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Understanding "Roadkill" through an Animal Method

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Understanding “RoadKill” through an Animal Method

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ABSTRACT

On North American roadways, the sight of dead, disfigured animal bodies is at once jarring and mundane. The environmental and transportation policy concerns surrounding “road kill” have been widely addressed, yet the cultural mediation of these highly visible animal deaths remains underexplored. Perhaps the humanities have shied away from engaging the nonhuman, in part, due to lack of methodology for investigating animal worldings.

Drawing on the work of scholars in animal studies and the posthumanities, this thesis outlines an “animal method” that could guide cultural studies inquiry of nonhuman experiences. Accounting for differential sensory perceptions among species and recognizing the lives of actual beings present in one’s work form the foundation of this animal method.

The animal method informs a subsequent investigation of road-killed animals in North America by considering how humans have understood their deaths.

Historically, road-killed animals have been outside the realm of acceptable human mourning. In the 20th century, for example, road kill was commonly the subject of cartoon and culinary humor that culturally disengaged humans from the deaths of actual animals. In the early 21st century, however, road-killed animals have begun to be integrated into larger narratives of subjectivity and interspecies community through activism, art, and policy.

Considered alongside policy initiatives such as wildlife corridors that work to prevent animal mortality on North American roadways, recent art and activist work suggest that road kill has successfully begun its cultural transformation from laughably grotesque to grievable animal death.

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This Thesis is dedicated to the animal kingdom, for whose universal rights to freedom we continue to fight.

PREFACE

American studies scholars have long kept a watchful eye on the mechanisms, expressions of, and responses to oppressive ideologies like racism and sexism as part of a larger, collective antiracist and feminist project. Despite this commitment to social justice, however, American studies has paid little attention to the oppression of nonhuman animals and their urgent need for strong abolitionist scholarship. With the expansion of interest in the field of animal studies over the last decade, many scholars are ready to hone in on speciesism as an ideology in need of analysis and swift dismantling.

The American agricultural system, for example, relies on the abuse of 9 billion nonhuman animal bodies every year to support a nation of meat-eaters. I argue that this is the physical manifestation of the ideology of speciesism, which maintains a prejudice toward members of one's own species. While the effects of speciesism are not limited to animals, the spillover implications for various human groups should not be a prerequisite for an analysis and deconstruction in American studies. The experiences of nonhuman animals deserve humanities-based investigation in their own right.

The field of American studies is uniquely equipped to take on the animal question because it is not bound by strict disciplinary limitations that would fail to access the boundless natures of nonhuman existences. At the same time, successful methods of analysis for an animal archive have yet to

be determined. To this end, I have outlined a potential methodology for posthumanist scholars investigating questions related to nonhuman animals in chapter one. In chapter two, I have applied some of this methodology to the question of road-killed animals, translating theory into practice. I hope to demonstrate that while animal studies can be effectively conducted within the field of American studies, accessing nonhuman experience requires new approaches and creative ways of thinking.

For example, the American studies practice of using keywords to deconstruct a oft-used concept is an ideal starting place for animal studies work. My keyword entry for “animal,” below, introduces the work presented in this thesis by rethinking the utility of such a category in cultural studies work.

Keyword: Animal

In Western philosophical and popular discourse, “animal” has long been used as a referent for what is “not-human.” The binary opposition of human/animal rooted in Aristotle’s formulation of a uniquely human rationality predicated on language was further entrenched in the 17th century by the Cartesian dualisms that denied nonhuman animals an immortal soul, relegating them to mere corporeality and thus available for human exploitation.¹ These foundational definitions of “animal” remain largely intact

¹Clarke, Paul A.B. and Andrew Linzey. *Political Theory and Animal Rights*. London: Pluto Press, 1990.

in 21st century American society, despite well-known scientific and philosophical arguments that disrupt the dichotomy.

For example, “animal” as a zoological taxonomy refers to all living organisms in the kingdom *Animalia*. Carl Linneaus’ 1758 classification system includes beings such as sponges and insects, as well as humans, in the animal kingdom, making the scientific definition of “animal” among the most inclusive in use today. The shared kingdom *Animalia* requires use of the phrase “nonhuman animal” to most accurately represent beings outside the human species.

According to U.S. law, nonhuman animals are things, as opposed to persons.² Beyond reinscribing human dominion over nonhuman animals, this denial of legal personhood limits the avenues for justice available to advocates for nonhuman animal rights. Yet even within U.S. law, there is no monolithic “animal” as the human/animal binary would claim. The Animal Welfare Act (1966), for example, regulates treatment of nonhuman animals used in research and exhibition, yet excludes birds, rats and mice – the latter of whom are the most widely used research subjects in the country. Similarly, the Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act (1958) excludes 99 percent of the animals slaughtered for food in the U.S.; most of those unprotected are

²Wolfe, Cary. *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.

chickens.³ Mice and chickens, then, are excluded from what little protections “animal” and even “livestock” provide under federal law.

The uneven distribution of species protections highlights the economic motivations behind flimsy definitions of “animal.” Increasingly, those nonhuman animals deemed “ungrievable”⁴ are those whose bodies are most aggressively coded as capital. To recognize chickens and other fungible animals as nonhuman lives worth living and, therefore, grieving, threatens the very foundation of neoliberal capitalism that has long relied on the exploitation of the less-than-human. The economic factor is arguably *the* driving force behind the endurance of the human/animal binary in 21st century American society.

The coding of “animal” as exploitable exemplifies the twoness of the term. Both basally material and capaciously abstract, animal is a site of tension between object and subject. The boundaries between human and animal, therefore, have always been elastic. Yet it is the appearance of rigidity in the human/animal boundary that gives power to biopolitically motivated transgressions of human and animal.⁵ Various humans and groups of humans have been coded as animal in order to be kept outside the bounds of American citizenship: black bodies considered livestock in chattel slavery,

³ Wolfe 2013.

⁴Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2006.

⁵Shukin, Nicole. *Animal capital: rendering life in biopolitical times*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

queer sex aligned with bestiality under anti-sodomy laws, and disabled persons subjected to forced sterilization have all born the mark of the brute beast.

These animal markings signify less-than-human subjects who no longer require the same rights and dignities afforded by the privilege of humanity. Employing “animal” as a discursive signifier marks the signified as both raw material (nonhuman being) and abstraction (qualities considered nonhuman), allowing a slippage between what is happening in fact and what is happening in narrative. The violence and oppression of millions of people coded as animal can therefore be discussed as exercise of natural right of dominion and nothing more.

The categories of human and animal, then, lie at the very core of the American project of nation-building. In the political discourse of liberal multiculturalism that relies on human rights as the foundational guidelines for justice, being brought into the fold of humanity is a prerequisite for moral standing. Because of this, animal liberation discourse has largely been forced to articulate itself in terms of human rights. Beyond the anthropocentrism of this approach, the critiques of rights-based claims to justice posited by queer and native theorists should have much to say to the scholar-activists currently working in critical animal studies. In the animalizing of queers, crips, women,

and people of color, so too have nonhuman animals been queered,⁶ handicapped,⁷ feminized,⁸ and racialized.⁹ “Animal” in American studies, then, has a stake in all these movements for justice and decolonization.

Despite the interlocking systems of oppression of which nonhuman animals are a part, “animal” suggests moving beyond intersectionality. The limits of analyzing species alongside race/class/gender/sexuality are clear, as the established identifiers are only truly relevant among one species: *homo sapiens*. “Animal” resists the temptation to stay within the bounds of identity politics precisely because of its history as a signifier made outside the realm of human claims. This lack of adhesion to one group, body, or agenda lends animal a conceptual motility that has been difficult to achieve in other fields.

As a result of this flexibility, to talk about animal has invariably been to talk about human. But nonhuman animals have been integral to the American project in their very corporeality. Vaccinations that aided industrialization and urbanization, such as the smallpox vaccine, were derived from the cowpox of

⁶Macaya, ÁngelesDonoso and Melissa M. González. “Orthodox Transgressions: The Ideology of Cross-Species, Cross-Class, and Interracial Queerness in LucíaPuenzo’s Novel *El niñopez*(*The Fish Child*).” *American Quarterly*, 65(3): September 2013, pp. 711-733.

⁷Taylor, Sunaura. “Vegans, Freaks, and Animals: Toward a New Table Fellowship.” *American Quarterly*, 65(3): September 2013. pp. 757-764.

⁸Gaard, Greta. “Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies.” *American Quarterly*, 65(3): September 2013, pp. 595-618.

⁹Weaver, Harlan. “‘Becoming in Kind:’ Race, Class, Gender, and Nation in Cultures of Dog Rescue and Dogfighting.” *American Quarterly*, 65(3): September 2013. pp.689-709.

bovine bodies.¹⁰ Nonhuman animals have long been used in medical and military research, with beagles singled out in the mid to late 20th century as the ideal beings on which to test nuclear radiation for the US Commission on Atomic Energy.¹¹ Outside of biomedical research, nonhuman animals remain central to agricultural development and the American ideal of the yeoman farmer: the federal conferral of livestock on the Seminole, for example, made animal bodies agents of the settler colonial project.¹² These are all examples of the ways nonhuman animals have been irreplaceable agents of change and even historical actors in human society, yet largely lack recognition for this fact. The sociohistorical narrative of the animal in American studies is just beginning its excavation.

And yet, in recovering these obscured narratives, is it fair to use national descriptors for animals? Do nonhuman animals occupy a national space? Are they able to claim membership or be counted as citizens? The beagles used in federal defense research suggest a forced performance of citizen-soldier that interpellated the dogs into the nation. On the other hand, the transnational migratory patterns of many avian species have generated regional coalitions like the North American Waterfowl Management Plan that

¹⁰Vaught, Jeannette. "MateriaMedica: Technology, Vaccination, and Antivivisection in Jazz Age Philadelphia." *American Quarterly*, 65(3): September 2013. pp. 575-594.

¹¹Anderson, Allen C. *The beagle as an experimental dog*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1970.

¹²Cattelino, Jessica R. *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

require a disavowal of national claims in recognition of the fact that migration does not attend to geopolitical boundaries.¹³

The persistence of nonhuman animals ignoring, subverting, and challenging manmade frameworks as revered as “the nation” is precisely their value to critical theory and cultural studies. “Animal” has been made oppositional to what is human, and herein lies its strength. What epistemologies can animal offer American studies?

As a starting point, consider that one of the distinguishing characteristics of animals is the absence of the rigid cell walls of plants. To be animal requires porous membranes, constant migration and exchange, mutation, regeneration. These are the qualities which “animal” can offer our intellectual landscape.

¹³Wilson, Jeremy. “Institutional interplay and effectiveness: assessing efforts to conserve western hemisphere shorebirds.” *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*,8(3): September 2008. pp. 207-226.

CHAPTER ONE: Toward an Animal Methodology

In her recent book on the rapidly developing field of animal studies, Kari Weil asks, *Why Animal Studies Now?* This investigation tweaks the question to ask, “Why animal studies? And how?” Animal studies has taken shape over the past forty years through contributions from diverse disciplines bridging the sciences and humanities. One result of this transdisciplinary influence is an acute indecision about how to define the field: with such divergent sculptors, what shape should animal studies take?

In the past five years, scholars have increasingly begun to lay boundary stones around the field. Boundary stones, however, are cairns more than fences. The work of figures integral to animal studies, such as Donna Haraway’s *When Species Meet* and Cary Wolfe’s *What Is Posthumanism?*, have provided markers to guide the field toward posthumanism. Meanwhile, as Dawne McCance suggests in *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction*, others continue to rely on aging signposts that point unwaveringly toward justice, even if on humanist terms. With the help of broader surveys of the field provided by Weil, Par Segerdahl in *Undisciplined Animals: Invitations to Animal Studies* and Linda Kalof and Georgina Montgomery in their edited volume, *Making Animal Meaning*, this chapter charts the key boundary stones laid by recent scholars. From this surveying, I

attempt to articulate an animal methodology that may lend some cohesion to the field.

The question of discipline

The current challenge of legibility facing animal studies in the academy is perhaps most succinctly captured in its unavoidable placement within the humanities. In this categorization, the subject of study seems precluded from entering the humanist realm. Yet, because animal studies is not simply zoology or ethology and remains sharply distinct from anthropology or sociology, here it must fall. In its suprabiological consideration of nonhuman animals, however, animal studies complicates the dichotomous distinction between nature and culture, animal and human. Indeed, this binary bending is one of its main projects. This work requires a self-reflexivity of the humanities that most of its disciplines have yet to seriously engage.

As animal studies makes a place for itself among the humanities, it remains unclear whether the field should claim the order of “discipline” as part of that process. Swedish scholar Par Segerdahl emphasizes that animal studies is not a stand-alone discipline, by virtue of its roughly simultaneous emergence from a number of unrelated disciplines in which nonhuman animals were largely peripheral.¹⁴ In compiling *Undisciplined Animals*, Segerdahl and his seven contributors realized that rather than providing a textbook introduction that defines the field, “each of us could only exemplify,

¹⁴Segerdahl, Par. *Undisciplined Animals: Invitations to Animal Studies*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2011. 2.

by our own work, how animals made us undisciplined in our discipline.”¹⁵

Despite the emphatically cross-disciplinary nature of the work presented, Segerdahl insists that animal studies is a field of inquiry to be explored by the methods of one’s home discipline. While this approach is appealing in its reach, it fragments the potential power of an entirely new discipline unbound by preexisting methods and frameworks. As its own discipline, animal studies and its evolving methods could challenge the very nature of humanities-based inquiry.

In the introduction to *What Is Posthumanism?*, Cary Wolfe clearly articulates this change-making potential. Wolfe argues that a posthumanist approach to animal studies forces established disciplines built on liberal humanist ideology to rethink entire frameworks and methodologies:

The full force of animal studies—what makes it not just another flavor of “fill in the blank” studies on the model of media studies, film studies, women’s studies, ethnic studies, and so on—is that it fundamentally unsettles and reconfigures the question of the knowing subject and the disciplinary paradigms and procedures that take for granted its form and reproduce it. [...] It is here—and not in the simple fact that various disciplines have recently converged on an object of study called “the animal”—that the deepest challenge to the disciplines posed by animal studies may be felt.¹⁶

Still, Wolfe argues against animal studies as a discipline in his chapter devoted to the question of “‘Animal Studies,’ Disciplinarity, and the (Post)humanities:” “In my view, it means that we should *not* try to imagine

¹⁵ Segerdahl, 7.

¹⁶ Wolfe, Cary. *What is Posthumanism?* (Posthumanities). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.xxix.

some super-interdiscipline called ‘animal studies’ [...] but rather recognize that it is only in and through our disciplinary specificity that we have something specific and irreplaceable to contribute to this ‘question of the animal’ that has recently captured the attention of so many different disciplines.”¹⁷ Yet even in expressing the disruptive potential of posthumanist animal studies, Wolfe acknowledges the widespread and counterproductive humanism that emerges from animal studies conducted within established disciplines. The resistance to disciplinarity, then, seems more ambivalent than Wolfe allows.

For example, Wolfe’s engagement with systems theory to reimagine disciplines as an ordering principle of the academy (primarily on the grounds that “no discourse, no discipline, can make transparent the conditions of its own observations”¹⁸) seems to dismiss the possibility of a radical animal disciplinarity that is already showing signs of emergence. Consider, for example, the highly collaborative nature of much recent scholarship in animal studies embodied by The Animal Studies Group.¹⁹ This collective of eight British scholars publish as the Group, defying the individualism required of achieving success in most disciplines. This collaborative approach remedies precisely what Wolfe critiques of disciplinarity that emphasizes the role of the

¹⁷Wolfe, 115.

¹⁸Wolfe, 116.

¹⁹see Segerdahl, 4 and The Animal Studies Group’s *Killing Animals*, 2006.

person as subject in myriad veiled ways. The Animal Studies Group refuses to claim this personhood, offering a new model of disciplinarity.

Maintaining animal studies as field of study rather than working to solidify it as a discipline has the potential advantage of having a wider net of influence, but the disadvantage of a perpetual lack of cohesion provided by disciplinary boundaries. This need for organization, for a central meeting place for animal studies scholars, is one of the strongest arguments for formalizing animal studies in the same way that women's studies and ethnic studies have demanded seats at the departmental table. Out of this formalization, animal studies can retain the promising mobility described by Wolfe through an animal methodology whose framework can be applied across disciplines.

Productive tensions: posthumanism, animal studies, critical animal studies

Though it is not yet a formal discipline, the field of animal studies has already begun to internally differentiate itself on a spectrum that ranges from posthumanism to critical animal studies. Resisting the exclusionary absolutism that a strict definition of the field would entail, animal studies has instead found that the tension between these poles can be wildly productive. Wolfe, McCance, and Weil explain the differences among these branches, and how they constitute, together, the field of animal studies.

McCance and Weil consider Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* to mark the opening of the field of animal studies in 1975.²⁰ Singer drew widespread attention to the unquestioned centrality of the human in Western ontology with his popularization of the term "speciesism," understood as a form of prejudice based on species membership that manifests itself in the human exploitation and abuse of nonhuman animals.²¹ Working from this genealogy, animal studies is rooted in philosophy driven by explicit activism for nonhuman animals. Yet others introduce the field without a mention of Singer and the rights-based roots of animal studies, beginning instead with the poststructuralist work of Jacques Derrida in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* or the posthumanist work of Haraway and Wolfe.²² This more recent lineage is the preferred parentage for posthumanist animal theory, but the liberal humanism of animal rights still drives much scholarship claiming the field of critical animal studies today.

These divergent influences point toward Wolfe's helpful distinction between posthumanist animal studies, which proceeds from Derrida and questions the notion of the human in the first instance, and humanist animal studies, which can likely be traced to Singer and relies on humanist language

²⁰McCance, Dawne. *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013. p. 7, and Weil, Kari. *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. p. 3.

²¹The term was introduced by Oxford philosopher Richard Ryder in 1970.

²²Segerdahl, 3.

to do its work.²³ The value of posthumanist animal studies lies in the ambitious and long-term project of disrupting the human/animal binary and its far-reaching consequences, while humanist animal studies most often offers more recognizable solutions to urgent matters of justice for nonhuman animals.

Wolfe acknowledges the importance of both projects, but he is most invested in developing posthumanism as the stronger current in the field.²⁴ It is important to note that Wolfe sees animal studies as part of the practice of posthumanism; that is to say, he would disagree with the categorization of posthumanism *within* animal studies. In *What is Posthumanism?*, Wolfe articulates the academic and social imperative of moving beyond the entrenched framework of normative human subjectivity. Wolfe defines his use of posthumanism as “*posthumanist*” in the sense that it disputes the classic liberal claims of humanism and, as it applies to academia, the humanist inflections that mar scholarship across disciplines.²⁵

Humanism is woven into the very fabric of knowledge production in the humanities: human beings and our ways of being human are the explicit center of study. Underlying this aim to understand human experience, however, are constructed values and claims to truth that limit the types of knowledge we can acceptably produce in the humanities. In *The Black*

²³Wolfe, 123.

²⁴Wolfe, 102.

²⁵Wolfe, 120.

Atlantic: Modernity and Modern Consciousness, cultural theorist Paul Gilroy names three tenets of the Enlightenment's ideological project that ground my characterization of modern humanism: universality, fixity of meaning, and coherence of subject.²⁶ These assertions about modern experience have historically excluded from subjectivity those held outside humanity, such as enslaved Africans in what Gilroy calls the Black Atlantic. While the concept of "humanity" has since expanded to include all members of the species *homo sapiens*, the tenets of humanism still hold a certain kind of subject—human—at the unchallenged center of modernity and all its associated projects and institutions. Posthumanism destabilizes this center.

Based on these definitions, Wolfe would label critical animal studies as the humanist practice of animal studies. In *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction*, Dawne McCance provides an accessible summary of current issues facing nonhuman animals including factory farming, nondomestic animal rights, and animal experimentation as a starting point for her survey of the field. She defines critical animal studies as a field "which first emerged some forty years ago as a specialization within analytic philosophy, one that set out both to expose, and to offer ethical responses to, today's unprecedented subjection and exploitation of animals."²⁷ Yet McCance never makes a clear distinction between animal studies and critical animal studies,

²⁶ Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Modern Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993. p. 55.

²⁷ McCance, 4.

and appears to use the terms interchangeably. She engages the “critical” sporadically when highlighting the theoretical challenges presented by posthumanism that animal studies must recognize.

Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction is meant for an audience unfamiliar with the field, and in this regard McCance covers many influential thinkers in a scant 150 pages. But her characterization of the field seems driven by a desire to map a linear progression for her book rather than a fair assessment of the work that has built animal studies. Indeed, the “critical” work to which critical animal studies has only just begun to turn, as McCance claims, has in fact been co-creating the field of animal studies for years. For example, McCance characterizes Derrida’s work as being the target of exclusion from the field due to lack of adherence to rights-based or utilitarian philosophy.²⁸ It is hard to say if this is an accurate reflection of critical animal studies in contrast to more moderate animal studies scholarship due to her confluence of the terms. However, the almost uncontested embrace of Derrida’s work in animal studies is evidenced by the fact that *The Animal That Therefore I Am* was cited more than once in every text consulted for this literature review. This point alone calls into question the genealogy of critical animal studies McCance constructs in her introduction.

Ultimately, *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction* lags behind the field even as it engages the work of boundary pushers like Derrida, Wolfe, and

²⁸McCance, 65.

Haraway. McCance's lack of differentiation between critical animal studies and animal studies makes it difficult to assert any defining traits of the critical branch, though the emphasis on contemporary problems of animal justice appears to be the mark of distinction. McCance concludes by suggesting seven theoretical areas where critical animal studies must emphasize the "critical:" ethics, anthropomorphism, dualism, rights, machine, passivity, and sacrifice. If these are new realms of inquiry for critical animal studies then its differentiation from the more theoretically advanced animal studies becomes critical, indeed.

In the ambiguous middle ground between Wolfe and McCance, Kari Weil provides a clear introduction to animal studies as a whole. *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* considers key concepts in animal studies, such as domestication and agency, in works of both art and philosophy in an effort to "show the urgency of undoing those boundaries between human and animal."²⁹ Weil argues that unthinking "the animal" requires a dialectical movement between art and philosophy that allows the human to both recognize the nonhuman and to reckon with the human responsibility toward the construction of the nonhuman.³⁰ This balance between recognition and responsibility marks the meeting of posthumanism and critical animal studies.

²⁹Weil, xviii.

³⁰J. M. Coetzee's novel, *The Lives of Animals*, is an oft-cited example of the effectiveness of this art-philosophy fusion.

To address the temporal aspect of her title, Weil contextualizes the critical engagement with nonhuman animals “as an extension of those debates over identity and difference that have embroiled academic theory over the past quarter-century. If animal studies has come of age, it is perhaps because nonhuman animals have become a limit case for theories of difference, otherness, and power.”³¹ She identifies three areas of literary and critical theory for which “animal” has proven an especially salient limit case: the linguistic turn, the counterlinguistic or affective turn, and the ethical turn.³²

As partial explanation for why nonhuman animals have become such widely tested limit cases, Weil suggests that it is the culmination of scientific advances that have made animals legible to humans on the requisite empirical grounds from which the academy prefers to draw conclusions:

It has become clear that the idea of ‘the animal’—the instinctive being with presumably no access to language, texts, or abstract thinking—has functioned as an unexamined foundation on which the idea of the human and hence the humanities have been built. It has also become clear, primarily through advances in a range of scientific studies of animal language, culture, and morality, that this exclusion has taken place on false grounds.³³

The implication of Weil’s point here is twofold. First, the shaky foundation of the concept of humanities emerges again, to which animal studies offers a particularly strong challenge. Second, Weil highlights that the engagement of empirical, scientific knowledge has been integral to establishing the legitimacy

³¹Weil, 5.

³²Weil, 7.

³³Weil, 23.

of animal studies as a field and potential discipline. The integration of empirical and theoretical work in animal studies is a defining feature of the field, though one that seems to have fallen out of favor. As Kalof and Montgomery note, “the vast majority of the recent scholarship on animal meaning has been theoretical, offering a stunning array of arguments about the essentials of ‘the animal,’ but there is a paucity of empirical research to illustrate the theories of animal essence.”³⁴ Leaving the puzzling essentialism aside for now, the need for animal studies to produce more systematic scholarship about material nonhuman animals is clear.

Throughout *Thinking Animals*, Weil suggests there is a learning to be done: more than simply learning about animals, humans should take seriously the task of learning from them. As she writes of the advances in ethology, “Perhaps in contrast to the sciences, much of contemporary theory gives value precisely to the ways animals resist our tools of analysis even as they succumb to our invasive and dominating need to know.”³⁵ The limits of human knowledge and the instructive choices of nonhuman animal subjects are questions both Haraway and Wolfe take up and that drive the formation of a methodology for animal studies.

Toward a posthumanist animal methodology

Across the spectrum of animal studies, scholars largely define the field by the challenge it presents to the human in its transdisciplinary focus on

³⁴Kalof and Montgomery, ix.

³⁵Weil, 23.

issues of nonhuman justice and posthumanist subjectivity. However, the fundamental question for animal studies, as Wolfe puts it for literary and cultural studies, remains, “what can [it] contribute, specifically, that could not be handled just as well (or better) by other fields such as history or sociology or philosophy?”³⁶ I want to suggest that the development of an animal methodology provides the best answer to Wolfe’s question. To that end, this chapter pulls together the threads of methodology dispersed throughout recent texts on the field of animal studies in order to present a unique animal methodology.

Despite the scholarship devoted to defining animal studies and its growing branches, conversation about the methodological possibilities for the field has been less pointed. So far, gestures toward methodology have primarily been revisions or expansions of existing disciplinary methods to allow better exploration of animal studies within one’s home discipline. In the opening essay of *Making Animal Meaning*, “Animal Writes: Historiography, Disciplinarity, and the Animal Trace,” for example, Etienne Benson argues for a new practice of historical writing about nonhuman animals. His intriguing methods include opening the idea of primary sources to include material traces left by actual animals and interpreting this evidence to determine if animals acted as historical agents in a given instance, rather than making a

³⁶Wolfe, 103.

philosophical decision about agency at the outset.³⁷ But Benson articulates these methods in the language of history, leaving animal studies scholars to outline a methodology similarly tailored to their field.

An extended discussion of the recent contributions of Wolfe and Haraway to animal studies scholarship reveals the centrality of posthumanism to any development of animal methodology. *What Is Posthumanism?* answers the title question in two parts that first define and then perform Wolfe's vision of posthumanism. Part I: "Theories, Disciplines, and Ethics" defines the need for posthumanism by showing how the aspirations of humanism are compromised by the reliance on "normative subjectivity—a specific concept of the human."³⁸ Wolfe presents nonhuman animals and disabled humans as subjects for whom humanism requires fundamental recalibration. Part II: "Media, Culture, Practices" performs the idea of "posthumanities" by applying posthumanist theory to close readings of cultural texts ranging from Emersonian romanticism to contemporary art and architecture. In this text, Wolfe makes two key contributions to a posthumanist animal methodology: the representation of the unrepresentable and the radicalization of the subject.

In his introduction, Wolfe emphasizes the "paradoxical observability of the unobservable, the communicability of the incommunicable" as one of the

³⁷Benson in Kalof and Montgomery, 7.

³⁸Wolfe, xvii.

more elusive pursuits of posthumanism.³⁹ This paradox refers to the challenges inherent in accessing, transcribing, and interpreting worlds that are formed in ways illegible to the dominant human knowledge systems of language and visuality. One way this paradox manifests in animal studies is in the limited ability to represent through language or image those nonhuman worlds built of radically different sense perceptions.⁴⁰ This limitation, however, is precisely the reason animal studies must tackle Wolfe's paradox and take seriously the diversity of animal worldings. To put it simply, human perception of the world is but one among many. A preliminary definition of animal methodology must claim the socio-sensory location of the human before attempting to learn something from that of another. Practitioners of an animal method must try, despite sensory limitations, to consider an animal within its own nonhuman worlding.

In chapter 2, "Language, Representation, and Species," Wolfe explains that posthumanism requires the investigation of "our assumptions about what knowledge is and the kinds of knowledge we can have of ourselves and of others" by directing this inquiry to the knowledge forms privileged by cognitive science and deconstruction.⁴¹ He argues that one's theory of language (who has it, what it is, how it is used) is central to any possible theory of subjectivity. He further suggests that the question of language demands input

³⁹Wolfe, xxxii.

⁴⁰Influentially argued by Thomas Nagel in his 1974 essay, "What Is It Like To Be a Bat?"

⁴¹Wolfe, 31.

from both cognitive science and literary and cultural studies in order “to fully comprehend what amounts to a new reality: that the human occupies a new place in the universe, a universe now populated by what I am prepared to call nonhuman subjects.”⁴² Animal methodology, then, must address the role of language, both cognitive and textual, in the human articulation of the nonhuman.

Wolfe’s naming of nonhuman subjects is a pointed blow to the liberal humanist subject that animal methodology works to dismantle. In chapter 5, Wolfe engages with the work of animal scientist Temple Grandin to demonstrate how animal studies finds an incredible ally in disability studies when making these disruptions of subjectivity. Wolfe is interested in the ability of Grandin to represent what was for decades considered unrepresentable—the world of autism from the “inside,” which was thought not to exist. What does it mean that Grandin’s autism allows her to think in pictures, rather than words?

For decades of humanist cognitive and linguistic science, it meant that she could not “think.”⁴³ For posthumanism, it means that rather than being incorporated into subjectivity on established humanist grounds (namely, as a rational holder of language), Grandin’s embodiment of a differently conscious subject exemplifies Wolfe’s argument against normative subjectivity. Finally, for animal methodology, Grandin’s thinking in pictures means insistence on

⁴²Wolfe, 47.

⁴³Wolfe, 130.

the instructive meanings brought forth by the sense-worlds of differently abled beings, both human and nonhuman.

These two refrains of *What is Posthumanism?* form the foundation of animal methodology. First, Wolfe's paradox of representing the unrepresentable establishes the limits of human knowledge and language, which requires the methodological acknowledgement of one's human perspective in order to fully recognize the worlds of the nonhuman. Second, the animal method expediently answers Wolfe's call for the radicalization of the humanist subject by claiming nonhuman animals as subjects, and treating them as such throughout one's research.

Donna Haraway supports both of these imperatives in *When Species Meet*, her 2008 contribution to the *Posthumanities* series, of which Wolfe is the editor. Indeed, Haraway's repeated engagement with the "nonanthropomorphic competences of many kinds of animals" informed Wolfe's 2010 articulation of the posthumanist ideals that have outlined the animal methodology.⁴⁴ Apart from her shared emphasis on alternative animal worldings, one of Haraway's main interventions in *When Species Meet* is the absolute necessity of engaging actual animals in work aiming to be posthumanist and animal. In the physical meeting of species, Haraway also argues for the necessity of action on the part of the human: "The point is not

⁴⁴Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *When Species Meet (Posthumanities)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. p.300.

to celebrate complexity, but to become worldly and to respond.”⁴⁵ These interventions, in addition to a close reading of a question posed by Haraway, further develop animal methodology.

In the ubiquitous invocation of a nude Derrida’s feline encounter in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Haraway finds fault with the philosopher for not

asking what this cat on this morning cared about, what these bodily postures and visual entanglements might mean and might invite, as well as reading what people who study cats have to say and delving into the developing knowledges of both cat-cat and cat-human behavioral semiotics when species meet. Instead, he concentrated on his shame in being naked before this cat.⁴⁶

Haraway argues that nonhuman animals demand recognition and respect in their beingness, and that to respect is to respond. She reserves full ire, however, for Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s “profound absence of curiosity about or respect for and with animals” in their discussion of becoming-animal in *A Thousand Plateaus*.⁴⁷ Haraway’s critique of these philosophers who are most often lauded in animal studies insists that animals are more than signs. Her disappointment lies in the lack of response from Derrida and Deleuze and Guattari; that is, in the failure to react to the animal in the moment of one’s trans-species encounter.

Scholarship practicing animal methodology, then, must respect the physical collision of worlds that occurs each time species meet. Respect, in this case, translates as recognition of the actuality of the animals encountered

⁴⁵Haraway, 41.

⁴⁶Haraway, 22.

⁴⁷Haraway, 27.

in one's research and the verbalization of an intellectual response that grows out of such encounters. Haraway simplifies this meet-and-respond concept when she articulates two basic questions that get answered in trans-species contact zones: "Who should eat whom, and who should cohabit?"⁴⁸ Though Haraway presents this question as part of the ordinary ecological and political development of a lichen- and leaf-covered stump, how might this question inform the development of animal methodology?

First, the question immediately requires a relational framework; it can only be answered under consideration of multiple subjects. In the practice of a posthumanist animal methodology, this point translates into a decentering of the human and constant recognition of trans-species connection. Second, this framework organizes equal, nonspecific actors: "who should eat whom," not "who should eat what." The open "who" makes room for posthumanist subjects unbounded by the liberal humanism so effectively critiqued by Wolfe.

Finally, dynamics of power and space express themselves in the main verbs "eat" and "cohabit." Yet, the auxiliary "should" illustrates the malleability of these constructions of power and territory. In animal studies, the presence of power must be acknowledged, and so must the variety of its construction. Furthermore, the idea of cohabitation provides an easy access point for articulating why animal studies matters. The primary definition of cohabit is to live together in a sexual relationship, followed by a secondary "to coexist, as

⁴⁸Haraway, 6.

animals of different species.”⁴⁹ In a single word, Haraway captures both the construction of reproductive futurity and the boundaries (or lack thereof) among species. To ask “who should cohabit” requires a simultaneously inward and outward glance that accounts for the present organizations of the “human” world and imagines the alternative organization of integrated posthuman worlds. Fundamentally, Haraway’s meet-and-respond method pinpoints the question for animal studies: What forms do interspecies relationships take, and how do they alter or create new worlds?

Wolfe and Haraway heavily influence the construction of a posthumanist animal methodology. The guiding principle of this methodology is best summarized as the destabilization of what Haraway calls the fantasy of human exceptionalism.⁵⁰ Claiming one’s socio-sensory location allows humans to remain open to learning from the sense-worlds of differently abled beings, a mindset that Wolfe argues is integral to the practice of posthumanism. Recognizing animals as nonhuman subjects to whom scholars must respond, physically and intellectually, answers Haraway’s call to account for actual animals. These posthumanist ideas form the foundation of a methodology for animal studies.

Adopting animal methodology: conclusions

The development of a methodology for animal studies provides a clear answer to Wolfe’s question of specific contribution from the field. While it may

⁴⁹*Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁵⁰Haraway, 32.

be too early or altogether unnecessary to delineate a set of practical methods, recent literature on the field of animal studies indicates that animal methodologies are already in formation. The methodology presented here is comprised of three main tenets. First, one must situate her work in the paradox of how to represent the unrepresentable. This means acknowledging the limits of human perception and language in articulating the sense-worlds of nonhuman animals and finding creative ways to work within this barrier. Second, research should proceed with the intention of learning from animals. This requires awareness of the entanglement of human and nonhuman at the most basic level and a willingness to read the animal traces hidden in one's archive. Finally, and most importantly, respond to the actual animals present in one's work. This means remaining accountable to issues of justice toward nonhuman animals even when it is not the explicit focus of the project. This also means respecting nonhuman animals as subjects who have their own needs, desires, and perceptions that are co-constitutive of interspecies contact zones.

Applying this methodology to the posthumanist side of animal studies should attend to the lack of response to actual animals that Donna Haraway critiques in *When Species Meet*. Cary Wolfe's *What Is Posthumanism?* and Kari Weil's *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* both echo the need to decenter human knowledges by learning from nonhuman animals, a task that must be approached with consciousness of diverse sense perceptions.

On the other end of the spectrum, much of the animal rights work in DawneMcCance's *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction* could benefit from animal methodology's critical consideration of language, both cognitive and textual, in arguing for nonhuman subjectivity. Finally, Par Segerdhal's *Undisciplined Animals: Invitations to Animal Studies* and Linda Kalof and Georgina Montgomery's *Making Animal Meaning* demonstrate the value of synthesizing knowledge from divergent disciplines, especially between those of the sciences and humanities, which the animal methodology encourages by design.

Animal methodology holds that there are multiple modes of perception: human and nonhuman, empirical and artistic, political and philosophical. Engaging the productive tension among realms using animal methodology confronts the fantasy of human exceptionalism from all sides. These sustained confrontations will collectively yield the radicalization of the subject fought for by posthumanism that will facilitate justice for actual nonhuman animals to which critical animal studies devotes the most attention. This is the unmatched contribution of animal studies that an evolving animal methodology can facilitate.

CHAPTER TWO: Mourning the Mundane: Road-killed Animals in North America

On the left shoulder several meters ahead lay a crumpled brown body with ribs exposed and legs twisted beneath. Stuck in traffic and inching nearer to the carnage, I alternated between curiously staring and deliberately looking away. My car came to a full stop just steps away from the mangled animal. I forced myself to look. Turned away from approaching traffic, but visible in profile from my new vantage point was the bloodied face of a fawn. The young deer must have been killed a few days ago as skin was still largely intact but exposed wounds were black with rot. In that time, tens of thousands of drivers and even more passengers would have passed his or her body. How many noticed? How many had time to take note of the species, possible age, and likely circumstances of the killing? And how many felt compelled to mourn the scene?

The question of which beings are mournable does not always have strict guidelines. Many, but not all, humans fall into that category today. Judith Butler argues that “the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and grievable death?”⁵¹

Butler’s discussion of grievable subjects does not engage with the grievability

⁵¹ Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London, New York: Verso, 2004. pp. xiv-xv.

of nonhuman subjects; indeed, nonhuman animals continue to be largely excluded from academic and political discourses of subjectivity generally. Butler's emphasis on one species and her conflation of the categories of "human" and "subject" limit the applicability of her work to lives like that of the bloody fawn. Still, the concept of "grievable life" already extends to animals in practice: humans grant it to some individuals and species while denying it to many others. By considering which animals are grievable and why, I seek to nuance our understanding of interspecies relations beyond the reductive human/animal binary.

While most nonhuman animals remain outside the realm of acceptable human mourning, those that are able to transcend the species barrier typically do so through social ties to a human community. Companion animals, for example, are increasingly mourned in ways traditionally reserved for humans. Farmed animals, on the other hand, are sequestered from the daily lives of most people in North America, making their killings largely invisible and therefore largely unmournable (especially for those who still consume them). Animals that have been hit by cars, for instance, popularly known as "road kill," seem to constitute a unique class of animal death. As wild species, road-killed animals lack the strong ties to a human community that companion animals, even those hit by cars, can claim.⁵² The highly public nature of their

⁵² Companion animals that have been hit by cars are generally set apart from "road kill." The deaths of these animals are more frequently accounted for and mourned.

killing, however, requires a human response in a way that the invisibility of farmed animal killing forecloses.

The question considered here is whether road-killed animals are permissible subjects of human mourning. Every day, roughly one million animals are killed by vehicles in the United States alone.⁵³ Bodies of large mammals like deer are usually moved from traffic lanes by state transportation authorities, but they often remain visible on shoulders and ditches as they decompose. The majority of animals we routinely kill with our cars, however, are smaller mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians whose bodies typically stay on the road to be driven over and over to disintegration. With nearly 400 million animals killed by cars annually, “road kill” is the second largest cause of animal death in the U.S., behind animals killed for flesh.⁵⁴ Despite these figures, road-killed animals remain on the outskirts of acceptable human mourning.

Road-killed Animals in the North American Historical Imagination

The idea of “road kill” is necessarily a 20th-century invention. The phenomenon of animals being routinely struck and killed by humans in automobiles requires, of course, a frequency of automobile use and an extension of road networks that was not established in the U.S. and Canada until the early 20th century. A historically contingent term, “road kill” as

⁵³Forman, Richard T. T. 2003. *Road ecology: Science and solutions*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

⁵⁴Seiler, Andreas; Helldin, J-O (2006). "Mortality In Wildlife Due To Transportation". In Davenport, John; Davenport, Julia L. *The Ecology of Transportation: Managing Mobility for the Environment* (Springer). pp. 166–8.

shorthand for “humans killing animals with their vehicles” should not be taken at face value. In his Marxist examination of “road kill” and commodity fetishism, labor studies scholar Dennis Soron explains, “As a human creation, ‘road kill’ is just as de-animalized as ‘beef’ and just as open to cultural meanings that are bracketed off from the embodied experience of the suffering animal.”⁵⁵ For this reason, I use the term “road-killed animals” in place of “road kill” to emphasize that the way in which these animals die does not exclusively define their relationship to the human community. As individual beings, road-killed animals have full and varied lives independent of the final violence inflicted upon them by humans.

Before animals killed by cars came to be known as “road kill,” many humans expressed some degree of accountability toward prevention and concern for animals in built transportation networks. Humane societies, which proliferated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, conducted humane education campaigns about braking for animals. In a cartoon published in the June 1926 issue of *Our Dumb Animals*, “Somebody’s Pal,” a young boy sits crying over a dog’s body in the middle of the road. A cloud of dust follows behind a moving vehicle at the edge of the frame labeled as: “The Man Who

⁵⁵Soron, Dennis. “Road Kill: Commodity Fetishism and Structural Violence.” in *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*. John Sanbonmatsu, ed. New York: Rowman& Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011, pp 63.

Never Stops.”⁵⁶ This cartoon placed car-killed animals squarely within the moral community as advocated by humane societies.

Some animal welfare groups made rescuing victims of auto-related injuries a common practice during this time. In Washington, D.C., the Washington Animal Rescue League maintained an ambulance to tend to injured animals on site. In 1935, for example, their records report sending emergency medical response to a dog that had been hit by a car in the middle of the night.⁵⁷ The volume of stray animals on the streets of Washington during this time made cats and dogs likely victims of vehicle collisions. It is also possible that the relationship between humans and companion animals made it easier for humane societies to take up the issue of car-related violence.

By the late 1930s, car-related deaths of wild animal species had become common enough to warrant a book-length study. James R. Simmons’s *Feathers and Fur on the Turnpike* (1938) was the first to examine “road fauna,” a precursor for “road kill.”⁵⁸ Simmons’s catalogue of road-killed animals in New England led to the sporadic formation of Simmons Society chapters in the U.S. and United Kingdom. Activities of the Simmons Society today include counts of road-killed animals and data analysis of seasonal

⁵⁶ Cronin, Keri (curator). “Be Kind: A Visual History of Humane Education 1880-1945.” Los Angeles, California: National Museum of Animals and Society. Online exhibit. Accessed 1 May 2014.

⁵⁷ Board minutes of the Washington Animal Rescue League, April 1935.

⁵⁸ Simmons, James R. *Feathers and Fur on the Turnpike*. Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1938.

changes in death counts as well as increase or decrease of kill-frequency for a given species.⁵⁹ By rationalizing the presence of dead animal bodies on roadways and presenting knowledge obtained by focused analysis thereof, Simmons's study did more than simply enter road-killed animals into the realm of professional and lay scientific interest. His work translated a relatively recent, disconcerting phenomenon into an identifiable taxonomy of "road fauna" over which humans could exercise ontological control through data collection, scientific discourse, and, ultimately, cultural assertion of the inevitability of car-related animal killing.

The rapid expansion of car ownership, road construction, and urban and suburban sprawl that exploded in the postwar years necessarily correlated with an increased frequency and therefore visibility of road-killed animals. This heightened visibility ostensibly prompted the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) to quantify the problem: in 1960, HSUS released statistics that placed the number of animals killed by cars each day in the U.S. at one million, a figure that has remained an accurate estimate over 40 years later.⁶⁰ While the HSUS count suggests a growing concern for road-killed animals, contemporary cultural developments suggest otherwise. While safety concerns for humans and automobiles grew in visibility through the graphic warnings against reckless driving featured in educational videos

⁵⁹ Knutson, Roger M. *Flattened Fauna: A Field guide to Common Animals of Roads, Streets, and Highways*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2006, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁰ Forman, Richard T. T. 2003. *Road ecology: Science and solutions*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

like *Signal 30* (1959), reminders of animals' safety on the road were not part of the curriculum.⁶¹ Instead, the simultaneously escalating rate of car-related animal death was reflected on screen in the form of mid-century cartoons that featured animal characters as humorous victims of car violence.

For example, the 1949 Warner Brothers debut of *The Road-Runner and Wile E. Coyote, Fast and Furry-ous*, made becoming "road kill" the ultimate punchline.⁶² In the final scene of the six-minute cartoon, Wile E. Coyote waits by the road with an axe when he suddenly becomes wide-eyed with fear: an oncoming bus heads directly for him. As the exhaust clears, Wile E.'s body lies completely flattened on the road, straddled by tire tracks. The coyote woozily rises, his face badly injured, and sees *The Road-Runner* taunt him through the window of the bus. In a series driven by creative methods of capture and injury, making car violence the last word in the episode heightens its status as a supremely humorous way to kill animals.

Temporary flattening by automobile became a popular animated event that made the idea of "road kill" laughable. Cartoons like this one made the reality of road-killed animals less threatening by denying the permanence of the violence. Unlike the real victims of collisions, Wile E. Coyote could peel himself off the pavement and walk away. Likewise, viewers could release any

⁶¹Highway Safety Films, Inc. *Signal 30*. Film, 1959. Public domain.

⁶² Jones, Chuck (director). *Fast and Furry-ous*. Warner Brothers Cartoons. Aired September 17, 1949.

trace of guilt over the repercussions of American car culture as they fixated on the mutable moment of death and its undoing.

This cartoon-style mockery of road-killed animals resurfaced in popular culture in the mid-1980s. Warner Brothers' cartoon tropes of permasurprise and tire tracks found new expression in 1985, when *The Original Road Kill Cookbook* heralded the beginning of a road kill cuisine and gag-gift enterprise headed by former *Playboy* food and wine columnist, Buck Peterson. Peterson's *Cookbook* combines exaggerated cartoon illustrations of road-killed animals with recipes for cooking commonly road-killed species. Recipe titles include "Pavement Possum," "Windshield Wabbit," and "Hushed Puppies."⁶³

While the illustrations work in the same dismissive way as Warner Brothers cartoons, the genre of "road kill cuisine" employed a new strategy in keeping road-killed animals outside the realm of human concern. By reclaiming road-killed animals as food, Peterson and others insert otherwise superfluous animal killing into the established framework of killing animals for food. Reframing roadside bodies as usable to humans makes road-killed animals a happy consequence of car culture rather than a problem to be solved. Indeed, Peterson goes so far as to provide pointers for acquiring road-killed animals that include intentionally hitting animals.

⁶³ "Windshield Wabbit" may be an allusion to Elmer Fudd, extending the cultural relevancy of mid-century animated violence toward animals.

Consumerist language in Peterson's text works to fit the process of killing animals with one's car into more familiar methods of acquiring animal flesh, such as grocery shopping. As Peterson writes in the foreword, "The *Original Road Kill Cookbook* is for the roadside shopper, that free-spirited American who wants to participate in Mother Nature's bounty. It's designed for both the motorist who purchased the critter with his own shopping cart and the casual shopper who stumbled onto good fortune either by accident or by design."⁶⁴

While preventing this kind of vehicular poaching precipitated Texas' ban on collecting road-killed animals, several other states have permit or licensing laws that allow citizens to collect curbside corpses.⁶⁵ Requiring state approval to eat road-killed animals simply adds authority to repurposing these bodies as food. This becomes an effective strategy for neutralizing concern for road-killed animals because "meat" is a category of dead animal bodies that the majority of North Americans are still comfortable with and not required or encouraged to mourn.

The release of the *Original Road Kill Cookbook* in the year following Ronald Reagan's election to office was the first of eleven humor publications spanning 22 years centered on road-killed animals and hunting culture. In addition to the 1993 release of the *Endangered Species Cookbook*, one of Peterson's most troubling publications is the 2001 *Roadkill U.S.A. Coloring*

⁶⁴Peterson, 1.

⁶⁵ Idaho, Montana, and Illinois are among those who require permits.

and Activity Book. Peterson's children's activity book comes with crayons in three colors: black, brown, and red. Classic activities like connect-the-dots take the shape of a wide-eyed bird caught in the spokes of a bicycle ridden by a child: "To see what kind of critter is caught in Billy's spokes, connect the dots from 1 to 15."⁶⁶

Roadkill U.S.A. bears a disclaimer on the inside cover page: "No state animals were injured in the production of this book. Injuries to state and many other animals are illegal and not encouraged. Injuries to cartoon animals are a different matter altogether."⁶⁷ While Peterson no longer appears to endorse intentional road-killing, he denies any connection between the symbolic violence depicted by his longtime illustrator J. Angus "Sourdough" McLean and the actual violence Peterson encourages children to visually consume through activities like "road kill bingo."⁶⁸ Soron describes this commoditization of road-killed animals as "a second-order form of exploitation in which the animal's expired body is offered up for consumption not simply as food or clothing, but as an image of its own ritualized abasement."⁶⁹ Soron's point here is that cultural mediation of road-killed animals that centers on the humorous inevitability of their bodies' violent expirations works to contain the threat of such public violence toward animal bodies. The daily reality of "road

⁶⁶ Peterson, Buck. *Roadkill U.S.A.*, 11.

⁶⁷ Peterson, Buck. *Roadkill U.S.A.*, inside cover.

⁶⁸ This game works like regular bingo, but the spaces are occupied by commonly road-killed species that players must spot from the car and mark on their scorecard.

⁶⁹ Soron, 56.

kill” and the cartoon images which illustrate Peterson’s cook- and coloring books are mutually constitutive in devaluing these nonhuman lives.

Peterson’s humor makes the guilt surrounding unintentional killing of wild animals less threatening. It also normalizes the violence to children.

Late 20th century cartoons and cookbooks, then, are expressions of a larger speciesist discourse that maintains a hierarchical divide between human and nonhuman animals. Narratives of human dominion and progress, along with the desire to travel further, faster, and more frequently in American car culture work together to create conditions inhospitable to compassion for road-killed animals.

The Phenomenology of Driving and the Practical Limits of Instant Grief

Cultural expressions of empathetic disregard for road-killed animals are, however, not the only barrier to their consideration as grievable life. The experience of driving is perhaps even more influential on people’s inability to mourn road-killed animals. Indeed, the only time most people encounter road-killed animals is en route to somewhere else. Assuming that drivers even notice the bodies they routinely pass, time constraints and safety concerns about stopping suddenly alongside busy roadways make expressing feelings of grief simply impractical. Soron further explains how the act of driving itself limits the ability of drivers to connect with their surroundings:

drivers--like television viewers-- gain access to a wider range of experiences, but such experiences are transformed by their ‘screens’ in to a rapid succession of visual impressions without context or independent value. The inability to respond morally and

politically to the problem of road kill is, in this regard, partly related to the phenomenological experience of driving, in which speed and mastery go along with a flattening of experience to its visual dimension and a loss of affective involvement with the sensuous life around us.⁷⁰

The detached and fragmented nature of visually encountering road-killed animals while driving emphasizes the decontextualization of wild animal lives by forcing individuals outside their natural habitat into “aggressively rationalized landscapes”⁷¹ where humans see them primarily as dead things rather than as living beings.

Furthermore, otherwise sensitive drivers are sometimes forced to travel on top of already dead bodies. Most state departments of transportation only remove large carcasses, so many others remain in direct paths of travel to become “flattened fauna.”⁷² This involuntary participation in violence can limit feelings of grief by reinforcing the sense that killing animals on roads is unavoidable.

Road-killed animals, of course, do not spontaneously appear in travel lanes as disfigured corpses. There are identifiable and, often, preventable factors that put animals at risk of being killed on the road. Road ecologists have studied what factors bring certain animals to the roadside and have long

⁷⁰Soron, 69.

⁷¹Soron, 68.

⁷² “Flattened fauna” is the title of another popular book in the road kill humor genre: Knutson, Roger M. *Flattened Fauna: A Field guide to Common Animals of Roads, Streets, and Highways*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1987.

been working toward preventative measures.⁷³ Wildlife crossings in the form of vegetation-covered bridge overpasses as well as tunnel- and gully-like underpasses have been proven effective in rerouting the migration behavior of many commonly road-killed species.⁷⁴ These measures, however, are far from commonplace in the U.S. Lack of political and financial support for mitigation efforts stem from the lack of concern for the fate of other animals in our shared road ecosystem. As this empathy deficit stalls mitigation efforts, failure to prevent animal highway mortality and its accompanying visual evidence hampers the building of empathy that would buoy mitigation efforts in a stagnant feedback loop of perpetual “road kill.”

In the case of road-killed animals, the frequency of drivers’ encounters with such violent imagery fosters a culture that is desensitized to the sight. The mundane visibility of bloody, dismembered wildlife on the road naturalizes this automotive violence in the same way that constant imagery of meat products in food advertisements naturalizes the consumption of animal flesh. In both cases, Soron writes, “The very banality of this everyday violence reinforces the tendency in commodity culture to regard animal bodies as things whose routine destruction inspires morbid curiosity, but never empathy or concern.”⁷⁵

⁷³Seiler, Andreas; Helldin, J-O (2006). "Mortality In Wildlife Due To Transportation". In Davenport, John; Davenport, Julia L. *The Ecology of Transportation: Managing Mobility for the Environment* (Springer).

⁷⁴Balmori, Diana and David K. Skelly. “Crossing to Sustainability: A Role for Design in Overcoming Road Effects.” *Ecological Restoration* 30(4): December 2012. pp. 363-352.

⁷⁵Soron, 59.

It is possible, however, that the constant visibility of road-killed animals could work to disrupt these animals' cultural status as outside the realm of human mourning. Engaging in a politics of sight surrounding road-killed animals could take up the broken bodies as productive sites of contestation over the legitimacy of human supremacy. As political scientist Timothy Pachirat defines it in his study of industrialized slaughter, politics of sight are "organized, concerted attempts to make visible what is hidden and to breach, literally or figuratively, zones of confinement in order to bring about social and political transformation."⁷⁶

Pachirat understands visibility as a powerful political tool, yet not one that is absolute in its outcomes. A successful politics of sight assumes that illuminating a given issue will result in feelings akin to pity. And yet, in reality, desensitization to violent images is a likely outcome of full transparency.⁷⁷ This desensitization is evident when it comes to road-killed animals: mutilated animal bodies have shock value often coded as humorous (as in mid-century cartoons) or brave (as in those who dare to eat road-killed meat). As we have seen, it is the constant visibility of these dead animals that renders them largely unmournable. How would Pachirat's politics of sight work as an activist tool for an issue like "road kill"?

⁷⁶Pachirat, Timothy. *Every 12 Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight* (Yale Agrarian Studies Series). New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. p.236.

⁷⁷Pachirat 255.

The bodies of road-killed animals are easy to spot. But the value of the individual lives that once filled those bodies remains largely invisible. Road-killed animals require not greater visibility, but rather a new visibility in an activist politics of sight that brings to bear not just the ecological issue of road kill, but the social issue of entangled animal lives, both human and nonhuman.

Catalyzing Concern Through the Strategic Affect of Mourning

Recognizing the individual value of road-killed animals is an important step toward human accountability for the lives and deaths of these beings. Mourning is a powerful affect that can translate concern to road-killed animals in ways that are familiar to humans. Mourning, in contrast to grief, connotes an *expression* of feelings of deep sorrow.⁷⁸ By making feelings of sadness and regret visible, audible, or otherwise public, mourning animals who have been violently killed mirrors the highly visible, public nature of road-killed animals. In recent years, road-killed animals have begun to be integrated into larger narratives of subjectivity and interspecies community through activism and art that seeks to fit road-killed animals into established human mourning practices.

One example of emergent collective mourning practices is the petitioning of state legislatures to erect highway memorials for mass road

⁷⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary* defines grief (n) as “mental pain, distress, or sorrow,” whereas mourning (n) is “The action of feeling or expressing sorrow, grief, or regret; sorrowing, lamentation; an instance of this.”

kills. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) have petitioned state legislatures in California, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, New York, Oregon, Virginia, and Wisconsin to erect highway memorials for farmed animals killed in transport.⁷⁹ While none of the petitions so far have been approved, the attempts have generated revealing discussions in news media about contemporary American attitudes toward mourning road-killed animals.

In May 2011, a truck crashed on an overpass near Chicago, Illinois causing passengers of the vehicle to fall from the overpass onto Interstate 294 below. An eyewitness described the sight of five or six falling bodies landing on either side of his car; as he drove past, he noted that one was raising its head, having survived the initial impact. State authorities were called to remove a total of sixteen bovine bodies, or “carcasses,” as reported in the *Chicago Tribune*.⁸⁰ To honor the memory of those lives lost in such a horrific accident and to remind others of the need for safe driving, an Illinois citizen asked the state Department of Transportation (IDOT) to approve a roadside sign at the site of the crash in accordance with state laws. The sign would read: “Reckless Driving Costs Lives / In Memory of 16 Cows.” Despite following state protocol under the 2007 Roadside Memorial Act, the citizen’s request was denied.

⁷⁹Wiser, Mike. “PETA wants memorial to turkeys killed in Sioux City crash.” *Sioux City Journal*, 23 April 2014. Online

⁸⁰Sadovi, Carlos and Andrew L. Wang. “‘Surreal’ scene as semi loses cattle.” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 May 2011. Online.

Local news outlets reported that IDOT denied the request because the state-issued memorials can only be requested by a relative of the deceased.⁸¹The request, which was made by a member of PETA, was reported by local newspapers, television stations, and national news websites. A second request for another accident that killed several cows outside Peoria, Illinois later that year was also denied, and also reported by several local and national news outlets. Why such interest in these failed bureaucratic requests?

Response to online reporting of the cow memorials indicate that extending permission to mourn animals killed on roadways is perceived as a preposterous and even offensive suggestion that draws people to publicly express their disapproval. Commenters on the *Huffington Post*, who were comparatively more sympathetic to animal suffering than those of local newspapers, attacked PETA for pursuing the campaign at all.⁸² People who identified themselves in some way as “rational animal advocates” or animal lovers sought to distance themselves from what many considered the non-serious aims of PETA’s campaign.⁸³ Even those who are aligned with animal liberation in other ways largely failed to view the memorialization attempt as anything other than a publicity stunt.

⁸¹ Mann, Julie. “PETA Wants Roadside Memorial for Cows.” *CBS Chicago Newsradio*. 20 January 2012. Online.

⁸²“Good grief, PETA really needs to cool it. They are making rational animal advocates look bad” comment by user Wendee M. 31 December 2011 5:28 p.m.

⁸³see: response to Wendee M.’s comment, “Exactly! What in the heck do they hope to accomplish with ridiculous stunts like this?” by user Leo E. 31 December 2011 5:40 p.m.

While the deaths of the Illinois cows are outside the bounds of what is typically considered “road kill,” PETA’s strategy centers on animal-vehicle collisions as an accessible site for activism. The established mourning practice of erecting roadside memorials for human deaths lends a strong affective corollary for how passersby should react to the deaths of sixteen cows in an automotive accident. Furthermore, the visibility of animal transport crashes breaches the otherwise invisible nature of contemporary slaughter. PETA’s memorials would capitalize on this visibility in the same way that the bodies of individual road-killed animals linger long after the initial death.

Other objections to the memorial focused more on the species’ status as unworthy of human mourning. As one commenter wrote simply: “cows don’t deserve it.”⁸⁴ For another commenter the thought of mourning the cows was simply unfathomable: “I am almost speechless--a memorial to dead cows seems to me the most meaningless thing ever.”⁸⁵ Again, it is the memorialization—the acknowledgement of a life’s value—that is the subject of ridicule.

Interestingly, several comments used road kill as a comparative example: “Stop the insanity! What’s next after cow? Deer? Rabbit? Skunk?”⁸⁶ Here, the extension of grief for road-killed animals is made even more ridiculous than grief for the cows. Marking commonly road-killed species

⁸⁴comment by user ejhickey 31 December 2011 3:18 p.m.

⁸⁵comment by user dancing bones 31 December 2011 4:11 p.m.

⁸⁶comment by user The_Contrary 31 December 2011 3:54 p.m.

like deer, rabbit, and skunk as even less worthy of mourning establishes a clear hierarchy based solely on species. This type of resistance to mourning is based not just on an anthropocentric human/animal divide, but also on ranking the value of life based on species membership.

A final theme in comments across news outlets is insistence on the species' place in a hierarchy of human supremacy by pointing to cows' status as unquestionably consumable and, therefore, unmournable: "The dead cows already have a memorial. They're called golden arches. These dead cows have made it to big mac land."⁸⁷ As one user writes, "I love Cows. But, since we eat them daily, it is a meaningless gesture."⁸⁸ The attempt to bridge the cognitive gap between recognizing feelings of "love" for cows and a resignation to "eat them daily" here is exactly what the PETA memorials sought to address. At this point, though, they are not taken seriously by more than a small minority.

The perceived impossibility and even frivolity of mourning road-killed animals attempt to bolster the same dismissive beliefs toward mourning food-killed animals. In both cases, commenters expressed that these animals' deaths were inevitable and, therefore, outside the realm of human accountability. PETA's proposed memorials question this framework for road-killed animals by emphasizing the role of human drivers in animal safety on the road while doing the same for farmed animals by reminding humans that

⁸⁷ comment by user canoeboundaryh20 1 January 2012 6:09 p.m.

⁸⁸ comment by user Chad_Bryant 31 December 2011 3:34 p.m.

supporters of nonvegan lifestyles, in fact, make active choices to support animal killing for which they can easily be held accountable.

The question of accountability is closely tied to questions of belonging: do wild animals belong to the moral community? Physically, do they belong in human geographic territory? As we have seen with the attitudes toward farmed animals expressed in relation to the PETA campaign and early campaigns for companion animals hit by cars, humans have performed impressive mental tricks to manipulate species' belonging and exclusion. The spatial relationship between humans and other species is often a key factor in determining whether certain animals belong in the moral community.

For example, Chris Wilbert and Chris Philo describe the function of zoos as spaces that “translate wild animals *from* ‘the wilderness’ *to* the special, enclosed and policed enclaves nearer to our human homes in the city.”⁸⁹ We might understand the cultural space filled by the concept of “roadkill” as serving the same purpose as zoos. Dismissive, mocking, or grotesque visuality of road-killed animals translates wild fauna from an independent space of “wilderness” to a space marked by humans as “our territory:” the road.

Dead animal bodies on the road serve as violent markers of territory—of who belongs, and who doesn't. The cultural concept of roadkill reinforces the notion that certain spaces are meant exclusively for humans by treating

⁸⁹Philo, Chris and Chris Wilbert, eds. *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places (Critical Geographies)*. London: Routledge, 2000. p. 13.

as inevitable the deaths of nonhumans in those spaces. Roads, however, are ubiquitous and largely indiscriminate. Their construction bisects nonhuman territory, threatens habitats, and makes migrations difficult and more dangerous. While humans recognize that roads are part of a larger, interspecies environment, we seem unprepared to reckon with the environmental consequences of insisting on our desires above all others.

The bodies of road-killed animals are visual reminders of the effects of North American car culture. To acknowledge each death would be to take accountability for its cause, and this is a responsibility few are willing to shoulder. Instead, an imaginative referent—"roadkill"—steps in to displace the individual animal in favor of an anonymous aggregate. In this way, the concept of roadkill polices the movement of wild animals to "keep out," or else. Those who trespass leave the category of "wild animal" and enter the realm of "roadkill." Witnessing road-killed animals, however, calls our linguistic bluff: "roadkill" is a fantasy in the face of individual animal victims.

In his essay, "Apologia," Barry Lopez describes his encounters with individual road-killed animals as moments to take accountability. For Lopez, accountability means pulling over to move the broken bodies from the road. When people ask him why he does this, he explains, "The ones you give some semblance of burial, to whom you offer an apology, may have been like

seers in a parallel culture. It is an act of respect, a technique of awareness.”⁹⁰

With each act of apology, Lopez chips away at the anonymous violence of “roadkill.” Awareness of the individual compels him to act, to express his apology through the ritual of burial.

American photographer Emma Kisiel has a similar response to witnessing wildlife mortality on U.S. highways. In her series, *At Rest* (2011), Kisiel constructs and photographs makeshift memorials for found road-killed fauna. Kisiel’s new visibility of road-killed animals allows us to recognize them as individuals worthy of mourning. The majority of the animals memorialized in *At Rest* are “road kill,” but Kisiel’s photographs resist the ambivalence of this culturally-constructed category of death.

Instead, the subjects of *At Rest* invite us to mourn them. The careful arrangement of objects around each individual animal compels the viewer to recognize the deceased as worthy of mourning. Kisiel’s circular memorials of fresh plant matter, imitation flowers, and smooth stones are inescapably tender, foregrounding the suggestion that their construction brought the artist into an intimate relationship with these road-killed animals. This transgression of modern spatial partitioning among human and wild animal, living and dead, translates into a recognition of the intimate entanglements of human and nonhuman beings in modernity.

⁹⁰Lopez, Barry. “Apologia” in *A Road Runs Through It: Reviving Wild Places*. Thomas Reed Petersen, ed. Boulder, CO: Johnson Books, 2006. p. 39.

In *Elk*(Fig. 1), orange and yellow flowers surround a messy collection of death. The scattered petals suggest a violent death and perhaps a more improvised memorial. Their irregular arrangement draws the eye from the bloated elk with broken hind legs, who at first appears to be the primary subject of the photograph, to a second set of remains in a much further stage of decomposition. The layering of fresh dead over old conveys the frequency with which these animals are killed, as well as the indignity with which their bodies are left to rot one atop another.

Kisiel's impromptu memorials codify these roadside sites as scenes of death by drawing on Euro-American human mourning practices. The stone and flower arrangements, she says, "reference the 17th century Netherlandish and later Spanish tradition of creating flower garlands around sacred objects, like the sacrificial lamb."⁹¹ Her larger body of work, including two other photographic series of deceased animals, draws heavily on the Victorian practice of *memento mori* that posed dead children and adults for photographic family shrines. By inserting road-killed animals into these established narratives of grief, memory, and sacred honor, Kisiel provides the visual cues for a strong affective connection to otherwise grisly and culturally ignored death scenes.

Squirrel 2 (Fig. 2) depicts an unambiguous case of "road kill:" the squirrel's body lies on the asphalt, bisected by the white highway boundary

⁹¹ Artist interview with BLINK magazine, *October/Issue #17*, 2012.

line. Blood from the injury sustained in the collision stains the pavement below. This photograph emphasizes the utterly mundane details of this squirrel's death through the signifiers of a memorialization practice that honors the specific. Here, the animal is considered not as *a* squirrel, but as *this* squirrel. Again, the individual animal is made the focus of the piece.

In contrast to other roadkill photography that hides evidence of human participation in the death scene, such as Clive Landen's *Familiar British Wildlife* roadkill images, Kisiel's photographs mark these road-killed animals as deserving subjects of human memorial practices. Landen's dark photograph of a brown hare (Fig. 4.) presents a stark contrast to Kisiel's memorialized "Rabbit" (Fig. 3). One evokes a crime scene; the other, a tended grave. Claudia Terstappen decontextualizes the disfigured bodies completely in her series *Road Kill (After Life)*. Terstappen's "Turtle" (Fig. 6) becomes an aestheticized form stripped of any community associations. Kisiel's "Possum" (Fig. 5), on the other hand, acknowledges both the human role in the animal's killing *and* in the animal's mourning.

Kisiel explains the individual attention she gives to each animal that she memorializes: "My animal subjects are not moved or altered. They are happened upon, visited with, remembered, and left to return to nature."⁹² Beyond recognizing a rather uncontroversial ecological connectedness across species, the explicit memorialization depicted in *At Rest* suggests that

⁹²Artist interview with iGNANT art and design blog, 2012.

these wild animal lives were, in fact, members of society who left behind beings—human and otherwise—who would mourn them.

Kisiel's work challenges the viewer to contemplate each individual death from the affective position of human mourning. In the case of animals who were clearly hit by cars, evidenced by asphalt or telltale fatal injuries, *At Rest* forces us to further acknowledge *human* participation in the killing. Drawing on the affect of mourning and its associated expressions of respect and regret emerges as the most promising way out of mocking the lives of road-killed animals.

Kisiel, Lopez, and PETA encourage us to take the time to recognize each road-killed animal we pass. The collective force of these millisecond mournings can have political power: once the affect of care shrouds these animals, we can express to transportation policy makers that these lives matter and press for preventative measures such as wildlife crossings and driver education campaigns that value animal life. In this way, "road kill" can continue its cultural transformation from laughably grotesque to grievable animal death.

APPENDIX



Fig. 1: Emma Kisiel, “Elk” from the series *At Rest*, 2011.

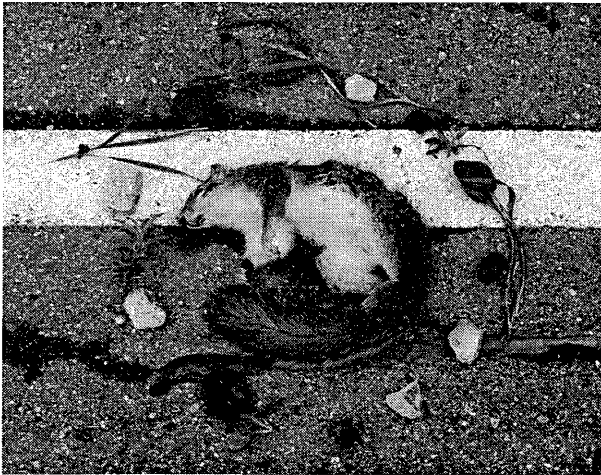


Fig. 2: Emma Kisiel, “Squirrel 2” from the series *At Rest*, 2011.



Fig. 3: Emma Kisiel, “Rabbit” from the series *At Rest*, 2011.



Fig. 4: Clive Landen,
“*Lepuseuropaeus*” from the series
Familiar British Wildlife, 2000.



Fig. 5: Emma Kisiel, “Possum”
from the series *At Rest*, 2011.

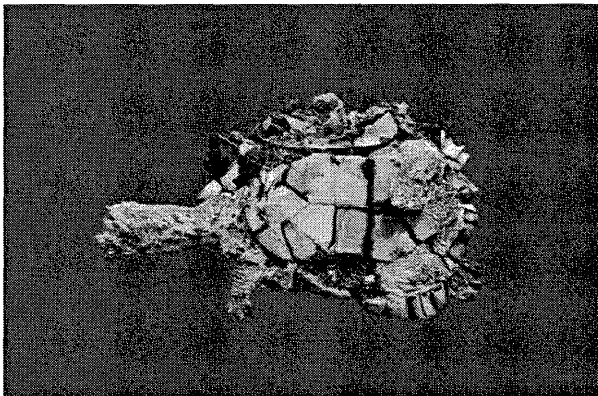


Fig. 6: Claudia Terstappen,
“Turtle” from the series *Road Kill*
(*After Life*), 2010.

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