

Gutting fishy empathies off the Shetland Islands, Scotland

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This article builds upon Amerindian epistemologies and develops a perspectival ethnography of industrial Northwestern European skilled modes of engaging with wild fish. It explores Amerindian perspectivism as an ethnographic methodology grounded on animic premises: subject or object status are relative and relational, experience is intersubjective; the body is permeable, and its perspectives can be exchanged through tools and mimetic processes. Thus subjectivity is collectively constituted and the fundamental means of knowing, leading to the acknowledgement of subjectivity in others. Documenting a perspectival exchange guided by Shetland fishers trawling for monkfish, the article focuses on some possible dynamics and affective affordances involved in gutting processes. Gutting is physically and emotionally taxing labour that involves brief but intimate encounters with responsive beings that may offer effective resistance, affecting fishers or damaging their own value as catch. It entails the possibility of developing an intimate knowledge of fish anatomy, ecology, and behaviour, as well as potentially awareness of fish suffering and *fishiness*, an empathic quality. The research reveals how Shetland fishers maintain animic modes of learning and being in their understandings of the body and fish. The ethnography presents first-hand insights into ‘relations of trust’, which, although widely reported, continue to be dismissed as implausible. These relations and their dynamics are further attested through Shetlands *háfwords* and other language practices that establish synecdochical relations between fishers and fish, restricting violence and making it endurable. These insights problematize violence, illustrating the social skills of fishing and the political dynamics of predation, suggesting paths towards addressing cruelty.

It is early in December 2009. Somewhere in the North Atlantic south of the Shetland Isles, the *Alison Kay*, a 30-metre-long twin-rig trawler, hauls its nets. Stuart and Terry empty the circa quarter of a ton of fish caught in the nets on the hatch on the floor and shoot the next tow. We go downstairs to process the fish and take stations in front of the conveyor belt. Walter, who oversees the gutting operations, stands at the end of the line. He fits forearm protectors to cover the sleeves of his gloves; the others wear windbreakers. While Stuart and Terry sharpen the knives, Walter presses the green button, and the belt starts running with the deafening cacophony of its – recently crashed – hydraulic system. A slow parade of fish begins (Fig. 1).

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Figure 1. Sweet Dreams, Felipe Barragan, charcoal and oil crayon on drawing on paper after video recordings. Top right: the clump hanging on the stern and the sea. Superimposed on the lower middle right: the conveyor belt, amongst other fish a dark monkfish, a whiting, and a cod, and superimposed on the left: a fisher. (Reproduced with permission of the artist.)

Stuart deals with the largest fish: monkfish – our main catch – but also cod and saithe. I will help him along. He enquires about my gutting knowledge, sharpens a knife for me, and shows me their gutting procedures: first for monkfish (Fig. 2), later cod and saithe, then smaller fish, and finally megrim, which are more delicate and expensive. Stuart grabs the monkfish ‘with the left hand’, turns it upside down and clockwise, ‘locking the ventral fins between the thumb and index finger, and then cut in the middle from the fins to the cloak. Then with the left hand, you grab the liver with these fingers’. He hacks in at the beginning of the cut, and, with the index and middle finger, gently cuts the attachment of the kidneys to the inner walls. He takes the throat (from within) between index and thumb and cuts it off with the knife. Then he grabs and removes all the viscera, and, with the knife, cleans off the remaining bladder, fat, and roe. Finally, he grabs the lower end of the intestine and cuts it near to the cloaca, leaving the guts on the belt and sliding the fish into the nearest washing tank, ‘belly down so that it is well washed’.

Monkfish is hardly cuddly; it looks like a nightmarish toad: a huge and ferocious mouth with several rows of needle-like crystalline teeth, followed by a muscular body and tiny fins. The females grow up to a metre in length; but, even dealing with a

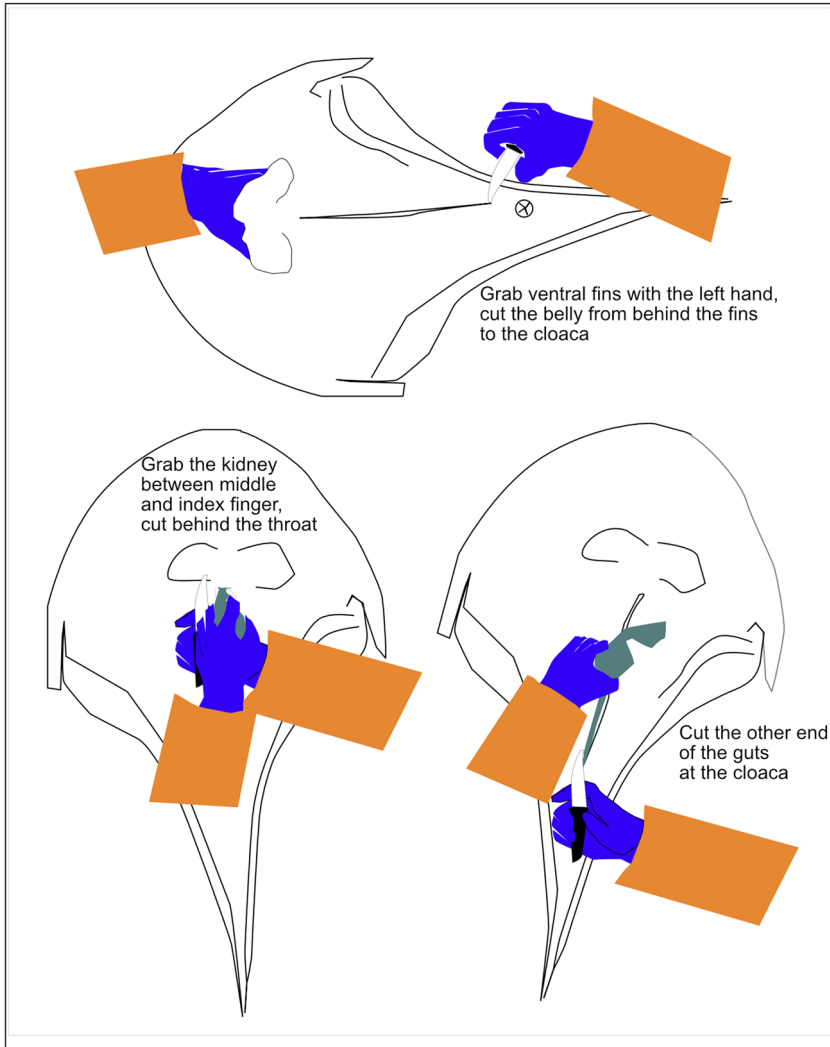


Figure 2. Gutting monkfish. (Line art by the author.)

medium-sized specimen (c. 70 cm) feels like wrestling with heavyweights. The scale-less dark greyish spotted dorsum and white belly somehow remind me of a grey friar. Later, when I mention the resemblance, James, the skipper, replies they are also called anglerfish because they have an antenna with a luminous tip, which they use to lure prey into their mouth. He explains how the twin-rig trawling gear was explicitly designed with the monkfish in mind, exploiting their specific reaction to the disturbance on the seafloor.

Rocking to the waves between Stuart and Terry, I try to avoid cutting off a finger while gutting my first fish; meanwhile, they have dealt with four or five. I proceed slowly, gaining confidence. Occasionally, the task gets complicated: a gluttonous monkfish had devoured – or become the hiding place for – several sizeable fish. Its incisive bite gives

me strife. The thick rubber gloves protect me from the teeth but become entangled in the process. Stuart explains:

To get the fish out of the mouth, you must cut under the jaw to open an easier access route. However, if the fish has been half-swallowed, it poses further trouble. Then you must help the monkfish swallow or use force to cut the fish along with the throat.

Cod, I find more challenging. You start with a cut at the gill, then you must find a space in the middle of the chest between the fins. After that, the knife runs smoothly down to the belly, though you must be careful not to burst the guts or the roe. However, I often struggle to find the gap, and the fish do not stop moving and fighting. Then you cut off the guts and remove the heart.

Fish flies in one or another box, splashing bloody water, in a gore-intensive process. The smell of fresh fish is not bad. But there is a lot of it. The slaughter goes on and on. It takes us two hours to get through the whole catch. The splattering is reiterated and multiplied while my initial ethnographical interest recedes; fatigue becomes overbearing, allowing several feelings to emerge. Throughout the whole thing, fishes move and react. Slowly, I start to become aware of how aware the fish is. It resists or endures the gutting process, and even beyond, much later in the cold room, it still moves and reacts. Losing the guts and the heart does not seem to make an immediate difference; it is still alive. It is turning me inside out.

Animal killing involves crucial and troubling aspects of human-nonhuman relations. It has been a problematic area of anthropological inquiry and is an increasingly contentious arena (Blanchette 2020; Friese 2019; Govindrajana 2015; Leroy & Praet 2017; Lien 2015; Lynch 1988; Nadasdy 2007; Pilgrim 2013; Sharp 2018; Singh and Dave 2015; Svendsen & Koch 2013; Willerslev, Vitebsky & Alekseyev 2015).

Nevertheless, according to Kopnina (2017), human violence towards nonhumans and their suffering continues to be neglected by anthropologists. She calls for a politically committed radical multispecies anthropology that amends the anthropocentrism characterizing the discipline, addresses animal suffering, and advocates for nonhumans, condemning all violent human practices against animals. Although I share Kopnina's concern for animal suffering and against anthropocentrism, I will argue that our first duty is to understand multispecies relations. The exploration of these relations demonstrates that such a wide-ranging condemnation is both anthropocentric and counterproductive. I will echo Singh and Dave (2015) in their analysis of Indian poultry abattoirs, arguing that interspecies violence is unavoidable, and the genuine concern should be addressing cruelty, elaborating on ways to kill well, a significant worry for fishers, farmers, and animal researchers (Blanchette 2020; Friese 2019; Lien 2015; Sharp 2018).

Early anthropologists expressed contempt towards attributions of personhood to other-than-humans (Lévy-Bruhl 1965 [1928]; Tylor 1870). Consequently, foundational discussions about slaughter and animal sacrifice undermined the implications of these modes of engaging reality, reducing their analysis to the interpretation of the (human) economic, social, or symbolic relations involved. General definitions of sacrifice proceed from the assumption that only what is owned can be renounced; thus, sacrifice has been generally circumscribed to pastoral societies that hold animals as property, differentiating their rituals from those performed by hunters (Willerslev *et al.* 2015). This categorization concerns itself only with the human side of the equation. Likewise, treating sacrifice as a prophylactic expiatory process, whereby a

propitious victim substitutes for the sacrificer, facilitating the catharsis of a (human) social conflict and the continuation of (human) social life (à la Turner 1977), disregards the explicit reasons for the rituals described: the maintenance of more-than-human relations.

Anthropological understandings of sacrifice were reinvigorated through science and technology studies (STS) approaches to animal research laboratories, demonstrating how scientific procedures parallel ritual sacrifice, transforming the body of research animals into samples and data (i.e. sacralized scientific objects and transcendental abstractions), substituting for future patients (Lynch 1988). Researchers and caretakers invest themselves in relations of care and affect with animal test subjects, which as working companions drive research (Despret 2004; Haraway 2008; Sharp 2018) and perform corporal exchanges that foster their potential to act as proxies for humans (Svendsen & Koch 2013). Nevertheless, STS perspectives are developed in contexts shaped by academic traditions that inherited the burden of human exceptionalism (Schaeffer 2005), and philosophy continues to reify a purportedly ineluctable abyss between humans and animals (e.g. Derrida 2002; Schrader 2015). While addressing animal suffering and death in the laboratory, anthropologists only exceptionally hint at animal perspectives (e.g. Svendsen & Koch 2013).

In an alternative take on religious sacrifice, Govindrajan (2015) notes that the substitution, making the victim propitious, requires identification with the sacrificer, constituting an identity paradox: the nonhuman victim must be human enough; sacrificial goats are looked after like children and like them also mourned, a process paralleled in laboratory contexts (Sharp 2018; Svendsen & Koch 2013). However, unlike laboratory animals, to be propitious, ritual goat victims must demonstrate their devotion to the devas, gratefulness and willingness to self-sacrifice for them and their masters through their behaviour in a separate ritual, which sometimes goes against their owners' intentions, forfeiting the ceremony (Govindrajan 2015).

The possibility of forfeiting the ritual substantiates the voluntary character of sacrifice and questions the goat's status as human property, suggesting a form of ownership founded in mutual belonging, more akin to animistic understandings of the hunt, predicated upon reciprocity in the form of either retaliatory antagonism or relations of trust (Ingold 2000). Animic hunters frequently claim that successful hunting requires acceptance and even the prey's collusion (Hallowell 1926; Nadasdy 2007; Willerslev 2004). These claims have been undermined as metaphorical constructs (Bird-David 1992; Lévi-Strauss 1966), romanticized justifications by animal rights activists (Kopnina 2017), implausible ethnographic inventions by unbelieving armchair anthropologists (Knight 2012; Smith 1980), and explained away by behavioural ecologists as maladapted pursuit-deterrent signals (Smythe 1970). Even Willerslev *et al.* (2015) end up dismissing their interlocutors' reports, declaring these cannot correspond to the inherently messy and violent reality of the hunt but merely express an idealization, presumably derived from the double-binding need to fulfil the antithetical expectations of trust encoded in hunters' cosmologies; a circular argument if one were to be squared.

Hesitation to take the victimizer's word on the victim's will is not unjustified. However, human exceptionalism, with its inherent assumptions about nonhuman capacities, lingers on, confounding these arguments. Moreover, anthropocentrism is rampant concerning organisms such as fish, invertebrates, or plants, which Western academia rarely deems sentient or aware.

Until recently, concerns about fish focused on the conservation of fishing stocks. Arguably, fish were only seen as a resource, ready to be plucked out from the water, hence not even counted as individuals but in tons (Driessen 2013). However, in the last couple of decades, along with the growth of aquaculture and its regulation, there has been an increasing interest in fish welfare (Lien 2015), with studies indicating that the perceptual and cognitive capabilities of fish entail the capacity to feel pain, to experience stress, and ultimately to suffer (Braithwaite 2010; Bshary & Brown 2014). The issue remains highly contentious, with methodological questions and charges of circular reasoning, anthropomorphism, and anthropocentrism ranging back and forth (Browman *et al.* 2018; Rose *et al.* 2014; Vila Pouca & Brown 2017).

Driessen (2013) suggests that the reluctance to acknowledge fishes' pain or suffering reflects fishers' and anglers' interests in protecting their business and pastimes, as well as a general inability to develop empathy for fish, presumably because they are not seen as cuddly. This view is partially refuted by Nordic and British notions of *fishiness*, a key concept for these fishing communities (Cohen 1989; Pálsson 1994a; Ramsay 2004), and by work with British recreational anglers (Bear & Eden 2011).

Fishiness has been understood as knowledge about fish behaviour (Cohen 1989): a somewhat preternatural fishing skill, inherited and independent of fishers' behaviours, even though it is sometimes associated with the ability to relate to fish species, for example 'to think like cod' (Pálsson 1994a). Nevertheless, Pálsson deems fishiness to be overrated in folk accounts, while Cohen (1989) downplays its role in modern fishing enterprises. Ramsay (2004) understands fishiness as an attunement to fish and describes it as one of the qualities '*saat in da blöð*' (Shetlandic: salt in the blood, perhaps sown): characteristics transmitted to kin, but not strictly inherited, rather acquired through early or prolonged exposure, through enskilment in tasks like gutting.

Shetlandic fishiness seems to coincide with the accounts of other British recreational anglers in their efforts to relate with and think like fish, which succeed in acknowledging differences in the minds and personalities of particular species and individuals (Bear & Eden 2011). Although these accounts attest to the anglers' intellectual engagement with the fish, these narratives and their analysis stop short of the messy ending and remain silent about the fishes' pain. According to Bear and Eden (2011), anglers follow a Deleuzian-Guattaresque approach to becoming fish (e.g. Deleuze & Guattari 1987), marked by imagination in the latter's absence rather than by Harawayian encounters (e.g. Haraway 2008). Such absent becomings would seemingly confirm the purported anonymity of human predatory interactions with wildlife (Knight 2012) as well as Driessen's (2013) arguments about the difficulty of empathizing with fish.

As part and parcel of industrialized fisheries in Northwestern Europe, the gutting process depicted in the introductory vignette might seem an unlikely place to find empathies for fish. Initially, I was not looking for them either. Aiming towards a decolonization of thought from a mestizo angle, my project built upon Amerindian epistemologies and explored Nordic relations with the sea through multi-sited research (including fieldwork in Denmark, the Shetland Isles, and later Iceland). I developed an ethnography exploring the insights of perspectival exchanges, accomplished through processes of enskilment guided by Nordic seafarers.

This article focuses on work with trawlers in the Shetland Islands, especially the *Alison Kay*, and on the skilled modes of engaging with large whitefish for slaughter. It shows how gutting fish, with the means and at the scale performed in these trawlers, is physically and affectively demanding labour that involves brief but intimate and

ultimately violent encounters with enormous quantities of responsive beings that may offer active and effective resistance. The article examines some of the possible engagement dynamics that fisher and fish develop through the process, analysing the affective affordances of these encounters. It examines how gutting entails the possibility of constituting brief empathic relations through which fisher and fish are aware of and influence one another, and explores how the gutting process can be the basis for the development of fishiness, suggesting an alternative role justifying its continued relevance. Thus this article reveals animic aspects extant in Northwestern European industrialized fishing, expands understandings of animic ontologies, and problematizes our understanding of violence, questioning radical multispecies anthropology and suggesting a path towards addressing cruelty.

Decolonizing anthropological methods; turning the gaze inside out: a perspectival ethnography

Regarded as representatives of a 'traditional' seaborne Nordic Scottish society, the Shetlands have been subject to copious folkloric, archaeological, historical, and ethnographic scrutiny (e.g. Baldwin 1978; Byron 1981; Cohen 1989; Fenton 1997; Goffman 1969; Jakobsen 1901), in part carried by Shetlander ethnographers (e.g. Ramsay 2004; Teit 1918). Aware of this image and its political potential in relation to the mainland, Shetlanders vividly perform their Nordic heritage,¹ presenting and representing themselves and their practices.² Nevertheless, it might still be possible to contribute with an alternative perspective, building upon Amerindian perspectival onto-epistemologies instead of Western ones, thereby turning the ethnographic gaze inside out.

As Gunadule scholar Abadio Green Stocel (2015 [1998]) remarks: the same methods employed by Native Americans to transform into and communicate with jaguars can be used to understand and establish alliances with Europeans. The Yanésa, for example, undergo deep immersion processes to appropriate the qualities of dangerous others, such as urbanite mestizos. However, whereas Western-style ethnographers would be frowned upon for going barefoot, wearing face paint or feathers, Amerindian ethnographers diligently put on make-up or cologne, watches, and sunglasses (Santos-Granero 2009). These ethnographic approaches are grounded in Amerindian perspectivist onto-epistemologies.

I have discussed Amerindian perspectivism at length elsewhere and the importance of acknowledging its role in mestizo thinking for decolonization (Giraldo Herrera 2018). For our current purposes, the central issue is that Amerindian perspectivism inverts Western objectivist ideals and objectifying premises (Viveiros de Castro 2004a). For Western ontologies, subjectivity is the internal process of an independent human individual, a mind in a body which communicates only through language and must strive for objective understanding. Remaining unaffected by and unrelated to the objects of study, which are thereby objectified and rendered inert, following the Western objectivist canon, in anthropological descriptions the epistemology of the anthropologist normally remains unaccounted for, and thereby uncontrolled (Viveiros de Castro 2004b). Meanwhile, Amerindian perspectivist onto-epistemologies start with the premise that experience is inherently intersubjective, subjects and objects are constituted through perceptual interactions with one another (Kohn 2013), and the body is a permeable coalition constantly in the making (Fortis 2010). *Habitus* and perspectives are not fixed but may be exchanged by wearing the clothes and tools

through which others, human and nonhuman, engage with the world, through which they perceive themselves as *we do us* (Viveiros de Castro 1998). Consequently, personal experience is the fundamental means of understanding (Heap of Birds 2020), and understanding is subjectifying (Viveiros de Castro 2004a).

Rather than focusing on language or delivering descriptions of the other's behaviours from the outside, these epistemologies require us to put our heart to work (Green Stocel 2015 [1998]), dressing like and mimicking the other, empathizing with them (Willerslev 2004), joining their paths and becoming with them, finding partial commensurabilities that allow us to see how *we* perceive of the world. Perspectival approaches require us to do what was long a taboo for ethnographers: to go barefoot, accepting the vulnerabilities and camaraderies of the worlds that host us (Scheper-Hughes 1995).

Perspectival ethnography aims to meet the expectations of many of our interlocutors in the field. As one of the Siberian hunters tells Willerslev: 'We bring you out here so that you can find out for yourself what it is like' (2004: 641). It records the processes of perspectival exchange, the stories we experienced with our interlocutors, and the commensurabilities we found in the process. Following Heap of Birds (2020), it is inescapably a work in progress.

My initial idea was to develop an apprenticeship in fishers' seamanship skills, focusing on their relations with the sea rather than with fish. I wanted to replicate the informal conditions of training, experiencing work on different boats, going three or more times in each to get a feel for what they were about. This methodology was compatible with established practices: fishing boats regularly partake of rookie fishers' training and international cultural exchanges. Five fishing crews hosted me, demonstrating and discussing their understandings at length. They welcomed the idea of a researcher actively immersing himself in their everyday practices. The approach proposed addressed Shetlander objections towards claims of universal expertise (Cohen 1993) and was aligned with fishers' modes of learning (Ramsay 2004), broadly encompassed by the notion of *enskilment* (Ingold 1993; Pálsson 1994b), providing the final touch for a perspectival ethnography.

Although it was not a precondition for my participation, I believe my hosts viewed my involvement as an opportunity to gain a witness and potentially advocate for their struggles. Shetland's whitefish trawlers perceived their way of life to be threatened. They struggled with a hostile political environment fostered by environmentalists, growing debt burdens, and strangling regulations, as well as competition from Norwegian fishers, aggravated by a peripheral position in relation to Scottish, UK, and European Union interests (Ramsay 2004).

Given that Shetlanders frequently know who participated in what research (Cohen 1992), anonymization is largely superfluous unless dealing with illegal issues. Instead, I sought to acknowledge the people involved, approaching informed consent as a continuous process. After concluding fieldwork, I sent reports, records, and publication drafts to the hosting crews and enquired whether they had suggestions, annotations, or amendments.

Fishy sympathies and gutting unease

We arrived at Lerwick in November. A week later, I meet Alison Ramsay, a former student of my supervisor, who, after inquiring about the project, lends me the contact of her brother James, a trawler's skipper. I finally reach him by phone on a Monday morning when a gale warning has been issued. After a brief consultation with the crew,

they agree to take me for a seven-day trawling trip on the *Alison Kay*. I am to meet them that same afternoon at the pier in Scalloway. After inquiring about my shoe size, they conclude they can fit me with some oilskins.

At the pier that afternoon, I ask a couple of fishers about the *Alison Kay*. They look a little puzzled; one counters: 'Is that the boat from the Skerries?' I am baffled. He reformulates the question: 'Is the skipper from the Skerries?' I do not know. 'Yes', replies the other and points in the general direction of a red pickup on an empty dock. As I approach, a man in his early fifties comes out of the car; three younger lads remain inside shielded from the wind. After a round of introductions, James explains that we must wait for the incoming crew, returning after a fortnight at sea.

After boarding, stocking up, another round of introductions with the older half of the crew, some challenging questions, and lighter conversation, the crew must land the incoming catch before our departure. They lend me some rubber boots and gloves, and James points back to the car, where I can find Alison's husband's oilskins.

At first, I become entangled getting into the trousers with the boots on. It will get easier once I start leaving the trousers with the boots attached in a ready-to-wear packet, as the rest of the crew do. I will not beat the record on the fisher games, however. The jacket is easier to wear but doing so is still an endurance test requiring deep breaths; even after washing, oilskins remain fishy, and every time you get into the jacket, the smell permeates you.

At some point, I touch the nets and squeamishly hold the gloves rather than wearing them – I do not want to get them stinky. James eyes me with curiosity. I try to explain. He replies: 'After some days, everything will be fishy'. Once I wear them, he regards me with something closer to approval: 'Yes, getting in the proper gear will help you get the feeling of what goes around. Everything holds in place'. Indeed, the oilskins and the thick rubber gloves keep me warm and dry, buffering the fishy smell and sliminess; they grant me a partially detachable fishiness.

We depart in the middle of the gale. I struggle with nausea as I will for the first few days of each of my future outings. (This, along with *sea legs*, is the subject of a forthcoming article.) Just as I am recovering, we have to return to port because the hydraulic system has crashed down. After some repairs, we return to sea, extending the outing another seven days.

The *Alison Kay* operated in an unrelenting six-hour work-eat-sleep cycle in which days multiplied. It aimed to catch circa 25–30 tons of fish worth about £2,000,000 in the market in its seven-day trips. Each fishing hand gutted roughly 7 to 10 tons of fish by hand, at sea, before storing them in the hold. Even at my sluggish pace, this amounts to a lot of fish.

Gutting is a vivisection, and you are performing thousands, many more than most biologists would perform during their studies. Gutting reveals the immense diversity of fishes, a wide range of skin textures, muscle structures, bone and organ shapes and arrangements. As John William will point out in a later trip, gutting shows what fish eat, how they reproduce, and how they behave. Gutting forces you to become intimately acquainted with them.

In the following days, even though my skills were increasing, gutting would not get easier. Greater skill allows you to perceive in detail the fishes' reactions: the building expectation, the tension as the belt brings them near to your hands, the explosive bouts of kicks upon contact, and their fight as they try to escape or delay your actions. You also may feel the pain you are inflicting, how some become tense with the knife. In

others, you sense abandonment, a relaxed exhaustion, or, on the contrary, a sense of never surrendering. Many of these things would be happening in the course of fractions of a second.

Perhaps these reactions are automatic. Perhaps, despite the trouble they give, fish are not aware. You may be functional in complex tasks like driving without necessarily being conscious or later recalling what was happening. However, this idea neither appeases me nor accords with my observations.

As the hauls pass, I reiteratively think perhaps there is a more 'humane' way to gut fish: maybe if we knocked them out, they would stop moving, stop reacting, stop being aware. Answering my unspoken question, on more challenging days to come, my hosts would bump the head of particularly rebellious fish, and sometimes they would stop moving. Although head-bumping may be a way to render fish unconscious, potentially conducive to a more humane killing (Lien 2015), I conclude that it might not make a difference either. It might inhibit their movements without affecting their perception. The ambience, however, becomes tenser.

But what are the alternatives? Letting fish die of asphyxia does not seem nicer. Nor does it solve the problem: fish have to be gutted – the faster, the better – to avoid parasites travelling from the guts to the muscles. Poisoning? Electric shocks, perhaps? No, those are not pleasant either: even if briefly, they imply intense suffering. As Lien (2015) remarked in the context of salmon farming in Norway, the issue of how to kill fish humanely remains problematic: the Norwegian government had to discontinue its formerly mandated practice of anaesthesia through CO₂ administration after studies revealed this procedure produces extreme distress in fish, equivalent to drowning. She also describes electrical stunning as often ineffective. Reflecting on it while we gut, there seems to be no better solution, no good mechanical way of killing or dying. The noise of the squeaking pipes becomes unbearable, men and fish irritable, head-bumping profligate.

Through never-ending gutting sessions, I try to justify myself rehearsing several arguments, ranging from practical convenience through dietary choices to ethnographic interest. However, none of them works. In the end, the only comfort I find is an angry and dubious idea of a food-web justice, which crawls out of the fishes' mouths: they are voracious. I am justified in being voracious too. I start picturing the fish as greedy and grow convinced of it. The evidence is in their mouths; at that catastrophic moment when the nets caught them, they were too busy catching as much as they could grasp.

Moreover, they surrender their lives more quickly than their mouths' contents. I keep ruminating over this consolation for the gutting. It is getting me through it, albeit barely. However, there comes the ling: as I am about to grab it, it throws up its guts, kidneys, and bladder, a mess that makes everything harsher. After gutting just a few ling, I cannot help but see myself in their place, throwing up everything in anguish, just like I was a couple of days before; ling disarm me.

My justifications also fail with cod, a nervous, warring, and utterly demoralizing fish which, despite a widely publicized decrease in its adult population and restrictions on their quotas, predominates in gargantuan sizes in our latest catches.

To make matters worse, every cod I miss, Walter guts and throws back to the tank in front of me, splashing me with bloody water and a smirk, hinting at a subtle punishment for my negligence. I try to rush through to quicken the pain. But it is no use: it was a colossal haul; the belt barely moves, and there is still a lot to gut.

The cod are now jumpy and giving further strife. After I cut the gill, some of them tense their ventral fins, closing the gap between them, making the second cut a real struggle. And after I cut the guts, their heart hides, and I spend hideous moments trying to find it while the fish still fights me. The fight goes on until I throw them into the tank, and still there, they splash bloody water. After a period, which seems to go on forever, Stuart and Terry join us.

For a while, the extra hands get the belt moving, and the environment relaxes. However, as fish continue to parade in front of us, the atmosphere turns heavy again. The belt works through an electrically powered water pump system. Stuart tells me: 'This is not as noisy as the purely hydraulic systems. Nonetheless, since it crashed, it has been producing that noise'. It sounds like an out-of-tune piper regiment, striking our deepest nerves. The fish, too, are jumpier. It is depressing to watch them in agony and then see that some of them get discarded, but we are out of quota for those fish. I enquire whether they could have survived had they been returned to the water on time. Stuart explains: 'No, it is unlikely given the rapid decompression fish experience during the hauling; they are unlikely to survive even if we dump them back'.

We get through gutting just as the next tow is catching up, another haul, no time to eat or sleep. The others maintain the same pace. Stuart goes about it steadily. It dawns on me that hurry is directly proportional to the fight the fish put up. You cannot rush death, especially not a merciful one. It has to be well done, patiently and with care. I take my time to work through the fish; they do their part and calm down. I still do not like it, but it feels better. We get through.

I wash my oilskins and gloves, trying to get the fishy slime and blood off. The crew watch me bemused. We head down to the hold, where Walter is already storing the fish. After we are through, I re-wash my oilskins and gloves and head out for a shower. I perceive a slight smirk at my persistent squeamishness.

Getting fishy: 'Enough is never enough'

Up in the wheelhouse, James plays a blues riff on his guitar. We start talking about life histories. He was 16 when he:

dropped out of school and started fishing in a 12-metre wooden trawler. It was very small and didn't have a covered deck or processing belts. Everything was processed out on the open deck. She did not have a mess room either, but only the communal cabin where you ate and slept. You were either sleeping or fishing. There was nothing else to do.

Later on, along with his father and three brothers, he bought a 17-metre trawler. They named her after their sister. A few years ago, they sold that boat. In 2000, James and the crew commissioned the construction of the *Alison Kay* by a Danish shipyard.

She is a fine boat, efficient and comfortable. We would not have been out at sea through the last gale in either of the other two. Every time it is harder to pursue fishing. Restrictions are constantly changing; the EU and the government are forever reducing quotas, making people fish less while the Norwegians take advantage of the situation. We cannot afford to fish less; we still have to pay the loan for the boat. To stay in business, we have to borrow money and buy additional quotas or work with the quotas of sleeping skippers, who remain landed and rent theirs. Bidding over fishing rights raises quota prices, making them affordable only to very large fleets. In that way, even people from Holland are more likely to get the quotas, and kids starting in Shetland stand no chance. In just a generation, there could be no Shetlanders left with fishing quotas. Shetland without fishing will have lost a lot of itself.

I ask James about our whereabouts. He replies: 'We are on the same ground we were before' (i.e. southwest of Foula). This raises the row with fishery scientists and

environmentalists: 'Trawlers are often accused of destroying fishing grounds; however, we have been fishing in the same grounds year after year, and there is no decrease in our catches'. He points to the GPS display tracing the history of paths followed by the trawler. The map is carefully scratched, filling every possible space: even when zooming in, certain zones are highly saturated, like a carefully ploughed field. For him, this refutes fishery scientists' claims concerning the destruction of the grounds and the purported collapse of fish stocks. Then, he points out the uncertainties of scientific knowledge about the impact of the policies they seek to implement:

They are trying to reduce Shetlands monkfish quota sizes, arguing that there has been a reduction in local populations. However, fish migrate, even benthic fishes, Shetland-tagged [monk]fish have been caught as far away as Iceland, crossing a deep-sea trench beyond the continental shelf... Fishery science doesn't know where monkfish are coming from or where they are going: they do not know where it spawns or anything else for that matter.

This reference (Laurenson, Johnson & Priede 2005) demonstrates that fishers are attentive to fishery science, to its advances and contradictions.

Another haul. The nets are fuller than before, fat with fish, which makes the small winch squeak, while the *lazy decky*, a thick and battered rope that holds the load, crackles under the tension. The sack hardly passes between the two winches to its resting place above the hatch on the floor. Stuart and Terry get a fishy shower while dealing with the tightened knots of the codline securing the cod-end at the tip of the net.

Standing next to Walter, I say aloud: 'It was a good haul!' Walter lowers his voice to such a degree I can barely hear his laconic reply: 'We'll see'. His attitude leaves me perplexed. Perhaps I am missing insights into the nuances of prices. Then something makes him sparkle, and he adds loud and confidently: 'You always have to look farther. Enough is never enough'. I am shocked by what strikes me as greed flowing overboard. Of course, James's lament made me aware of their financial situation. However, Walter's attitude reminds me of the 'insatiable' monkfish, with whom his expression somehow bears a remarkable resemblance. Like monkfish, the *Alison Kay* seems to be caught in a net of events beyond their control. Their response, like the monkfish's, is to swallow as much as they can. As with the monkfish, I would hesitate to accept the validity of my rushed judgements of their fishy behaviours in the exceptional conditions imposed by the cod-end.

Everyone is in a lousy mood. A police boat threatens to board us to check whether we have fished more than a quantity of cod per hour at sea. If we have trespassed, the police will close the ground, as happened with the Fair Isle grounds. The notice comes as a surprise. It is a novel regulation, presumably related to ongoing negotiations with Norway over fishing quotas, featuring on the news.

After another haul, another gutting session, it is becoming overwhelming. I really dislike gutting, in particular the feeling of still living animals moving in anguish. Cod are the worst, although, lately, I must be doing something better; they seem calmer. It is easier to find their heart and take it away. The rest of the guts come out with two cuts: one near the anus, another by the throat. Monkfish, on the other hand, are becoming harder. I still dislike what seems like their vicious greediness, their slimy spikiness, their big mouth ever full of wanting, but the liver is not coming out so easily as before, when I could remove it with just a slide of my fingers.

I am faced with more fish than I bargained for. It takes Walter and me a long time to process them. I lean back and cut across them with my teeth gritted while spluttering

blood, faeces, and ammonia fly around. Finally, it is over. I wash the oilskins and go down to the hold to shovel ice. The place is cold, slippery, and exhausting. Now shovelling seems easy; you rock with the boat and find in its rocking the strength to cut through the ice. Just pause, and you feel the exhaustion: lean back, and it is over. I wonder whether I am being helpful or just fooling around. 'We are through. It's enough,' says Walter.

Once we are done with the fish, I talk with Walter. I tell him that the hardest thing for me is gutting. In a barely audible voice, held perhaps by a lump in his throat, he remarks: 'Nobody likes it'. I keep blabbering: 'What's hardest for me is the fish: sticky, smelly'. He looks back with an expression of disappointment that passes several layers under my skin and replies: 'I don't like it either; I wouldn't do it with my bare hands'. An irony considering the bloody showers I took. It strikes me then: on his cheek, there is a dried drop of blood. It has been there for the last couple of days. Like the shirt, his cheek will remain stained for the rest of the trip – a lucky shirt, perhaps; fishy for sure.

On Christmas Eve, the crew invite me to their Christmas dinner. I inquire whether my then wife can come along; James agrees. When we arrive at the restaurant, Walter, Eoin, and John (as distinct from John William) are having a beer in the bar. There is an awkward silence. None of their partners are there; the dinner is usually just for the crew. They invited us together as a concession. After a while, the environment relaxes, and we come to find that John is actually from Glasgow, although half his family is from Lerwick, Eoin is from Orkney, John William and Stuart from Whalsay, Terry and Kevin from Burra, and Walter and James from the Skerries. The underlying rivalries between the mainland and the Eastern isles become evident. John William arrives and starts enquiring about my first trip, about seasickness, sleep, and fishing. After my report, he concludes: 'All fishermen are the same. They never know when to stop'.

Sweet dreams and fishy empathies

A fortnight later, with another gale raging, I get around to a second outing with the *Alison Kay*. This time, we depart from Lerwick with the senior crew, piloted by Kevin, the second hand. We head off Balti to the Flugga, 70 miles east of the coast of Shetland and 130 from the coast of Norway. Soon after leaving port, nausea ensues.

On the third day, I participate in the hauling, gutting, and storing in the hold-room. The crew are happy; it is a very large haul. Watching me gut the cod, John William comments: 'Now we are cutting both gills of the cod, to get it better washed'. He prides himself on the high, bruiseless quality of their produce, on their long-standing relations with their customers. It takes a while to get used to the new techniques. Processing and storing the fish takes us four hours.

We have a couple of smaller but still good hauls, then one of our nets gets torn, the weather gets cursed again, and nausea returns with a vengeance. I am useless. The crew pass the following hauls straight without rest or sleep, split between mending the torn net and processing the fish. They work ceaselessly through a rough gale, even after a cable snaps at Eoin's ankle. He comes down, hopping on one leg, wraps his ankle with a bandage, and starts cooking. I am still useless but decide to join them in the following haul.

But the gale is too strong and they stop fishing. I wait to join the processing of the next tow. The weather is still rough, but there is a very jolly mood. Seldom do I hear the pipes whistling. John William and Eoin goof around, making the process hilarious;

John, who is leading, murmurs some shanty. John William asks me to pass him 'the cold iron' (i.e. the knife). It amazes me how little strife there is with the fish. They are not kicking, locking their chest, or peeing on your face. Instead, they are calm; I dare say, even friendly. They seem to run swiftly through the knife and then swim their way off your hands and into the tank. Beneath the murmur of the engine, I recognize that John is singing the Eurythmics' 'Sweet Dreams'. It is like he is lulling the fish with it. With its theme of appetites, of wanting to use and abuse, and wanting to be used and abused, the song describes perfectly the situation: the monkfish whiting in the mouth, the cod sardine in the stomach, the nets, the boat, the fishers' voraciousness, the impending loan from the bank, the anthropologist's greed for new information. We are all fishing, victimizers and victims, potentially even willingly so. You gut fish to use them; you abuse them, revealing their voracity. Even if the song choice is not premeditated or necessarily related to what is happening – and 'Sweet Dreams' is neither a traditional Shetland reel nor a fishing shanty – it is nevertheless overwhelmingly accurate and appropriate: scalpel-sharp. I get the song stuck in my head; its sincerity is soothing.

It might be another self-justification. Unlike others I tried, it seems to work, somehow also for the fish. Even cod are at ease, relaxed with my hold. Some do gasp with the iron (knife), it is indeed cold, but I easily find the gap between their gills, so it slides effortlessly along their bodies without meeting resistance; their hearts do not hide. After helping them ease off their guts, they swim back into their washing tanks. After storing, I am exhausted, dizzy with the feeling of low blood-pressure numbness, but happy.

After the hold, a shower and dinner, I fall into an intense dream. I wake up at 4:40 the next morning. John William is on watch; he comes down to grab a coffee. He tells me they call this slot, from '3 to 5 a.m., the graveyard watch. It's very dangerous, most accidents occur during this watch because you feel sleepy all the time'. I mention the dream. He comments how when the sea is still, you dream more and rest more. I start telling him the dream, which was something oddly erotic about a boat-fishnet-girl shagging the sea-me. He is bemused and interested. He suggests: 'It might have been the sea that shagged us yesterday; certainly that was the case'. I emphasize that it was the boat shagging me, but he stands by his interpretation of us being shagged by the sea. Then he lightens up and with a gleam in his eye says: 'Perhaps, it is a fishy dream'. He elaborates: 'Fishy dreams are those auspicious for fishing; ebb [tide] dreams are really fishy'. I ask him whether the tide plays a role in fishing. 'Not particularly in this kind of fishing, more so in the seine'.³ We talk about different fishing techniques, fishing skills and fishiness, an affinity with fish some people just seem to have, while fish seem to avoid others.

A couple of hauls later, John and Kevin enquire whether I am 'getting the channels'. The tone is tainted with a certain complicity. Are they talking about porn channels? As frequently happens when I am in doubt about a turn of phrase, there is no way to have them repeat it; instead, they reformulate it in the Queen's English, turning it into an innocent 'excited about the return home', in which any trace of complicity is gone. When we are about to haul, I ask John William. He replies with joyful amazement: 'Where did you pick [up] that [phrase]?' He does not respond either, not immediately, but comments enthusiastically with the others: 'You know what he asked me?!' It was as if these were my first words. John looks annoyed. John William's reaction becomes even more enthusiastic when I ask him to 'pass the iron' to sharpen the knife. John William starts clearing things up:

Getting the channels is like when water is going through a straight, it is channelled, in the same way when you are near to the return home you want to be with your woman, you get a drive that channels you and allows you to work hard through.

We are finally through. It was a huge tow. As John goes to the wheelhouse to calculate the catch's worth, I hear him reciting: 'one, two, three, a lot of fisher-wives, I see'. They come down from the wheelhouse with jolly faces: the tow was some 'fifty-five boxes, about a quarter of a ton of fish'.

Reflective speculations

At first sight, John's enumeration of boxes and tons confirms Driessen's expectations: fish seldom are counted as individuals, and while gutting, fishers express little sympathy for their suffering. However, we ought to examine this in light of the formula with which John preceded the act of counting. Rorie (1904), who records a version in Fifeshire, Scotland, describes it as a way to dispel the ill luck associated with the taboo act of counting fish. Analysing the formula reveals its audience and intention. It performs two transformations of meaning: first, it establishes fish as fishers and then displaces the forthcoming enumeration from the prey caught to their widows left behind. These are not metaphors, but synecdoche: fish are indeed fishers, and the rhyme mourns 'fisher-wives' (i.e. fisher widows). Fishing is a dangerous job. Enumerating the widows left, fishers demonstrate their experienced compassion, thereby establishing a common ground with the fish left in the sea, reinforcing their own fishiness. Although this could be a remnant and may not necessarily reflect the fishers' ontology, it was not an isolated language practice.

The crew's reluctance to explain turns of phrase like 'the channels' or the 'cold iron' might be explained in these being *háfwords* (Shetlandic: sea-words) or *luckywords* (Flom 1925; Jakobsen 1901; Knooihuizen 2008; Westerdahl 2005), periphrases employed at sea instead of taboo words, respectively wife/homesickness and knife. While some *háfwords* are metaphors with land phenomena (e.g. lamb or elk for seal), these *háfwords* are synecdoche. They refer to unmentionable objects, feelings, or persons, emphasizing some of their inherent qualities. Albeit masking the truth, they are honest, enabling alternative interpretations of events, actions, and responses: the burning feel of *cold iron* makes you gasp but does not imply the knife's harm; *getting the channels* describes the affect in terms of water dynamics establishing fishiness, while simultaneously disguising land motives.

The endurance of taboos and precautionary actions such as the counting rhymes and *háfwords* suggests that even if failing to play a substantial role in catch sizes, fishiness continues to be essential for Shetlandic fishers. The characteristics of these expressions suggest that beyond the knowledge of fish behaviour or the cognitive capacity to think like fish, the importance of fishiness lies in its intimacies, constituted partly through shared vulnerabilities (Friese 2019; Schrader 2015), but also through empathy with complicit actions.

Háfwords identify common perspectives between fishers and fish, common capacities and modes of acting, allowing fishers to relate to their actions in fishy neutral terms. They reveal and veil fishers' intentions, demonstrating a concern for the fishes' awareness about what fishers say and do. Fishiness questions that purportedly ineluctable abyss between humans and animals. As Westerdahl (2005) suggests, Shetlandic *háfwords* closely parallel hunting languages of neighbouring circumpolar

animists, revealing an intimacy akin to their approaches to other-than-humans, which are grounded in empathy and trust (Ingold 2000; Willerslev 2004).

Someone in the vein of Knight (2012) could argue that trawlers' encounters with animals are even more limited than in hunting scenarios. Indeed, these encounters are brief, bounded to a context akin to the slaughterhouse, though without the familiarity with humans endowed by breeding and rearing (Lien 2015). The approach is the reverse: fishers become fishy. Much like recreational anglers, which many, like Terry, are in their spare time, through trawling gear and the experience of previous tows, fishers develop an intimate knowledge of fish behaviour and of the grounds, actively structuring them (Howard 2017).

However, unlike the fraction of the engagement described by Bear and Eden (2011), gutting constitutes the actual encounter with the very real fish. Whereas the terminal interaction with lab animals or livestock on the slaughterhouse is a moment of detachment marked by anaesthesia (Lien 2015; Svendsen & Koch 2013) and glance avoidance (Blanchette 2020), in gutting as in ritual slaying (Govindarajan 2015), it is the moment of encounter, developing knowledge and becoming fishy.

Refractive speculations

Becoming fishy starts with exposure to fishy substances, with the traces of fish: the slimy mucous and the enduring smell; an initial, material connotation of fishiness, which, as mentioned by James, will become prevalent. Squeamishness was the first barrier: an unwillingness to relate. Although Walter remarked he would not handle fish without gloves, his and John's uniform – reduced to gloves, sleeve covers, and oilskin trousers – demonstrates their greater skill and familiarity with fish, highlighted by the traces of blood on his face and t-shirt. The bloody baths Walter and the fish gave me could be accidental or mischievous. But perhaps fishiness is indeed sown in the blood. These baths dampened that initial aversion, allowing me to cross the affective threshold, familiarizing me with fish, becoming fishy in a materially embodied sense, which might be of consequence considering the role of olfaction on fish behaviour (Hara 1986).

Learning to gut large whitefish entails exploring modes of engaging with fish, allowing us to expand Willerslev's (2004) insights about sympathy and empathy regarding them as part of the process of enskilment (see Fig. 3). I started oblivious, *apathetic*. Nevertheless, these fishes' dimensions, strength, and unpredictability demand attention, forbidding rookie *apathy*, which became difficult to maintain with increasing fatigue, eliciting *antipathy* and *sympathy* for the fish. The fish reacted adversely to antipathy, resisting more emphatically. Meanwhile, sympathy was paralysing. These emotions were problematic, not in a supernatural sense, but as disarming, nerve-wracking experiences, damaging in their own right.

Walter's admission of discomfort with gutting surprised John William and his wife Caroline: As Caroline said: 'If anyone in the crew could regard fish as simply merchandise, that would be him, and yet he also found it troubling'. Walter carefully avoided gloating over the size of the catch and rephrased it in terms of a fishy voraciousness, leading him and the younger shift to push their boundaries. Although the crew's voices were not always audible over the noise of the malfunctioning hydraulic system, antipathy and sympathy were sometimes apparent in their expressions, seemingly constituting a vicious circle: increasingly agitated fish led them to resort to head-bumping, further worsening the atmosphere. On other days, however, observing

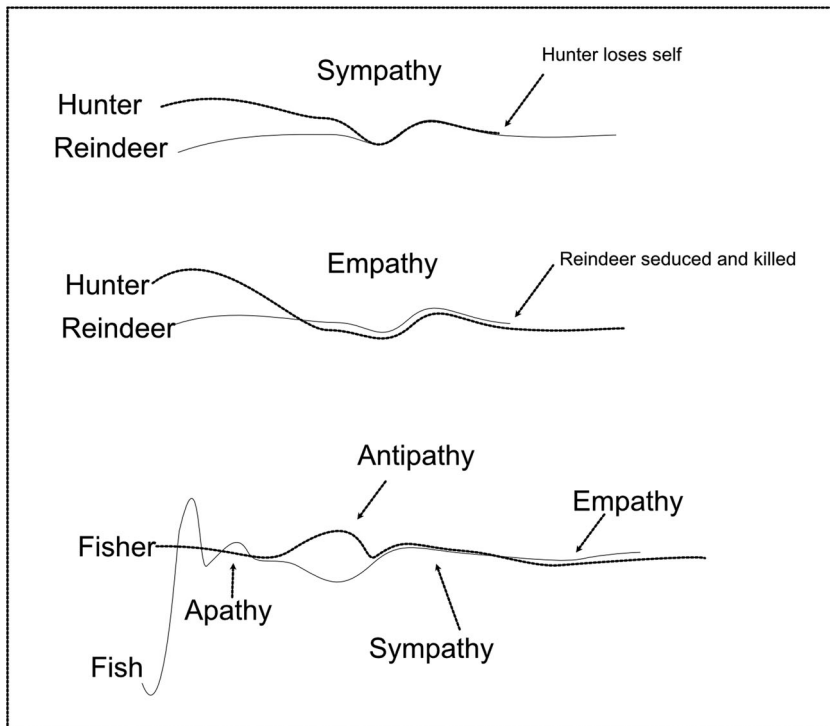


Figure 3. The paths of engagement in hunting, fishing, and through the process of enskilment. Sympathy and empathy modelled after descriptions in Willerslev (2004); the final graph depicts these paths as part of the process of enskilment. (Line art by the author.)

the fishes' calmness, it became evident that death cannot be rushed; killing must be carried out patiently and with care.

The senior crew rarely relied on head-bumping, and they prided themselves on it. Listening to John's recital of 'Sweet Dreams', a resolution to the gutting paradox became palpable. As it was happening, I interpreted the fishes' demeanour as a response to John's singing. Reacting to a draft of this article, John William quipped: 'I hope the fish appreciated it more than us', revealing both his stance towards fish sentience and the long-standing friendly feud between the two men. For my part, the lyrics were soothing, showing a path through empathy, while the melody and the rhythm were gripping. The likes of Smith (1980) could ask: can fish even hear? Was John's intention to becalm them? Or to represent his world and its complexities? How could a random pop song afford so much? How could fish respond to a man's singing?

Auditory systems developed early in vertebrate evolution and those of fish and humans are closely related. Theirs encompass the frequency range of our voices (Fay & Popper 2000), and some, like haddock and saithe, produce calls in those ranges (Finstad & Nordeide 2004). Furthermore, in zebrafish, a model organism for neurosciences, musical enrichment has demonstrable effects, improving their welfare (Barcellos *et al.* 2018).

Why should John's interpretation of 'Sweet Dreams' be any less fishy or representative than a reel or the counting rhyme? Having worked at a fish-processing factory during

her youth in Aberdeen, its original singer, Annie Lennox, was no stranger to gutting emotions or truck economies. John might not have had further intents with his song; nevertheless, he had fish, colleagues, and a gutting-troubled rookie for an audience. His performance affected the ambience: it made us cringe or smile, relaxing the operation.⁴ Even if the fishes were unable to hear John's voice, if neither its melody, harmonies, or rhythm directly affected them, their differing attitudes attest to their capacity to read us and relate accordingly (Despret 2004). Their behaviours demonstrate there is more to their reactions than nociception: pain is a subjective experience, but as our mutual responses evidence, it is collectively constituted and can be collectively quenched.

By giving voice to the shared burden of predatorial existence and remarking on the unknowability of the other's intentions, the song articulated an elusive justification for the concurring slaughter: we are all fishers caught in the food web, swallowing others in this cod-end; we are doing the same. Herein lies the substitution of sacrifice. Beyond delusion and messy violence, empathy remains a ludic path for mutual identification that reframes and neutralizes suffering. Playing on complicity-founded compassion leads us to come to terms with our demise (fishing is dangerous), constituting an enduring mode of engaging, and restricting unnecessary violence. The value of fishiness lies not necessarily in catch size but in peace of mind, which has repercussions for fish and fisher well-being.

Calling for a radical multispecies anthropology condemning all violence against animals, Kopnina (2017) reproduces the paradoxes of animal rights and welfare advocacy. Despite allegiances to non-anthropocentric ethics, these calls implicitly establish limits to which nonhumans are worthy of care, conditioning them to qualities treasured in humans, such as sentience or awareness. Fishiness and the growing research on fish sentience remind us that these exclusions are predicated on temporary ignorance associated with lack of familiarity, anthropocentrism, and convenience. Moreover, reminding us that animal lives depend on eating others, forcibly exerting violence upon them, gutting subverts the scale of worthiness as only plants and algae abstain from that form of violence.

On the other hand, condemning those who, often obliged by circumstances, carry the burden of exerting violence towards nonhumans contributes to their precariousness (Blanchette 2020; Friese 2019; Howard 2010; Salazar Parreñas 2018; Sharp 2018; Svendsen & Koch 2013), seeding resentments, which often find expression in cruelty (Singh & Dave 2015). Improving fish welfare requires fostering fishy solidarities, recognizing and remunerating gutting as highly skilled labour, involving intimate knowledge of fish and the social skills to play fish(er), quenching their suffering, and avoiding cruelty.

In conclusion

This article builds on Amerindian epistemologies and develops a methodology to perform a perspectival ethnography of the ways of engaging with fish amongst the Shetlander crew of a whitefish trawler. It registers the process of perspectival exchange involved in becoming fishy and reveals the density and complexity of multispecies relations at work in gutting. This process leads to reflective and refractive speculations. Refractive speculations demonstrate the displacement and transformations of our perspectives as we develop through enskilment: from apathy, through antipathy and sympathy, as we build partial commensurabilities that allow us to empathize, acknowledging and drawing on solidary alliances (Green Stocel 2015 [1998]). Reflective

speculations express relations amongst others, palpable in interspecies responses to language practices, demonstrating controlled equivocations (Viveiros de Castro 2004b) and their underlying logic: what appears like not counting fish is not neglecting them as individuals, but a measure of discretion; what appears like messy violence is cod-end solidarity; the cod-ends in which the *Alison Kay* is caught are not nylon but financial, whereas mine are disciplinary. Nevertheless, these are not metaphors but synecdoche: the fish and I are fishers too, and by now, we are all fishy. Killing well, or humanely, depends on processes of care that are messy and fishy. These processes are in turn dependent on a deception whereby delusion and fishy dreaming are transformed into real underlying solidarity.

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NOTES

¹ For example, <https://www.uphellyaa.org/>.

² <https://www.shetlandmuseumandarchives.org.uk/>.

³ Scottish seine netting employs the force of tidal currents to force shoals of fish into a long net, weighted at its bottom edge and buoyed by floats at the top.

⁴ See also Gatt (2020) for the correspondence between sounding and listening.

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Empathie poissonnière en Écosse, au large des îles Shetland

Résumé

À partir d'épistémologies amérindiennes, le présent article développe une ethnographie en perspective des pêcheurs qualifiés de poissons sauvages employés par la pêche industrielle dans le nord-ouest de l'Europe. Il explore l'emploi du perspectivisme amérindien comme méthode ethnographique ancrée dans

des prémisses animistes : le statut de sujet ou d'objet est relatif et relationnel, l'expérience est intersubjective, le corps est perméable et ses perspectives peuvent être échangées au moyen d'outils et de processus mimétiques. La subjectivité se crée ainsi collectivement et constitue le moyen fondamental de savoir, qui conduit à reconnaître la subjectivité des autres. L'article relate l'échange de perspectives à l'œuvre chez des pêcheurs de baudroie sur les chalutiers des îles Shetland en se concentrant sur le vidage des poissons, qui implique certaines dynamiques et concessions affectives. Le travail de vidage, physiquement et émotionnellement très éprouvant, implique des rencontres brèves mais intimes avec des êtres réactifs, capables d'une réelle résistance qui peut affecter les pêcheurs ou diminuer la valeur des prises. Il rend possible l'acquisition d'une connaissance intime de l'anatomie, de l'écologie et du comportement des poissons, ainsi qu'une sensibilisation potentielle à leur souffrance et à leur caractère *poissonnier* : une forme d'empathie. Révélant comment les pêcheurs des Shetland pratiquent des modes animiques d'apprentissage et d'être dans leur compréhension du corps et des poissons, l'article offre des données ethnographiques de première main sur les « relations de confiance », maintes fois rapportées mais dont la plausibilité continue à être mise en doute. Ces relations et leur dynamique sont également attestées par les évitements lexicaux (*håfwords*) et autres pratiques linguistiques des Shetland, qui établissent des relations synecdochiques entre pêcheurs et poissons, restreignant la violence et la rendant tolérable. Cet éclairage pose le problème de la violence, illustre les compétences sociales mises en œuvre dans la pêche et la dynamique politique de la prédation et suggère des moyens de répondre aux problèmes de cruauté.

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