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common sense and good practice can often be brushed aside in the rush to secure financially attractive contract work. Hopefully, the results of this discussion exercise may prove thought provoking to those responsible for the care and maintenance of other museum reference collections.

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How do you Value Specimens?

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This article talks about the way we value specimens. I see science as our “legitimate” valuation of specimens, the way we describe officially their value to our funding bodies. Specimens are scientific documents linked to a specialist theory, Taxonomy. My premise is that there is more to specimens than science, there are other ways of relating to specimens. I see a problem in that specimens are no longer seen as the central interpretative tool for exhibitions. In the Predators exhibition at the Natural History Museum (NHM) the designers have placed animatronic models at the centre of the exhibition rather than specimens. The exhibition is good and there are some very interesting specimens on display but they exist as examples rather than the focus.

For my MA in Museum Studies entitled; A neorenaissance episteme for the natural history specimen: Breaking the fixity of “legitimate” valuation, I interviewed staff at the Natural History Museum. I asked them how they valued specimens, for their subjective opinion, their personal feelings. I found the most spontaneous responses from

people when they described behind the scenes tours.

“I love the specimens but that’s me, I love working here, I think others wouldn’t give a monkey’s [sic]... I’m curious,... they’re beautiful, even the ugly ones,... amazing we’ve got them... I suppose maybe average people who came into the Museum... might think ‘that’s a dodo’ (meaning that it is nothing)... a sterile animal... just a scientific object... I don’t, I see them as totally amazing, that you can look at them in complete detail... I love to show them to people” (NS, administrators, NHM).

The above is a quote from someone who works in museums but not with specimens. I think that it is revealing that the word “just” is used to describe a scientific object, it suggests that there is more. I suggest that there are clues to how we value specimens in the relationship between behind the scenes tours and exhibitions. We need to give the audience more points of access into specimens, encouraging a social, an aesthetic and an emotional response, incorporating “alternative” value systems that seem so present in behind the scenes tours, and whilst doing so legitimise these alternative value systems.

Social values are becoming more appreciated and legitimised particularly with respect to social history. Exhibitions such as the Voyages of Discovery at the NHM are an example of this, where specimens can be put on display for being themselves, significant as historic objects. Yet the social also includes the personal or sentimental attachment to specimens. Do you know anyone who doesn’t have a favourite specimen? Guy the gorilla is a brilliant example of how relationships can exist between people and scientific documents. Guy was a notorious character at London Zoo, smoking people’s cigarettes and eating their ice creams until 1978 when he died. He was transferred to the NHM but although the NHM waited until 1982 before trying to display him, there was public uproar due to people’s feelings for Guy and he was put away out of sight. I occasionally come

across him in the NHM store at Wandsworth; he is an imposing figure when you're alone in semidarkness.

Specimens seem to be unable to attain the individual value that is attributable to art objects, unlike an 'art object' specimens remain a 'sample' or 'example'. Scientists appreciate specimens for the beauty of their form and function related to their developmental evolution, but they argue that this beauty isn't **aesthetic**. Yet artists like Damien Hirst challenge this relationship. This is not the first time art has shown us different ways of looking at things, African paintings on shields and ceramics were considered primitive by ethnographic establishment thinking, but when Pablo Picasso used these media as a source for his Primitivist period, he destabilised the legitimate viewpoint. Rather than evidence of a primitive society, African painting became creative, it became a communication

between people, and became art. The more you look at specimens the more you see the "unnatural" representation of nature. What you see is the person who created the object - the taxidermists have added something of themselves. Specimens are evidence of a society, and they are a communication of our relationship with nature.

Science comes out of the revulsion from what was seen as the chaotic thinking of the Renaissance. At that time, early protomuseums existed in the form of Cabinets of Curiosity, where the emotive was as important as objectivity to an observer's examination of the universe, but secular authority came to pin this examination down to an objective basis. This objectivity has made the observer unaware of the unusual and macabre nature of the specimen. We take beautiful living creatures and turn them into something that invariably looks macabre by adding preservative and storing them in a museum. Yet this quality of museums' has drawn people who are repelled and yet fascinated by specimens, by the atmosphere, by the aura of death. Modern museums brighten up the atmosphere with modern displays, but by removing the macabre image

we are stripping the material of some of its quality. As an alternative we create plastic and palatable exhibitions, with make up, glass eyes and benevolent expressions.

Science is a palatable 'mask' for the 'face of nature' that literally hides the subjective context of our relationship with specimens. Can museums utilise alternative values without negating science? Science already lends legitimisation to the BBC's programme 'Walking with Beasts', which mixes science fiction and science fact. Museums already paint specimens and construct false animatronic models that tantalise the observer with visions of living motion. I am not suggesting that museums should invite the audience to view horrors but allowing the audience to relate to specimens in freer way might make them more alive for them.

Leaching and Degradation of Lipids in Zoological Fluid-preserved Collections.

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Most, if not all, of us have to maintain fluid-preserved collections of natural sciences material. There are many problems associated with maintenance of such collections and where the problem of lipid leaching occurs, mammals, including Damien Hurst's lamb, invariably head the list. Those that come from polar regions of the world, cetaceans especially, are among the worst offenders and during the early stages of fluid preservation these should be stored in an area where they can be observed by passing members of staff.

The preparation of specimens for freeze-drying requires defatting either through solution in acetone - in which case all traces need to be washed out following treatment or the solvent action of the acetone will damage the freeze drier unless you happen to have an in-line charcoal filter. Alternatively, the fat