



ANIMAL TORTURE AS ENTERTAINMENT

BY MIKE ROBE

AN ETERNAL TREBLINKA

The noted social theorist Hannah Arendt coined the phrase “banality of evil” to describe the routinized violence carried out by “good Germans,” from prison guards to bureaucrats, during the Nazi era in Germany. This same phrase describes quite well the everyday violence against animals caught in the net of imprisonment, torture, and killing by humans. In so-called research labs like Huntingdon Life Sciences, cleaning fluids, pesticides, food dyes, and many other toxic products are regularly tested in massive doses on fully conscious beagle puppies, monkeys, and rabbits (see, www.shac.net). Lynx, foxes, baby harp seals, mink, and other wild animals are trapped, clubbed, and killed, then stripped of their skins so that the rich can wear luxury items (see www.seashepherd.org and www.animalliberationfront.com). In the year 2000, an astounding 45 BILLION animals across the globe were killed so that human animals—by nature, herbivores—could consume the flesh of other animals. The vast majority of these animals were confined in concentration camps euphemistically known as “factory farms”, their genetically altered bodies stuffed full of hormones and antibodies and then mutilated, without anaesthesia, before being killed. Mutilated? To reduce damage and enhance profit, male pigs have their testicles and most of their teeth pulled out by pliers; baby chicks are have their beaks sliced off with hot blades; ducks and geese are forced—fed by having a metal tube shoved down their throats; and bulls are de-horned just to name a few regular, grotesque practices. This transformation of animals into commodities is both colossal and horrific.

Of course, none of this efficient, everyday violence against animals is actually acknowledged by either the industries or the public. A corporate media cocoon coddles us with advertising images of dancing pigs, chickens lifting weights, and happy cows. And state sanctioned public education is

typically silent about anything controversial or antagonistic to corporate interests. So this routine of violence continues while we are comforted by the illusion that we love animals. In fact, life for the animals is, as the novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer noted, “an eternal Treblinka.” The real question is “why do we hate animals so much?”

In many ways the animal circus is the most disgusting form of animal abuse. It is not possible even to make a pretense of arguing the medical or nutritional benefits (most animal testing and flesh eating yield neither) of this mode of animal abuse. Violence against wild animals in the circus is for the purely gratuitous purpose of “entertainment.”

The violence in animal circuses comes in several distinct forms. Except for the tiny percentage of the time when they are “performing,” lions, tigers, bears, elephants, and other “circus” animals mostly are kept chained or caged. By nature, each of these animals was born into freedom. Their natural lifeways involve roaming vast areas, hunting or grazing, forming social bonds, procreating, raising their young, and living out their natural life spans. Circuses, like zoos, are animal prisons (except that animals did absolutely nothing to deserve their imprisonment), denying the animals any vestige of their natural life experience. On numerous occasions circus animals deprived of necessary heating, cooling or ventilation have died in transit to or from a circus show. Last year, a two year old Ringling Bros. lion named Clyde died in a sweltering animal train in the Mojave desert en route to a “performance” in Fresno. Frank Hagan, a veteran Ringling Bros. employee who was later fired, handed an affidavit to federal investigators stating that the animal died from lack of water and extreme heat. Hagan also stated that Ringling Bros. instructed employees not to discuss the incident with the federal authorities. Surely many similar instances of animal death have gone unreported.

Of course, some argue that humans have no way of knowing how the animals feel about their confinement; perhaps, they say, animals prefer the security of the cage

to the uncertainties of the wild. But trust your own eyes and common sense: would any animal prefer to exhibit the neurotic behavior of these unfortunate animals—to pace, stare vacantly, hide, or cringe? Would any animal prefer the rope burns and chain marks, the sore and infected feet, and significantly shorter life spans that circus and other captive animals experience? Would an animal that prefers its current situation turn on its “trainers” and “fans” in a fit of rage? According to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, since 1990 over 60 people have been killed and more than 130 injured in elephant rampages alone. I, personally, have never seen anything as pathetic as the look of terror and rage in the eye of Tyke, a circus elephant who rampaged in Honolulu and killed her “trainer” and injured a dozen spectators. Tyke was killed in a hail of gunfire soon after simply for doing what any healthy, wild and free animal would do in those circumstances.

But most significantly, while you run the risk of facing animal enterprise terrorist charges under the Animal Enterprise Act, try simply opening a cage or cutting the chains holding a captive animal, and see if the animal prefers its captivity. Wild animals were meant to be in the wild, not in cages and chains and certainly not performing tricks for human entertainment. After all, that’s why they’re described as “wild.”

Beyond the matter of their imprisonment, violence is inherent in the process of breaking and training animals. To be transformed into performers, captured wild animals are first broken by being forced to their knees, immobilized by having their legs chained, and then systematically beaten by their “trainers” until they learn who is in control. Whips, baseball bats, electric prods, and bullhooks are used under the ears, inside the mouth, in the anus, and in other sensitive places to condition the animals to respond to commands. (Neither the tools nor their use are regulated by the pathetically weak and largely unenforced federal Animal Welfare Act.) Once enough violence has ensued, the “trainer” need