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Angler and Fish Relations in the UK: ethics, aesthetics and material semiotics

Tom Mordue and Sharon Wilson

Abstract

This chapter examines how freshwater angling is both naturally and socially delineated in the UK. In this, freshwater angling is seen as a multiplicity of socio-natural practices that have become bifurcated into two sporting codes: coarse angling and game angling. It is within these nature-society cross-sections and coded practices this chapter is targeted as it applies a material semiotic perspective to explore the knotted intimacies of angler-fish relations, and asks: are wild fish social animals deserving 'sporting justice' or natural beings deserving absolute protection from that human corruption we call angling?

Introduction

Freshwater angling is one of the most significant leisure activities in the UK. In 2009, for example, freshwater anglers' gross expenditure in England and Wales was £1.18 billion, generating 37,386 jobs (Radford et al, 2009). Despite such spending power, and the sheer popularity of angling (see Mordue, 2009), it is relatively rarely researched, sitting in and between the different policy and academic foci of sport, leisure, recreation and environment. This chapter goes some way towards redressing that situational anomaly, and, using a material semiotics approach, places angling in all these contexts as it examines the social and natural relationships between anglers and fish across the main UK freshwater angling codes: coarse angling and game angling. From here the question is asked: are wild fish social animals deserving 'sporting justice' or natural beings deserving absolute protection from that human corruption we call angling?

By applying material semiotics we recognise that all angling is made up of a multiplicity of socio-natural practices. These practices include anglers subscribing to certain sporting practices and angling methods, learning about fish species and their habitats, buying and applying equipment in very particular ways, attempting to 'think like a fish' (Bear and Eden, 2011) and becoming part of the fish's environment when angling. The multiplicity of such practices is not only legion in general terms, but vary according to the specificities of the quarry sought and angling methods used. That said, freshwater angling practices in the UK do aggregate to an overarching bifurcation of angling codes we term coarse angling and game angling, and it is this bifurcation that guides the analysis here.

While coarse and game angling are two sides of the same sporting coin, those two sides are not equal. For example, coarse angling accounts for 87% of all freshwater angling in the UK (Bear and Eden, 2011), and targets essentially any non-salmonid fish that are common to lakes, canals and rivers up and down the UK. While coarse angling has many sub-divisions and specialisms, in general terms coarse anglers are very catholic in angling methods used, adapting any legal means available to them, with bait fishing being by far the most dominant. UK game anglers, on the other hand, fish only for trout, salmon and sometimes char, mostly in the rivers where these fish are the predominant species. They are also selective in methods deployed, mostly fishing with lure or fly, with fly-fishing being by far the most dominant method. The differences between coarse and game angling are, however, much more than about differing sporting preferences and practices, they also constitute divisions along social lines. Game angling occupies a more exclusive social position to that of coarse angling - even though its economic significance is much less. Such divisions are also reflected in the way fish are valued, with trout, for example, being conferred a certain 'wily' intelligence and salmon often exulted as 'the king of fish' in the game angling literature (Lapsley, 2003; Osborne, 2007). The coarse angling literature seems less inclined toward such anthropomorphic levitation, though it is not unheard of for coarse anglers to engage in reactionary retorts by comparing the merits of 'their' fish with those of 'the other side'. For example, in an

interview with Kevin Parr for *The Idler* magazine in 2014, Chris Yates, a coarse angling author celebrated for his literary style, barks:

I'm not a great fan of salmon and trout... They are pushy sort of fish, always jumping about and being far too flashy and showy. [They're] incredibly thick – because they're like a cruise missile, with the same amount of intelligence, in that they just keep going, no matter what you throw at them, they keep going. Whereas the carp, the carp is the grandmaster of chess.

The absurd humour in the statement serves to illustrate the push back on the self-asserted superiority of game angling, which is obviously disliked in at least some coarse angling quarters.

Similar imputed superiority extends to game angling's geographies, where the best game fishing rivers and streams are very exclusive spaces, being either prohibitively expensive to access or simply closed off to the public and the open market altogether. For example, Country Life magazine writes of the Houghton Fly Fishing Club on the river Test, which is a river 'world renowned' for its brown trout fishing:

the Membership of the Houghton Fishing Club (HFC) is the dream of every serious fly-fisherman [sic], but is obtainable by only the very fortunate few. Started in 1822, the HFC is the oldest private fishing club in Britain... The club owns—and has exclusive fishing rights on—13 miles of the River Test, near Stockbridge in Hampshire. Once known as the Stockbridge Fishing Club, the HFC is famously very private, and has a restricted, elected membership of a mere 25. Eminent members [are]: Lord Tanlaw, Lord Tryon and the Duke of Northumberland.

(www.countrylife.co.uk/country-pursuits/clubs-you-cannot-join - accessed February 2017)

Salmon fishing on the river Tweed's 'Junction Pool' near Kelso in the Scottish Borders is similarly famous and exclusive, reportedly costing around £27,000 for a week's hire in October, when the main salmon run happens, to a limit of five anglers who have not only to be rich enough but well connected enough to access it (salmonfishingforum.com – accessed February, 2017). Though such spaces are never physically too far from anyone living in the UK, they are situated way beyond the reach of the vast majority of its citizens who may want to chance their arm. Freshwater fish and the environments where they thrive, then, are as socially embroiled as they are authentically natural.

In consequence, demarcating what are natural or social relations and practices in UK freshwater angling is difficult to fathom. Yet it is at the point of such nature-society cross-sections that this chapter is targeted as it explores the knotted intimacies, relationalities and separations of angler-fish and angler-angler interactions across the two main UK freshwater angling codes. From this vantage the chapter considers angling and anti-angling interests and antagonisms to answer the question already mooted: are freshwater fish social animals deserving 'sporting justice' or natural beings deserving absolute protection from those human corruptions we call angling?

Fish and angler, nature and society

The material semiotic approach taken here integrates aspects of actor-network theory and 'performativity' (Thrift, 2003) because they complement each other by providing ways of understanding how social and natural forces can come together to create relational effects. This conceptual platform allows a relational focus on the effects of power within and between different angling practices and the actors that *perform* them. From an angling practice perspective, performance is applied to consider how the human world is both socially constructed and embodied, made by natural rhythms and registers as well as cultural representations and discourses. This sits alongside the post-humanism of actor-network theory which sees humans and non-humans as *symmetrical*, in that neither one should be privileged over the other in any a priori sense. Rather, they should be critically evaluated as to how they are able to effect and create the world. Actor-network theory's starting position is that human and non-human actors should only be assessed

against what they do and how they exercise power to act and enlist heterogeneous others to build networks of association (Murdoch, 2006). Freshwater angling, then, bifurcated into coarse and game sub-divisions, is a multitude of relational effects made up of heterogeneous human and non-human actors that are assembled together into actor-networks of common endeavour. In this network perspective, fish are co-creators of angling with humans, as are other non-humans like fishing technologies and equipment, rivers, and lakes. The issue here is about the varied power anglers and fish have in the angling actor-network and how their interests are shaped and served.

Such human/non-human symmetry does not mean that all actors are equal or should be seen as equal. Rather, that all actors are equally implicated in power relations and some will become more dominant than others. Dominant actors are those who determine action the most, and whether they are human or not is of less importance than their ability to be powerful and enlist others in the actor-network. Murdoch (2006) reminds us however that humans do occupy a uniquely powerful place in the world because of their ability to represent and speak for others. The most powerful human actors will therefore gain the capacity to literally speak for other humans and non-humans in a network, giving them enormous potential influence.

The way angling is shaped and performed is thus an effect of particular sets of discourses, material circumstances and embodied practices. These elements also feedback on each other every time an angler engages a fish in the wild and discursively relays his or her experiences to the wider angling network. In this way, successful angling authors gain immense authority in the angling actor-network and are sought out by organisations - such as angling media like magazines and TV, and fishing tackle manufacturers - who can profit through their commentaries and their endorsements. As angling communication networks expand, the citational power (cf. Butler, 1993) and impact of these dominant actors also expands and the potential influence of the UK angling actor-network becomes that much greater. Indeed, though modern fly-fishing for trout and salmon was perfected as a unified sport on the rivers of the UK in the late 1800s, through citational performances and other sporting mobilities its codes were soon exported to the USA, and it is now offered as a tourism experience in destinations all around the world (Mordue, 2013).

There is a corollary to such development. When a network establishes and endures over time and expands its reach through space, it will face increasing challenges and perhaps oppositions from other networks and associations, whether they be sporting, cultural, social, or moral. For example, the strict UK codes of fly-fishing are often adapted to new local circumstances and environments as the tourism industry offers increasingly exotic destinations to anglers seeking new experiences. Closer to home, the challenge of anti-angling voices in the UK has become louder since environmental and animal rights movements gained momentum in the 1960s, and a power struggle here is always lurking between field sports and environmental and animal welfare interests (more on which later). Moreover, further dispersal of the sport is always a possible threat as different network actors could attempt to assert their own dominance and angling interests over others. In this way they may seek 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1998) away from the established network to form new angling codes and practices and, therefore, new sub-divisive network arrangements that could make the current bifurcation between coarse and game angling more complex and unstable. Just as with any other successful actor-network, such dynamism and complexity means that network maintenance is a constant requirement in angling if its current sporting configurations and arrangements are to endure and prosper.

Working on the sport and delineating the social

Until the Victorian era, freshwater angling was largely undifferentiated in terms of methods and species sought. Angling was seen as an open and inclusive pastime most famously described and celebrated by Izaak Walton in 1653 as a convivial leisure pursuit that was good for the mind, body and soul; taking men [sic] away from the machinations of everyday life into a world of natural and peaceful simplicity (see, Walton, 1962; Franklin, 1999; 2000). On this Paxman (1995: 475) notes

Although some Jacobean authors suggested there was a hierarchy in fishing, it took the Victorians, with their fine nose for orders of being, to create the full range of class

distinctions. Before then, anglers had been happy enough to use worm, maggot or fly, just as long as they caught a fish or two.

This represented the greatest 'line of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1998) in freshwater angling to-date, which was led by rather privileged men such as F. M. Halford, G. S. Marrayat and G.E.M. Skues who themselves privileged fly-fishing for brown trout in southern England chalkstreams above all other means and methods of catching fish.

This development involved considerable actor-networking. For example, Halford, Marrayat and Skues each authored what are considered seminal texts on the science and art of fly-fishing in their own rights, but in doing so they vied for leadership and dominance of the sport, purporting certain fly-fishing methods as either superior to or more appropriate than others. Halford was the ultra-purist, advocating a dry fly only code where the angler's flies are fished only on the surface of the water, no matter what the ambient weather or water conditions. Marrayat and Skues were less dogmatic, and quite oppositionally advocated wet-fly fishing (placing flies below the surface) or dry-fly depending only on ambient circumstances of weather, water and fish. These debates were more than esoteric or simply aesthetic, they constituted 'the most controversial developments the sport [of fly-fishing] has ever seen — indeed, a controversy that would carry right to our own fishing today' (Law, 2017: online).

Indeed, the substantial, and often very literary, fly-fishing literature of today is still pregnant with these debates, analyzing them and retelling them in ways that constantly re-authenticate fly-fishing's 'rightful' place at the zenith of the angling world (see, for example, Lapsley 2003). These trout fishing men also had their salmon fishing counterparts who undertook much of their own fieldwork on the great salmon rivers of Scotland, and who published their findings in books that became seminal texts. They also imputed Victorian hierarchies and orders of being onto the natures and societies where their quarry was to be had:

The writings of T. H. White, Frederick Aflalo, Captain Albert F. L. Bacon and countless others record an age of endless salmon and wild moors, peat-fired lodges and wisened ghillies in kilts, and a world of rigid class distinction where everything – including the salmon – had its rightful place. (Berry 2011, p. 78).

At the same time the landed gentry - particularly those with riparian ownership of the most valued waters - played a major part in designing and ordering a whole new angling licencing regime, as well as the policing of the rivers by bailiffs, and instituting the dominance of fly-fishing as the most appropriate way to catch salmon. As with elite brown trout fishing, salmon fishing cemented its sporting codes and spatial regulations in such a way that it 'rapidly accumulated a burden of tradition and convention which was predominantly elite in character and origin' (Osborne, 2007: 211).

Sporting practices, space and power

As alluded to, coarse angling is much more varied in terms of methods used and species sought than is game-angling, and this is arguably a significant reason why it has sub-divided so catholically into quite different specialisms over the last 100 years or so, giving it less coherence than game-angling both as a sport and as an angling/social movement. For example, there is match fishing where anglers compete with each other to win cash prizes for the greatest weight of fish taken from a particular stretch of water in a given time. There is also specimen hunting in which anglers target only the very largest of a particular species of fish with the hope of breaking a British record. Many carp anglers, for example, fall into this category. The types of water fished by coarse anglers is also very varied, ranging from rivers, streams and canals to lakes, ponds and gravel pits – many of which can be found in or very close to conurbations. There are also many pleasure anglers who are not too partisan about their fishing and who are happy to catch whichever type of fish appears at the end of their lines wherever they may be fishing. These anglers are more easily placed into the coarse angling camp than the game angling camp precisely because of their absence of dogma.

Though, as we have seen, there is some stated distain between game and coarse, these subdivisions seem to have emerged with little debated controversy within and outwith coarse angling. Perhaps this is because the spaces of coarse angling are less restricted than those of game-angling, making room for large populations of coarse fish and myriad methods to catch them. It may also be because coarse angling has not seen the need to be self-consciously ideological in the way game-angling has. This is evident from the coarse angling literature, which is much more instructional, focusing on the 'how to' of practice, rather than on literary treatise on any intertwined sporting etiquette and social status. Indeed, coarse angling has never defined itself, but was given the appellation 'coarse' by a Victorian sporting elite which, in doing so, indicated their disdain for the practice, and no doubt the fish and the people that practiced it (cf. Lowerson, 1993).

Having said all this, it would be wrong to imply that game-angling is only an upper-class activity and that coarse angling is left to those who cannot cross the requisite social threshold to practice it. The boundaries between the two are not so clear cut but they are, nonetheless, there. For example, game-angling has become quite widely practiced in the UK in recent decades as market forces have sought to profit from it by growing the market and widening access to it. In this, there has been: mass production of instructional texts and equipment; commonplace stocking of rivers with brown trout and salmon; de-industrialisation, which allowed the cleaning up of once polluted rivers with game-angling potential; and by creating purpose built game-angling lakes close to conurbations. While these developments have no doubt widened access, they are anything but threats to the hallowed rivers, streams, clubs, traditions and dominant actors that make up and sustain the game-angling sporting tabernacle. Indeed, the provision of popular game-angling has served to protect such secluded waters by diverting the popular angling gaze away from them and onto spaces where the elites of the sport have little desire to tread or colonise. Moreover, the sophistication of the game-angling literature, with its emphasis on sporting codes and traditions as well as instruction, ensures that game-angling is as tightly and 'authentically' practiced and protected as it ever was.

All this social work not only reveals a particular ideological framing of nature and society but implies a certain deliberation and assertion of power in which game-angling simply out-muscles coarse angling in social, if not financial, terms. However, and notwithstanding all this, it would be wrong to think that such imposition is only a matter of force applied from the top of society down. Things are more subtle than this. The way power operates in angling involves nuanced as well as more obvious interchanges between material and semiotic forces, and happens in a Foucaultian sense whereby power and knowledge are indissociable and mutually reinforcing. Power/knowledge is thus integral to concrete practices (Law, 1986; Fox, 2000) whereby certain knowledges reproduce certain power relations that produce effective actions in (and from) particularly effective spaces. For instance, Murdoch (2006) tells us that in early actor-network studies laboratories were the focus of analysis because they are specialised spaces that produce scientific knowledge that may become effective. That is if knowledge born in the laboratory is successfully circulated in wider society to influence everyday practices, then it assumes power with effectivity that is way above and beyond its value to science. Scientific knowledge, then, does not have intrinsic power of itself, rather power gathers through its interpellation and translation into everyday life, and that takes actor-networking. Such power can be either a force for good or ill and, in Foucault's words, comes from effective locales and travels through 'the moving substrata of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power' (Foucault, 1984: 93). Therefore, to create and sustain a cultural field such as game-angling and its opposite, coarse angling, power needs to be harnessed from effective local actions and spaces, such as the laboratory work in the chalkstreams of England and/or the salmon rivers of Scotland, and through discursive techniques, such as publishing empirical findings, directed toward the purpose of network building in wider society. However, once built those networks are never completely stable, and are always liable to external and internal threats. It is thus the ability of an actor-network to hold together in the face of such dynamism that is the most important attribute if an actor-network is to endure (Murdoch, 2006). This is why there needs to be so much vigilance exercised in maintaining the boundaries and

hierarchies in angling, not least those separating game and coarse angling, if current arrangements are to be maintained.

Sporting aesthetics and ethics in game and coarse angling

It is clear, then, that angling is socially constructed and is divided by bifurcated power struggles and performances that are reflective of power geometries in wider society. That is not to say that the coarse and game angling apartheid simply reflects or represents wider social divisions, it is to say that they are both implicated in and constitutive of, as well as outcomes of, wider power struggles. As such, they are material semiotic regimes that link the natural world and the social world in very particular, dialectical, ways and operate through clearly bounded networks that produce quite distinct sporting outcomes both for anglers and for fish. For this reason, it is worth examining the aesthetics and ethics of these sporting codes a little more and consider whether these different codes of practice produce comparatively more or less ethical angler-fish relations.

As we have noted, fly-fishing is at the very heart of game-angling, putting tight restrictions on how one might catch a trout or a salmon most sportingly, with all the best trout streams and salmon rivers insisting on a 'fly only' code, and with some trout streams even restricting anglers to 'dry-fly only'. Similarly, the game-angling literature lauds fly-fishing as an authentic and highly skilful craft that is intimately in touch with nature because it uses as light and little tackle as possible, and is therefore unencumbered by gismos and suchlike that would interfere with that authenticity. On the other hand, coarse-angling is less precious about such authenticity. Indeed, coarse angling embraces technology, both in terms of equipment and baits, which allows the advancement of any legal practice that helps catch fish. These different stances toward craft and technology underscore very fundamental differences in sporting values, sporting practice and ethics of 'fair play' between the codes. And, as Hummel (1994) points out, a fair play ethic is the capstone to any sport fishing practice.

Figure 1. is an attempt to capture these differences in diagrammatic form and illustrates that coarse angling is comparatively democratic because of its inclusivity, mass appeal and accessibility.

Figure1.

Comparison of Ideal-Typical Forms of Angling in the UK

	Coarse Angling	Game/Fly Fishing
Value orientations	democratic/inclusive	elitists/exclusive
Goals	most/biggest fish	most difficult fish
Means	technology (latest gadgets)	craftsmanship (lightest tackle)
Standards of performance	results of performance (the size of catch)	quality of performance (how caught)
Rewards	external (displayed skills, public esteem, trophies)	internal (self-satisfaction)
Participants	mass appeal	selective appeal
Technology	promoted	resisted

(adapted from Hummel, 1994: 45)

Fly-fishing, on the other hand, is ethically elitist because it is selective, takes time and practice to learn, even at a rudimentary level, and is cerebral, mostly eschewing bait fishing in favour of fishing with hand-made flies that mimic natural insects. Indeed, fly-fishers often lambast coarse angling as simply feeding fish with hooked bait whereas fly-fishing is about out-foxing fish on their terms by ingeniously presenting a hand-made lure that is apparently natural to them. Fly-fishing is also predominantly about the individual angler angling for personal pleasure and personal sporting advancement in a natural environment that allows unencumbered individual wandering to hunt and

search for catching opportunities. Indeed, on the best game-angling rivers the numbers of anglers on any one 'beat', or stretch of water, is highly restricted. Coarse angling is much more gregarious and static as anglers bait particular swims to attract fish towards them. It can also be all about competition between the anglers themselves, as in match fishing for example, which is the most instrumental and Taylorist form of fishing there is. While fly-fishing does sometimes hold competitions, it is not characterised by them in the way coarse angling is. The norm in game angling is to pitch ones wits only against the quarry, not ones fellow anglers. Moreover, 'catch-and-release' fishing has always been the preserve of coarse angling, apparently because they are not good eating, while game-anglers traditionally killed and kept their more tasty catch 'for the pot'.

In recent years, however, catch-and-release has become common practice in game-angling, particularly at key times of the year when, for example, salmon runs or trout populations are not at their strongest. Thus by returning caught fish to the river the maximum number of fish can be encouraged to spawn and stocks are replenished naturally. When on those occasions catch-and-release policies are lifted – usually because of the plenitude of healthy fish at a given time of year – restrictions on the number of fish an angler can take are still often applied. This is not simply about managing populations of game fish in rivers, it is about maintaining and enhancing the authenticity of those stocks by minimising the need to compensate for the loss of wild fish by restocking with farmed fish. 'Truly' wild trout and salmon are the greatest prize in game-angling precisely because they are seen by game-anglers as untainted by human hand and are therefore the most natural and authentic of fish to be had in British rivers. Moreover, a crucial aspect to this authenticity is that authentically wild fish have provenance in that they are of that particular stream or river, and the more a river produces and reproduces fish authentically the more valuable that river will be both in cultural and economic terms. Indeed, and as already alluded to, the best of these rivers, and the best parts of them, are largely unavailable to the market or if they are they command such high rental fees that they prohibit all but the very well healed and the very well connected. Thus while practices of managing and protecting fish populations in UK freshwaters are becoming more

convergent, the sporting aesthetics of catching fish in game and coarse angling remain as bifurcated as ever.

Is game more ethical than coarse? To answer this question it is worth consulting a long-standing treatise on the ethics of different angling practices as voiced in an influential essay by A. A. Luce, a Trinity College, Dublin, Professor of Moral Philosophy in the 1950s, and game-angling man [sic]. Luce argues that catch-and-release is wrong and unethical because sport alone does not justify even the admittedly 'mild form of cruelty' (1959: 179) involved.

The primary object of justifiable angling is to catch fish for food; there are various pleasures incidental to angling; but they cannot justify the infliction of pain or death. (*ibid.* 180)

When Luce was writing catch-and-release in game-angling was not the norm, and killing fish for the pot was. Luce's beloved game-angling therefore survives his ethical terms while coarse-angling does not. Whatever one may think of the ethical rights and wrongs of such an argument, for Luce's ethic to work in practice, while maintaining the sport's authenticity, the population of regular game-anglers would have to be correspondingly small relative to the population of fish to sustain wild fish stocks. This of course means that game-angling is ethical and authentic as long as it is kept relatively exclusive.

The sustainably modern and more democratic answer to this conundrum is catch-and-release, which brings game angling closer to coarse angling than ever in terms of the practicalities of fisheries management. Other sustainable activities such as conserving waterways, the wildlife, environments and the ecologies that fish and anglers depend upon and enjoy are also integral to modern practices of all freshwater angling. There are also degrees of cruelty in both types of angling, but just because there is cruelty in both it does not mean that all anglers do not care for fish welfare. Some anglers will treat individual fish with more care than others of course, but in general terms anglers do care about the welfare of fish. Therefore, given the wide practice of catch-and-

release, the environmental and ecological management practices of anglers in general, and the levels of cruelty across both codes, it is difficult to argue that one is any more ethical than the other.

It is also true that underpinning the care for fish that anglers in general exhibit is a deeply held passion for the sport of catching them. This passion, care, cruelty triad seems contradictory, but it is nonetheless real. The next, and final, section focuses on this contradiction as it considers the universal passion for angling that anglers share against those non-anglers who share a passion for banning it.

Tangled ethics and corruptions: a passion for and against angling

All angling literature, whether it be coarse or game, proclaims a deeply held passion for the sport that drives anglers to leave their beds on cold mornings, to travel significant distances and/or pay significant sums just to put a line in the water. Equally, there is the anti-angling lobby who see all angling as both cruel and pointless in this day and age. We discuss these passions here because they are significant both to the development and the future of this ever popular and pervasive of modern pastimes.

A review of the book *A Passion for Angling* (1993), which accompanied the BBC TV series of the same name, sheds some light on what draws men [sic] to fish. Both book and series crossed all freshwater angling boundaries, and are therefore quite even-handed in their treatment and promotion of freshwater angling. This is what the review has to say:

The book, and the film series, sets out to capture the very essence of fishing. That almost intangible thing that draws grown men to the river bank, in the manner and wonder of a small boy, every weekend. That undefineable, certain something that we as anglers all know, but can never put our fingers on. The book does not elucidate what this something is, to do so would be to destroy the magic, but it does show the beauty and wonder remains for years and years. Ephemeral, and elusive like many of the quarry species, but real and vibrant nonetheless.

If you are an angler, or you require to develop an understanding of a husband, boyfriend, or brother that fishes you could do worse than read this book. The answer is not there, but it will give you a measure of understanding as to what drives them. Maybe, the only way to really understand is to grip the rod yourself and follow the dream. To adopt and embrace the Passion for Angling. (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/> 2011)

Notwithstanding the gender bias in this review, it is reflective of angling being a largely male sport, and, ending as it does on an emphasis on doing rather than discoursing, it stresses the physicality, the embodied nature and the non-representational mysteries of angling practice. In other words, it alludes to how angling is a performed relational effect in which body and spirit along with culture and society enmesh when an angler takes to the water to catch and bring his quarry from its watery world into the airy world of society. After Deleuze and Guattari (1998), Bear and Eden (2011) say that in doing this the angler comes to 'think like a fish' and in that quest 'become-fish' as an essential part of learning to become-angler. A passion for angling, then, is about loving nature in the form of fish and fishy environments, but it is also about domination of those.

Because being a successful angler means being able to get close to fish in their natural state in these ways, Franklin (2001) argues that angling is a much more profound form of leisure and ecotourism than any other. Moreover, Bauer and Herr (2004) assert that angling, as with hunting, is an elemental practice appealing to our 'killer ape' instincts. It is, therefore, a doing that can only be partially revealed by social constructionist accounts that emphasise the gender, culture and class-based divides that structure what it is and how it is performed. Thus, while angling has been increasingly shaped by culture it cannot be denied by culture because it sits at the very crossroads of society and nature, human and animal, emotion and instinct. And it is in this material semiotic reciprocation where a universal passion for angling resides, and where the power of dominant angling actors is focused as they connect the ways of the natural to divisions of the social, creating the bifurcations and unions between and within coarse and game angling discussed above.

Ironically, then, passion is a unifying force in a sport that is anything but united, and, as alluded to, is the prime motivator that compels the angler to get to the water's edge in a prepared state of readiness for 'the catch'. Catching a fish can thus be something of a climactic event which instantaneously releases days, weeks and even years of anticipation and learning. In a discussion of fly-fishing in these terms, Preston-Whyte (2008: 53) describes the moment of the catch as

interweaving [a] sense of abandonment to an external force at the moment the fish strikes and during the fight for its life, with the delight and satisfaction afforded by casting virtuosity, hunting skills, and local environmental fish lore... Deeply buried primeval urges surface that glory in the lust for the hunt. Time comes to a standstill. The fisher inhabits a liminal space between the moments before the fish takes the hook until after its successful capture.

Couple this elementally visceral moment with a passion and appreciation for simply being in the environments where freshwater angling takes place, then a heady mix of dualities - such as genetics and aesthetics, restraint and lust, cruelty and welfare, town and country, culture and nature, regulation and escape, and love and domination – can be seen to be co-presences in the world of angling. Moreover, if we examine just one of these co-presences, love and domination, and pick apart the contradictions it contains, something of a relational window begins to open through which we can view and situate many of the arguments for why angling is such an importantly compulsive pastime and those against angling as a pointlessly cruel activity.

Firstly, from the time of Izaak Walton to the present day, the angling literature expresses universal love not only for the quarry but for immersion in the environments in which fish are found. Predictably, it is also true of the literature, especially the game-fishing literature, that the wilder the fish and the wilder the environment the greater the love expressed seems to be. In recent times, however, the expression of this love has taken an interesting turn. For example, Washabaugh and Washabaugh (2000) notice that touching and loving fish in the USA has become more demonstrable

both in USA fly-fishing TV programmes and in first-hand observation of fly-fishing practice where anglers would commonly kiss fish at the time of capture. In the UK, angling TV programmes now also commonly show game and coarse anglers kissing their prize before its release back to the watery world from whence it came. This is not to say that this is an essential or universal practice either in the UK or in the USA, but it is apparently common enough that we may ask: what can we read into this growing penchant for kissing fish?

It appears that the kiss is an anthropomorphised expression not only of love for the wild creature but an act of grace and favour as the fish is permitted to leave the airy world of the angler to return to its natural state. If the angler was starving, this of course would not happen. Love and domination are thus meted out simultaneously in a single, sporting act even if the love/domination dualism is not obvious in the way the performance is usually enacted and perceived.

Domination, in the stream as well as in social life beyond it, is normally cloaked, guarded, and hidden from view. One sees the kiss, the adulation, the celebration; but in trout fishing one rarely sees the sword and the thrust. Especially where fly-fishing is pursued with a catch-kiss-release style... [o]ne can recognize the affections with no difficulty, but not the domination. (Washabaugh and Washabaught, 2000:129-130)

Back in society, domination is invariably hidden from view in representations of angling by anglers. For example, on UK TV when a game fish is sometimes (still) despatched for the pot, that moment is hardly, if ever, shown.

However, what is clear to the keen observer is that whether fish are kissed or not all freshwater angling involves hooking fish and bringing them out of their watery worlds, which must be stressful for the individual fish and therefore cruel. Moreover, it is done these days overwhelmingly for sport and not for sustenance. Should we not then refrain from kissing fish altogether and leave them to swim unhindered by human hand or mouth in their natural state of being? Following Luce's (1959) argument, modern angling in the UK is largely playing with wild

creatures and is therefore unethical, which is an argument that the most tolerant in the anti-angling lobby would no doubt subscribe to – the more militant, of course, would ban any sort of angling, including fishing ‘for the pot’. However, while there is some congruence between ethical positions in the anti-angling lobby with that of some game-anglers, there are also similar contradictions in the anti-angling passion for banning or curtailing angling that are open to criticism. For example, by applying Singer’s (1990) animal liberation philosophy the anti-angling lobby simply assign a sentimental anthropomorphism to fish in claims that fish feel pain and anxiety in similar ways to humans would if literally dragged from their lifeworld. There is, however, no concrete scientific evidence to support this claim (Rose, 2007; Newby and Stevens, 2008; Arlinghaus et al, 2009) though equally there is no scientific evidence that categorically denies it (Arlinghaus et al, 2009; also see Arlinghaus et al, 2012). This said, we must not fall into the dualistic trap of arbitrating moral positions on positivist scientific grounds when those grounds are incomplete and have their own existential and philosophical limitations. It is useful, however, to apply these different subjective/objective positions to illustrate how each side of the dualism can deny the ‘other’, and exercise a will to overpower it. It also helps to clarify that it is in the space that lies between, across and outside these two positions that our material semiotic position straddles, connects and challenges via its networked relational ontology.

As we have seen, freshwater angling is an actor-network with a long heritage that is part of the very fabric of British society. It has an extensive network of clubs and affiliations, it is publicly accepted, and it has a government agency, the Environment Agency, which regulates, promotes and supports angling as a wholesome practice deserving continued public support. As such, the anti-angling lobby has a significant and complex regime to overturn if it is to get its way on banning angling on the grounds of animal cruelty. To put it bluntly, it is difficult to see the anti-angling lobby gaining enough power to stop freshwater angling in the UK. That is not to say it is devoid of power, or indeed that it does not have an important cause, but that its real power lies more in its potential to influence angling practice with regard to the welfare of fish, rather than to overthrow angling altogether. Angling will probably always involve some level of cruelty, and the level of cruelty may

always be impossible to determine, but there is much common interest between anglers and anti-anglers with regard to either minimising cruelty or ridding angling of cruelty altogether. It is in this shared concern that mutuality exists, but that mutuality will always sit alongside the many socio-natural contradictions and complexities that divide the human actors involved as each side debates the rightfulness of their positions while the public, by enlarge, are unaffected and unconcerned.

Conclusion

To return to our question: are wild fish social animals deserving 'sporting justice' or natural beings deserving absolute protection from that human corruption we call angling? As one might expect the answer is not a simple one, but given the relationalities involved in angling, it is clear that fish are natural beings who contribute enormously to society not only as a food source but as a means of sporting pleasure. The animal liberation position casts them differently as suffering victims belonging only inside nature, away from human harm. Likewise, anglers are cast as either being outside of nature or that they should be separated from it because they value fish only as play things, and at worst things for cruel play. In this schema, elite game-angling, a la Luce (1959), has a chance of survival but coarse angling has none and 87% of angling at the very least would cease. The social impact of this would be significant and regressive, but is that a fair price to pay for the protection of fish?

On this lessons can be learned from Germany and Switzerland where the Luce (1959) ethic has won out and catch-and-release angling has been banned, though fishing for the pot has not. In both countries there has been a counterintuitive decline in total fish welfare as more fish are unnecessarily killed and as the political clout of recreational anglers, and the sustainable management of fish stocks by them, has been seriously diminished (Arlinghaus, et al 2009; Arlinghaus et al, 2017). This is not to suggest that only anglers should be the guardians of fish interests, though it is recognition that recreational angling is a sustainable, albeit socially unequal, practice in the UK. It is also important to recognise that although fish are actors with social impact they cannot speak for themselves, so natural justice is denied them. Instead, as happens with non-

humans in all actor-networks (cf. Murdoch, 2006), fish have to rely on humans to speak on their behalf. This means that fish are caught up within socially unequal angling performativities as well as animal welfare discourses, though it is also true to say that fish welfare is important to anglers and non-anglers for numerous compassionate and sporting reasons. Is it not apt and realistic, then, to acknowledge fish within these tangled socio-natural relationalities as actors possessing intrinsic value while having rights to social justice?

Such a relational perspective could override entrenched positions which see fish as either innocents needing protection from certain humans, or as simply food, or as metaphors for naturalising unequal social relations, or as objects of scientific evaluations justifying their status on whether or not they feel and fear like humans. Indeed, viewing fish as material semiotic agents within the angling actor-network positions them socially as well as naturally and repositions the animal welfare arguments aimed at protecting them both inside and outside that network. In this way, social justice sits with sustainable angling practice and eschews socially divisive aesthetics masquerading as sporting ethics. Moreover, the oppositional binaries of fish and angler, nature and society, sentiment and objectivity, angler and anti-angling are reset as dialectical relations that are neither purely good nor bad or amenable to a 'solution' one way or the other. Instead, resolution is a continued and imperfect process where justice for fish and the angling public is not about making them harmonious bedfellows or separating them as natural/social antagonists or indeed casting some anglers as more worthy than others. Rather, it is about resetting the debate in which it is acknowledged that angling produces all sorts of tangled relational effects that not only raise legitimate moral and scientific concerns and interests but ones that have very real socio-natural and political implications.

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