

## All Animals That Are Not White Men

Claude Levi Strauss observed, "cooking food is a metaphor for the human transformation of nature into culture." Cooking is the thing that separates us from other animals, and it can also be the thing that brings us together. The reason I need to mention cooking in order to talk about animals and white men, is because it was cooking and its relationship to domestication and the taming of the wild that begins our long history of manipulating the natural world to suit our desires.

Domestication is a process of changing plants or animals to make them more useful to humans. The domestication of nature, or taming, or training, to produce desired traits: beauty, behavior, appearance, cultivating a population of organisms that may become dependent and lose their ability to survive in the wild. Domestication refers to a whole population while taming may mean just an individual. Cooking is just one example of taking organic material and transforming it into a cultural product. The act of Harnessing nature and turning it into something aesthetically pleasing to us is as common as topiary, ornamental gardens, elaborate confectionery and the training of horses or other "animals". The idea of being close to nature is very seductive to us. We are drawn to the exoticism and sometimes the fear of the other, the wildness, the unknown, and chaos. Perhaps this explains our need to tame wildness. However, while we want to commune with it, we do not want to be subject to it's whim.

According to, Eco-feminist and scholar Caroline Merchant, this taming of "the chaos of nature into order, destroyed a great deal of the earths cultural and biotic diversity." Of course, later on we tried to repair the situation by creating the great parks and conservation projects of the nineteenth century, "but these movements ostracized those "others" of different classes and colors that did not fit into the story."

Wittgenstein wrote "if a lion could talk we could not understand him", perhaps implying that we do not have the ability to comprehend the alternate universe that exists in the mind of a nonhuman animal (read other, stranger). I have found in the years I have spent working with wild animals that the only certainty is uncertainty. Without fail every plan I ever had for the animals was subverted by them. I try to keep my anthropomorphic assumptions in check, but I think these experiences have made me realize that our language is indeed very different, and it is worth engaging and learning to embrace the chaos of plans gone awry. Especially since more and more we are sharing the same spaces and we need to start to relinquish our territoriality.

I, myself, am drawn to the allure of taming nature, by way of flour, sugar and eggs, into culture, by way of cake. I am fascinated by the vast number of cookbooks and recipes for performing this task that have existed for millennia dating back to the ancient Egyptians. And while I am working in the kitchen to make food for all the animals I feed, we are surveying each other from a distance and it is confusing to wonder who is taming who.

