



'Redneck, Barbaric, Cashed up Bogan? I Don't Think So': Hunting and Nature in Australia¹

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ABSTRACT Hunting is a controversial activity in Australia, and much debated in international research. Positions range from 'the first hunters were the first humans' to the 'meat is murder' argument. There is, however, very little research on non-Indigenous hunting in Australia, particularly on the social aspects, but also on biological and ecological issues. In contrast to a general lack of research on non-Indigenous hunting, there is extensive literature on Indigenous hunting. This paper reviews initial research exploring hunting participation and motivation in Australia, as a window into further understanding connections between humans, non-humans and place. My focus is on an analysis of hunting as cultural involvement in nature. Is it a cruel, archaic and redundant practice; or a respectful relationship between and among humans and non-humans which can reorient us to our emerging recombinant ecologies?

*"Outside Eden, eating means also killing, directly or indirectly,
and killing well is an obligation akin to eating well."²*

My children and I sometimes hunt in the sea. We swim out from the coastal rock platform near where we live on the south coast of New South Wales, Australia and spear fish and harvest invertebrate animals. We add wild plants harvested on shore, and plants we have grown, to feed ourselves. We also hunt on land, at *Cloud Range*, a rural mountain country place we own, where we hunt rabbits and other animals and harvest wild plant foods.

One of the reasons my family does this is because it connects us intimately with cycles of life and death: our bodies are sustained by the taking of the lives of other bodies. Being active in taking living things and making them into food confronts us with issues of ethics and responsibility, sentience and suffering. It also clarifies the position of humans in ecological processes, and in all of these things, with the relationships between humans and nature. American writer and anthropologist Richard Nelson writes of his ambivalence as a modern

¹ A 'cashed up bogan' is an Australian stereotype: a person of unsophisticated background with a high income spent on conspicuous consumer goods.

² Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

hunter, of one “so removed from the fundamental realities of life and death that he can indulge in pangs of conscience, questions of right or wrong, and the peculiar luxury of choosing sides between predator and prey.”³ Donna Haraway argues that “outside Eden, eating means also killing, directly and indirectly, and killing well is an obligation akin to eating well.”⁴

In this paper I want to use our own practice, as well as my conversations with and observations of others who hunt, to explore new ideas from the disciplines of geography, animal studies and ethics. These viewpoints connect to arguments by Native American scholar Gregory Cajete. While not using the term Anthropocene, his words clearly situate the dilemma there:

Two quintessential interdependent issues face people in the twenty-first century, and both are fundamentally about relationship. The first is how we are going to deal with the environmental crisis, or how will we relate in a proper, sustainable way to plants, animals and the earth. The second is how we are going to deal with each other in a proper, respectful way that acknowledges our common interdependence. Biological diversity and cultural diversity are both issues of relationship.⁵

Hunting in Australia

There is limited research on hunting in Australia, particularly on the social aspects, but also on biological and ecological issues. Even relatively recent summary publications such as Dickson, Hutton and Adams and Lovelock tend to rely on earlier studies such as Bauer and Giles, who suggest that there are around one million hunters in Australia, relying on earlier estimates from 1996 and 1997.⁶ In the most recent study, Bauer and English reaffirm a figure of one million hunters, with 1.2 million licensed shooters and an unknown but growing number of bow hunters.⁷ In contrast to this very large figure, the largest shooting club in Australia, the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, represents 130,000 members, and Field and Game, another large hunting organisation, represents 14,000 members. Bauer and English argue that these relatively small memberships reflect the disinclination of “highly individualistic” hunters to act as a group. There are more than 50 other recreational hunting organisations in Australia.⁸ Few researchers have engaged with research on the social aspects of hunting in Australia, with the exception of Franklin.⁹ There is no Australian literature on participation of women in hunting,

³ Richard Nelson, *The Island Within* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

⁴ Haraway, *When Species Meet*.

⁵ Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000).

⁶ B. Dickson, J. Hutton and B. Adams, *Recreational Hunting, Conservation and Rural Livelihoods: Science and Practice* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); B. Lovelock, ed., *Tourism and the Consumption of Wildlife: Hunting, Shooting and Sport Fishing* (London: Routledge, 2008); J. Bauer, and J. Giles, *Recreational Hunting: an International Perspective* (Wildlife Tourism Research Report Series No 13, CRC for Sustainable Tourism, 2002).

⁷ J. Bauer, and A. English, *Conservation Through Hunting: An Environmental Paradigm Change in NSW* (Orange NSW: Game Council, 2011).

⁸ S. Craig-Smith, and G. Dryden, “Australia as a Safari Hunting Destination for Exotic Animals,” in *Tourism and the Consumption of Wildlife: Hunting, Shooting and Sport Fishing*, ed. B. Lovelock (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁹ A. Franklin, “Australian Hunting and Angling Sports and the Changing Nature of Human-Animal Relations in Australia,” *Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 3 (1996); A. Franklin, *Animals and Modern Culture* (London: SAGE, 1999);

and limited international literature.¹⁰ In contrast to a general lack of research on non-Indigenous hunting, there is extensive literature on Indigenous hunting.¹¹ In North America, Europe and New Zealand, there is an established tradition of popular writing on hunting, as well as a long tradition of research on hunting issues, much of which documents significant recent declines in hunting participation.¹²

Hunting in many places, including Australia, is controversial, with strongly held views both pro- and anti-hunting.¹³ It can impact on conservation objectives, with some hunters attempting to maintain high populations of introduced and potentially destructive game species.¹⁴ Hunting also has the potential to strategically contribute to conservation objectives, as well as providing a very significant pathway to developing strong connections to nature, in a period where much research indicates that people are increasingly separated from contact and understanding of the natural world.¹⁵ Internationally, scholars in several disciplines, including tourism researchers, anthropologists, and feminist scholars have engaged with many aspects of contemporary hunting.¹⁶

This paper is a continuation of that topical research. I am approaching this research through a number of methods, two of which are relevant to this paper. The first is by using 'observant participation', personally entering the world of hunters and hunting to physically, emotionally and intellectually experience what it can mean.¹⁷ Matthew Desmond calls this 'full

A. Franklin, and R. White, "Animals and Modernity: Changing Human-Animal Relations, 1949-98," *Journal of Sociology* 37, no. 3 (2001); A. Franklin, "Neo-Darwinian Leisures, the Body and Nature: Hunting and Angling in Modernity," *Body and Society*, 7, no. 4 (2001): 57-76; A. Franklin, *Animal Nation: The True Story of Animals and Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Mary Zeiss Stange, *Woman the Hunter* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997). See also Val Plumwood's critique: "Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature: A Critical Feminist Eco-Social Analysis," *Ethics and the Environment* 5, no. 2 (2000): 285-322; T. Heberlein, B. Serup, and G. Ericsson, "Female Hunting Participation in North America and Europe," *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 13 (2008): 443-458.

¹¹ For example, Jon Altman, *Hunter-Gatherers Today: An Aboriginal Economy in North Australia* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1987); Ian Keen, *Aboriginal Economy and Society* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004); D. B. Rose with S. D'Amico, N. Daiyi, K. Devereaux, M. Daiyi, L. Ford and A. Bright, *Country of the Heart: An Australian Indigenous Homeland* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2002).

¹² Ted Kerasote, *Bloodties: Nature, Culture, and the Hunt* (New York: Kodansha America, 1994); David Petersen, ed., *A Hunter's Heart* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1996); David Petersen, *Heartsblood: Hunting, Spirituality and Wildness in America* (Boulder, Co: Johnson Books, 2000).

¹³ B. Green, ed., "Hunting in Perspective," *Sporting Shooters Journal* 11, no. 1, Members-only insert (2009); N. A. Finch, and G. S. Baxter, "Oh deer, What can the Matter be? Landholder Attitudes to Deer Management in Queensland," *Wildlife Research* 34 (2007): 211-217; Kelly Miller, "Human Dimensions of Wildlife Population Management in Australasia - History, Approaches and Directions," *Wildlife Research* 36, no. 1 (2009): 48-56.

¹⁴ L. Kretz, "A Shot in the Dark: The Dubious Prospects of Environmental Hunting," in N. Kowalsky, *Hunting: Philosophy for Everyone* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010).

¹⁵ For example: C. Eisenberg, *The Wolf's Tooth. Keystone Predators, Trophic Cascades, and Biodiversity* (Washington: Island Press, 2010); Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2008).

¹⁶ Arianne Carvalhedo Reis, "More than the Kill: Hunters' Relationships with Landscape and Prey," *Current Issues in Tourism* 12, nos. 5-6 (2009): 573-587; Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000); M. Cartmill, "Hunting and Humanity in Western Thought," in A. Mack, ed., *Humans and Other Animals* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999); Haraway, *When Species Meet*.

¹⁷ Loic Wacquant, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

immersion fieldwork'.¹⁸ I am particularly interested in the outcomes of such a process, following Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, who argue that "interdependence and creativity are thrust upon us as we become implicated in the very existence of the worlds that we research."¹⁹ As this paper unfolds, there are deeply ethical issues at stake in this process. The second methodological approach is through a series of conversations with a wide range of hunters (men, women, Indigenous, European, Australian), and examination of the writing these hunters produce.

Sentience and Suffering—The Sea

Recently, we had a rare, perfect diving day, with very calm seas flattened by a westerly wind. We swam a long way offshore, into deeper water probably rarely visited by other divers, commercial or recreational, and where we ourselves had not dived before. My son hunted with a handspear, and I swam holding gloved hands with my daughter and carrying a handspear and knife. We returned to shore with two herring cale speared by my son, four sea urchins collected by my daughter and myself, and one abalone I prised from a rock crevice about six metres underwater.

For divers, cale are generally regarded as a "beginner's fish", but they are very common where we swim and we often hunt them. Sea urchins, while highly regarded as food in parts of Europe and Asia, are often ignored in Australia, and are also very common on our coast. Abalone is the most expensive seafood to come out of Australian waters, the focus of a very valuable commercial industry, and relatively uncommon in our waters. For "recreational" purposes, there are no regulations on how many herring cale may be harvested, for sea urchins the bag limit is ten, and for abalone it is two (only to be harvested on weekends, and they must be larger than 11.7cm).

When we brought in our catch from this dive, we killed the fish using the *iki jime* method (quickly inserting a spike into the brain), regarded as one of the most humane. When this is properly done, the fish convulses and is then still. We gutted and scaled the fish at the water's edge, so we could throw the parts of the animals we don't use to the waiting gulls. We prepared the sea urchins by cutting them in half and scooping out the edible part (often called roe, but actually the sexual organs). Urchins are not really able to show signs of physical distress, although I knew they were alive by the slight movements of their spines. I prepared the abalone by cutting it out of its shell with a very sharp knife, and then slicing it into thin strips. As I did this, the animal initially writhed in my hand, and then eventually became still.

There is extensive discussion about the nature of, and the limits to, sentience and suffering in animals (and recently, plants).²⁰ Most Australian government fisheries agency websites now include recommendations on how to humanely kill sea animals. While these include crustaceans (lobsters, crabs) as well as fin-fish, they seldom include molluscs (such as abalone), and do not include echinoderms (such as sea urchins). Molluscs are a very large marine phylum, including everything from the neurologically advanced cephalopods (octopus

¹⁸ Matthew Desmond, "Making Firefighters Deployable," *Qualitative Sociology* 34 (2011): 59-77.

¹⁹ J. K. Gibson-Graham, and G. Roelvink, "An Economic Ethics for the Anthropocene," *Antipode* 41S1 (2009): 320-346.

²⁰ M. Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011).

and cuttlefish) to gastropods such as abalone, and bivalve oysters and mussels. Prominent ethicist Peter Singer argues that although "indifference to the suffering of fish is widespread", fish are clearly sentient and feel pain, and we accordingly need to minimise suffering when handling them. He argues that cephalopods are highly likely to be conscious creatures, and should be treated accordingly, but the evidence for consciousness in bivalves is "vanishingly slight", as it is for plants.²¹

Kate Rigby examines Val Plumwood's rejection of this division on the grounds of consciousness (sentience), and connects this with the colonial landscape division into "wilderness" (now national parks), and lands available for resource use.²² Plumwood argues for acknowledgement of the ecological embodiment of all living things, and hence extension of a moral relationship to them all: "someone who lives in a rich interspecies community may often have ... to deal with the moral demands and dilemmas of justice and care [for non-humans] very similar to the ones that can appear in the human case."²³ She further argues "that it is not predation itself that is the problem but what certain social systems make of predation."²⁴ While ethicists debate where the boundary should be drawn in terms of our moral relationships with other species, the view from many Indigenous hunters and foragers would affirm that *all* living things should be treated with respect, including the ones they kill and eat. Because I have spent some of my life interacting with Indigenous peoples, including hunters, fishers, herders and foragers, I, like Richard Nelson, accept "the wisdom of establishing a moral contract with the natural world that gives sustenance."²⁵ But as a person with no Indigenous heritage, while I can learn and accept what Elders teach, it is a personal choice for me, rather than a cultural framework. So I teach my children, and personally follow, rules of respect and gratitude to all the living things we harvest.

Within the rich interspecies communities to which we belong, so far my family and I make intuitive decisions about which marine animals we hunt. We have never hunted stingrays or cephalopods, although we have eaten both of these in restaurants. We like watching them when we swim, and they quite obviously watch us. Cuttlefish in particular are very curious and will swim right up to humans, and large stingrays often circle us looking for scraps from our hunt. But stingrays are also dangerous, and having a large stingray on the end of a spear would be a difficult situation to deal with safely.

Recreational fishing has huge participation rates in Australia, with 20% of Australians participating every year. Most of this is angling, with the spearfishing catch being about 1% of the total commercial and recreational catch.²⁶ Fishing is generally uncontroversial, except when it comes to restricting fishing, by closures and marine parks. Hunting on land however, is consistently controversial in Australia. I have harvested from the sea for much of my life, but have only recently learned to hunt on land.

²¹ Peter Singer, and Jim Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2006).

²² Kate Rigby, "Getting a Taste for the Bogong Moth," *Australian Humanities Review* 50 (2011).

²³ Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002).

²⁴ Val Plumwood, "Animals and Ecology: Towards a Better Integration," unpublished article (available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/41767>) (2003): 2.

²⁵ Nelson, *The Island Within*.

²⁶ A. Smith and S. Nakaya, "Spearfishing – is it ecologically sustainable?" paper presented to the 3rd World Recreational Fishing Conference, 21-24 May 2002, Northern Territory.

Sentience and Suffering—The Land

At Cloud Range it is early morning, a hard frost, the surrounding mountains white with snow. My son walks to the rabbit warrens to check the traps. A big rabbit is caught and struggling. He holds the rabbit down, then kills it by grasping its hind legs and sharply pulling its neck away from him. He can feel the neck dislocating. A rabbit is a mammal, warm blooded and furry, so we don't question its sentience or capacity for pain. My son is clearly engaged with the rabbit, excited and also concerned to make sure it is properly dead. The actual killing leaves him a bit shaky, but he is very pleased to be providing tonight's dinner.

My son was taught how to kill and dress rabbits by his grandfather, who trapped many hundreds of rabbits as a teenager on a Depression-era farm in the Victorian Mallee country. The killing method though, is exactly the same as that recommended in the 2004 Australian government "standard operating procedure (SOP)" for killing trapped rabbits. When he killed the rabbit, it was "euthanased by neck dislocation" as described in the SOP. The SOP also discusses other impacts on trapped animals, including the fact that they can be preyed on by other species while in the trap, "causing significant distress." It makes no comment on the fact that being preyed on by other species is how most rabbits actually do die "in the wild."

Deborah Rose *et al.* wrote that for Aboriginal hunters, "to be alive and to be actively involved is to participate deeply in ecological processes as they exist in the world ... Nothing in this worldview says that predation is wrong, only that it is not to be undertaken without knowledge and care."²⁷ Similarly, Plumwood, in her famous essay about being prey, contrasts the "Western master narrative" with Aboriginal perspectives: "Aboriginal thinking about death sees animals, plants and humans sharing a common life force", with a "continuity and fluidity between humans and other life."²⁸

Animal lifeways do not avoid violence. Lynn Schooler, describing humpback whales feeding, writes "a hundred tons of small silver lives perished in the feeding, yet it was patently a fair exchange, this trade of small lives for large."²⁹ I have a lot of respect for vegetarians and vegans because they want to make ethical, informed, respectful decisions about what they eat. But there is a larger discussion to be had here. Dominic Lestel argues that if humans participate in the world as other species do, then predation is a normal part of an omnivore's activities, and suggests that vegans want to "evade the constraints of the ethics of reciprocity" that is at the core of hunter-gatherer societies.³⁰ Cerulli, describing his journey from vegetarian to hunter says, "I was aiming to be mindful about the outer consequences of my diet ... and to better understand the land and my non-human neighbours."³¹ His journey starts with an awareness that farming, even local, organic vegetable farming, involves the deliberate deaths of animals. Whatever your moral choices, it is not really possible to avoid the deaths of animals in human lives, although you can distance yourself at various scales from those deaths. At its best, hunting can do the opposite: you do the killing yourself, taking personal moral responsibility.

²⁷ Rose *et al.*, *Country of the Heart*.

²⁸ Val Plumwood, "Human Vulnerability and the Experience of Being Prey," *Quadrant* 39, no. 3 (1995): 29-34.

²⁹ Lynn Schooler, *The Blue Bear* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002).

³⁰ Dominic Lestel, "The Posture of Human Exception," *Australian Humanities Review* 5 (2011).

³¹ T. Cerulli, "Hunting like a Vegetarian," in N. Kowalsky, *Hunting: Philosophy for Everyone* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010).

Self-provisioning: Redneck, Barbaric, and Bogan?

In academic literature the type of hunting my family does tends to be termed "self-provisioning", as opposed to "subsistence", because we don't need to do this, we choose to do it. This sort of activity usually includes hunting on the land, fishing (angling), and various other forms of acquiring natural materials to use for food, warmth, and shelter. Many people in Western nations do this, with many different motivations.

In a recent analysis of Canadian rural communities, Teitelbaum and Beckley uncover a wide range of motivations for involvement in hunting, from food hunters, where the primary motivation is obtaining food directly rather than purchasing it, to middle and high income earners who invest hundreds and thousands of dollars in hunting activities, and for whom the return is in *the experience* of hunting and consuming wild food. They argue that "self-provisioning is a culturally-embedded activity and ... an important component of rural life."³² In another study of specifically subsistence activity in the United States, Emery and Pierce contend that while the primary purpose is to obtain the resource, "the social, cultural and psychological benefits of subsistence activities are prized in addition to their direct material contributions."³³

In Australia, a winemaker recently developed a series of wines that he marketed under the label *Ladies Who Shoot Their Lunch*. The winemaker, who is also a hunter, was the subject of a media article in a major daily newspaper that, while a measured and positive analysis of issues around game hunting, was provocatively titled "Men who kill."³⁴ The on-line version of the newspaper included a poll, which attracted nearly 6,000 votes, and a comment section, which resulted in 206 postings before being closed. These comments, some of which are quoted below, displayed the full gamut of the hunting debate:

The wonderful thing about being a human being is that you have the cognitive capacity to choose not to inflict suffering and death on other species, and the digestive system that does not require flesh to sustain life and health. Hunt if you will, but don't pretend it's about survival. It's about pandering to your basest instincts. It's about sport and the thrill of the chase. Grow up and play a video game instead.

Everyone who eats meat has blood on their hands. Everyone who lives, works, shops or drives in a deforested area has blood on their hands. Get over it. No one is innocent and the only difference is a Hunter is able to see where their food comes from.

Redneck, barbaric, cashed up bogan, I don't think so. No I think just down to earth who enjoys living the outdoor life now and to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday living.

³² S. Teitelbaum and T. Beckley, "Harvested, Hunted and Home Grown: The Prevalence of Self-Provisioning in Rural Canada," *Journal of Rural and Community Development* 1 (2006): 114-130.

³³ M. R. Emery and A. R. Pierce, "Interrupting the Telos: Locating Subsistence in Contemporary US Forests," *Environment and Planning A* 37 (2005): 981-993.

³⁴ Richard Cornish, "Men who Kill."

Firstly I'm not a greenie and I love to eat meat—but the problem I have with people hunting animals even if it is for food is the fact that they derive some kind of sicko pleasure from it which is reason they didn't just go down to the local butcher in the first place ...

The responses from redneck and cashed up bogans come as no surprise. To equate intelligence with nothing more than the possession of facts and academic achievements is indicative of the superficial mindset of said bogans. They have offered no new insights or valid justifications for their desire to hunt. Some even see themselves as conservationists. Hunting takes no skill other than stalk and shoot—as long as the target is hit, it doesn't seem to matter if the animal is maimed or dead. They lack empathy and show no sophisticated social maturity. Ultimately the sign of a civilised society is how it treats its most disadvantaged members and species. Please go to America where rabid republican hillbillies will gladly welcome you back to the family. You've got nothing this country wants or needs.

Hunting brings up all emotions. I have been hunting & hunting for the table for 50 years. Started with my grandfather & father. I am now a grandfather and the tradition continues. For 1 week a year I spend time away in the bush with my father, son & grandson. We live off the land hunting & fishing. I always remember a saying of my grandfather "The hunt is more important than the kill." Wild game & home grown vegies is such good food compared to the processed rubbish in the supermarkets.

But please hunters, don't try to wrap your pathetic, arcane blood lust in a pretty light by saying you're protecting the environment or whatever.

Hunting? A creature is peacefully in it's own domain, it is shot. How is that worse than being carried for hours in a truck, being forced into a crush, hearing the bellows of other creatures, being physically restrained at the peak of terror, then culled? Or bred in an area hardly big enough for the creature to move, then bundled off to be slaughtered en masse?

I have NEVER encountered a hunter that is civilised and intelligent. INTELLIGENT PEOPLE DON'T HUNT. With apologies to the only people that hunt for legitimate purposes—those people who are invariably indigenous and do not have access to shopping facilities. Don't drag in the argument of abbatoirs—there are people who are paid to slaughter humanely (pity the cows can't give their point of view) versus the sick, arrogant and inhumane mentality that gets a thrill and sense of satisfaction from killing.

As many contributors to this debate noted, each side is speaking past the other: there is little actual intellectual or logical debate because the issue is so emotive. Mostly, you are either a believer in one of the sides, or you are not. Also interesting is that, while the anti-hunting contributors characterised the hunters as "redneck, barbaric, cashed-up bogans", members of both groups participating in the discussion clearly read a major broadsheet daily newspaper predominantly read by people identified (by the media circulation records) as employed, educated and in upper socio-economic groups.

There are, however, certainly a proportion of hunters in Australia who presumably do fit the description of "redneck, barbaric, and bogan." National park rangers I interviewed described muscled, tattooed, shaven-headed pig hunters whose dogs wear chest armour with

built-in knife sheaths—rangers are instructed to never interact with these people, but take details of vehicle registrations and dates.³⁵ Bauer and English quote national parks sources as saying pig hunter offences can involve “firearms, drink driving, drugs, trespassing and theft.”³⁶ There are many versions of hunting, and one of the challenges facing responsible hunters is finding a way to regulate or discipline those considered irresponsible hunters.

Recent discussion about food ethics has included ethical relationships between eater and eaten, and among a broader network of participants in “foodscapes.” Sarah Whatmore argues for an examination of the role of food in the bodily imperatives that enmesh us in the material fabric and diverse company of livingness.³⁷ Ruth Panelli and Gail Tipa argue that “these considerations would assist in thinking through connections, responsibilities and politics occurring between lifeforms.”³⁸ One of my interests in directly harvesting my own food, including animals, is that it has the potential to reduce the scale of these relationships.

When we harvest animals and plants for food, it is a direct relationship between ourselves, the organisms and our shared environment, with the only mediation being the tools we use. Harvesting from the sea of herring cale and sea urchins at the scale we and others do has no effect on commercial or recreational fisheries catch, or local ecologies. Spearfishers argue that their technique is among the most ecologically sustainable: it is selective, has no by-catch, uses no bait, causes no habitat damage and no pollution.³⁹ Angling potentially has significant impacts in all these categories (it sometimes feels ludicrously macho when we strap on our diving knives, but we always carry knives partly to cut ourselves free if we become caught in the hundreds of metres of invisible monofilament line routinely left by anglers tangled around underwater rocks and plants).

Harvesting of abalone is more complex—it is an ancient sustainable tradition, reflected in the presence of abalone shells in 4,000 year-old Aboriginal middens along our coast.⁴⁰ Local Aboriginal people I spoke with say that there is an unbroken tradition of harvest, and that abalone and lobster were regarded as “poor man’s food” up until the 1970s. Since abalone became extremely valuable, Aboriginal people have been increasingly marginalised and then criminalised for involvement in this harvest. Australia produces half of the world’s wild harvest of abalone, and has demonstrated little interest in how this industry impacts on Aboriginal customary harvest. In New South Wales, the commercial harvest is currently worth \$13m annually, and is restricted to 42 commercial divers.⁴¹ When we harvest abalone then, we are aware of the commercial value and the ancient tradition, and the conflicts between them, but primarily we focus on the animal and the food. Abalone is delicious, and diving for it is challenging and interesting.

³⁵ I should note though, that pig hunters regard their quarry as one of the most intelligent, dangerous and challenging animals to hunt – wild pigs are positioned as worthy adversaries.

³⁶ Bauer and English, *Conservation through Hunting*.

³⁷ Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies: Natures, Cultures, Spaces* (London: Sage, 2002).

³⁸ Ruth Panelli and Gail Tipa, “Beyond Foodscapes: Considering Geographies of Indigenous Well-Being,” *Health and Place* 15 (2009): 455-465.

³⁹ Smith and Nakaya, “Spearfishing.”

⁴⁰ Beryl Cruse, Liddy Steward and Sue Norman, *Mutton Fish: The Surviving Culture of Aboriginal People and Abalone on the South Coast of New South Wales* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005).

⁴¹ Ecology Lab, *Abalone Fishery EIS Vol 1: Review of the Existing Abalone Fishery* (Sydney: NSW Department of Agriculture, 2005).

The creatures we harvest are mostly ones that turn something non-edible, or marginally edible, into something that humans can eat. Cale, urchins and abalone are all eaters of marine plants not normally consumed by humans. Similarly, rabbits turn grass into meat protein, as do kangaroos, cattle and sheep.

In New South Wales, it is only legal to “recreationally” hunt introduced land animals. These rules are much debated by hunters, who point out the quite obvious inconsistencies and contradictions. Many of the non-Aboriginal hunters I interviewed, including those I would consider the most ethical (on the basis, for instance, of their understanding and attitudes to animal welfare, conservation issues and safety concerns) indicated off the record that they at least occasionally hunted common native animals for food. It is also likely that there is a large level of hunting of native animals by farmers, and also by Aboriginal hunters. Many farmers hold the view that they have effectively sovereign rights over their land, and many Aboriginal hunters consider that “whitefella law” does not apply to them. While many hunters have been prepared to discuss this with me, accessing other reliable information about this issue is difficult: the only records are likely to be in crime statistics, and presumably a very significant amount of such hunting is entirely undetected.

While there is some concern about Indigenous hunting of some species in northern Australia (particularly dugong and turtle), there is no indication in the threatened species or conservation literature that the level of this illegal hunting in New South Wales is problematic in conservation terms. Hunters respond by pointing out the politically-based dimensions of these rules. They reflect interest group lobbying rather than ecological management realities: why is it illegal to recreationally hunt kangaroos when there is a very large ecologically-assessed legal commercial harvest of the same species? Why is it illegal to hunt ducks when farmers can get permits to shoot large numbers damaging their crops? Recreational hunting of native species could be conducted under a game management regime of ecologically monitored seasons and bag limits. Instead, reflecting elements of the Aboriginal position with abalone, hunters’ activities become criminalised, underwritten by apparent conservation objectives.

Hunting as Relationship to Nature

In the waters and lands we hunt, others hunt also. At Cloud Range we have listened to a chorus of dingo howls at dawn, watched eagles patrol the valleys, found the bones of many animals, and heard the crack of human hunters’ rifles. In the sea we encounter stingrays and cuttlefish, find small sharks in caves, swim with cormorants, and reasonably often share the water with other divers and anglers. Some of these hunters are top predators in the trophic cascades connecting predator, prey and plants, and some of these predators are sometimes themselves also prey.

There is a large literature on the knowledge and activities of native hunters, and an established field of game or wildlife management research which considers the science of managing hunted species. But only occasionally do researchers write about the particular knowledge of contemporary Western hunters themselves. Paul Robbins calls that knowledge “barstool biology”, Francis Putz calls it “redneck science”, and they both suggest that the situated knowledges and activities of these hunters should be taken seriously in modern

ecosystem management.⁴² These arguments challenge the god-view of science, acknowledging instead the strength and relevance of long-term knowledge developed and practised in particular places and with particular non-human others.

A recent review of the potential contribution of hunting to conservation concludes, unsurprisingly, that “environmental values, interests and beliefs among hunters and other environmentalists are often divisive instead of complementary.”⁴³ The paper grounds this conclusion in distinctions between sustainable use and protectionism, but both of those positions potentially separate humans and nature, one positioning nature as a resource, the other positioning it as pristine and outside society. There is the possibility in hunting though, to transcend this dualism. King argues: “in returning to nature, we must acknowledge our vulnerability to nature’s inhospitality.”⁴⁴ While this view recognises agency in nature, it suggests an absence in the moral relationships from nature’s side. Plumwood, who has a relatively unique perspective, having the experience of being prey rather than predator, but surviving to write about it, says “we too are positioned equally and along with the whole cast of non-humans in the drama of the ecological world of populations, species and the flows of the food chain.”⁴⁵ For Plumwood, this means seeing the “rich intentionality” of the world: “extending intentionality to the non-human is crucial for extending to them a narrative conception of ethics.” Sarah Wright *et al.*, writing of Yolngu Aboriginal people in northern Australia, say “animals, as well as plants, the land, the winds, the water and the elements, are sentient, sapient and have agency ... they are watching, listening, smelling and communicating.”⁴⁶

In the 21st century, how humans interact with the planet is a defining question: “responding to the challenges of the Anthropocene is not simply about humans finding a technological or normative fix that will control and restore the earth. It is about human beings being transformed by the world in which we find ourselves—or, to put this in more reciprocal terms, it is about the earth’s future being transformed through a living process of inter-being.”⁴⁷ Hunting properly embeds hunters in the more-than-human world.

Conclusion

All living things die. Hunting properly teaches us how to directly, sensitively participate in what Barry Lopez calls the “conversation of death”: “it is a ceremonial exchange, the flesh of the hunted in exchange for respect for its spirit.” The conversation of death is “the striving for a death that is *appropriate*.” Lopez contrasts this with the deaths of domesticated animals, and

⁴² Paul Robbins, “The Politics of Barstool Biology: Environmental Knowledge and Power in Greater Northern Yellowstone,” *Geoforum*, 37 (2006): 185-199; Francis Putz, “Are Rednecks the Unsung Heroes of Ecosystem Management?” *Wild Earth* 13, no. 2/3 Summer/Fall (2003): 10–14.

⁴³ N. Paulson, “The Place of Hunters in Global Conservation Advocacy,” *Conservation and Society* 10, no.1 (2012): 53-62.

⁴⁴ R. King, “A Return to Nature?” in *Hunting - Philosophy for Everyone*, ed. N. Kowalsky (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010).

⁴⁵ Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁶ Sarah Wright, Sandie Suchet-Pearson, Kate Lloyd, Lak Lak Burrarrwanga and Djawa Burrarrwanga, “‘That Means the Fish are Fat’: Sharing Experiences of Animals through Indigenous-Owned Tourism,” *Current Issues in Tourism* 12, nos. 5-6 (2009): 505-527.

⁴⁷ Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, “An Economic Ethics for the Anthropocene.”

the meat provided by those deaths, which to him cannot be consecrated, sacred, noble.⁴⁸ I think one of the problems for animal welfare and animal rights groups is the conflating of these different kinds of death.

Thinking about hunting raises many questions. Would more hunting lead to better conservation of species? Is it legitimate to conduct large scale kills of non-native, “feral” species (in Australia this happens with wild horses, donkeys, deer, pigs, cats, foxes, dogs and others), to protect populations of native species? What is it like to be the person doing the hunting in each of these scenarios? Is there a place for hunting in Western societies? In opening these discussions, in collaboration with (becoming one of) the hunters themselves, I hope to bring “an experimental (learning) rather than critical (judging) stance to ethical projects.”⁴⁹

Living within the conditions of Western modernity, to engage with death might teach some of us how to properly engage with life. Relearning the skills of our ancestors, including our Paleolithic ancestors who painted hunting scenes on cave walls, might actually open new ways of thinking about how to most appropriately respond to the key questions of the Anthropocene.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS I would like to thank all the hunters I have spoken with, and two anonymous reviewers and Thom van Dooren for very helpful comments. I also thank several of my colleagues at the Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research for helpful discussions on hunting in general, as well as this paper, especially Emily O’Gorman, Christine Eriksen and Jenny Aitchison.

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⁴⁸ Barry Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Scribner, 2004).

⁴⁹ Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, “An Economic Ethics for the Anthropocene.”

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