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The horror of natural history collections

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I must have been seven, or perhaps younger, when my mother and her sister took me with a cousin of mine to a zoo in Poznan for the first time. The zoo was located in the centre of the city, with the animals being crowded within a small area. The visit to the zoo was an unforgettable experience for me. I could look from up close at the animals the images of which I had admired in books and on television. I decided to become a naturalist; that moment of happiness when meeting the animals was etched so strongly in my mind that even today, when I enter the animal prison with horror, it weakens and masks the grim reality of the zoo. I had very different impressions after visiting natural history museums. Usually, I would pass them by and if I decided to visit them after all, I went through some rooms nearly running with my eyes shut. I experienced the full force of the horror of a natural history museum in 2008, when before visiting the Natural History Museum of the University of Wrocław with students, I found myself in its back rooms. As I walked to a meeting with a researcher employed by that institution, I had to walk along a corridor the walls of which were lined with stuffed animals, very tattered and dusty, as well as dozens, hundreds of jars with various creatures preserved in various solutions. What reigned in that respectable institution, a research unit investigating the variety of the forms of life, was death. The museum once again proved to be a tomb.

It would be interesting to know whether those who gathered specimens for the collections – and they were often collectors and naturalists – "no longer hear[d] the cry of animals and no longer [saw] the blood that [flowed]" and saw "only [their] idea and [...] organisms concealing problems which they [intended] to solve"?[1]

[1] C. Bernard, *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, Paris 1926, vol. 2, p. 103, translated by Henry Copley Green, Transaction Publishers, 1999, after B. Klug, "Can We See a Moral

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Inflicting death and suffering on animals is the foundation of fauna collections. This means that building but also watching them pose questions to us concerning the ethical dimension of collecting; this also raises the moral question concerning the legitimacy of killing living creatures with scientific and educational purposes in mind. A question arises whether collectors-explorers-naturalists ever asked themselves about it and whether we, watching impressive natural history museums today, "can see a moral question about animals"[2]. It is worth beginning any reflections on the ethical dimension of collecting and watching natural history collections by presenting at least an outline of the history of this type of collecting.

A short history of natural history collections

Zygmunt Waźbiński begins his extremely interesting book *Ut ars natura, ut natura ars*, devoted to the impact of the interest in nature, discovered in the 15th century, on art, by referring to a fragment from Christopher Columbus' journal of 21 October 1492. The discoverer of America wrote in it about the Ysabela Island:

> Throughout the island all is green and the herbage like April in Andalusia. The songs of birds were so pleasant that it seemed as if a man could never wish to leave this place. The flocks of parrots concealed the sun; and the birds were so numerous and of so many different kinds that it was wonderful. There are trees of a thousand sort and all have their several fruit, and of a wonderfully delicious odour. I feel the most unhappy man in the world not to know them, for I am well assured that they are all valuable; but I have preserved specimens of them and of the plants[3].

According to Waźbiński, this text was an inspiration for 16th and 17th century naturalists, and Columbus collecting specimens of the fauna became a "role model for modern explorers"[4].

Columbus inspired the Bolognese naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi to set out on a journey to America, and when this plan did not come off, Aldrovandi began to study nature on the Apennine Peninsula. "Thus", writes Waźbiński, "began a new chapter in the history of Western civilisation, a supplementing of what the ancients knew. People did not realise yet at the time that this process would never

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Question About Animals" [in:] *Animals on the Agenda*, ed. A. Linzey, D. Yamamoto, University of Illinois Press 1998.

[2] I was inspired to raise these issues by a very interesting article by Brian Klug the title of which features the question quoted above. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jacek Małczyński, Rafał Nahirny and Dorota Wolska for their valuable comments that have influenced the final version of the present article.

[3] Quoted after: Z. Waźbiński, Ut Ars Natura, Ut Natura Ars. *Studium z problematyki Medycejskiego kolekcjonerstwa drugiej polowy XVI wieku*, Toruń 2000, p. 5.

[4] Ibidem, p. 9.

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end. This was the beginning of what Giuseppe Olmi calls a universal inventory taking of the world"[5].

This inventory taking of the world, guided by divergent visions of nature, would manifest itself over the following centuries also in numerous collections differing in their contents and premises. There emerged herbaria, botanical gardens and zoos, geological and mineralogical collections, and natural history museums. Scholars were embarking on special expeditions to expand the knowledge of the world and its biological diversity; there emerged a market for natural exhibits and new professions associated with it; collectors began to compete against each other, both individually and internationally. This was motivated not only by cognitive but also aesthetic considerations, by a desire to distinguish oneself, by prestige, educational aspects of such collections and their attractiveness for tourists.

According to some accounts, the Library of Alexandria housed collections of minerals and natural specimens preserved in honey. Biological specimens were also to be found in collections of apothecaries and doctors, who were interested in them obviously for professional reasons. This type of interest in collections of plants, stones, minerals, shells and living organisms with time began to give way to an ordering and descriptive approach. In the late 17th century, collections of natural specimens became part, as Pomian would say, "of natural history"[6].

But before this happened, in the 16th century natural specimens were collected not only because of their healing properties, but also because of undisciplined, encyclopaedic human curiosity. The second half of the 16th century was a heyday of natural history collections[7]. "Theatres of nature"[8] (e.g. Aldrovandi's) were used by scholars as well as artists, tourists and all kinds of rich *diletanti*. The collections included fragments of various animals and birds, fruits, shells, dried fish and crocodiles. The value of a collection depended on the novelty, rarity, peculiarity and distant origin of its specimens. What diverged from the norm was particularly valuable. It was from the second half of the 16th century that cabinets of curiosities, which also contained biological exhibits, began to spring up across Europe. Abandoning the interest in what was interesting, peculiar in favour of the ordinary, regular signified a different attitude to studying nature[9]. Eventually – also owing to the classification system introduced by Carl Linnaeus in 1735 – natural collections were arranged in a completely different manner[10]. Changes

[5] Ibidem.

[6] K. Pomian, *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise: XVIe–XVIIIe siècle*, Polish translation by A. Pieńkos, Warsaw 1996, p. 130.

[7] See Z. Waźbiński, op. cit., p. 190.

[8] This is how Aldrovandi called his cabinet of natural exhibits (see ibidem, p. 194).

[9] See K. Pomian, op. cit.

[10] For more on 17th century natural history collections, see *The Origins of Museums. The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. O. Impey, A. MacGregor, Oxford-New York 1985.

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in attitudes to nature are clearly visible in 18th century collections, the number of which increased considerably at the time. It was then that "Nature became [...] an international topic", and the collecting of its specimens – a noble form of entertainment. Natural history, according to Pomian, became "virtually political: it should contribute to an improvement in the living conditions and to fighting prejudice. It should play an economic and educational role"[11]. An important object of collectors' interest at the time was the fauna and flora of the neighbouring areas, and not only exotic specimens. Classification systems developed by Joseph Pitton de Tournefort and Linnaeus began to be used to introduce order into botanical collections and then the world of the fauna. Collecting became methodical; it showed nature functioning in accordance with simple and common rules "without any spontaneity and inconsistency, subjected to discipline and reason"[12].

The 19th century is sometimes described as the "golden age of natural history collections"[13]. It is also a time of rivalry, as it were, among those compiling various collections that were to represent the fauna and flora of the whole world as fully as possible. Linnaeus' classification system became commonly accepted; the purpose of scholars studying nature was to describe species and classify them. The number of known species of plants and animals was growing rapidly. According to Piotr Daszkiewicz, the author of an extremely interesting study of 19th century collectors-naturalists, in the early 19th century scholars knew about 20,000 species of plants, towards the end of the century – over 200,000. It should be added that building up fauna collections was often difficult because of the impossibility of storing the acquired specimens. It was not until the 18th century that Jean-Babtiste Bécoeur invented a special substance which made it possible to preserve specimens and which was commonly used in the 19th century. The interest in natural history collections is associated with both treating collections as scientific aids, with the search for "useful" species, and with the fascination with science, knowledge of natural history. Such collections, as Daszkiewicz points out, begin to be increasingly important in education and tourism. Presentation of collections to the general public gives rise to the practice of preparing specimens for the needs of science and exhibitions[14]. 19th century collectors seek to make their collections complete within a given taxonomic group or regional fauna or flora. There even emerges

> a tendency to amass a large number of specimens of the same species, in order to take into account sex and age differences. Collectors also seek to acquire specimens from the entire area in which a given species is present. American museums from New York and Washington are cited as role models with their hundreds of specimens of one species. In the case of species with some subspecies, this number begins to exceed thousands of specimens[15].

[11] K. Pomian, op. cit., p. 268.

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 287.

[13] See P. Daszkiewicz, *W cieniu Maison Verreaux. Paryż polskich przyrodników-kolekcjonerów*, Warsaw 1997, p. 9.

[14] Ibidem, pp. 13–14.

[15] Ibidem, p. 14.

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Collections are compiled by public institutions – museums and private collectors – amateurs and professionals. In addition, the number of natural history museums is on the increase; they are established also in the provinces, not only because of the great interest in natural sciences, but also a decrease in the price of specimens, huge amounts of which appear on the European and American market.

19th century focus on collecting complete series of specimens of a given species and not individual specimens, and rivalry, as it were, among collectors wanting to have the finest collections contributed to a mass killing of animals. In order to realise the scale of the collecting endeavour, it is worth quoting some figures concerning the number of specimens kept in Polish museums and the Natural History Museum in London. In 1984 Polish natural history collections were estimated at ten million animal specimens and samples (the number must be higher today), while London's Natural History Museum alone has over seventy million specimens in total, including five million animal specimens[16].

Collecting of biological specimens changed in the 20th century. Its beginning was marked by a diminished interest in natural history collections and a decreased in the available resources that could be spent on such collections; "naturalists-explorers" were replaced by specialised biologists[17]. They focus their interest on invertebrates, which, as Daszkiewicz notes, cannot "provoke similar emotions among the general public that large animals from distant continents once did"[18]. In addition, the "naturalist-trader" group disappears almost completely[19].

According to Daszkiewicz, after a period of financial crisis as well as crisis of identity of natural history collections we are dealing with a renaissance of this type of collecting[20]. More and more people stress the scientific, educational and material value of the collections, their social significance, their pedagogical role; they recognise their documentary function – the fact that they are a source of information about the past and extinct species, a resource for biogeographic studies[21].

Collecting the fauna and flora is a practice that is still undertaken, though the expansion of museum collections is very limited and takes into account relevant ethical aspects[22].

[16] See D. Iwan, "Rola muzeów przyrodniczych w badaniach bioróżnorodności", *Wszechświat* 2007, no. 4–6, p. 202, http://www.gbif.pl/materials/wszechswiat/Wszechswiat2007_7-9_Iwan.pdf (access: 9 February 2012).

[17] See P. Daszkiewicz, op. cit., pp. 14–15.

[18] Ibidem, p. 15.

[19] Ibidem.

[20] Ibidem.

[21] Ibidem, p. 16.

[22] These issues are raised in, for example, the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, legal regulations dealing with protection of animals or the website of one of the largest natural history museums in the world, the above mentioned Natural History Museum in London (http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Codes/poland.pdf, access: 9 February 2012); see Act of 21 August 1997 on the protection of animals in Poland, art. 22; http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/insite/collecting-society/B41.html (access: 9 February 2012).

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The river of silent fish

Like other forms of human activity, collecting reveals our entanglement in the world of values and poses very specific ethical challenges. Some insight into the experiences and moral dilemmas that may have affected collectors-explorers going on journeys to distant countries to bring specimens for museum collections as well as their own collections can be obtained from books by Arkady Fiedler, an author of travelogues, who was once very popular in Poland.

In his autobiography, *Wiek męski – wiek zwycięski*, Fiedler recalls his first dream trip to Brazil in 1928, during which, encouraged by his zoologist friends, he collected fauna specimens for the natural history museum in Poznań[23]. In his opinion, collecting made the trip special: "Such collecting activity, such an approach to the matter, gave my journey a specific objective: I would not be going to Paraná as an adventurer or a tourist, but as someone with a specific, clear benefit in mind"[24]. As he prepares for the journey, Fiedler learns how to dissect mammals, birds and reptiles, "how to handle insects – I had known that since boyhood"[25]. Antoni Wiśniewski, a preparator and later founder of the Natural History Museum in Puszczykowo, became his travelling companion. "The trip to Paraná," he will write, "fulfilled the greatest hopes any collector might have had"[26]. Fiedler brings back 1150 birds, 100 mammals, 45 reptiles and amphibians, 4000 butterflies and 2000 beetles, about 30 live mammals and birds for the Poznań zoo, a live *Tupinambis teguixin* lizard for the University of Poznań as well as over 200 live orchids for the Poznań palm house. He sums up his account of the trip in his biography in the following manner:

> The trip to southern Brazil was full of strong impressions and adventures. We were intoxicated by the richness of nature, just like I had dreamed in my youth. The reality did not disappoint us. We were amazed anew almost every step of the way. But was it possible not to be amazed, when from the body of a shot and quartered jararaca there suddenly crawled out live, small vipers, children of their killed mother and miniature plagiarists of the ancient Hydra, lively and already angry, wanting to immediately bite with their small venomous fangs?... Oh, how I wished that my father had still been alive and that we could have experienced this tropical forest together![27]

When we read this account, it might seem to us that killing animals and inflicting suffering on them was not a problem for the author. And yet in many books by Fiedler we can find moving descriptions of "fulfilling the noble task" which

[23] "The conversation immediately moved to Chrostowski and Doctor Jaczewski, and Professor Niezabitowski wasted no time at all. He urged me to follow my two predecessors and collect there, in the jungle, specimens of the Brazilian fauna for some Polish museum" (A. Fiedler, *Wiek męski — zwycięski*, Poznań 1983, p. 45). Fiedler suggested that he would bring his collection to Poznań.

[24] Ibidem.

[25] Ibidem, p. 51.

[26] Ibidem, caption under a photograph.

[27] Ibidem, p. 59.

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makes it impossible to forget that the animal is not just a collector's item and that service to science does not create a sufficient distance to silence the conscience.

Fiedler begins his book *Zwierzęta lasu dziewiczego* (*Animals of the Primeval Forest*), a collection of stories of encounters with animals, with a description of the work in Paraná, on the Ivai River. The account is terrifying. The Brazilian forest is a kingdom of death and cruel nature.

> And so, coping excellently with a strange forest, with animals and humans, we multiplied our possessions and the pile of soldered cans was getting higher and higher. It seemed that nothing could push us off from this straight path to a clear destination, and that, having begun this trip with a firm resolution, we would finish it just as victoriously. Yet, it was by no means easy. Killing one-hundred Brazilian birds was a mere trifle. Acquiring the five-hundredth bird in the eighth week was a deserved reward for one's steadfast efforts. The one-thousandth bird, though shot out of necessity for scientific purposes, became a problem of conscience, heart and nerves. Something began to malfunction inside oneself. At the same time, after coming into closer contact with the primeval forest, we came to the conclusion that the grotesque lines and brilliant colours were just as tiring as a nightmare, that the luxuriant life of nature, knowing no respite, breathed as if it were in delirium, that the entire exotic forest was a horrible cauldron of cruelty. It devoured itself, constantly, with terrifying passion. There came a moment when deep down my soul there emerged a slight feeling of doubt and loneliness. I wanted to quench it, but to no avail. This hot land lacked food for the heart, which had nothing to lean on. A simple thing: for far too long we did nothing except poisoning our collections with arsenic and potassium cyanide, and putting them into cold cans; far too often we looked at the animals through the bead of the deadly gun[28].

Fiedler writes about a narrowing of his view of animals – he is interested only in specimens to be added to the collection; he laughs at the suggestion of a Brazilian *kaboklo* to purchase a live coati from him. The collector is interested only in dead animals, specimens for museums, his reply to the seller's arguments that he will be able to enjoy the animal, look at it, tame it or simply like it is: "gibberish". He eventually buys the coati and begins a new form of collecting: in addition to dead specimens, he collects live animals, which save the collectors from madness in a way.

Killing on a mass scale, taking part in a chain of death and cruelty, members of the expedition establish personal relations with animals. Yet this more humane attitude to them has its darker side too – although animals are not regarded as potential specimens anymore, although the explorers do not want to kill them, and even save them from death, they still remain trophies, which will eventually be brought to Poland. This is how Fiedler writes about his menagerie:

> It did not interfere with our ordinary work, on the contrary, it introduced a pleasant diversion. Most importantly, we were now able to love something and we really loved these good, innocent creatures like children. This was an incredible love – for it inflicted great harm, deprived them of their freedom, often caused death. The animals did not take revenge for their anguish; after a dozen or so days in captivity, they became trusting and showed us genuine friendship like that

[28] A. Fiedler, *Zwierzęta lasu dziewiczego*, Poznań 1981, pp. 8–9.

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> showed by children. They brought bright, joyful moods full of warmth. [...] And here, among those Brazilian animals of the forest, I discovered that each of those creatures, once it had shed its innate fear and wild nature, transformed itself into a perfect friend of unshaken faithfulness. When its heart had been won, its faithfulness had no parallel in the human world. It was without reservation, nearly absolute. One could trust it with one's eyes closed. This truth, discovered on the green banks of the Ivai, really enriched my life. I felt stronger, better, happier[29].

This friendship between humans and animals is strange, as is the author's transformation, for he does not immediately cease to hunt animals, though sometimes he does act against the rules of rapid and consistent pursuit of his objective.

When describing animals, Fiedler anthropomorphises them, finds human qualities in them. Like people, they resist their supervisors and fight for their freedom:

"The animals we captured would usually bang around in their cages for two-three days before they accepted the first morsel of food from the human hand"[30]. Their look is a strong moral challenge that cannot be ignored[31]. One of the protagonists of Fiedler's book quoted here is a lizard, which Fiedler's eventually sets free:

> Its look began to haunt me. Among the agitated nature, inflamed and hysterical as it were, as if running somewhere headlong, only they, the lizard's eyes, were frighteningly calm, were hard and stern. Around there raged unbridled passions, here another passion looked from the immobile eyes – quiet but heartbreaking passion of great reproach. It was the relentlessness of a stubborn, unrestrained complaint. The eyes seemed to be constantly accusing the man: "You are hurting me!". They had the power of a spell. Their expression was full of severity, which pierced you like a dagger. It was a fight in which the captive animal managed to shift the whole weight of hostile tension to the human soul and burden the human conscience. One day I could stand the lizard's look no more and I set it free. But it did not move, it did not want to flee. It still looked at me sternly and gave me a piercing look. It seemed almost as if it still wanted to hold me captive by some invisible tether. It went away only after an hour passed. It walked slowly, step by step, with some lizardly dignity. [...] its telling look stayed in my mind for a long time. For ever. I could not be free from its complaint. I could not forget the spell. For many years to come I could still see in that lizard's eyes a reproach, as it were, of all nature, a reproach for human violence. But perhaps what I saw in its eyes was just a reflection of my own conscience? But isn't it all the same in fact?[32]

The author of *Ryby śpiewają w Ukajali* (*The River of Singing Fish*) will talk many times about his experiences associated with killing animals and insects. Killing will haunt him in his dreams:

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[29] Ibidem, pp. 10–11.

[30] Ibidem, p. 22.

[31] For more on the look of the animal and its relation to humans, see A. Orzechowska-Barcz, "Człowiek i zwierzę — problem granicy w Dziennikach Gombrowicza", *Artemix. Sztuka. Feminizm. Kultura Wizualna* 13 March 2010, http://www.obieg.pl/artmix/16507 (access: 9 February 2012); J. Derrida, "The animal that therefore I am (More to Follow)", translated by D. Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28, 2002, no. 2; J. Berger, "Why Look at Animals", Polish translation by S. Sikora, *Konteksty* 1997, issue 3–4.

[32] A. Fiedler, *Zwierzęta lasu*…, pp. 49–50.

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Last night I had a nightmare. I dreamed about a hot forest, bursting with some gruesome orgy, full of sensuality and at the same time dissonances of hate. Then my face was licked and bitten by a mad lizard, which could not be killed. It was not easy to fulfil the collector's duties here[33];

it will cause suffering (about the first killed hummingbird):

This was the beginning of my hunt for the smallest of animals. My heart was breaking when I had to shoot them, but this was what duty demanded: after all, I was to bring specimens of the local fauna to a museum in Poland. The duty was unpleasant, repugnant even, but – as I thought at the time – unavoidable[34].

Fiedler felt compelled to deny that he liked to kill[35], though not only Dolores, his companion in the Amazon jungle, but also readers of his books, who know that even before his expeditions Fiedler had gone hunting and collected butterflies, may have doubts as to whether his denials are true.

As I have already mentioned, at some point Fiedler was unable to continue to look at animals as specimens for a collection or as research material. He looked at animals as animals and this is why it was impossible for him not to feel pangs of conscience, not to ask questions about the moral dimension of his actions[36]. Fiedler, we could say, paraphrasing Brian Klug, ceased to be merely a collector[37]. He was a human being first and the arguments which he himself invoked – that he was killing for a just cause – did not silence his conscience. They enabled him to see the bond between himself – a living creature – and another creature. Despite that Fiedler finds it difficult to stop killing. He will confess it, he will recall moments of an irresistible desire to collect more specimens, he will also try to understand in his own way the reasons behind this urge.

In his, as he put it, "the most personal and most emotional" book, *Motyle mojego życia* (*Butterflies of My Life*), he describes a very important day that was a "test of character". As a thirteen-year-old boy he decided to earn some money by selling butterflies to a man who traded in these insects. Under the influence of his parents and a friend, the entomologist Karol Pluciński, he did not kill the butterflies in the end but set them free. Fiedler ended this story with a telling confession:

From my youth I had considered myself to be a friend of the animals, but, ironically, I did not cease killing them for many years to come. It is not easy to be rid of the remains of the savage man and the legacy of distant generations. So I killed as a hunter, proper hunter, and I killed as "a collector of fauna specimens for scientific purposes". Despite the fact that I did not hide my

[33] A. Fiedler, *Ryby śpiewają w Ukajali*, Warsaw 1976, p. 221.

[34] Ibidem, p. 162.

[35] Ibidem, p. 164. He will explain to Dolores that he kills because he is collecting material for a museum.

[36] See B. Klug, op. cit., p. 85.

[37] Klug: "[...] experts are never *merely* experts: they are, in the first place, human beings. Calling a question moral is to call attention to this fact: to the fact that we are human beings first, whatever the particular angle of our professional interest" (ibidem, p. 212)

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> pangs of conscience and then would often openly admit to a sense of guilt on many a page of my books – I still killed. I killed and how much time it took to escape it!? But I did escape[38].

In this book, too, we will find reminiscences of his inner struggle as he tried to resist the temptation to kill butterflies during a trip to Brazil, the purpose of which was not to collect, but to write a book:

> In my cabin, I had tools for catching and poisoning butterflies in my suitcase, but something put me off. This was not why I had come to Brazil. [...] But with this magnificent charm of dozens of enchanting animals merely a metre away, with this colourful wealth so close at hand, it was difficult to maintain spiritual calm. Involuntarily, I felt a long-time hunter or, in fact, killer awaken in me. The temptation, the desire to grab these entomological marvels was simply irresistible. By 10pm on that New Year's Eve, there were probably several dozen hawk moths lounging on our ship, and around midnight there appeared numerous groups of owlet moths; among them was that huge moth, Thysania agrippina. My mind was in turmoil. I was consumed by great urgency! There were shivers up and down my spine: should I kill all these magnificent creatures, or, on the contrary, should I let the butterflies go and remain a man with a clear conscience? I wasn't sure of anything! I was plagued by scruples, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker. I was constantly in a quandary: to kill the butterflies or not to kill them![39]

The compulsion to kill is not or at least has not always been for Fiedler a dictate of science. Rather it is his latent primeval instincts, his desire to possess that stimulate the hunting urge. Together with the duty to science, they replace the dictates of conscience[40].

Fiedler's account of the experience of gathering specimens for natural history collections has not only a cognitive value. Its strength lies in, among others, the fact that it is difficult to pass museum cabinets indifferently after reading it. In the context of the present reflections, it provokes the question concerning all of us visiting natural history museums. What happens to our conscience and can analogous dilemmas concern us too?

Probably many of us visiting museums would never want to posses or build up a collection of animal specimens on our own. We come to a museum to look at animals, though we should probably close our eyes and try to hear their cry. Are we not becoming guilty watching specimens prepared especially for us? Perhaps our situation is similar to that of scholars studying the world of nature, we too want to know, we want to learn something. I assume that a situation in which we visit the museum purely to learn is rare[41]. If so, does the scientific discourse,

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[38] A. Fiedler, *Motyle mego życia. O wielkiej miłości i wielu miłostkach*, Poznań 1983, p. 19.

[39] Ibidem, p. 48.

[40] I refer here once again to Klug, op. cit., p. 210.

[41] In this context it is worth quoting the opinion of Dariusz Iwan, an entomologist and employee of the Zoology Museum and Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, who comments in the following manner on Wieńczysław Łoś's argument from *Przewodnik dla urządzających zbiory botaniczne i entomologiczne* in favour of creating collections according to which we have to see animals, plants or minerals in order to become familiar with them: "It is worth realising that the cheapest and best organised facilities to preserve living organisms on Earth are natural ecosystems

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which justified the creation of natural history collections and which comments on museum exhibitions, allow us to feel comfortable in museums?[42] The problem is very well presented by Jerzy Świecimski, who when examining ethical issues related to the presentation, reconstruction and preservation of museum exhibits, includes the following remark in a footnote to his article:

> Ethical issues appear especially in the context of zoological museums, though there they acquire an additional dimension. Zoological collections are usually compiled by means of inflicting death on living creatures treated as "animal research material". We could say that these collections are mass graves, but of animals, not of people. The dramatic aspect of these collections, forcing us to show special respect for them, still remains, however. Often it instils in us a terrible sense of guilt, which scientific objectives are unable to alleviate[43].

The horror of natural history collections, which has its source in the suffering and death of animals that are behind the collections, shakes our position of uninvolved spectators. The heartbreaking sadness, which we may feel when visiting natural history museums, may derive also from the fact that they show and confront us with a unique limitation of our relations with animals. Slain animals, transformed in the collections into objects of knowledge and spectacle, can be regarded as a testimony to an increasing distance between them and us, as well as their disappearance from our world, a phenomenon so eloquently described by John Berger[44].

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and not museums. Even if we use state-of-the-art cryopreservation (freezing) techniques, combined with a possibility of fully bringing the creatures back to life in the future" ("Rola muzeów przyrodniczych w badaniach bioróżnorodności", *Wszechświat*, no. 4–6, p. 207, http://www.gbif.pl/materials/wszechswiat/Wszechswiat2007_7-9_Iwan.pdf, (access: 9 February 2012).

[42] Although we probably must agree to the inevitability of killing, also for scientific purposes, which Donna Haraway indicated ("Instrumental Relations between Laboratory Animals and Their People", *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press 2007), yet given the functioning of museum and private collections, we should ask questions similar to those posed by that scholar: was each death of an animal necessary, was it possible to limit the killing, to reduce the suffering inflicted by us? These questions become all the more important given the fact that in the case of the type of collecting analysed here, it has not always been and today still is not always about the cognitive benefits associated with it.

[43] J. Świecimski, "Eksponat muzealny w aspekcie zagadnień ontologicznych, estetycznych i etycznych", *Opuscula Musealia* 2004, issue 13, p. 12.

[44] J. Berger, op. cit.

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