizing wolf images, rumours and conspiracy theories (see e.g. Skogen, Krange & Figari 2017: 138–158 for Norway and France).

Regarding the focus on wolfish agency in taxidermy, however, these statements are of interest in another (but not contradictory) way. The preying of wolves is one of the biggest issues within the heated debate that began with the return of wolves to Switzerland. Wolves may kill livestock, especially sheep, which results in damage to the respective farmers on not only an economic but also emotional level. The killing of sheep by wolves on Swiss Alps is further discussed as a threat to Alpine sheep-farming that may lead to bush encroachment and – when continuing this line of doomsday scenario – the depopulation of Alpine regions. However, wolves preying on game animals, such as roe and red deer, are also an issue. In some forestry circles, wolves are welcomed as essential "helping hands" in forest regeneration, whereas certain hunters see them as rivals. In addition, the returning wolves preying on other animals always meet with the deposits of a specific cultural memory (Assmann 2011). Although this cultural memory of wolves is multilayered and comes with several ambivalences, the vicious wolf forms an eminent part of it (Marvin 2012; Ahne 2016).

With the return of the species, the preying that wolves do became a politicized issue in Switzerland. The returning wolves sharpened the preying of wolves and corresponding representations. Anyone who takes part in displaying preying wolves (in my example, in a taxidermied form) acts in a charged sphere he or she has to tackle. That is how the wolves within the network in which they are embedded by their return to Switzerland contribute to the politicization of the work of museum staff and taxidermists. This entails a lot of negotiation work for the museum staff and the taxidermist, as we have seen in the quotes above – especially against the backdrop of the self-understanding of museum actors as neutral and objective. Their detailed weighing up cannot be fully explained without considering the wolves themselves as real animals who are (back) doing something in Switzerland: hunting. If free-living wolves were not physically on-site preying on game animals and livestock, the question of how exactly to mount wolves and stage them would not be as political as it is. It is in this sense that the returning wolves as preying animals – together with museums and their self-understandings, museum staff and their aims, taxidermists and their work ethics, museum visitors and their wolf images arising from a cultural memory – perform agency in taxidermy networks like the one in the Olten example, thus, taking part in generating the exact poses and in staging the taxidermied animals.

Elusive Wolves

In the summer of 2016, the wolf M68[10] killed more than 50 sheep in the canton of Uri in central Switzerland, thereby exceeding the legally fixed maximum of kills by a single wolf. Therefore, the cantonal government issued a shooting licence. On July 28, 2016 the wolf was shot by the local hunting authorities (Kanton Uri 2016).

As the official *Plan Wolf Switzerland* (BAFU 2016) stipulates, the dead animal was brought to the Centre for Fish and Wildlife Health at the University of Bern for a pathological examination. In addition, genetic samples were sent to a laboratory at the University of Lausanne, which is mandated by the federal authorities to carry out DNA analysis on large carnivores. The laboratory identified the killed

wolf as the individual M68. The cantonal government decided to mount the wolf and awarded the corresponding contract to a freelance taxidermist in the region. The finished taxidermied wolf was shown publicly in temporary exhibitions at the Historic Museum of Uri (summer of 2017 and 2018) and in the Lucerne Nature Museum (2018/19).

In the frame of my research project I follow the "afterlife" (Alberti 2011a) of this particular wolf and was, thus, able to accompany the taxidermy process in 2017. I visited the taxidermist in charge several times: when he skinned the animal, while he was working on the internal body-mould and finally when the tanned skin was put on the artificial body and stitched together. At the very beginning of my first visit, when the task was to skin the wolf, there was a moment that pointed to what I will discuss below as elusive wolves:

> As the taxidermist and I enter the workshop, the wolf's body is hanging on a meat hook in one corner of the room, ready to be skinned. The wolf's abdomen is open, and the inner organs have been removed. […] The taxidermist puts on his apron while explaining to me the plan he made for this first working step. He needs to adapt to what is already given, he tells me: the cut in the abdomen, made in the university animal clinic to remove the inner organs for pathological examinations. He then shows me the skin in detail and explains that if he was free to choose where to cut for skinning the animal, he would not have slit the skin in the abdomen, but on the back where the fur is the densest, because the wolf was shot in summer and is, thus, rather short-haired, which makes it difficult to hide the stitching. At least, the abdominal wall is an area the beholder doesn't look at directly, so that it should be possible to keep the stitching more or less hidden, the taxidermist acknowledges. (Participant observation record April 19, 2017)

The cut in the abdomen that the wolf's body had when it arrived in the taxidermist's workshop is due to an important way of dealing with the wolves returning to Switzerland, especially from official actors, in the so-called wolf-monitoring. The few traces that the wolves leave behind – such as faeces, urine, hair, saliva, foot tracks, the bodies of hunted and killed sheep and game animals or dead wolf bodies – are meticulously gathered, documented and analysed. People locate, survey, quantify and register the wolves and their residues, thereby, producing as much information as possible about the wolves' whereabouts, movements, numbers, conditions and behaviours:

> Summoned up, these cultural techniques [of monitoring wolves] form the arsenal of a policy consisting of making an elusive wilderness visible and, thereby, graspable. This is – exactly in the sense of Foucault's "positive technologies of power" – about getting a grip on the uncontrollable by accumulating data and information, about governing wolves by producing knowledge. (Frank, Heinzer & Tschofen 2019: 24–25; exemplified for the case of Norway by Stokland 2015)

This human registering of wolves is – especially in the light of their long absence and only recent return – an answer to new and unknown animals that evade humans' sight and grasp by their way of living (Alpines Museum der Schweiz & Universität Zürich – ISEK 2017: 40–41; Frank & Heinzer 2019: 102–105). The human reaction of registering, however, must not be misunderstood as a linear causality: wolves do not force humans in a deterministic way to sort them out by registering. Nevertheless, registering is not explainable without considering the mobility and evading of these newly arrived elusive wild animals.

The registering of wolves goes beyond death, as it became clear in the story of M68's afterlife outlined above. Even after their death, free-living Swiss wolves continue to be measured, examined and documented; the knowledge production goes on. The practice of registering may at some point – even though in the case of M68 only after his death – also be inscribed directly into the wolf's body: M68's abdomen was cut in order to remove the inner organs for a pathological examination.

Another taxidermist reported on a similar case concerning another returned big predator and another practice of registering. A collared lynx is displayed in the Natural History Museum of St. Gallen. The animal (named Ayla) was part of a translocation project (KORA undated c) during her lifetime and, therefore, marked with a radio collar. After her death (due to car traffic in the St. Gall Rhine Valley) (KORA 2004), Ayla was mounted in the Natural History Museum of St. Gallen. The lynx was taxidermied with the radio collar for a simple reason, the taxidermist told me: "You have to add it because the hair is lacking there. If you don't attach the collar, then it will have a bald neck [he laughs]" (Interview September 1, 2017). However, that this decision is not compelling becomes clear when comparing it to the story of a wolf named MT6 by scientists and Kurti by his fans that European ethnologist Irina Arnold (forthcoming) lays out. This wolf came to be known in Lower Saxony (Germany) for getting too close to humans. Lacking the shyness expected of him, he was finally legally shot in April 2016. During his lifetime, authorities tried to get him under control, *inter alia*, with the help of a radio collar:

> The signs of this non-human technique network are still visible on the exhibit: "The visible abrasions on the neck are marks from the radio-collar". By tracking his movements, researchers hoped to get more insights into his life and, thus, more safety in telling how to react to him. (Arnold forthcoming)

Human practices, such as registering, may form animals' bodies in a very material way (Kosek 2010) – sometimes already while still alive, as in the cases of the radio collar, sometimes only after death, as in the case of the cut abdomen. Taxidermists then have to deal with these materialized traces of registering in the raw material they get. Can these traces be made to disappear by skilled taxidermy, or will they be visible in the finished specimen? Regarding the cut abdomen of M68, the taxidermist in charge tried to make this trace vanish in spite of the short-haired coat. For MT6/Kurti I have no further data, but one can imagine that the taxidermist probably tried to make the bald neck vanish by draping the few hairs remaining accordingly – similar to the efforts to hide M68's abdominal cut. The case of the lynx Ayla, however, seems to be ambiguous. On the one hand, the radio collar is a very visible and obvious sign of the human practice of registering large carnivores. On the other hand, the collar is exactly what makes the material inscription of this registering in the lynx' body disappear: the bald neck. In this respect, the collared lynx is similarly a form of making the human influence on the animal's body disappear, that is, the very direct influence which materialized in the animal's coat, by opting to display a more superficial influence. The radio collar seems to be only attached to the animal's body, but not changing it in its own bodily materiality, a change that the radio collar in fact caused but is simultaneously able to cover up.

In the words of Haraway, the aim of multispecies research is to uncover "a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down" (Haraway 2008: 42). This is exactly what I have tried to do in this section to address the question of wolfish agency in taxidermy processes. It is the mobile, elusive animals that humans – in the course of the wolves' return and the problems concerning coexistence with large carnivores in a cultural landscape – try to make governable by registering that perform agentic capacity in these examples of wolf and lynx taxidermy. The evading of the animals, though, must not be misinterpreted as intentional. This is possible when following a concept of agency, as stated in the beginning, that does not suspect motives behind each movement: "[I]n the praxeological paradigm [it is enough] to note that these practices [here: being mobile and elusive and, thus, seldom available to humans' sight and grasp] exist" (Kurth 2016: 198). The agentic capacity of wolves in taxidermy processes lies, in these examples, in the material impact that the registering of these (when still alive) elusive animals may at some point have on the animal bodies that taxidermists have to deal with later.

Material Wolves

Another way in which wolves become agentic in taxidermy processes is by their mere material dimensions. During my first visit to the taxidermist when he was skinning M68, the internal wolf body-sculpture, which he had bought from a taxidermy trader, was already standing in a corner of the workshop. The taxidermist explained to me that the adjusting of this inner body sculpture is an important step on the way to the finished mount:

> On the one hand, he needs to shape the mould into the exact pose he wants the mounted wolf to have. […] On the other hand, he needs to adjust the mould's dimensions to the exact measurements of M68's "original" body. The mould he bought is too big for M68's skin. This is not surprising, I think to myself, as I have learned that the so-called Italian wolves who moved to the Swiss Alps are noticeably smaller than the wolves of other European populations [cf. Ahne 2016: 116–117] who most probably served as examples for this standardized wolf mould. While telling me about this adjusting, the taxidermist – mischievously grinning – adds that he might make the wolf's chest a bit broader than it was originally as M68 was quite thin. (Participant observation record April 19, 2017)

Later this day, I help the taxidermist to take different measurements of M68's body: neck girth, abdominal girth, the distance between snout and eyes and from eye to eye as well as the length of the wolf (from the snout over the head all the way down the back to the tailhead).

I visit the taxidermist a second time while he is working on the internal body sculpture. As I arrive, the wolf mould stands on the workbench, put on the root onto which the finished specimen will later be fixed. The cuts, screws, lines drawn and measurements written on the mould indicate that the taxidermist has already worked on it. He first explains to me everything he has already done to the form. The task of this afternoon is to do a first skin-fitting, that is, to put M68's tanned skin onto the mould to see if and where the mould needs further adjustment. In addition to some minor adjustments on the legs, it is – as was to be expected – primarily the abdominal girth, on which the taxidermist has not yet worked, which remains the task for this afternoon:

> The girth of the mould measures 80 cm at the thickest section of the abdomen at the beginning of the afternoon. M68's original abdomen sets 70 cm as the objective. Always with an eye for its form, the taxidermist then works on the abdomen with a rasp for about two or three hours [figure 3]. It is obviously an exhausting, arduous task. His colleague [who also came to see him working on the wolf today] helps him by holding the mould tightly. Every now and then, the taxi-

Figure 3: Adjusting the abdominal girth (June 13, 2017). (Photo: Elisa Frank)

> dermist measures the girth in order to check how many centimetres are left to rasp. At the end of the working day, it stands at 71.5 cm. The taxidermist puts the mould back onto the root platform and marks with some lines on the mould how he will remove the last 1.5 cm and bring the abdomen to its final form the next day. (Participant observation record June 13, 2017)

The wolfish agency in this example can be grasped by reverting to New Materialism approaches that radicalize the understanding of agency as introduced in the beginning (for an overview on New Materialism, see Kurth, Dornenzweig & Wirth 2016: 27–31). New Materialism "start[s] out from materialities as active entities" (Kurth, Dornenzweig & Wirth 2016: 27). A prominent representative of this approach is political theorist Jane Bennett. In her concept of "vibrant matter", Bennett tries "to theorize a vitality intrinsic to materiality as such, and to detach materiality from the figures of passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused substance. This vibrant matter is *not* the raw material for the creative activity of humans or God" (2010: xiii, emphasis in the original). Crucial to Bennett's concept is that she always thinks of materialities in "an agentic assemblage", that is, in an "interactive interference of many bodies and forces" (Bennett 2010: 21). Such an approach can be applied fruitfully to the example outlined above, as M68's body in its material dimensions causes – in interaction with the sizes, that is, the materiality, of the mould – some exhausting work for the taxidermist. It is out of his materiality that M68 performs, beyond his death, agentic capacity in this taxidermy network in which several materialities interact and interfere.

The wolfish agency in this example – although the fact that the wolf is dead and is, in this sense, a dead wolfish agency, must not be forgotten – is of a resisting quality: M68's body, in its mere materiality, is individual, does not fit to the standardized wolf mould and, thereby, challenges the planned, normal taxidermy process, inserting an array of arduous extra work between skinning the animal and putting on and stitching together the tanned skin on the internal body-sculpture. This is not a resistance directed against norms in an intentional sense, it is more about "something that bodies do", as Kurth explains:

> Already their material quality gives the animals a resistance that refuses complete mechanization; […]. This bodily-understood resistance hardly ever leads to an escape from the institutions of power in practice, however, it disturbs the idea of an absolute [human] power of disposal over animals. (Kurth 2016: 186)

M68 remains dead, but his body, in its materiality, co-shapes the taxidermy process.

Bennett writes that it is not the aim of a materiality-focused approach to agency in networks to equalize all the entities the network consists of: "This understanding of agency does not deny the existence of that thrust called intentionality, but it does see it as less definitive of outcomes" (Bennett 2010: 32). When analysing the anecdote with the broad chest, this means that the taxidermist – acting intentionally and out of a power-position – would, of course, be capable of making M68's chest broader than it was. Nevertheless, the taxidermist's power in doing so is not endless: it is limited by M68's material agency. The taxidermist cannot make the specimen's chest as broad and corpulent as he likes, because the skin may be stretched but not arbitrarily long.

Conclusion: Moments of Interference

The work humans carry out in the empirical examples of wolf taxidermy outlined is not fully explainable without considering the returning wolves doing something: covering long distances to colonize new territories (in Switzerland) and, while doing so, preying on game animals and livestock, living a mobile life mostly evading humans' sight and being of a certain material size. Thereby, not mistakenly to be taken as intentions, the animals enter into a sort of dialogue with humans' taxidermy work and start performing agency in wolf taxidermy networks that may have an influence on prepared specimens in a highly material way: on the creation itself of specimens, on the material dimensions and exact poses of

the mounts, on their staging, and on concrete steps in the taxidermy procedure, such as the cutting of the skin, the draping of hair or the forming of the mould. As demonstrated, this animal agency in wolf taxidermy is tied, to a large degree, also to the tense social context that the wolves' return opens up and in which the wolf taxidermy I examined takes place. This also means that the wolfish agency in taxidermy that I observed cannot be transferred one-to-one to other animals causing less furore.

I propose the term *interference* in order to capture the specific, selective and clearly restricted agentic capacities that the returning wolves perform – partly posthumously – within the sociomaterial networks of taxidermy dominantly carried out and controlled by humans. This wolfish agency is neither intentional nor is it capable of breaking out of the asymmetrical power relations in taxidermy. However, taxidermists and museum staff need to tackle the returning wolves and their doing; wolfish doing interrupts, changes, influences and sometimes complicates the continuation of humans' taxidermy work or is a crucial trigger to get it going in the first place. Wolfish agency does not question the taxidermy process itself, but it influences its progress. Apart from the fourth example in which the wolf performs his – material – agency, even though dead but present in the taxidermy workshop itself, the wolfish agency to *interfere* in taxidermy processes is characterized by the wolves performing as sort of offstage actors. The living wolves are not literally physically present in the taxidermy workshop, but being back in Switzerland, preying, evading humans' sight and grasp they, nonetheless, influence taxidermy processes going on in Swiss museums' workshops in a physical way.

Using the term *interference*, I try to address the demand of Lorimer to differentiate "the vast diversity of agency potentials performed by different organisms" (2007: 927). This differentiation of animal agency within specific networks can best be done in empirical case studies (cf. the appeal of Steinbrecher 2014: 35). For that, animals must be conceived as, in principle, "creative agents" (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010: 546) from the beginning in order to read the material "against the grain" to be able to filter out the agency of animals between the lines (Steinbrecher 2014: 32; Fudge 2017). A performative, relational and praxeological understanding of agency as outlined at the beginning and then followed in this article, allows one to do so without levelling off the very different sorts of agency (as, for example, the one characterized by intentionality) that the various elements perform within a network. However, animal agency should not be found because one is searching for it. But without considering it to be possible, one will certainly fail to notice it. Careful analysis of the empirical data is the best assistance one can get in this balancing act of understanding agency in its interlocking heterogeneity.

Notes

1 All the quotations in this paper (those of my interviewees, of my participant observation and inspection records and cited articles and literature) that are not in English in the original have been translated by me. I thank all my field partners for letting me participate in their thoughts and practices. Thanks to Michaela Fenske, Sophie Elpers, Bernhard Tschofen, the editors of *Ethnologia Europaea*, two anonymous reviewers and especially Nikolaus Heinzer for helpful comments on the text, and to Philip Saunders for the proofreading.

2 I use gendered pronouns in cases where I know the sex of the individual animal as it was mentioned by my field partners. In all other cases, I use the impersonal pronoun "it" – being aware of its problematic aspect of reducing the animal to a passive, mechanical status. Always choosing the relative pronoun "who" (instead of "that") is a way not to increase this further (on this difficulty, see Fudge 2017: 268–269).

3 As these mounted wolves – even if their raw material comes from a zoo – not only tell something about the biological animal *wolf*, but also something about the history of this species in Switzerland, they are additionally historical objects and cultural records. This is even increased in cases where the raw material for taxidermy comes from wolves who lived in the wild in Switzerland, as in the St. Gallen example I outline in the next paragraph. I discuss these aspects in greater detail in another paper (Frank forthcoming).

4 St. Gallen is a city in the east of Switzerland, but it is also the name of a canton, thus, St. Gallen also stands

for the region surrounding the city of St. Gallen. The museum is in the city.

5 The Ringelspitz (3,247 m) is the highest summit in the canton of St. Gallen.

6 Some months later, the taxidermist of the museum told me that perhaps temporarily they are now going to display a taxidermied zoo wolf on this square metre to bridge the time gap as he just came to finish one (Interview September 1, 2017).

7 The LCIE is "a group of experts who give their time freely to help conserve large carnivores in Europe" (LCIE undated).

8 KORA is the German acronym of an in-state foundation for carnivore ecology and wildlife management that is mandated by the Federal Office of Environment for monitoring and managing the large carnivores protected by Swiss federal law, see KORA (undated b).

9 Hägendorf is a village near Olten where in 1990 a wolf of unknown origin was legally shot after having killed more than 30 sheep within two weeks.

10 M68 is the 68th male wolf identified in Switzerland by DNA analysis since the return of the species.

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