

Rituals of Dominionism in Human-Nonhuman Relations: Bullfighting to Hunting, Circuses to Petting.

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Introduction

A Social Ritual Makes the Headlines for All the Wrong Reasons

It is traditional for the British ‘royal family’ to spend their annual winter break at the Queen’s Sandringham estate in Norfolk, England. The family shoots pheasants there every year. In December 2008 the ritual created headlines all over the world, not for the killing of pheasants, for that is routine, but due to one of the royal princes being photographed possibly striking gundogs who were fighting over a shot bird. The plight of the dogs, who may have been hit with a stick, not that of the pheasants who were certainly killed by shotgun fire, filled the column inches: included in them were comments by members of the public, Buckingham Palace spokespersons, and representatives of the animal protection movement.

Social rituals play an important part in the shaping of human cultures. Rituals can have a fundamental social function in articulating, reinforcing and spreading the shared values and beliefs of societies. Rituals can create a firm sense of group identity and create social bonds. The sociological analysis of the role of social rituals ranges from the writings of ‘classical’ sociologist Emile Durkheim (1954), through Erving Goffman’s (1971) dramaturgical approach, into Marxian views on consciousness (Block 1986) and beyond. Although a Durkheimian understanding of ritual would tend to emphasize its importance in the sacred rather than the profane, others see ritual as influential in both realms. This begs the question: what can social rituals tell us about human-nonhuman relations?

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Sociologists suggest that it is useful to consider a distinction made in some studies based on the difference between ritual *behavior* and ritual *action*. However, the former is regarded as rather devoid of meaning and associated with an overly reductionist view of the instinctual behavior of nonhuman animals. In stark contrast, the latter is regarded as imbued with shared social meanings for participants. These shared meanings are culturally transmitted through custom and tradition and, therefore, Jim Mason's (2005) multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of human-nonhuman relations is helpful in terms of investigating both social ritual and important socialisation processes central to the social constructionist perspective employed in this paper. For this reason, Mason's perspective provides the core resource for the beginning of this article and acts as a commentary throughout.

As a general matter, Mason states that he is dedicated to uncovering the roots of our destruction of nature. To this end, utilizing the concept of 'rituals of dominionism,' he describes a 'bull run,' such as those that take place in Pamplona Spain and made famous by Hemingway (1995). Mason argues that rituals involved in bull running teach humanity to dominate nature. Such rituals contain a degree of instrumentality in order to produce just the sort of 'beasts' required. For example, according to Mason (2005: 242) the bulls used in this spectacle have typically been starved for days. They are therefore in a 'frenzy of hunger' before being forced onto the streets by men wielding whips, knives and clubs. The bulls are chased through the streets, with townsfolk slashing at them and attempting to club them. Fireballs may be thrown; people attack the bull's eyes and try to cut off their tails. The bulls meet their ends eventually: "Wounded and exhausted after three days

of torment, the bulls are finally killed and eaten” (ibid). Meanwhile, in another town, men fasten wax and resin balls to the horns of three bulls who are driven into the streets once the wax and resin has been lit. The bulls are nearly blinded by the dripping wax as they run through the crowd-lined streets. The bulls are pelted with stones and attacked with sharpened poles. After four hours of this, these bulls are also taken away to be slaughtered and eaten. Similar events are being repeated in towns nearby, while “in one town, a live female goat is thrown from the church bell tower. She falls to the plaza below and struggles to get up on her broken legs” (ibid). In yet another town, children are socialized into callous attitudes towards other animals as men dressed as clowns ‘entertain’ them by slowly killing some young calves. Chickens may also be hung by their feet across a street; the ‘sport’ here takes place on horseback as competitors gallop by attempting to grab the chickens by their necks.

Mason asks us to consider in what century such things took place: ‘3000 B.C.?’ ‘A.D. 500?’ 1300? In fact, these are descriptions of Spanish festivals (‘popular fiestas with acts of blood’) which occur in the present day. According to Mason, more of these festivals happen now than thirty years ago. Similar festivals take place in Brazil, celebrating Easter Week, New Year’s Day, and during weddings. The repeated nature of these events raises another sociological distinction to add to the differentiation of ritual *behavior* and ritual *action* - that of ritual *occasion*, which focuses on deliberately manufactured ceremonial aspects of social rituals. *ArcNews* (1999: 20) cites *The Times*’ report that hundreds of young Hemingway-inspired American men travel to the annual Spanish ceremonies which they apparently regard as a ‘rite of passage into manhood.’ When it

comes to explaining such festivals, Mason rejects biological or psychological theories advanced, for example, by the fox-hunting philosopher Roger Scruton.

Scruton (2005: 83) argues that hunting can reunite modern humans with the hunter-gatherers' "intense communion with nature." He states that, if we become separated from nature, we may become damaged, for example, by thinking *distorted* thoughts. It is vital, Scruton says, that humans should do the things they were built by nature to do. Mason (2005: 244) also rejects other theories based on the notion of biological determinism in explanations of human aggression - the Lorenzian version of aggression-in-our-genes. Instead, he talks about the cultural and sociological roots of male aggression in "rituals of dominionism." Such rituals, Mason holds, explaining his definition of "dominionism," should be regarded as part of the dominant agrarian Western worldview: the socially-constructed hierarchy of living beings or the "ladder of being" in which humans (*mainly male humans*) are at the top. These "acts-of-blood" rituals, incorporated in the practice and ideology of male supremacy, do for women as they do for animals, nature and everything else that is labeled within the dominant patriarchal agri-culture as '*other*'. The point of these rituals is to demonstrate and practice (usually male) power and domination: "We have built such festivals...into our culture over the centuries in much the same way that we have built religious rituals: to remind us that we are on top and in command of the world...Rituals, as anthropologists know, serve to express, remind, reaffirm, and perpetuate a society's worldview and ways of life" (Mason, 2005 p. 243).

Mason argues that in dominionist rituals, which amount to ironic displays of spectacular brutality to demonstrate and celebrate human ‘civilisation’, nonhuman animals perform two chores for human beings. The first chore consists of the material benefits gained from exploiting animals: the meat, the leather, the muscle-power and so on. The second is *symbolic* and *ideological* and part of ongoing socialization about what the terms: ‘human’, ‘animal’, ‘nature’ and ‘other’ may be taken to mean. Thus, other animals are material *and* ritual resources, the latter exists “to reaffirm the body of assumptions and myths that make up dominionism” (2005, p. 244). A quick tour of several regions of the modern world dramatically illustrates Mason’s point. Mason concentrates on the Spanish corrida and claims that once the bullfight has been stripped of the pretensions of cultural tradition and art form – notions of the ‘sacred sport, the ‘stylized ballet’, the ‘religious ceremony’ - what remains is a ritual contest demonstrating human dominance over ‘bestly nature.’ Mason contends that, in bullfighting, the deck is stacked in favor of the bullfighters to make sure the ritual comes out right in public. Bullfighting involves men first dominating, then, as the ritual comes out right, vanquishing ‘dark’ and ‘savage’ nature. Thus, the bull - however meek and mild the actual living individual may be - must categorically be seen as wild *and* dangerous: thus, all the more heroic is his beating. In contrast to such wild savagery stands the representative of human society: the matador: cool - cold even - but tough and hard and, most importantly, *fearless*.

The complete ‘macho’ man is one who greets death and pain with disdain: “His performance defines civilization as a patriarchal accomplishment - one produced by the male heroics of warriors and strong men” (Mason, 2005, p. 245). In the bullfight, this is

the setup: the human master versus animal savagery. But, precisely because it is important that the spectacle comes out right in public, little in practice appears to be left to chance. The bull himself is primed for performance; his 'savagery' is *man-u-factured*, if necessary. Until the actual fight, the bulls are often all kept together in a dark pen beneath the grandstand. Suddenly an individual animal is thrust forcibly into a bright and noisy arena. Isolated from the herd, he is blinded by sunlight, deafened by trumpets and the roar of the crowd. In this strange and frightening situation, Mason says a bull tends to "rant" about the arena in confused terror, looking every inch like a 'brave' bull, thus fulfilling all of human expectations. However, as said, the odds are stacked.

For behind every fearless matador is a whole team of other people known as his *cuadrilla*. There can be five men in this team: two *picadors* on horseback and three *banderilleros*. The latter, along with the matador, are the first to test a bull, noting his movements and his ways. Then the picadors dominate the arena to 'work' the bull, often spearing him in the neck. The loud trumpets sound again as the banderilleros reenter the scene for the second phase of the so-called fight. They jab small barbed spears (*banderillas*, hence their name) between the bull's shoulder blades. This results in the production of a properly enraged bull, however, one with painful, weakened, muscles.²

Trumpets sound again as the matador enters to tease the bull with a *muleta* - the world famous small red cloth mounted on a short stick. Skill with the muleta means bringing the bull close, dangerously close; thus, bringing all that savage nature into striking distance.

² See http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2008/07/running_with_the_bulls_in_pamp.html

Yet, despite such dangerous proximity, the matador stands firm - *proud and aloof* - in his tight-fitting suit of lights: according to Mason (2005: 246) each matador is “a picture of male condescension and narcissism.” The matador’s display is designed to be a show of pure (yet brave and risky) domination: he is there to personify humanity - or about half of it - in an act of pure dominionism. As a final touch, some matadors conclude with the *displante*. In this act, human mastery and control over nature is theatrically proclaimed, while the nonhuman’s utter degradation is emphasised and amplified: “With pure macho bravado, the matador shows contempt for beasts by stroking the bull’s horns or nose, usually with an arrogant gesture to the audience that shows his disdain and fearlessness.” (ibid) The actual kill follows in which the matador attempts to thrust his three-foot-long sword into the bull’s heart. With further gestures of arrogance, “the matador may clean his bloody sword by wiping it across the animal’s body” (Mason, 2005, pg. 247). Mason sums up the bullfight experience with these words:

“The entire corrida, then, is a ceremony for the exercise of agrarian society’s values on subduing wild, dangerous nature. It parades its fine, brave men with their horses and weapons before the entire community. It displays the fearsome, dangerous bull - the beast of nature. It enrages the bull to emphasize his wild, evil nature, which symbolizes the wildness and evil of the rest of nature. And into this arena steps the matador, the elaborately dressed, rationally controlled representative of human civilization. Coolly, fearlessly, he faces the beast (and beastly nature), subdues it, and degrades, dominates, and humiliates it in cooperation with the entire community.” (ibid)

Many of the ritual elements of the bullfight are found in the dominionistic spectacle of the North American rodeo - another social spectacle with yet more brave men and their weapons. Thus, while the rodeo first and foremost replays the cowboy’s work out on the

range, it also displays the cowboy's skills and power over other animals, and his society's values on fearlessness, violence, strength, domination, and obliviousness to pain. Mason (pp: 248-249) cites *Rodeo*, a publication of anthropologist Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, who asserts that the modern rodeo is the result of a long history of herder values and culture. Like the matador, the rodeo cowboy is often viewed as a patriarchal, macho, figure of male sexuality, self-control and bravery in the face of danger. Rodeo riders display a certain degree of stoicism as part of North American competitive and rugged individualism: these guys do not complain when things get rough. Indeed, they personify the slogan: *when the going gets tough, the tough get going*. For example, rodeo performers regularly continue to ride even with broken limbs and strapped-up chests. And, as part of the image, these guys try to look like they would out-cool Cool Hand Luke every time.³

What the rodeo is all about, however, is a socially-constructed dominionist representation of human mastery over nature in general and nonhuman animals in particular, which emphasizes the pioneer within the cowboy. As the Europeans did in Europe, the white cowboys felt they must *conquer, subdue* and *vanquish* the moral vacuum that is wild nature (Spiegel 1988: 14). On the symbolic level, the rodeo's major theme is the herder's literal conquest of nature, as men physically wrestle nonhuman animals to the ground. However, as with the case of the bullfight, the deck is loaded. For example, several rodeo performers may work together in teams; they are often on horseback, and have ropes,

³ There is one bizarre feature in some rodeo shows where cowboys sit playing a game of cards as if they were in a saloon. A charging bull is entered into the arena in which they continue to coolly play. The cowboy who is the last to lose his nerve and dive for cover wins.

whips and other weapons. Furthermore, some of the animals used in rodeos are little more than frightened babies, used for example in the spectacle of “calf-roping.” Calf-roping often results in neck and back injuries to young animals. When calf-roping was covered regularly by US cable news service ESPN, the camera would deliberately pan back to horse and rider so viewers were spared seeing the calf “hitting the end of the rope and being slammed down to the ground” (*ArcNews* 1996: 17). In addition, again just like in bullfighting, it is sometimes necessary to employ artificial means to provoke naturally docile individuals into acting like the ‘wild broncos’ the public are led to expect to see being ‘tamed’ before their very eyes.

When hunters from different countries talk about hunting, they are often describing quite separate activities. The main forms of hunting in the U.S. are what many European hunters, certainly British ones, would call “shooting.” Therefore, in North America, hunting often means tracking and shooting deer, bears, turkeys and moose with bows and rifles. According to Spiegel (1988: 57), citing information from the U.S. Committee for Humane Legislation, 81% of North American hunters target deer in what Mason (2005: 251) calls “the great seasonal ritual.” In Europe, the term ‘hunting’ is most likely used to refer to fox and deer (or stag) hunting on horseback, and perhaps boar hunting also - in mainland Europe. Therefore, hunting for Europeans tends to mean hunting with hounds (or, in the language of recent legislation in Britain, ‘with dogs’). Hunting furthermore also describes hare hunting, hare coursing, mink hunting and the minority pursuit of drag hunting in which there is no live prey. For many Europeans, shooting is regarded as an activity separate from hunting: thus, concerning British field sports supporters will talk of

“hunting and shooting,” the latter also referred to as “stalking” in Scotland. Mason (2005, pg. 250) describes (North American) hunting as “the quintessential man-beast contest”. It is the enactment of a ritual designed to clearly assert that humans have supremacy over all the other animals and, importantly, enjoy the right to kill and eat many of them. Indeed, hunting ideology is intrinsically bound up with Spinoza’s notion that civilization itself would be put at risk if it were to attempt to “act justly” towards nature, or the idea that humanity would be somehow weakened if society were to succumb to the superstitious “womanish tenderness” in the objection to killing animals (Spinoza, quoted in Thomas 1983: 298). The hunting ritual, therefore, invokes the notion of Man-the-Predator, who stands at the top of the food chain.

Marjorie Spiegel (1988) argues that the term hunting can connote often contradictory images: perhaps “a carefree day in the woods with ‘the boys’.” (pg. 55) Or perhaps it means “a show of skill”(ibid). However, hunting for her is ultimately a demonstration of absolute power over someone else: “a demonstration of the ability to *end* someone’s life” (ibid). By deliberately using the pronoun ‘someone’ to define other animals, Spiegel emphasizes that hunting transforms a life into a *thing*; it turns “a vital, living being with a past and potential future into a corpse” (p. 55). Indeed, it is noteworthy that “wild” animals become property once - but not until - they are killed (for an account of the socio-legal importance of the property status of nonhuman animals, see Francione 1995; 2008). As Bernard Rollin (1981: 77) explains, “wild” or “stray” nonhuman animals are regarded as the property of the public, or the property of individuals states in the U.S. When an individual nonhuman animal is killed, a living sentient is being transformed into

an owned *object* and *legal thing*. What hunters do, Spiegel (1988) suggests, is provide visible proof that they have the power to bring about this transformation. Hunting, therefore, is an overtly masculine⁴ demonstration that ultimate power over life and death can be exerted over someone else. All of these strands of thought about hunting are fundamental ideological constructs based around humanity's "agri-culture" (Mason 2005: 251-253).

Mason argues that the development of agriculture has led to two basic beliefs about the nonhuman world which can be described under the headings, "Necessity" and "Nature." All rituals and practices of dominionism, and perhaps especially hunting, are ideologically connected with these two interlinked concepts. Mason claims that *the hunt* is portrayed as an absolute necessity which therefore acts to eliminate questions of choice and morality. Necessity beliefs are based on notions that hunting performs the vital dual role of *people-feeder* and *nature-controller*. In this view, hunting prevents starvation and, by managing nature, it necessarily helps to keep potentially *unruly* animal populations in check. Mason asserts that agri-cultural thought means that controlling nature has become *second nature* for humans, resulting in a popular myth that the natural world - and nonhuman animal populations in particular - can become *ungovernable* to the extent that human existence may be threatened. Without the essential order imposed by human control, nonhuman numbers may 'explode', with disease and starvation - of both humans and other animals - a likely consequence. Ideologically, the hunter is seemingly constructed as humanity's 'protector' and 'hero': in this scenario, humans are pitted

⁴ Since the mid-1990s, women-only 'Bows and Does' hunting excursions have been organized in the U.S. to encourage more women to hunt. See <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/print?id=3092629&type=story>

“against teeming elements of vicious nature” and must rescue us all from “a fate worse than death” (p. 2005, 252). Western nature beliefs incorporate those basic man-the-predator and “survival of the fittest” ideas mentioned above. Hobbesian struggle and Herbert Spencer’s evolutionary hierarchy are prominent in this mode of thought in which humans are constantly described as occupying the top of a ladder of being, or simply being the “highest level” of being.

As part of his general views on the importance of the domination of nature, Spinoza declared in the seventeenth century that “man cannot survive without being a predator” (Thomas 1983: 298), while a modern deer hunter states: “I know these animals well. I have spent much time with them in seasons past. I decide on my target. I am the predator.”⁵ Such views see the living world as a competitive “meat-hungry, snarling mass of predators” in which “everybody is eating everybody” to survive in “Mother Nature’s basic life plan” (Mason 2005: 252). These views, therefore, put human beings above all and everyone else, yet abiding by a general myth of some sort of structured “grand design” in which killing is somehow essential for survival. Thus, the model of humanity-doing-what’s-natural within *red in tooth and claw* nature is a fundamental male value, says Mason. Hunting, along with other rituals of dominionism, becomes symbolically significant as a rite of passage, initiating the young into “the patriarchal model of manhood.” The powerful U.S. National Rifle Association, along with hunting clubs and magazines, suggests to parents that hunting is an extremely positive socialization tool,

⁵ <http://www.scenesofvermont.com/hunting/huntdeer/huntdeer.html>

based on encouraging virtuous notions such as being a strong and healthy “outdoorsman” and “sportsman.”

With the use of search engines and links on the internet to locate accounts and depictions of various forms of hunting by hunters themselves, several expressions of cultural values were found, most extremely similar to those conceptualized as dominionistic by Mason. Modern North American whitetail deer hunters, for example, subscribe to a specialist magazine called *Buckmasters*; its name alone being an example under Mason’s rubric of dominionist values, based on mastering parts of the nonhuman world. The main content of this magazine are hunters’ personal accounts of shooting and killing with guns and bows; technical information about hunting weapons; and advertisements for hunting gear, books, and videos such as: *Big Bucks Volume 3, The Thrill of the Hunt*, and *Big Bucks Volume 4, The Thrill of the Hunt*.⁶

When North American humans go hunting, they do not “kill,” rather they “take” and they “harvest.” Unsurprisingly, dominionist views are embedded in the normal language of hunters. For example, James Ehlers,⁷ a professional fishing and hunting guide, invokes all the manifestations of the caring but rugged patriarch in his account of killing deer. He “loves,” “cherishes” and “takes care” of the countryside and feels “connected” to the earth, often by killing its [Ehlers writes, “her”] occupants. He believes that, “a closeness to earth, the bond between true hunters and their game has existed since man has walked

⁶ <http://www.buckmasters.com/bmstore/c-20-dvds.aspx>

⁷ James Ehlers, “Hunting Deer in Vermont”:
<http://www.scenesofvermont.com/hunting/huntdeer/huntdeer.html>

the earth, and it is no less stronger today. It is truly timeless.” He delights at the “antics” of the various wild creatures he sees, including his ”ghost-like” prey, which he feels he must kill in his capacity of predator. With conservationist themes he can conceive of killing as *caring*; his heavy dominionistic responsibility “feels as real as the arrow shaft sliding back across the rest as my fingers draw back the string.” He remains motionless and unobserved, carrying out society’s sometimes distasteful (but also exciting) task of controlling the nonhuman world; taming the wild; caring while killing:

“The young buck stands before me. A mere 20 yards or so separates us. Intense excitement mixed with anxiety has been building in my heart, stomach and throat since the animal first appeared. A quiet beyond quiet rings in my ears. I let the string slip over my fingers and with it goes as much sorrow as joy.”

“Yes, I have taken its life, and for that I do feel remorse. But, as a human being there is a connection to the earth and her animals that is established only when we take responsibility for the blood ourselves and for this I am grateful.”

In just a few lines of hunter-talk many strands of Mason’s notion of dominionism are indicated. The proclamation, for example, that the role of human predator *means* something fundamentally important; sociologically, in a Durkheimian sense, the hunter’s role is seen as essentially functional, yet almost separate and apart from the *actual individual* who performs it. Furthermore, the notion of nature controlled, and absolutely requiring direct human orderly intervention is clearly identified. Also seen are ideas that paternalist humanity must sometimes (perhaps like a caring but firm father figure) be “cruel to be kind” in its objective dealings with “in-need-of-taming” nature. With an apparent painful mixture of sorrow and joy, humanity gallantly takes on board the

onerous responsibility of managing and tending - as in Bauman's gardening thesis (Bauman 1989) - the savage earth. Even when some necessary tasks are bloody and repugnant, *humanity* does not let "Mother Earth" down because "she" desperately needs his kindly and connected control. What kind of chaos would we see if "Mother Earth" were not subject to this benevolent "ordering"?

The flip side to this conceptualization appears within the notion that human beings also must have in them the strength of character to carry out those *necessary* and probably *messy* tasks which may nevertheless cause harm or suffering. Therefore, although perhaps utterly distasteful at times, "Man" must rule over nature with what Lasch (1991) has named *an easygoing oppression* because it is wholly necessary that he does. Men demonstrate their caring patriarchal control by "taking responsibility for the blood."

On an ideological level, all this can be achieved without causing *unnecessary* suffering (Radford 1999). *Yes it is true: a man's really gotta do what a man's gotta do*. According to the ecofeminist perspective of Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993), the Enlightenment thought of men of the industrialized North resulted in a *going away* from nature, seen as emancipation *from* nature. However, despite this "rupture" from the natural world, modern men return to nature in order to commodify it and in a purely consumptionist manner. Within this form of instrumentalism, they act in nature as *voyeurs* rather than actors, like visitors to cinemas or art galleries. In the case of hunting, hunters act in nature as "sportsmen" with a romanticized, nostalgic connection to what they see "as nature."

From this perspective, those who live full time in the countryside are engaged in *creating* nature as a “sports arena” or “visitor center” for urban consumers, be they the North American hunters or the members of the “field” on a British fox hunt. Naturally, the patriarch calls humanity “Man” and insists that his own caring-by-killing relationship with others has existed throughout the history of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. How much harm has been predicated on “tradition”? Mason (2005) notes that modern hunting acts as a symbolic reassurance that modern human beings are “merely” and “naturally” following the same patterns of behavior towards other animals which, they tell themselves and their children, humans have followed since “the beginning of time.”

Significantly, Mason also contends that archaeological evidence (that is, the interpretation of archaeological findings) supports the view that organized hunting was not common in humans until around 20,000 years ago, and debate continues about how important hunting (for food) has been in human history. Until this time, the vast majority of the human diet was plant-based, with the small amount of meat coming from scavenging rather than what might be called “proper hunting” (see Diamond [1991: 163-172] for an account of agriculture’s “two-edged sword” which shows the health and leisure benefits of forager lifestyles over modern sedentary agricultural ones. Apparently many theologians have held that human beings were not originally omnivorous, an argument supported by Mason (2005: 289) “Many biblical commentators maintained that it was only after the Flood that humans became meat-eaters.”

It is also perhaps significant that the lifestyle Mason and Diamond call "foraging," most others tend to call "hunter-gathering." Its ideological significance is surely further underlined, given the quantitative evidence of dietary practices, that they are *not* generally known as "gatherer-hunters." To her credit, the evolutionary anthropologist and ex-animal laboratory assistant Susan Sperling (1988) does use this term in her book *Animal Liberators*. Similarly, Erich Fromm (1963: 353) writes "For many thousands of generations man lived by food gathering and hunting." Of course, many hunting accounts are far more straightforward and less romantic than the account offered above by Ehlers. Yet, they still tend to reveal examples of dominionist thought. For example, the anonymous author of *Vermont's Annual Deer Hunt*⁸ relates how the "shoot-em-up crowd" simply desire to have themselves "a good time". As the yearly hunt gets underway, the trade in "American-made beer in throw-away cans" is brisk, while "the normally serene countryside echoes to the sound of gunfire." Sometimes, the disturbance is so great that it sounds as if "there is a small war on in 'them tha hills!'" Danger caused by stray bullets is real. Another account from the same website talks about people waiting for that "supreme moment" when prey falls within the sights of their high-powered rifles. There is talk about the power and deadliness of weapons and ammunition, and also the satisfaction of seeing a magnificent bull stagger to the ground, writhing in a moment of death.

After such brutal honesty, one author feels obliged to offer more *considered* justifications for the hunt. "It's part of life and death," he suggests. "It's sportsmanship and it's killing

⁸ http://www.huntingforbambi.com/Vermont_deer_hunting.cfm

for food which anyone who eats meat must accept,” he tries. Finally, he settles on: “Why should Vermonters have to buy their food (usually riddled with pesticide) from Florida or California when the local environment can supply something less tainted?” Interestingly, Ehlers offers a similar justification for shooting a deer: “Fast food provides no meaning in my life and I am sceptical that it does for anyone.” Someone else being “brutally frank” is Steve Timm, a contributing editor to the *Varmint Hunter Magazine*. In 1999, Timm had been assigned to visit a gun manufacturer somewhere called Nesika Bay but he’s less than pleased that writing the piece may interfere with his regular hunting routine:

“To be brutally frank, the assignment couldn’t have come at a worse time. I had just finished meeting my last deadline and I was set to kill my fall’s ration of big game. After that, my wife Karen...was scheduled for very major spinal surgery. I was going to be out of commission making meat and tending my bride for about two months... Hunting and family comes first. And that’s the way it’s supposed to be. After I killed my yearly allotment of critters and got Karen relatively stabilized, I made arrangements for the visit to Nesika Bay”.⁹

There are a number of patriarchal, dominionistic, values to note in such an account. Timm does not so much “take responsibility for the blood,” he is out there fearlessly “making meat.” Interesting phrases, “making meat” and “tending my bride,” especially perhaps in the very same sentence. Good ol’ North American family values are seemingly evident here, comfortably nestled alongside the accounts of killing sprees, with the explicit ideological suggestion that this is the way it was *intended* to be.

⁹ Steve Timm, in *The Varmint Hunter Magazine*: <http://www.varminthunter.org/articles.shtml>

According to hunter Jeff Murray,¹⁰ macho values are also commonly seen in hunting with bows as well as with guns. For example, a bow is sometimes chosen because it is large and therefore looks impressive; but often such a bow can be too large for the physical drawing strength of the person who intends to use it. Apparently, insiders in the bow-making industry call bows that are “too long” or “cranked up” beyond a shooter’s natural strength, “ego bows.” The author says he himself was initially attracted to the allure of an ego bow and began with too big a bow; “shooting 85 pounds at 29 inches; now I’m down to 75 pounds at 27 inches and have never shot better.” Clearly aware of the potential of a negative reaction to the macho-man image of bow-hunting - and yet recognizing that hunting is a way of affirming or demonstrating your “manhood,” Murray warns, “don’t let your manhood be measured by your bow’s draw weight.” However, lest we forget what the whole business of bow-hunting is about, he adds, “The fact is that today’s bows set at a modest 60 pounds are fully capable of delivering enough kinetic energy to drive an arrow through the chest of any white-tailed buck.”

Turkey hunters tend to talk about their activities in a particularly macho way, perhaps ostensibly to compensate for the type of prey they seek to kill. A turkey as prey hardly sounds the same as a “wild” and potentially “dangerous” “animal opponent” like a bear, a moose, or even a fully-grown stag. Indeed, possibly for similar reasons, the size of the North American turkey is often carefully emphasized in hunters’ photographs of themselves and “their” bird. Common iconoclastic poses tend to feature dead turkeys with their tail feathers fanned out or thrown nonchalantly over hunters’ shoulders, the

¹⁰ Jeff Murray: <http://www.bowhunting.net/07-June.html>

birds' lifeless heads hanging down limply with large wing feathers cascading below the conquerors' waists. In turkey-hunter talk, male turkeys are termed "gobblers," "tom turkeys" and "longbeards," and these individuals are the more prized prey, while the smaller females are simply called "hens" (see Van de Pitt [1998: 23-39] for a discussion of the "construction of the sexes" in ornithological literature).

With unacknowledged irony, turkey hunters such as John Trout, Jr. speak of the male turkeys being rather macho, almost arrogant; strutting around, scratching at the earth, and "parading" around to attract mates.¹¹ Male turkeys "gobble" at other birds; and they walk-the-walk, checking out the competition and the availability of females. Turkey hunters say they use their considerable knowledge of turkey behavior *against* the birds, evolving clever hunting "strategies" to "outwit" the gobblers. Hunters also often like to emphasize the necessary expertise and skill required to successfully kill wild turkeys, who seem to the hunters capable of forever keeping themselves (the little teasers) just outside "killing distance." Furthermore, dedication and perseverance are essential qualities for successful turkey killing, for any false move on a hunter's part will be inevitably seen by the birds' putative "supernatural vision." When Trout Jr. describes his own turkey hunts, he portrays a mental and physical struggle between "man" and "bird." He keenly passes on his long experience of "bumping heads" with "afternoon gobblers" and says that by following his hunting strategies you may "double your fun" in the wild turkey kill. After establishing the difficulties of battling the allegedly "supernatural" gobblers, the skills of

¹¹ See http://www.sportsmansguide.com/tip/tip_read.asp?tid=175407&sid=7 and J. Trout, Jr., "The P.M. Rendezvous," in *Beards and Spurs Turkey Hunting*, (1999): www.rack-mag.com/bsmag/articles/pmrende.htm

the dominionist hunter are amply demonstrated with accounts of the frequency of their successful kills. Thus, when a gobbler appears behind Trout Jr. the bird soon “falls victim” to the hunter’s “trusty Winchester.” When two turkeys appear out of a huge valley, he wastes no time in “taking” what he expertly identifies as the “best” bird by skilfully “calling” to a gobbler in the manner of a female turkey:

“Almost instantly, three hens and a strutting gobbler appeared on the opposite side of the field, just out of shooting range. Patiently, I raised the gun while Joe [note: two against one] took over the calling and offered the strutting bird a sweet string of clucks and purrs. The hens paid little attention, but the gobbler found the calls irresistible. Slowly he approached, and when he reached the point of no return I squeezed the trigger. The gun roared and the 4-year-old gobbler toppled.”

Another strategy of human skill over animality involves targeting the guy-without-a-gal: or the “lonesome turkey.” After all, according to Gary Sefton, cited by Trout Jr., an experienced wildlife shooter and honored as “turkey calling champion,”¹² any male turkey is more likely to respond to calls if he has “no hens alongside.” Another turkey hunting strategy involves hunters attempting to “scream like a peacock.” This practice is apparently designed to cause “shock-gobble.” It seems that there is nothing like a peacock’s call to intrigue even a weary “afternoon turkey” who is “desensitized after gobbling at crows and other turkeys all morning”: “The peacock call is like an extra stimulant that can force a turkey to talk when he has stopped answering the crows and other sounds that made him gobble earlier in the day.”

¹² http://www.nwtf.org/nwtf_newsroom/press_releases.php?id=11767

Focusing his analysis specifically on North America, Jim Mason (2005: 251) argues that hunting keeps dominionist values “alive” and “handy for all of society.” He notes that a hunter regards himself as the “leading” and also the *controlling* species on the planet, encroaching on wildlife every day, deciding where wildlife can and cannot live, and which to domesticate in order to eat. Finally, talking specifically about nonhuman animals rather than nature in general, the hunter is aware of the weighty responsibilities of having “total power over them” (hunter in *Greenwich News* [Connecticut], cited by Mason, p. 250). Mason calls hunting “human society’s oldest man-over-beast ritual,” further noting that, although only a small percentage of Americans hunt themselves, society in general tacitly supports it, especially the hunting of deer. For example, the opening day of the deer hunt is described as “a secular day of obligation.” It appears that this North American ritual has a powerful sociological influence in terms of the maintenance of a “misotherous” culture (a term coined by Mason, meaning hatred and/or contempt for animals - explored below in greater detail). For Mason, misotherous culture is transmitted and maintained through peer group and secondary socialization processes. For example, on this significant first day of hunting, “schools and factories close, restaurants offer ‘sportsman’s plates’, local media sponsor Big Buck contests, and a standard greeting is, ‘Get your deer yet?’” Mason further reports that the *New York Times* has poetically described the annual opening day deer-killing phenomenon “the song of the rifle” in the “rite of autumn” (p. 252).

Mason argues that only a few North Americans hunt. Likewise, it is also the case that only a minority of the British population take an active role in hunting (according to

Gellatley (2000: 27) there were about 350 fox hunts in Britain at the turn of the century). If one were to include in the term “hunting” fox, deer and harehunting, shooting pheasants, partridges and grouse, shooting deer, hare coursing *and* angling, the total number of participants would probably number less than four million people (for example, Gellatley (2000: 173) estimates that there are about three million British anglers: angling being by far the most popular form of bloodsport in Britain).

When thinking about British society’s general attitudes to hunting (hunting and shooting), it may be thought that the British situation differs dramatically from the North American context just outlined. British accounts and justifications for hunting by participants and supporters, however, also feature a good measure of romanticism associated with hunting rituals and practice. Scruton (2000)¹³ claims hunting connects people to the land, is a form of totemism involving the “ethics of combat” and the revival of forebears’ emotions. Meanwhile, food author and ‘celebrity’ chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall (2004) speaks of a “symbolic contract” between parties in which hunters act as conservationists, caring for the habitats of those hunted and taking responsibility for issues such as global warming. In legal terms, there does seem to be a growing divide between public and political attitudes to hunting in Britain compared to the U.S., particularly since “hunting with dogs” was made illegal in England and Wales in November 2004 (finally implemented in February 2005 - in Scotland, the ban was implemented in 2002)

¹³ And see “Roger Scruton: The Patron Saint of Lost Causes,” *Independent*, July 3rd (2005): <http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/books/features/article296509.ece>

following 700 hours of parliamentary debate (Hills 2005: 181, 198). However, the Conservative Party has pledged to repeal the ban once they regain political power.¹⁴

In Britain, particularly in England, and certainly until the end of the twentieth century, heavily ritualized hunting and shooting events were regularly spoken of in terms of social class location and affinities. Fox hunting, "the sport of kings" according to novelist Robert Smith Surtees' *Handley Cross, or Mr Jorrocks' Hunt*, has been largely regarded as a traditional "upper class" activity, somewhat distant and alien to "the masses," or at least distinct from "working class" sports such as angling and hare coursing. This image persisted despite the enthusiastic efforts in recent years of pro-hunting organizations such as the British Field Sports Society (BFSS) and the Countryside Alliance (CA) suggesting otherwise. Class divide has been seen in the practices and rituals within the hunting field, involving a strict hierarchy from "top of the heap" hunt masters, and wealthy landowners with "cut-glass accents" to the "working class laborers," the terriermen, who "dig out" foxes who find sanctuary underground. Somewhere between these categories are ordinary car or "foot followers" who compete to be the first to open farm gates and doff caps when the hunt rides pass. These cronies will also direct the huntsman if the scent has been lost.

While reputable opinion polls have consistently shown public opposition to hunting in Britain, certain hunting rituals have attracted substantial public and media attention and some tacit and overt support at least until very recently.¹⁵ For example, some fox hunting

¹⁴ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article5397912.ece>

¹⁵ www.merl.org.uk/news/images/ruralhistory_issue_3.pdf

gatherings such as “pony meets,” when most of the following riders are children are time for field members, foot followers and the general public to socialize not on horseback and, perhaps especially, the traditional Boxing Day meets have often been supported by large numbers of the general public way beyond the number who physically take part in the weekly hunts or spend the day as followers in vehicles or on foot. This has been especially true of hunts that depart from public houses on Boxing Day mornings.

Typically, the public on such occasions would attend in the late morning when hunters drink the ritual “stirrup cup” and when the hounds and horses were paraded longer than usual on village greens or in small rural town centers. Perhaps of little significance in itself, although possibly providing some indication of a latent cultural acceptance of the use of nonhuman animals, one can still find hunting scenes in public houses, be they in hunting pictures on walls or on the beer pumps at the bar. Furthermore, many British pubs are still called such names as “Horse and Hound,” or “The Sportsman,” suggesting that the assumed widespread opposition to most bloodsports does not extend to serious objections to seeing its cultural representation. It is also the case that it is only in the last decade that the media have not given generally favorable and widespread coverage to the opening day of grouse shooting (at one time typically characterized as the “glorious” 12th of August). The media tended to give particular attention to the annual competition between hotels to be the first to serve grouse on their menu. The flying by plane of freshly-killed birds (much to the disgust of culinary traditionalists who argue that “game” needs to be hung and be semi-decomposed before it is cooked) to London direct from the

grouse moors, and seeing them parachuted in by the “Red Devils” stunt team, used to be featured every year in August 12th news bulletins until the 1990s.

With regard to fishing, many more than the estimated three million British anglers appear to be catered for in media programs and popular publications about this “pastime.” Angling, even with its ritualistic displays of dead fish trophies (see virtually any cover of *Angling Times*), and possibly due to the relatively large number of active participants, has yet to be considered as controversial as other bloodsport pursuits involving hounds and still features prominently in local newspapers and other media.

The arguments - or justifications and excuses - that British hunters have rehearsed over the years are still in use, despite the hunting “bans”: all correspond well with Mason’s concept of dominionism. For example, foxhunters portray foxes as “vicious” and “ruthless” predators who prey on innocent lambs and chickens (in other words, the foxes got to the lambs and chickens before the humans did). Controlling foxes, therefore, falls within the dominionist rubric of controlling nature in general in an attempt to maintain a “proper” balance of creatures in the countryside. Therefore, British foxhunters know that when “Mother Nature” louses up and reduces the fox population to a greater degree than is “proper” and “balanced,” then “her” hunting guardians must conscientiously step in, now in the role of “fox conservationists” rather than “pest controllers,” restoring their version of “natural equilibrium” based on long-standing agri-culturalist values. British foxhunters, like North American deer hunters, argue that they have “cherished” and “respected” the nonhuman animals they prey upon, provided, for example, that fox

numbers are carefully monitored and ordered. Without the foxhunter's essential caring-through-killing, society risks becoming overrun by vermin. On the other hand, without this indispensable human "intervention", "order" and "care," we may tragically never see a fox again.

Gamekeepers employed by British shooting estates, until barred by the 1992 Animal By-Products Order, would commonly display all the animals they regard and killed as "vermin" on gibbet lines. This practice, a dominionist ritual based on the human control and manipulation of nature, involved hanging polecats, mink, blackbirds, thrushes, rabbits, hares, and others, from long strings of rope or wire set in woods and hunt coverts (small woods). The result is a line of decomposed and decomposing individuals acting as a rather grotesque scarecrow, almost as some kind of signpost or warning signal to animals not wanted for the actual practice of shooting. The Hunt Saboteurs Association once produced a post card which depicted a gamekeeper explaining to a "sab" that he shot numerous species of wild birds and other small animals such as stoats and weasels to protect his master's pheasants and partridges. So, what happens to the apparently favored pheasants and the partridges, the saboteur asks. "Ah, the master, *he* shoots them," the gamekeeper declares. Mason argues that hunting is often and falsely depicted as a "primal necessity" of early humanity. This historical exaggeration of hunting's role in providing *essential* human food, he suggests, should be seen as a powerful ideological response to modern guilt and unease about meat eating. If we actually believe the notion that humans "must" kill and eat animals, that we were indeed "meant" to eat and kill

them because humans are “natural carnivores,”¹⁶ then animal deaths can be more easily rationalized as absolutely necessary and utterly unavoidable. Furthermore, if we agree with Erasmus Darwin’s assertion (quoted in Thomas 1983: 299) that the whole of nature is “one great slaughterhouse,” then humans, like other “predators,” have *no other choice* but to take the lives of other animals in order to survive, and may as well simply get on with the regrettable, messy and often violent business.¹⁷ In an ethnographic study of slaughterhouse practices in North America, Esnitz (1997) found such sentiments when she was bluntly told by an animal slaughterer, “someone’s got to do it.”¹⁸

For Mason (2005) early forms of hunting commonly took place as a part of rituals marking a time when fundamental relationships between men and women, and men and “nature” were changing. These changes, and their repercussions, form the substantive part of Mason’s (and most ecofeminist’s) thesis about human relations with the earth - or “nature” - or everything that we now regularly regard as “other.”¹⁹ Mason suggests that

¹⁶ Thomas (1983: 292) notes however that seventeenth-century scientists such as Walter Charleton, John Ray and John Wallis “were much impressed by the suggestion that human anatomy, particularly the teeth and the intestines, showed that man had not originally been intended to be carnivorous.” Similarly, Franklin (1999: 178) notes that Rousseau used the scientific and anthropological knowledge of his day to claim that humans were not natural meat eaters but were rather a “frugivorous species.”

¹⁷ This rationalization for killing and eating animals is, historically speaking, separate from the most commonly used Old Testament mandate argument; that is, “God permits, allows or even commands it”: “BE KIND TO ANIMALS BY USING THEM AS INTENDED! Raise them as stock, love them as pets, learn from them through science, wear their skins to comfort us in the cold, eat their dead flesh to nourish the glorious bodies that God gave to us. ANIMALS ARE BEAUTIFUL, EAT THEM!” (www.mtd.com/tasty/-comments3.html). See Thomas (1983: 287-303) for other arguments such as “uneaten” animals would overrun the world or, conversely, would not exist if they were not eaten by humans.

¹⁸ When Independent TV News reporters interviewed slaughterers involved in the British foot and mouth outbreak in 2001, they were similarly met by this same “someone’s got to do it” response to the mass slaughter of sheep.

¹⁹ Engels (1972 [1884]) contains surprising echoes of this theme. Engels argues that the advent of agriculture altered social relationships in what he characterized as “primitive communism.” He argues that animal agriculture effectively created private property and patriarchal relations to the extent that women suffered “a world historic defeat.” It should be noted that Engels’ use of anthropological data has been severely criticized.

humankind took a giant leap backwards when significant sections of its early population took to sedentary agriculture rather than continuing to forage. The human worldview changed in terms of the role of human beings in nature. Instead of simply being *in* nature, a part of some notion of “the natural rhythm of things,” humankind began to attempt to control nature, to effectively “tame” and order it but Mason is also claiming that the history and modern practice of hunting are ideological and ritualistic dimensions of male-dominated, dominionistic, thought.

Mason traces the beginnings of the modern animal circus to pre-Christian times when the ancient Egyptians kept trained animals in parks. The Greeks also trained animals such as bears, lions and horses to perform tricks and dances, and were the first to develop the idea of traveling circuses. However, he suggests that the Romans, whose circus events could last a hundred days and involve the deaths of thousands of animals, were mostly responsible for putting the notion of animal circuses on the “West’s cultural map” (p. 254). Mason notes that man-beast contests in modern circuses do not have to feature violence on a spectacular level which results in animal deaths. Instead, dominionist rituals in today’s traveling menageries involve the deliberate degradation and humiliation of the nonhuman world dressed up as entertainment and education. While violent rituals involving killing animals reinforce the idea that humans are required to physically manage, conserve and control their populations, Mason suggests that rituals of humiliation “tend to reinforce myths of animal stupidity, inferiority, and the willingness to submit to human dominion.”

This perspective suggests that events such as the circus which feature performing animals contain powerful foundational messages about the “place” of human beings and other animals in the world. When children are taken to the circus, they see the hierarchical ladder of being with a human being - a *ringmaster* - in charge; when adults go to the circus, they are reminded that they stand masterfully on the top rung. Therefore, “going to the circus” may still have a strong effect on children in particular in terms of their socialization. A great many socialized lessons-of-life take place long before children are in the position to hold firm moral positions about what they are being taught and, despite the general decline in circus-going in recent years, it is still not unusual to see even babes-in-arms being taken to “the Big Top” along with their older brothers and sisters. One striking image of nonhuman animals painted by the circus - that they are playthings, clowns, objects of human whimsy - may be internalized by audience members before they can make up their minds about the rights and wrongs of the spectacle displayed before them. When the British tabloid the *Sunday People* investigated Circo Atlas, “in the popular British holiday resort of Albufeira on Portugal’s Algarve,” they found lame horses and sick lions being forced to perform (Garson 1999). Furthermore, audiences clapped and cheered despite the obvious animal suffering before them. They applauded when three Shetland ponies appeared in the circus ring with apparently frightened baboons chained to the saddles on their backs. While families, including children aged as young as two continued to clap and cheer, the baboons became more and more terrified, writes journalist Garston, eventually screaming in panic as the horses were induced to canter faster and faster.

From Mason's perspective, circus shows such as Circo Atlas are exemplars of dominionist values. They encourage people to downplay or turn a blind eye to the suffering of nonhuman animals and teach old and young alike that animals are human playthings. "Performing animals" are often forced to act out highly controlled but unnatural behaviors in the circus ring. For example, free-living elephants do not stand on their front feet and raise their back legs to perform a forward "handstand." This common circus routine places enormous stress on the skeleton of an elephant. Mason suggests that human laughter in such circumstances indicates an acceptance of the "buffoon status" of these animals. Dressed up in showy trappings, their simplicity is affirmed. Their instrumental utility has a dual socializing effect, *teaching* children and *reminding* adults that human beings are the dominant controllers of nature. Of course, part of the attraction of attending circuses, for adults as much as children, is to see at first hand the "clever tricks" of the "animal performers." When a family "goes to the circus," the experience reinforces the belief in adults that other animals are "lesser-than" humans in a moral value construction, while it introduces children to accept or affirm this dominant ideology. Circus rituals, then, in Mason's view, are like the zoos which developed in the nineteenth century, acting as reinforcement rituals of dominionist values, by recycling ideas of humanity's "mastery" and "victory" over nonhumans animals and nature in general. They act as another cornerstone of misotherous dominionism (p. 255).

Who was told what to do by the man.
Who was broken by trained personnel.
Who was fitted with collar and chain.
Dogs.
The Pink Floyd.
Animals,
Harvest, 1977.

Jasper (1999) explains that “loving” nonhuman animals fails to exclude their use and exploitation. This may indicate why many animal rights advocates resist and many despise the “animal lover” label.²⁰ The phrase “a nation of animal lovers” is best understood to mean the maintenance of a large population of select nonhuman species who are *not* intended for eating. It also means that several profitable industries have developed to service pet owners. The term may also invoke thoughts about the many modern television shows now dedicated to the care and ownership of nonhuman animals, or perhaps the dotty old man down the road seen each evening struggling with three large dogs while not preventing them from fouling the local children’s playing fields.

When Mason discusses the topic of pet animals he begins with the changing values about the nonhuman world beginning in Britain and North America in Victorian times. Writers such as Thomas (1983), Kean (1998) – and Mason (2005) himself - tend to stress that this is another period witnessing a significant shift in human attitudes to animals and nature in general. Thus, Mason claims, as “nature” was beginning to be seen as an object of beauty and serenity rather than something to be utterly feared for its “evil dangerousness,” there was an attendant moderation in dominionist thought. However,

²⁰ Groves (1995: 448) reports that an activist at a North American anti-vivisection rally declared: “I’m not an animal lover. Some animals I like, others I don’t like. To say I’m an animal lover is the same as saying I’m a nigger lover.” This consciousness is far from universal in the animal protection movement. Most animal forums feature sections where contributors can talk about and send pictures of their nonhuman “babies,” or “furbabies.” In 2003, a spokesperson for a British animal group campaigning against the “culling” of pigeons reportedly told the press that he was “a tax payer and bird lover.” If asked, some activists suggest that they merely employ terms of reference familiar to the public. Others say they are emotionally committed to relationships with nonhuman “companions,” sometimes suggesting – ironically like supporters of animal circuses and zoos - that direct contact between human beings and other animals is beneficial in engendering concern in humans for nonhuman beings. This latter point is discussed by Gold (1995: 105-107). Tom Regan has acknowledged that “the pet issue” is a problem in terms of the logic of animal rights thought since nonhumans such as many types of dogs and cats are hardly suitable candidates for liberation into the “wild.”

whatever this shift really meant socially (and contrary to the “massive transformation” in human-nonhuman relations thesis found in Franklin 1999), it did relatively little to shake the basic foundations of dominionist ideology. If anything, by way of Jasper’s (1999) perspective, the development of pet ownership provided yet another strand to the central ideas of dominionism, entirely consistent with agri-culturalist thought based on instrumentally “shaping,” “controlling” and “ordering,” most obviously seen in the manufactured lives of “pedigree” nonhuman captives. Tuan (1984: 51) notes that human desire for power over nature led to the deliberate “manufacture of curiosities.” Tuan says that Tudor horticulturalists experimented by wittily altering the shapes of plants, while Francis Bacon realized that vegetables, fruits, “beasts,” birds, and even humans can be molded in more “accurate figures” (p. 50-51). Discussing the issue of the power and grandeur of nonhuman animals and the human power *over* animals, Tuan (p. 69) relates an exchange between C.S. Lewis and his friend Evelyn Underhill and claims that the correspondence reveals that the former view of animals is, in general terms, “weak in modern men and women.” While dominant social elites through the ages have demonstrated their power through controlling “wild nature” now everyone can do it, symbolically and for real, in their own homes, especially through the keeping of “exotic” pets.²¹ Vets, of course, are cashing in on the growing trend.²² Tuan (p. 80) shows how the nineteenth century general publics of major European cities such as Paris, Berlin, London, Dublin, Bristol, Frankfurt, Antwerp and Rotterdam became fascinated in zoo visiting, not least to see the spectacle of “feeding time.” To facilitate business, zoos feed their “big cats” once a day, whereas once a week would better represent their natural experience of

²¹ <http://www.animalaid.org.uk/images/pdf/pettrade.pdf>

²² http://www.usatoday.com/life/lifestyle/2005-07-24-exotic-pets-main_x.htm

obtaining large chunks of flesh. Particular pleasure was gained, says Tuan, when zookeepers made large animals seem to “beg” for their food. From this, all the onlookers could get a feeling of superiority and power. This may now translate to the home when pet owners make another being “eat out of our hand – *that* yields a special thrill” (p. 80) just like when we see it at the zoo. More ways in which human beings can demonstrate and practice their daily “loving” control over the lives of other animals.

As Mason writes (2005: 256), following environmental studies professor Andrew Rowan, the pet is seen as *something* “safe,” “captive,” “loyal,” and “obedient.” The pet is a “subservient” symbol for the “appropriate relationship between humankind and the natural world.” Not only do human beings control virtually every aspect of the lives of the nonhuman animals they keep, including having the legal right to chop bits off them, surgically alter them for cosmetic and “show” purposes or to prevent them desiring and having sex, and dictate their movements and motions (literally, their *motions*), the pet breeding industry even attempts to dictate their exact physical shape through selective genetic breeding programs, sometimes to the clear detriment of animal welfare considerations. Thus, humans control both the *form* and *behavior* of their nonhuman property. “Showing” animals in, say, cat or dog shows, is an extraordinarily ritualistic activity with many formal rules owners must strictly adhere to. This is what the dog owners needs just to attend: tack box, brush and comb, scissors, thinning shears, chalk - block and powder - hair spray, hair dryer, leads, grooming table, noose and arm, exercise pen and mat, pen shade cover with clamps, bath items (i.e. rinseless or regular shampoo, sponges and bucket), towels, crate, crate fan, bait and/or small toy, wheels and bungee

cords, food for dog (after the show), water and water bucket, newspapers/paper towels, pooper scooper/plastic bags/trash bags, and weather gear (i.e. cool coat, rain coat). And for the “handler”: grooming smock/apron, appropriate ring clothes and shoes, bottled water, snacks/ice chest, sunscreen, portable chair, tent or large shade umbrella, emergency raincoat and change of shoes.²³

Since some humans are involved in “ordering” the physical shape of many other animals, dominionist thinking has simply put fresh emphasis on the notion that humans can and should control nature, here viewed as *improving* beings of nature as well as “ordering” them. Furthermore, if the display of exotic animals in circuses and zoos has a powerful socializing potential, so does the direct ownership of various nonhuman “companion animals.” While such contact is often assumed to be positive, pets nevertheless have the legal status of property, which owners can dispose of largely as they wish. For example, the RSPCA states that it is perfectly legal for British pet owners to kill their animal property,²⁴ *so long as they do not cause ‘unnecessary suffering’ in the process*. Therefore, “a pet is a diminished being,” figuratively and literally, says Tuan. Pets are *possessed* by property owners, *possessors* whose vanity and pleasure their existence serves. Pets may be “doted on” and given “lavish treatment” - even viewed as “valued members of a family” to be included in family rituals. However, that in itself may be seen as a display of generous privilege and wealth on the part of owners. Owners can order and control the

²³ http://dogshows.suite101.com/article.cfm/the_night_before_your_1st_dog_show

²⁴ This information came from the RSPCA, responding to an emailed question by the author. Of course, animal keepers often say they have animals “put down,” or “put them to sleep” rather than killed. What sounds more innocent - and caring - than putting someone to sleep?

lives of their playthings, acquiring and disposing of them rather like compact discs and shoes; they can *collect* them like stamps, *trading* and *swapping* them with other “collectors” if they wish. Tuan says that most dogs kept by North Americans are discarded after two years or less, “in other words...these American dogs are kept so long as they are playful, enduring, and asexual pups” (1984: 88). Humans like “furbabies” not adults. Those kept can be “doctored” of course to make them more docile and less smelly, thus “making it possible...to forget the insistent sexuality of all animals” (p. 89). And what of these rights violations sponsored by so many animal advocates?

The cruelty of castration is suggested by the tools used. A modern company offering “all your animal health care needs” lists a variety of instruments that, together with accompanying diagrams, must shock all but the most hardened reader. How is one to choose? Should one use a relatively simple castration knife (“a double-bladed scalpel and hoe in pocket guard”) or a Double Crush Whites Emasculator? A Baby Burdizzo only nine inches long or a Stainless Steel Emasculator? Farmers have to confront these instruments; pet owners in the cities, a much more genteel breed, are able to look the other way (p. 89).

Tuan observes that, on the surface, human interaction with nonhuman pets appears to be about “love,” “play” and “devotion” but these are “incorrectly perceived.” There are harsher facts to be recognized in human pet keeping.

Conclusion

Rituals of dominionism are social rituals articulating human domination of other humans, other animals, and nature as a general category. Such rituals involving and incorporating nonhuman animals are widespread and sedimented in society by centuries of philosophical and theological thought, and by routine social practices – I have said nothing in this article about the fact that most humans eat other animals and wrap up their own bodies in the skins of others. This paper has been restricted to perhaps “lesser” forms of normative rituals in certain cultures. As Mason (2005: 268) points out, there are dozens more reaffirming the inferiority of nonhuman animals and human groups. By such means we bring meaning to our lives as we generationally transmit values through human societies. In terms of human-nonhuman relations, societies are deeply speciesist, literally saturated in core speciesist norms. These are the powerful social forces that animal advocates must fundamentally challenge if real change is ever to occur. In this light, campaigning — especially single-issue campaigning — that fails to directly challenge speciesist rituals of dominionism, including pet-keeping, and which does not posit ethical veganism as the solution in an unequivocal manner, is essentially tinkering at the edges of the problem. As suggested in this paper, then, speciesist and other harmful rituals of dominionism are deeply embedded in the very structure of society: these are core societal values and motors which need dismantling completely. Reforming such sedimented means of discrimination and oppression is not enough and, as I have long argued (see Yates 1999: 16-17), social movements, as important claims-makers in civil society, need to regularly audit their campaigning methods and effects, and adopt a mature, reflexive,

stance at all times. The changes nonhuman animals need are cultural, for it is widespread and mundane cultural activities, along with taught values and attitudes, that bring billions of them into existence for the purpose of exploitation. Social change occurs all the time and, therefore, change *is* possible but much more likely when more and more animal advocates and activists attack the core of the problem. Their task is aided by a sociological understanding of the social forces at play, identifying the factors at the heart of the issue, such as that offered in this paper.

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