

# The Practice of Hunting as a Way to Transcend Alienation from Nature

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores whether and to what extent the practice of leisure hunting is used as a way to transcend the human-nature alienation and thereby reconcile modern society and nature. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with hunters around Stockholm, Sweden and participant observation. In the paper, modernity is discussed from a Marxist perspective as causing the alienation of human beings from nature and natural sources of production through processes of industrialisation, capitalism and urbanisation. By exploring hunting as an ancient activity in a modern society the paper further discusses whether hunting can, through managing and harvesting wildlife, offer some kind of insight into people's interaction with natural sources of production. The question is whether hunting has the potential to facilitate a more profound appreciation of wildlife and ecosystems by reconnecting people with nature. The effects of Modernity on hunting are also discussed to reflect some of the paradoxes and internal contradictions that exist within hunting.*

**Keywords:** Hunting, Alienation, Reconciliation, Modernity, Nature

## Introduction

The first question that led to this project is “why would modern people want to hunt?”. The fact that there is no need for most people to hunt made it more interesting, especially since I do not hunt myself. From this first question the idea expanded onto what a modern hunter is. People have become such a successful species in terms of thriving populations that it has become a problem in modern society (Beck, 2009). In western societies most communities want for nothing and processes inherent in capitalism have led to a system where people are no longer in touch with sources of production; causing what is referred to as alienation. Alienation is the Marxist term for separation and estrangement of people from themselves and the reality of the world they live in (Ollman, 1976). Modernity is the vehicle that facilitates alienation through the inherent processes of industrialization, capitalism and urbanization which

monetize value and separate producers from consumers. In turn, modernity creates an understanding that nature and culture are two separate systems that only interact with one another, nevertheless, this is argued to be an alienated understanding of the reality of the world (Harvey, 1993). The separation of producers and consumers means the consumer no longer has knowledge or control over the means of production and therefore cannot determine the source of what they consume or the clear effects of their own consumption. Due to society's alienation from natural systems there is a resulting anxiety in individual consumers because they are separated from modes of production.

Recently championed as an antidote to alienation (Reis, 2009) hunting is an activity which not only places people in natural environments and in close

contact with wildlife, it also is an ancient practice that has been continued until this day (Peterson et al., 2010; Persson, 1981). The purpose of hunting has not changed much but its practice has evolved and changed along with society (Persson, 1981), perhaps in response to the increased scrutiny it is under from the latter. Hunting is now more multifunctional.

Hunting scholars generally argue that hunting, as a leisure activity, in modern society holds the potential to reconnect people with nature thus facilitating an understanding of society's dependence on natural sources of production (Peterson et al., 2010). People's wellbeing often benefits from being in nature (Peterson et al., 2010) and hunting takes a person outside and lets the hunter interact with natural sources of production such as ecosystems and wildlife. Hunting unites the producer and consumer as the hunter embodies both. Hence hunting can provide a potential opportunity to bridge the alienation gap between "culture" and "nature". On the other hand, as hunting changes along with society, it is paradoxically affected by modernization and thus juxtaposes both the ancient and the modern. This means that as far as hunting approximates reconciliation, it does not do so unproblematically.

The question of alienation from natural systems is important due to the possible causative effects such as; unsustainable attitudes about consumption, consumer anxiety, general ignorance about nature and environments. By studying the viewpoints and changing reality of hunters in Sweden, the role of hunting in relation to nature reconciliation may be clarified.

Alienation is defining of the modern person who is separated from sources of production and ratified by artificial consumption. Hunting could perhaps "fit in" like some atavistic puzzle piece and bridge the hypothetical gap between the individual and sources of production. The concept is explored from the perspective of hunters and if hunting carries such a relevance for them. This is a question that is part phenomenological by exploring the subjective views of the hunters themselves on what they derive from the experience, and part philosophical, discussing the extent to which, but also with what practical and philosophical limitations, the institution of hunting today can deliver as dis-alienation.

## 1. Modernity and Alienation

Modernity exists at the heart of most social theory as a critiqued phenomenon and is a catalyst for the alienation of human society from nature (Peterson et al., 2010). The wellbeing of individuals is said to depend "*on improving understanding of the connectedness between people and natural systems and applying that understanding in the policy arena to meet social challenges.*" (Peterson et al., 2010 p. 127). Yet it is evident that modernity, and the functions inherent in modernity such as capitalism and urbanization, work against such goals of understanding the relationship between humans and nature, viewing them as separate bounded systems rather than a functioning whole (Harvey, 1993).

William Cronon writes about nature or "wilderness" and how the concept has evolved from what used to be associated with savageness, desolation and waste that has now become a new "Eden", a depiction of the sublime (Cronon, 1996). Wilderness, just like nature is a human idea coloured by perspective. In a modern society the vaguely defined idea of "nature" is only understood as something that is separate from "culture" (Peterson et al., 2010). The distinction between society and nature means that environmental issues are defined as a problem with intricate relations between these interacting systems. This way of thought is the crux of many ecological issues and is the "*product of alienated reason, having no historical or well-grounded scientific justification*" (Harvey, 1993, p. 33). We understand natural systems as we would our gardens that depend on our care, yet glorify the wild outdoors because they inspire wonder and remind us of existence outside of the human world (Cronon 1996).

Nature often becomes a separate object from the point of view of the subjective human and therefore something that humans perceive they can control. Conversely, modernity has also led to great advances in technology through observing nature under a Cartesian type lens that has provided insight into various natural systems but, also led to the reductionist view of nature which can only be defined as "alienated" (Levins and Lewontin, 1985). Nonetheless, a separate "nature" causes a disturbing separation from personal self-realisation through labour and the appropriation of nature (Ollman, 1976). "Appropriation" is a term used by Marx to describe the process where "*man incorporates the nature he*

*comes into contact with into himself* (Ollman, 1976 p. 137). Capitalism and industrialization have created a society where people “*are in fact alienated from their human nature, because that involves people working freely and creatively, for their own benefit, and for that of people in their community*” (Inglis and Thorpe, 2012, p. 25). Due to the separation of consumer and producer by industrialized producers, the consumer is rendered helpless as they no longer are in control of their own production but dependent on industrialized versions instead (Ollman, 1976). Ollman states that “*man is alienated from his product because the activity which produced it was alienated*” (1976, p. 141) and through people’s dependency on external processes they may lose control of their consumption and its effects. The lack of control over production and consumption leads to inherent anxieties in society amongst consuming individuals who are, through mass media and connectivity, aware that they are “short-changing” the future (Harvey, 1993).

Social trends such as sustainable living and the locavore could be interpreted as a response to the social anxieties brought about by alienation. The meat industry is an example of alienation where the reality of industrial meat production is hidden from consumers and often with great effort; farms are far away or ‘Ag Gag’ campaigns in the US (McGrath, 2013). There are adverts promoting a ‘happy farmer and livestock’ image in children’s books and misleading consumer labels reassuring “*customers in a vague and fuzzy way while holding producers to standards that scarcely rise above the legal minimum*” (Monbiot, 2015). The gruesome knowledge that does sometimes seep through to the consumer is a reminder of how “*in pursuit of material affluence, society is running up an environmental deficit, a situation in which our relationship to the environment, while yielding short term benefits, will have profound, negative long term consequences*” (Macionis and Plummer, 1997 in Mythen, 2004, p. 46).

Nevertheless, people must eat and live, so despite the mounting information of society’s effect on the environment, we must continue to consume. Paradoxically, we have replaced the insecurity of a successful hunt with the insecurity of where and how our food is produced; perhaps our ox fillet is really dyed pork (Pehrson, 2012)? We cannot always be sure at the supermarket, which leads us to understand “*why individuals in the West live comparatively longer and*

*healthier lives, whilst simultaneously feeling less safe and secure*” (Pidgeon 2000 and Mythen, 2004). The underlying insecurity of an individual’s impact having larger and graver implications somewhere else creates a foundation of social anxiety.

Hunting often presents itself as a solution to the issue of living in Modern society and as such, dealing with alienation by getting away from “it all” and returning to nature. Hunting is sometimes implied to be a vacation away from society and the human condition (Morris, 2013). However, hunting itself can be considered an artificial escape into the wild, pretending to go back to primitive means of subsistence with many of the comforts afforded by modernity such as cars and weapons (Morris, 2013). Therefore, hunters expressing hunting as a solution to the issues of modernity is often problematic as they sometimes appear dishonest by disguising their leisure and killing. This is visible in the language used by hunters to “fool” themselves and the public, such as “viltvård” (wildlife care), and the systematic use of ‘absent referents’ to refer to wildlife such as calf being objectified into veal, deer into venison, body parts into meat and so on (Adams, 2010). Hunters are often defensive; hunting is challenged in many ways in a modern society where personal acts of subsistence are not necessary and acts of violence and killing are viewed as crude and primitive. Therefore, these arguments can be seen less as innate beliefs of the hunters on the ground and more retroactive justifications of the activities involved in hunting. Hunters may preach ethical conduct to a critical society more than they practice themselves when out in the woods. They can be viewed as erroneous by trading on claims of ‘naturalness’, nostalgia, atavism and romanticising an invented or socially constructed past.

## 2. Hunting in Sweden

Hunting has generally been practiced by rural populations in Sweden as a supplement to the household since 1789 when “Förenings- och säkerhetsakten”; an amendment to the constitution of 1772; endowed landowners the right to hunt on their own property (Hansen et al., 2012). Hunting was and is to some extent still a cultural heritage traditionally passed down the family line (from father to son) in rural dwelling families and the rights were mostly used

to hunt small game (Gunnarsdotter, 2005). Hunting is strongly linked to wildlife management in Sweden (Ednarsson, 2010) to such an extent that hunters are used for both surveying and managing wildlife populations (Ericsson et al., 2008). Studies have shown that hunters are more likely to engage in outdoor activities such as camping, berry picking, hiking, and fishing than the rest of the population that does not hunt (Ericsson and Heberlein, 2002).

Persson's studies about hunting at the late 1970s and early 1980s (Persson, 1977, 1978, 1981 & 1984) were initiated at an interesting point in hunting history in as much as modern hunters started to break from the traditional hunting background and agrarian society (Hansen et al., 2012). The modern hunters, who started hunting later in life, had been introduced through friends or work colleagues and were more interested in big game and less dedicated to hunting in its holistic form, including duties of wildlife management (Hansen et al. 2012). The hunter that emerged sometime in the 1980s was also likely to have no connection to farming and was used to animal pets but not to the death and gore of slaughter (Gunnarsdotter, 2005).

Hunting scholars argue that separation from the countryside and natural resource extractive work such as fishing, mining and farming leads people to base their ideas of nature on emotions (Kellert, 1996). Hunters, on the other hand, tend to spend more time outdoors and acquire knowledge and experience of natural environment and therefore base their perceptions of nature more on their experiences (Ericsson and Heberlein, 2002). People's awareness of nature and wildlife depends on their experiences which fortify any attitudes they may have on the subject (Petty et al. 1992). Hence, hunters which are proven to be active outdoors are held to be more likely to form stronger opinions about nature and wildlife management as well as develop a sense of stewardship (Ericsson and Heberlein, 2002).

The Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife Management (Svenska Jägarförbundet) has listed their ethical guidelines on their website;

- *We respect wildlife, nature and community*
- *We nurture and manage a natural resource sustainably*
- *We protect the name and reputation of hunting*

- *We seek and promote knowledge*
- *We are diligent with safety*

(Svenska Jägarförbundet, 2015)

Indeed, because hunting is generally considered a controversial subject in modernity, there is a strong incentive for keeping to ethical standards both as an inward practice to maintain order and as an outward exercise projecting morality (van de Pitte, 2003).

A study by Peterson et al. (2010) focused on the symbolic meaning of food and its production due to alienation between people and nature being most underlying challenge to sustainability (Peterson et al. 2010). A repeated imagery is that hunters face the reality of how life is. Western scholars have often characterized hunting and fishing as a special and complex relationship with nature, a romantic view derived in social constructivism (Franklin, 2001). The anachronistic reality of hunting and its past is reconstructed in modern society to fit romanticized ideas of "man's" place in nature. Hunting can therefore be considered a pastiche that approximates some ancient ideal. Yet in many ways modern hunting is different from the past for example, the Neo-Darwinian hunter who brutishly celebrates the act of killing and follows a violent hierarchy of natural selection (Franklin, 2001). Modern hunters often reject such notions and vilify this approach as irresponsible and choose to instead portray themselves as refined, methodical, and rationalized "game" and nature managers (Franklin, 2001). On the subject of hunting they will highlight efforts beyond the enjoyment of killing game and rather discuss the valued skills of responsible and good hunters such as; training, patience, knowing the ecology, painless killing, transporting and butchering.

Hunting is often a long memorable experience in nature, an interaction that is considered by many hunters to be "a natural way of life" (Svenska Jägarförbundet, 2015). However, naturalness is not a cosmic sanction that can be used to justify all values, practices and traditions (Bateson, 1989) meaning that just because it is perceived as natural it is not the correct thing to do. Many opinions of what is natural are often wrong understandings of subjects such as evolutionary biology by various peoples and communities (Bateson, 1989). Similarly, one could argue that humans should not be compared to animals due to humans having "conscious selves" and that basing our ethics on what is perceived as

natural is not a justification for behavior. Indeed, many species of animal fight and sometimes kill each other during mating season, men fighting over women in bars can therefore be construed as natural. Most people would likely agree that violent behaviour in this context has no place in modern society. Hunting being good because hunting is natural can therefore be considered fallacious or at least somewhat reductionist. The idea of ethical hunting propagated by hunting organizations further drives home the point that hunting in Sweden is not a natural process. The focus is on maintenance, and stewardship of nature. Hence putting hunters in charge of keeping order in an otherwise chaotic biome. Claiming that hunting is somehow natural can therefore appear contradictory.

### **2.1 Hunting in a Modern World**

Hunting culture has begun to frame itself as a significant contributor to sustainability by emphasizing its part in the production of game meat (Peterson et al. 2010) and wildlife conservation (Nordic Hunters' Alliance, 2014). Due to opposition towards hunting, hunting associations in Nordic countries have started to encourage hunting's potential to link social and natural systems as well as develop "*an awareness of the internal ambiguities existing within the hunting culture*" (Peterson et al. 2010, p. 137). The ambiguous relationship between modernity and hunting has to do with certain paradoxes concerning what people want, such as the popularity of free range and local food, and the undesirable reality of death in its production (Peterson et al., 2010).

Urbanization creates physical separation between culture and nature (Peterson et al., 2010) and a cut from traditional agrarian communities. Theoretically resulting in the loss of hunting traditions and difficulties in accessing land, paving the way for hunting tourism (Gunnarsdotter, 2005) Ketil Skogen adds that "*Economic modernisation, cultural diversification and increased social and spatial mobility weaken the basis of traditional rural communities that were built around agriculture and resource extraction*" (Skogen, 20013, p. 312). Social mobility between rural and urban areas and increased higher education are making rural communities more complex (Skogen, 2005). Nevertheless, despite more social mobility some hunters maintain strong rural linkages and do not fall under the "urban hunter" category (Persson,

1981). According to Persson and affirmed by Heley (2010), a hunter's upbringing is more important in shaping perceptions of hunting than their current place of residence (1981).

The commercialization of hunting presents an especially relevant and current trend that could change hunting culture in Sweden. Urban raised hunters were shown to spend more money on hunting and "*income and education were positively related with annual expenditures and negatively related with the number of days spent hunting*" (Hansen et al. 2012, p. 448). Hunting tourism can be considered a primary example of commercialization and commoditization of the activity as the introduction of market forces into hunting often breaks apart the hunting process into separate price-valued parts that dissolve the relations between hunter, forest, wildlife and place (Gunnarsdotter, 2005). It contaminates community values by transcending the moral innocence of food to the morally perilous status of money; in the end, it may contribute to a loss of social control and moderation (Gezelius, 2002). The price tag creates instrumental values where there once were intrinsic ones which is done by cutting connections in order to create separate parts that are assigned a price (Gunnarsdotter, 2005). Hunters who have paid money will also expect more results and often a trophy which would lead to a more stressful hunt as the customer has paid for a "successful" outcome (Gunnarsdotter, 2005 & Hansen et al., 2012).

Commercialized hunts obscure the relationship between society and nature because it presents a commercial operation as natural and wild (Peterson et al., 2010). This is where commodity fetishism is argued to take place as hunters chose to harvest trophies because commercial enterprises rely on delivering a product rather than experience (Peterson et al., 2010). In Gunnarsdotter's study, statements even went as far as to say that hunting tourism had an effect on the very 'essence of hunting' (2005). Loftin (1984) has termed it "*the single most alarming trend in hunting today*" (p. 249).

In light of these processes impacting upon, and perhaps compromising the essence of hunting, the question is; can modern hunting deliver a form of reconciliation with nature?

### 3. Methodology

Using Sweden as a case study, empirical material was collected using different methods, mainly semi-structured interviews and academic literature. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with hunters in Sweden around the Stockholm and Uppsala region (in Mälaren Valley). Sweden is particularly interesting due to hunting being deeply rooted in the traditional household and how it has manifested itself in a modernized society, especially among urbanites (Hansen et al. 2012). The interviewed hunters are people who have acquired both Swedish hunting and weapon permits and have some hunting experience, even if the extent of their experience varies. An important component of the research, especially concerning gathering primary data, is that the hunter's background or upbringing is a contributing factor to their perspective of hunting (Persson, 1981). Hence some account is taken of the respondents' upbringing and relation to hunting, identifying whether they have a more traditional hunter upbringing or modern. This in turn is used to contrast narratives and contribute to a more defined idea of the respondents' perspectives. The study attempts to reflect the viewpoints of the respondents as truthfully as possible so that their perspectives on hunting are clear. The interviews include questions that aim to understand what it is that drives them to hunt and if there exists potential of reconnecting with nature which is fundamentally defined as natural sources of production.

### 4. Data Collection

The interviews were all semi-structured (Flowerdew & Martin 2005) and lasted up to one hour but averaged about 45 minutes. The questions, mainly open-ended with focus on starting narrative, aimed at answering how hunting shaped the respondent's perceptions of nature by exploring their "lifeworld". A lifeworld is built from social interactions between individuals as they interact with each other in a shared everyday world which shapes their respective viewpoints (Inglis and Thorpe, 2012). The questions for the interviews were developed using participant observations data from a field day spent hunting in Södertälje in the outskirts of Stockholm with some local hunters. The insight gained from the field study allowed for the identification of topics and issues within hunting that formed the base of some

of the questions. The focus was on gaining insight into hunter's experiences, values and practices whilst simultaneously critically examining my own understanding of the data (Gibson, 2014). The focus is to understand why hunters hunt and whether bridging alienation could be considered part of the reason. My interaction with hunters over time and during the field trip has provided insight that allows for more accuracy in my theoretical interpretation of answers and argumentations made in relation to hunting in Sweden. It must be noted that answers are subjective and personal and do not form a base for the opinions of all hunters, the focus lies on the individual possibilities that hunting enables with regards to the alienation topic (Gibson, 2014).

All interviews were with people who had a hunting weapon permit and had hunted in Sweden. In total there are 11 semi-structured interviews used in this research; 9 audio recorded, 1 non-recorded and 1 interview conducted by another interviewer and is referred to as an "external source".

Details about respondents are listed in Table 1 outlining the more relevant factors of their hunting background and social group.

The information listed in the table is used in the results to contrast the individual respondent's answers with some fundamental factors that contribute to their social and hunting background which places their qualitative narratives in a clearer context. The categories are mainly based on the studies by Persson from 1981 and Hansen et al. from 2012. The extracts used in the results are numbered in the order they appear; they are each taken from narratives by respondents but are not numbered to refer to each specific respondents.

The approach of this study has been centered on trying to create an accurate – in terms of a phenomenologically grounded – understanding of the lifeworld of hunters through typifications and habitualizations (Inglis and Thorpe, 2012). This is presented in the form of a thematic analysis which spans across three different themes in the results. Starting with the appropriation of nature which is central to how hunters use nature for their own means and which is apparent in several of the narratives. The second part is based in the heuristic property of hunting which is often remarked upon by hunting scholars

**Table 1: Respondent Background**

Respondents	vo01	vo02	vo03	vo04	vo05	vo06	vo07	vo08	vo09	vo10 Not recorded	vo11 External Source
Sex M/F	M	M	M	M	F	M	M	M	F	M	M
>30 years old	Yes	No	Yes	-							
Started hunting <19 years	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Introduced by family member	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rural or urban upbringing	Rural	Rural	Rural	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Urban	Rural	Rural	Urban (Uppsala but owns land)

and gives insight into how hunting experiences can shape people’s perspective of nature. The last heading is called “the alienated hunter” which surfaces from the fears about modern developments in hunting and a move away from the ideal naturalist hunter who is a responsible manager of nature. The title concerns itself with the defensive front of hunting where hunters struggle to disassociate themselves from the bloodthirsty, urbanite Neo-Darwinian tourist hunter (Franklin, 2001).

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Appropriating Nature

According to answers, knowledge of nature and wildlife is anchored in learning and experience and, in accordance with previous literature, not imagined perceptions of wildlife and nature. The hunting experience shaped a majority of respondents view of the forest, for example;

*Extract 1: "You notice with many people that 'you look but you do not see'. You're in a forest, and they only see the forest, but they do not look for signs and things." - vo07*

The hunting experience of another respondent changed their view of nature from the romanticized views of wildlife from childhood;

*Extract 2: "Before it was somewhat doubtful I probably cannot pull the trigger' like, 'why should I kill Bambi?' But now it's just 'well, why not?'" - vo05*

Respondents describe how they became desensitized to the act of killing through hunting and the disemboweling of fresh carcasses. Postulating that hunters are sometimes considered more “raw” (vo03) and they can take otherwise considered difficult or irksome tasks into their own hands. One narrative describes aiding in the euthanasia of pets or the culling of diseased wildlife are responsibilities carried out by hunters not for sport or joy, but because it is within their capability to do so. Dealing with death is to some a new situation and, to others, a known part of the “natural cycle”.

*Extract 3: "... this entire process chain is food, the meat cannot be more ecological than an animal that has been going around and following its own natural instinct until it stopped. I like that; that meat from the forest lies in the freezer, 'yes well I know how it died' it was I who made sure that it was done right." - vo05*

Perhaps the guilt of consumption is replaced with pride by appropriating natural resources for personal use through skill and effort and knowing the animal was free, killed and processed in a way that is considered more humane than buying industrially farmed meat. Respondent vo09 recounted how people in her rural home are more open to hunting than people from Stockholm who are “distanced” from nature and therefore very opposed to the shooting of animals but accept buying commercially produced meat;

*Extract 4: "That logic does not really work in my world, to buy meat at ICA [grocery store] means you have not thought of where your meat comes from and that was usually my argument against*

*many who thought it was horrible or questioned what we were doing, that we are actually doing something much more natural than meat production today.” - vo09*

## 5.2 Experiencing Nature

Hunting is not only about killing and meat production. Respondents also want to create more immersive hunting experiences. There is an eagerness for a more active experience than the standard ‘beginner’ position of lookout;

*Extract 5: “Then I would rather have a dog... It becomes more of a nature experience if you get to walk by yourself in a large forest landscape and preferably that it should be difficult to hunt, not just shooting just because you want to, but that you should strive to achieve a result, I think that is important.” - vo06*

Hunting with dogs is mentioned positively by all respondents and according to many answers the increased effort is part of the desired experience. One could speculate that it is a question of deeper immersion into natural systems through active use of personal skills, all leading to heighten one’s efforts to appropriate resources for personal gain. The experience appears to be intense and memorable. They feel that hunting takes them outside and gives them a break from the mundane, which resonates with the earlier argument by Morris about vacationing from society (2013). Being outside in nature is described as comfortable, relaxing, exciting, triggering, daunting and so on; contributing to a fulfilling nature experience. Several respondents also commented directly on the ignorance of the general population about nature;

*Extract 6: “I received a call about a wildlife accident that involved an antelope, I was like ‘ok?’.” - vo01*

Many respondents see themselves as nature “managers” or “stewards”, reflecting a trend among Scandinavian hunters in particular (Kaltenborn et al., 2013). The argument that often follows is that if hunters did not manage wildlife then there would be large booms and busts in animal populations through famine or infectious disease. Some respondents argue this point more than others who

are neutral on whether nature should be allowed to manage itself. One respondent, however, spoke more of the extent to which people are already involved in nature;

*Extract 7: “This ‘natural way’ that everyone is talking about, that it will take care of itself, I do not really believe it, because, or I believe in it if it really is allowed to attend to itself, but now people affect everything else as well, so to suddenly let a small part attend to itself like hunting and wildlife it would be very problematic, so to not have any hunting in Sweden would be very difficult.” - vo04*

Respondents also discussed how hunters manage the coexistence of rural productive services, especially forestry and crop farming, and nature. Often those with slightly more traditional hunter upbringing would argue for hunting being necessary in management of the countryside saying that, without hunting, crops would be eaten and wildlife would spread disease and move into urban areas. The respondents appear to immerse themselves into a role of managing ecosystems that contains both wildlife and humans. Amongst this, there is an understanding in their narratives that death is part of what is natural and necessary for balance:

*Extract 8: “... that nature is also very tough; if there is someone who is slightly worse or looks strange or so, nature will choose to remove those individuals; if a calf, for example, is born a bit weird or the like, then there is no chance that nature will choose to preserve it, it just requires too much energy.” - vo09*

The romanticized views of a benevolent natural existence is eradicated once responders start to hunt, who instead see a system where energy is not wasted, patterns of subsistence rule and death is necessary - also relevant with the “killing bambi” answer. Whether they are romanticising hunting itself is also arguably true, however part of the hunting process like butchering is harder to “beautify”. Butchering is often highlighted as important and approached with a sense of fascination by respondents, one retelling how as a child she would peek into the slaughtering shed whilst the adults butchered the meat. Others speak of seeing sinew and muscle separate properly as something interesting and so the importance of creating good cuts of meat.

Some hunters go so far as to identify hunting as natural within themselves and their own instincts. They relate to natural systems, such as Respondent vo11 who describes hunting as a “primeval force” that, if not satisfied, is expressed in other ways;

*Extract 9: “I definitely think it is genetic on my part, like I feel, it is some primeval force...” - vo11*

Despite whether they see it as a natural instinct or as a hobby; all respondents agree that hunting provides them with a holistic understanding of nature and the countryside. Extract 10 is a reflection on the value of hunting and nature. When asked to describe what that value is, he references his knowledge of economics and states that;

*Extract 10: “Look at the city forest in Uppsala: how would you evaluate the urban forest? How do people who cycle through the city forest in the morning and think ‘ah, it is pretty quiet and peaceful here’ and relax a little bit, how would they evaluate the urban forest in their daily lives? Would they be willing to pay 20 SEK for cycling through there? They would probably not, but the value is certainly quite high anyway, but they have like no way, they can’t pay, because it is difficult to put money on it but it is easier to put an appreciation on it.” - vo06*

### 5.3 The Alienated Hunter

In the narratives it is very important that wildlife is not left injured and other people are not put at risk. Yet there are doubts among more experienced hunters about the training of new hunters.

*Extract 11: “It is probably the Stockholm hunters, they have not learned, it is so easy to get a hunting permit today, so they do not know what hunting really is, they get only a quick education, ‘ah now you are a hunter’ but they are not hunters at all really because they have no idea about what is ethical or how the forest works or why you do things the way you do.” - vo01*

Mentor programs are suggested as a way to pass on knowledge that otherwise would have been given by a relative. Mentoring is understood as aimed at new hunters so they can increase their skills in the field but, more importantly, teaches them proper hunting ethic and respect for wildlife. Hunters like Vo01

seem to be anxious about the standards of some people who are starting to hunt without enough guidance. He mentions the “Stockholm hunters”: meaning urban hunters who lack the mentoring that is prevalent among hunters with traditional hunting backgrounds. Vo01 also links this trend to commercial hunting opportunities where the hunter does not even “see the animal they shot” and the meat is processed and sold by someone else. Other respondents have linked wealthy hunters with little time to the consumption of commercial hunting;

*Extract 12: “They are well, when they are hunting, they do not do as much, for example, when they go out and hunt, they will be served, they have “today’s exercise”, as they call it, instead of hunting, and so they are driven into forest and sit down and shoot a lot of animals...” - vo03*

A respondent who worked on commercial hunts says that as an employee you are expected to deliver a special experience as well as a successful hunt with a kill, it becomes stressful for the workers and also the paying customer who expects to shoot something. The stress can result in less care being taken when shooting because the customer wants to get their money’s worth.

*Extract 13: “...those who arrange a hunt, much is demanded from you, and as I said, again many forget it is somewhat on the animals’ terms and then - one can’t do magic with animals, it is just so, they choose their own ways. So those times when things do not go well and so on, it becomes a stress factor. You want to deliver so much and it is not working, you mess with nature it goes its own way.” - vo04*

Another point is that communicating that hunting is more than just ‘shooting animals for fun’ is very important for all respondents and simultaneously distancing themselves from the image of what they consider unethical hunting or a bad image of hunting. What respondents try to communicate is the experience that “happens along the way” during a hunt and killing adds a somewhat morose or heavier meaning to the experience for some. There is a significance to the experience gained when engaging in a full hunting process, as illustrated by respondent vo06 when he was asked about the benefits of introducing more urban dwellers to hunting;

*Extract 14: "And then to make people understand that it is not about slaying animals, but in the end it leads to it, but there is something else that happens along the way that is perhaps the most important, and that is, I think, an important thing to convey to people who are not as acquainted." - vo06*

## **6. Analysis: Exploring Hunter Perspectives**

Where hunting appears to bridge the alienation "gap" between nature and culture often varies in extent between each narrative. Often respondents compare good and bad hunting practices where bad hunting practices don't seem to respect exhibited hunting ethics and are more associated with the transgressions of modernity. Many respondents expressed dislike of commercial hunts because it strays from the traditional hunting format. Commercialization often means the hunter is engaging in an artificial process that at once reflects and enforces alienation from the realities of nature and personal achievement (Ollman, 1976; Peterson et al, 2010). The concern seems to be that if a hunter buys a hunt, he/she no longer fully participates or understands the full process or 'essence' of hunting, hence, the potential to connect with nature and transcend alienation is obscured. The experience is "delivered" - the buyers only experienced parts of the hunting process and were aided in the activity, meaning that they were alienated from the significant parts of the work process and their own efforts (Ollman, 1976).

Non-commercial hunting often allows for the respondents to control the labour process in the creation of the product. The labour involved in hunting is not described as a forced activity that "*mortifies man's body and ruins his mind that in it he is uncomfortable and unhappy*" (Ollman, 1976, p. 136). Keeping in mind that hunting is often a recreational activity and not a full time job for all but one respondent. Nevertheless, the narratives express feelings that are reflective of a pleasant environment during the hunt and it switches between exciting and calm through various moments. There are feelings of accomplishment when successfully shooting prey; Vo05 expressed particular pride over hunting her own meat in Extract 3.

Respondent vo06 likes to be challenged during hunts to enhance the nature experience. The effort he puts into hunting is rewarded not only by material means,

such as meat, but also by the experience itself which could mean a greater immersion into natural systems and stronger emotional impressions. The desire for "immersion", i.e. a more intimate or enhanced nature experience, was alluded to during narratives through the desire to own hunting dogs and hunting alone for small game. Hunting immersed people into natural environments by allowing them take control of their actions and appropriate nature for their own use as well as rely more on their own efforts by using dogs rather than depend on those of the team.

Hunting allowed for the respondents to interact and use nature to their own advantage. The hunters are able to "appropriate" the objects of their natural surroundings during hunting as an act of self-realization by transforming objects in nature into something for their own personal use. However, during commercial hunts parts of the process are eliminated and the activity becomes just as alienated as any other form of capitalist labour (Ollman, 1976). Many respondents referred to meat production, (a potent symbol of production and appropriation); vo05 discussed her experience of visiting factory farms the horrible conditions of livestock which is why she prefers hunting. Similar opinions were voiced by all respondents who discussed the topic of industrial meat production. Hunting allowed for the respondents to make connections for example between the materiality of food and "*natural processes, such as life and death*" (Peterson et al. 2010, p. 128). Hunters are however criticized for their killing; Extract 10 brings up the clear comparison between buying meat or hunting for it. A person who buys meat but criticizes hunters for killing and obtaining meat is probably not making the connection between natural processes, such as life and death, and the food on their plate (Peterson et al., 2010). Vo01 illustrated many people's ignorance of natural surroundings when recounting an incident where he was called to handle a car accident involving an "antelope" when it was a deer, such a gap in basic knowledge about the environment was surprising to the respondent.

Respondent vo03 recommended hunting to anyone who is interested in wildlife, asserting that it would change their view of nature and animals from what some narratives indicate are emotionally based perceptions of animals to perceptions based in knowledge and experience (Ericsson and

Heberlein, 2002). Killing animals for reasons such as maintaining healthy populations or food often falls within the ethical framework that is learned and developed over time.

Hunters often legitimize their actions by creating ethical frameworks that hunters can use to justify their actions. These ethical frameworks are often prominent on hunting websites and in the general discourse used by hunters which is a strategy to legitimize hunting by morally neutralizing killing in some manner. Above one could say that the hunter is discussing the classic argument of “the end justifies the means to get there”. The discourse is changing to match the scrutiny of society where animal well-being is often an argument, instead of more archaic arguments stemming in biblical references to religious hierarchies of animals serving “man”. Ethical reasonings vary, on an institutional level hunters try to keep with society and contemporary beliefs much like the ethical guidelines used by The Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife Management that were shown earlier. However, as discussed, ethical frameworks vary on an individual level, and even if hunting institutions want to frame themselves as “wildlife managers” their ethical guidelines are not written into law neither are they taught when people take their hunting certificate. Hunting can be said to communicate a more responsible and ethical ideal of hunting than what is practiced or enforced. This could mean that hunters frame themselves as more responsible than they are in practice because ethical frameworks are more based on ideals than enforced reality. Respondents have often voiced beliefs that are in line with the ethical framework portrayed by Swedish hunter organisations, nevertheless, personal nuances of hunting are also apparent.

The Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife Management express online that hunting is a way to be close to nature and harvest any excess produced, be part of food production and ecological. Not all statements by respondent fall in line with this, for example respondent vo03 who highlights that game is not ecological as the wildlife eat the crops on sprayed fields. Another respondent has described the need to hunt as an “urge” that needs to be satisfied and whilst it may stem from the idea of people interacting in nature, the answer has more archaic prehistoric connotations similar to those discussed earlier. Arguments based in the primitive urge to

hunt appear to not fit the contemporary ideal and hence is often left out from how hunting institutions try to frame themselves. Yet other hunters hold the ethical standards very highly such as respondent vo01 which probably has to do with him being a professional hunter for the municipality.

Respondent vo01 considers his job to be caring for wildlife. To this end, “care”, “nurture”, and “mercy” along the lines identified here are sometimes criticized by ecofeminist scholars, who observe that hunters couch death and unsavoury practices, a euphemism that resonates with the majority society (Adams, 1993). Respondent vo04 considers hunting necessary for the management of wildlife especially as humans already have such a ubiquitous effect on the world. In several of the narratives there is agreement over hunters maintaining some kind of balance. That hunters have a role to manage wildlife populations and keep them healthy as well as managing the clash between society and nature. Some criticize this view because hunters don’t shoot the weak and unhealthy animals that would fall victim to other predators.

Respondent vo09 uses the imagery of a “circle” to illustrate the hunter as part of a balance where managing wildlife and human interests is very difficult but also vital for the functioning of nature and rural areas. Balance in nature is seemingly a very human concept as nature itself is often very volatile especially considering the argued booms and busts in wildlife populations if unregulated. Yet, as vo01 puts it: he does not want to create a “sterile city” devoid of wildlife, separating humans and nature. Respondents consider exposure to nature and wildlife important for people in society. They acknowledge that nature is fascinating and it is healthy to get out and interact with natural systems, whether through hunting or other outdoor activities. Respondents seemed to think that the sourcing of their own meat is a very valuable aspect of hunting. However, many respondents agree that if they did not hunt they would just find another activity in outdoor natural environments. Implying that hunting can bridge the alienation gap by spending time in natural environments is perhaps more important for the personal wellbeing of respondents.

In Ericsson and Heberleins’ study hunting can encourage a stronger sense of stewardship for wildlife

and nature because hunters have more centralized and stronger attitudes about wildlife and nature management than the rest of society (2002). Education levels are increasing in Sweden and catalyzing interest in environmental causes, however, the lack of natural experiences can often lead to unfocused and weaker engagement (Ericsson and Heberlein, 2002). Hunters and other groups with direct experience of natural systems stand to be stronger advocates for policy makers and “comprehend and support goals designed to meet a balance of social values, recreational opportunities and a sustainable use of natural resources” (Holsman 1999). It correlates with answers from mainly the respondents with more traditional hunting backgrounds who believe that hunting maintains a balance not only with wildlife population but also the interests of various people who work with natural resources, specifically farmers and foresters. When the respondents express concern about the suffering of animals and the time they spent training to avoid mistakes, they display an understanding of the impact of their actions in nature, responsibility is transferred to their hands in contrast to people in the supermarket or other consumptive behaviour. It follows that encouraging outdoor activity and hands-on experience in nature could help reduce negative impacts of human activity on the quality of the environment because of increased awareness and responsibility (Ericsson and Heberlein, 2002).

The reductionist view of nature is enforced by the capitalist valuation system. In a capitalist society value is determined by money; we do it on a daily basis through monetary and commodity transactions when we go to the shop or pay our bills in a process of production and consumption (Harvey, 1993). People are caught up in putting monetary valuations on everything, yet we do not often engage in direct transactions when enjoying the nature that surrounds us, such as trees or clean air, that are essentially considered “free”. Money is, according to Marx, “*a leveller and cynic, reducing a wondrous multidimensional ecosystemic world of use values, of human desires and needs, as well as of subjective meanings, to a common objective denominator which everyone can understand*” (Harvey, 1993, p. 4). The environment is perceived as an ‘externality’ that has a structure we can decipher and predict enough to impose a price structure or regulatory regime in order to be internalized by human society.

### **6.1 *Transcending Alienation***

Hunting is not necessary in a modern society. There are other ways for people to experience nature. Several respondents said that if they did not hunt then they would have engaged in some other outdoor activity, stating that hunting is not necessary to get into nature and it is just another way of doing it. Scholars also argue that the same sought after virtues in hunting can be achieved from other activities which are less harmful and consumerist, such as; wildlife watching/ornithology, nature photography, mushroom picking and hiking.

If other sports produce a “good” such as companionship, solitude, challenge and pleasure then one need not commit the morally questionable act of hunting (List, 1998). Charles List uses Aristotelean and Land ethics to argue, not for the justification of hunting, but for the ethical significance of hunting. He argues that hunting must produce a “good” that cannot be found in any other sport, otherwise, why hunt at all? What is apparent from his essay “On the Moral Significance of a Hunting Ethic” is that hunting produces several forms of good that other activities cannot. Firstly, hunting does not only happen on an anthropocentric plain, it is biotic and involves the human and animal spheres by inserting humans into the act of predation, hence hunting produces a biotic good. Hunting also lets the hunter imitate the constant alertness of the wild animal and the sensation of being “all there” which List calls an “internal good” and thirdly links to the act of conservation which is also a good (List, 1998).

Without going into too much depth on the morality of hunting, reconciliation could be classified as a desired “good” that is achieved to a larger extent through hunting than for example, spectator activities such as ornithology. Combining this with the answers of the respondents there appears to be a chance of transcending some of the artificial borders erected by modernity into what could be considered the “sensation of being closer to nature”. Hunting enlightened respondents to being part of a natural “circle” whether it meant animals perpetuating themselves through the death of others or the various human actors who exploit or appreciate natural resources.

As wildlife managers hunters see themselves as having a role buffering the interaction between humans

and wildlife; from dealing with wildlife in car accidents to managing populations in urban areas. It enables respondents to appropriate natural resources through using knowledge, skills and sometimes struggle to achieve their goals in a natural setting. Hunting could also provide a more realistic view of nature not grounded in emotionally based moralizing but instead experience and responsibility. Hunters need to see themselves as “managers” in order to find a purpose and role for their hunting. Through these immersive roles hunters understood themselves as engaging in nature and also becoming part of it, bridging the alienation gap as humans in nature.

On the other hand, creating uses for hunting that justify the practice is common and possible considered necessary to legitimize the practice. Whilst the culture and nature divide is taken from the concept of modernization, the respondents answers follow a similar perspective of people being placed into the nature system through hunting. The idea of bridging a culture-nature gap through hunting is beneficial to hunters who will use it as a reasoning for the activity. The “naturalness” of hunters shifts depending on the argument or justification used by the hunter, perhaps as part of a defensive discourse. Respondents justify hunting to some extent by arguing that it is a natural act in line with the rules of the natural world. Hunting is used to get “closer to nature” which could imply that it is distanced

from modern society. Most answers argue that hunting should be an entire process, sometimes so the hunter can enjoy a challenge, have a more authentic atmosphere and feel immersed. Hunting is tailored to create a memorable and enjoyable experience, it is not a natural struggle between life and death for the hunter. It is manipulated and made to be challenging to seem like hunters are bridging a gap between nature and culture, but this is perhaps more of an advertising point to market hunting and make it appealing rather than truth.

The truth of nature is perhaps much harsher and in the end the hunter experience is still artificial. Hunting itself is affected by processes of modernization, and commercialization in particular. There are not only conflicts between hunters and non-hunting society, but also hunters and hunters. So called “bad hunting practices”, such as trophy and commercialized hunting, threaten the image of hunting and how the activity tries to frame itself in society. In general, everyone involved in the study displayed a sense of responsibility and ethic with regards to the treatment of wildlife. These tensions give rise to the image that hunting inhabits a tenuous status as a valid activity in a modern society. That while ultimately unnecessary, if done “properly”, hunting could be valuable to how we perceive and value wildlife, nature and ourselves as part of nature, thus effectively bridging the alienation gap.

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