

**STWOTKS**

**FRRREH**

**FRRREH**

**FSTH**



EAGLE  
CREEK  
FIRE

HERMAN'S  
CAGE

### **Fishing is oral history.**

I grew up knowing my grandfather was the first person to fly fish in the Long Island Sound. I grew up visiting his home and gazing at the fish on the wall: tarpon, bonefish, salmon. I learned all of the stories: of his fishing camps in the Florida Keys and Canada, his trips around the world, his legendary Seamaster reels, and walk-in closets filled with gear.

My father was a similar fanatic, but his vice are the mountain trout found in the Rockies. His stories are of the Green River, the San Juan, or the humble Pecos. These were all filtered through my childhood brain, while on fishing trips of our own, or during our phone calls to this day. Fly fishing was never forced upon me, but I was compelled to like it, compelled to enjoy it.

I do enjoy it, although it has never felt like recreation. Fishing is always work for me; I never quite had the knack for it. Each trip out is a learning experience, each tangle an extreme test of patience. It not hard to catch a trout, but to do so satisfyingly is extremely difficult. To catch a trout, and know exactly why you caught it is something I will never truly understand. More often than not, it feels like dumb luck.

### **Fishing is recreation.**

The idea of recreation is constantly changing. Recreation defines itself relative to race, class, and gender. We distinguish it from work. In fact we define it in opposition to work. But is it that recreation is unproductive? Is recreation different than leisure?

Does fishing really need to be about catching? I wonder what my own type of fishing is for. How do I re-evaluate what I'm getting out of it? I don't think I need to land a trout to be happy. I don't think I need to hold it in my hand, drag it out of the water. I'm interested in finding a middle ground with fish. What's something

I can put in the water that we both find interesting? How do we collaborate?

### **Fishing is violence.**

The heart of fishing is to trick, capture and kill. Fishing revolves around a need to conquer and a desire to win. Fishing is a colonial act, where at its most humane, the fisher allows the fish (its subject) to be released, once they have asserted their dominance. In this process, the failures are forgotten, and the victories embellished. The whole history of fishing is a history of victories.

I wish fishing was a practice in humility, but there are few stories where you go out and don't catch anything. This sensationalist view of fishing is by no means all encompassing. I think there are many fisher people who have a great day fishing while not landing a single fish. But the dominant culture of the sport remains to catch.

### **Fishing is not catching.**

There was a moment, historically, when catch and release fishing first became popular as a pastime. This was actually a very big deal for recreation as a whole, because it took an activity that was traditionally associated with providing food, and turned it into an activity whose sole purpose was the pleasure of the hunt. Big game hunting is sometimes also focused on the pleasure of the hunt, but catch and release fishing took away the kill (at least in the ideal situation)

Sometimes I imagine with horror what catch and release hunting might look like for a big game animal: a barbed hook gets thrust through the lip of an elk, trailed by hundreds of feet of high strength cable (but not too strong, or else there would be no sport in it). The elk, upon realizing it hadn't bit into a tasty morsel of whatever, freaks out and runs around until it is too tired to put up a fight. The hunter gleefully lands the elk, takes a photo of it, sloppily rips out the hook taking half the elks lip

with it, and points the animal upwind so that a fresh breeze might restore its health and send it on its way.

### **Fishing is not for fish.**

Once the transition to catch and release became widely popular (and this relates mostly to fly fishing), the emphasis shifted from catching fish as food, to catching fish for pleasure. But I've taken less and less pleasure out of the reeling in and landing of fish over time. I've come to feel that putting a fish through the prolonged trauma of getting caught, only to put it back again to be caught by someone else, is one of the most insidious practices in outdoor recreation. There are so few instances where we explicitly harm nature because it is fun.

At the same time, catch and release policies are enacted to protect the fish, helping to maintain a sport fishing industry that supports many rural communities. The trauma these fish experience support guides, fly shops, meals in restaurants, hotel rooms, gas station beef jerky, and more. Fish aren't getting anything out of this relationship. So I'm left with the question, how can we fish for fish? How can we serve them in some way that still allows us to interact with each other?

### **Fishing is performance.**

There is a thing called hook-less fly fishing. It's performed by a small cadre of disciples around North America who are as heretical as the first catch and release fishers. Hook-less fly fishing focuses solely on the presentation. Much like conventional fly fishing, the fly must perfectly imitate a specific bug, at a specific time of year, so much so that the fish must be inspired to rise up to it and take a bite-

That is where it ends. There is no hook, so there is no trauma, no sound of reel spinning, no fish flailing about. The whole ritual of fishing suddenly becomes about

showing something interesting to another being. The ritual of waders, line, rod, reel, tie, hike, cast all becomes about showing this tiny hand wound fake bug to a fish and seeing if it likes it. Maybe this is still tricking the fish, but I like to think of it as harm reduction. Each hookless fly that I fish rises for increases its literacy towards those flies that do have hooks.

### **Fishing is an exhibition.**

We know that fish are selective feeders. They see things and are interested in them as food. But what else are they interested in?

We tie flies to look like caddis, nymphs, eggs, wounded fish, and even dead mice. Sometimes we tie flies to simply look flashy and eye-catching. Why have we never tried tying flies to look like Abstract-Expressionist paintings, or to mimic a gesture from a contemporary dance piece? What exhibition might we curate for a trout, a steelhead, or a salmon? Now that we no longer have to fear catching and landing this fish, do we even need to have them bite? Might it not be enough to simply have them regard our exhibition as it floats down the river?

### **Fishing is history.**

This art exhibition might radically redefine the history of human art for the audience of fish. We might highlight voices that were marginalized, inflect artists' practices with the history of knowledge we have now. What world of art might we present! What utopic visions could be realized!

Or do we simply tell it how it was? Follow the eddies and ripples in our own history and let those flow down the river for all the fish to see. Maybe we stop fishing altogether, and let the water flowing down the river shape its own history, and watch the fish feed on the evening hatch.

### **Fishing is vision.**



The world's first totally fish focused art gallery. The current audience are fish that were themselves part of an artwork produced for a large, international art festival.

## **Loosely, some types of fishing:**

1. Leisure fishing.
2. Recreational fishing.
3. Sport fishing.
4. Work fishing.
5. Meditative fishing.
6. Vanity fishing.
7. Party fishing.
8. Competitive fishing
9. Familial fishing.
10. Commercial Fishing
11. Romantic Fishing

### **A QUICK NOTE ABOUT HERMAN THE STURGEON:**

HERMAN IS SAFE AFTER THE EAGLE CREEK FIRE. ALTHOUGH THE FIRE SPREAD RAPIDLY, AND NEARLY ENGULFED THE BONNEVILLE DAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREA, THE HATCHERY WAS SAVED, AND HERMAN WAS NOT HARMED. OF COURSE, IF HERMAN WAS NOT IN CAPTIVITY, THIS WOULD NOT BE A PROBLEM TO BEGIN WITH.

STURGEON PAPER, VOLUME III IS PRODUCED AND WRITTEN BY SPENCER BYRNE-SERES