ENVIRONMENTAL ART AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ROAD-KILLED ANIMALS

by

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Abstract

The broad aim of this research creation project is to explore my emotional encounters with road-killed animals. This project involves the current road ecology issue of road-killed animals; the encroachment of human settlements and road-building contributes to overwhelming numbers of animal deaths by vehicular slaughter. These animal deaths occur, perhaps as an acceptable cost to the convenience and cultural necessity of road travel. Emotional Geographies demonstrate how humans and animals move through shared spaces, and how road-killed animal sites might impact their emotional connection. Animal geographies examine the importance of animal agency, both in their right to use these spaces and their representation in an anthropocentric world. Acts of mourning are considered in how humans might grieve animals, elevating their lives to be equal to those of humans. The ethical obligations humans have towards animal deaths are explored and my diary entries provide insight in each encounter with a road-killed animal. Examining a variety of approaches to trans-species artwork, I approach my own paintings in an effort to provide the individual animals agency while simultaneously evoking emotional reactions and ethical conversations among viewers. By using juiced fruits and vegetables, I create a blood-like staining dye. My paintings take current, animal-focused environmental art and use environmentally conscientious materials and remove any use of animals within the art pieces. I mix pre-existing canvas staining techniques and move them forward by creating organic dyes. The stains on the canvas mimic the stains remaining on asphalt after a road-killed animal victim has long been forgotten; displaying these paintings within a human space contemplates the divide between human and animal spaces and insists that these animal deaths are considered. Confronting viewers with frequently ignored deaths of often unvalued individuals highlights that further steps must be taken to consider how animals co-exist with us in shared spaces and how human power within these spaces causes animal death.
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1 Introduction

My work emerges from a never-ending quest to see animals from my car and an inability to detach emotions from my interactions with my surroundings, even in such transient experiences. Of course, I hope to never see these animals deceased, but it is sadly often the case. Their lifeless bodies littered all over the road accompany all of our journeys. Yet these bodies are not litter like the other detritus expelled by consumer society, and we should not see them as such. There is something terribly wrong with regarding animals as just ‘being(s) in the way’, as things intruding on and then violently expelled from human spaces and activities. We may live, in Berger’s terms “parallel lives” (Berger in Cherry 2016, 72) with other species, a language that suggests that these lives can, and perhaps should be described or imagined without intersection. Yet such crossings are inevitable, and unfortunately, on roads, this often takes the form of a proximity that is fatal rather than a closeness that is felt.

Why is it that we so often fail to recognize or care about these fatal collisions? Why are the victims seemingly invisible? How can responsibility for these deaths be deflected? Desmond (2016, 144) who uses ‘road-killing’ as a verb, notes that this action is generally seen as one that does not hold responsibility to the human involved and notes that there are many contributing factors to this situation.

John Grady and Jay Mechling (2003) argue that this invisibility comes from the fact that animals are everywhere, meaning they can be perceived essentially as background noise (Grady & Mechling 2003, 92-95). Certainly, within the world of meat production, there are also quite deliberate processes that decrease animal visibility to consumers, the seclusion of abattoirs, the packaging and naming of animal parts (meat products). Michael Carolan (2004) gives such practices the title “distancing” (Cherry 2016, 70). When we are in our cars, we can imagine we are very separate from the outside world- we are enclosed in a container and swiftly moving past
things. What our car comes in contact with feels impersonal, since there is metal and glass between our skin and what the car touches. Where traffic ‘accidents’ are concerned this distancing is less purposeful yet no less effective than in the meat industry. Shielded by windscreen and contained in metal boxes, vehicles rush past blurred surroundings their drivers focused on the asphalt and advertising hoardings, and animal bodies are reduced to bloody mounds soon lost in a rear-view mirror.

Of course, some animals are very visible in our lives, mainly companion animals. Nick Fiddes (1991) refers to these companion animals as being honorary humans, a position which generally grants them more comforts than other animals (Cherry 2016, 70). This means that a dead cat or dog might elicit more that passing attention, but other species certainly seem to suffer from what Berger (1980) refers to as cultural marginalization. As Burt (2001) also argues animals not only fade away with species extinction, but also as beings in their own right: they often become reduced to mere symbols (Cherry 2016, 70). Yet anyone can see the limits of such human-centric positions first-hand. Without much effort, I am able to see living animals all around human activity (seagulls asking for food in market square, geese on the side of Front Road, a fox kit hiding in a culvert near my parents’ house). All of these are at immediate risk from road traffic.

As an artist, I explore all of my emotional life experiences and ethical questions through creativity. My journey in this project began by documenting my encounters with road-killed animals in a journal. I indicated the animal’s species, time of encounter and location, and then detailed my emotional experience. If I was driving, I would stop and get out of my car, and walk up close to the animal. I would look closely at them, acknowledging their individual markings, looking into their eyes if they were open. I would look for any movement; chest movement, eye movement. It was sometimes difficult to know whether they were truly dead, and often I would spend many minutes trying to decipher if I could see them breathing or if it was my imagination.
I would then work in my studio, trying different painting techniques to find the most fitting visual representation of the subject. My goal was to create paintings that evoked strong emotional responses, inciting discussion about road-killed animals, the environment, and our ethical and moral obligations to animals. It was also important to me to think critically about my materials and process, as that is just as important in this work as the final artistic product. By using juiced produce in a staining technique on raw canvas, the materials were more environmental thoughtful, as well as more closely connected to animals (these fruits and vegetables could be a part of their diet). The process of selecting a thoughtful material, making the dyes by hand, and then pouring them onto the raw canvas, I was able to work through the emotional elements of my encounters and use my paintings as an outlet.

Throughout the following paper, I use academic texts to support my artistic practice. This includes research on road ecology and road-killed animal studies, written works on emotional geographies, and the ethical considerations of animal deaths. I provide examples of environmental artwork, trans-species artwork, and artists who work directly with road-killed animals. Finally, I will describe my process in detail and how it connects to the scholarly sources.

The broad aim of this research creation project is to explore my emotional encounters with road-killed animals. The objectives used to fulfill this aim include: (1) detailing issues related to road ecology, (2) examining emotional geography and the importance of emotions as we move through spaces that we share with animals (3) situating my work in the field of abstract painting and environmental art, as well as animal-based artwork, (4) creating paintings from environmental conscientious materials to process my scholarly and artistic journey and (5) exploring the ethical responsibilities humans have to animals.
1.1 Preliminary definitions

Art has always been the method through which I work through emotions. The intensity of the emotions involved in my encounters with road-killed animals as well as the general feeling of helplessness mean that I need painting as an outlet. This mix of emotions including frustration, anger, sadness and powerlessness can be alleviated by the act of art-making.

Throughout this thesis, I will use the term animal when referring to any non-human living being. I have come to this decision after much consideration, reviewing other authors’ reasoning, and my own personal reflection of the ethics of a term. I recognize that, in the Western world, ‘animals’ and ‘humans’, are routinely regarded as fundamentally different, with animals usually spoken of as inferior (Wolch and Emel 1998, 123). Those writing in this field, like Jane C. Desmond, sometimes use the terms ‘human’ and ‘animal’, and sometimes use ‘nonhuman animals’. She uses the first to show that there are socially constituted differences between the two, that exist in the public and academic world. She uses ‘nonhuman animal’ to emphasize the similarities of humans and animals (Desmond 2016, 5). Spiegel, 1996, also questions the human-centric categorization of animals. She challenges the fact that we have made two basic groupings of ‘humans’ and ‘non-human animals’, which project the idea that we are wildly different from animals (no pun intended) (Cherry 2016, 67). However, I would also argue that even a language of non-human animals also represents the way in which we view our position within the world; naming all other living beings as ‘not us’ still positions them as secondary, and describable only as how they differ from us. It perpetuates an ‘us’ and ‘them’ that clearly places humans first (Cherry 2016, 68).

In writing this I was continually torn back and forth between thinking animal was more powerful in its emphasis on importance of their uniqueness from us but would then be stopped by
perhaps perpetuating otherness through the language of exclusion from the realm of humans. I would then think that ‘nonhuman animal’ was more weighty, because it included animals within a community that consisted of all living beings, but always came to the conclusion that it was still anthropocentric because it made it necessary to state them in relation to ‘humans’ and how they were not and were other. I have found both these terms at some point agreeable and at others incomplete in their efforts at capturing both the uniqueness and self-worth in their own right of beings other than humans.

Although neither term is perfect, I finally chose to use animal since, in my mind, it gave more autonomy to other beings, without using non-humanness to define them. Within this text, I will use also the term road-killed animal instead of roadkill. To refer only to roadkill would infer something different than the animal itself, as though this type of death has changed it from an animal to an object (although some people would see it as an object before death as well). Rarely are there any adjectives attached to describe the type of road-killed animal, and rarely is the species named (Desmond 2016, 144). I use road-killed animal to give a more accurate description and visual of the being, as well as offering respect by acknowledging the animal it was and still is, in body.

2 Road Ecology

Our cultural and urban identities have impacted the way in which we think of the animals who share our urban areas (Dean, Ingram and Sethna 2017, 2). Canadians who live in urban areas will encounter animals such as squirrels, rabbits, local birds, raccoons and companion animals, and encounter their sounds, movements and actions often, through their activities like nesting, foraging, mating, or leaving ‘droppings’. Although we still see many urban animals
every day, since the late seventies their numbers have been dropping in many areas they share with humans (John Berger “Why Look at Animals” 1997; Dean, Ingram and Sethna 2017, 3).

Part of this drop in numbers may be due to road casualties. Road ecology and the effects of roads are referred to by Forman and Alexander, 1998, as the “sleeping giant of conservation ecology”, due to the large scale of effect (Coffin 2007, 403). Spellerberg, 2002, refers to roadways as “long, narrow slaughterhouses”, which is a fitting name when mammals are killed in the thousands annually by vehicle collisions (Smith-Patten, Patten 2008, 844). That said, roadkill numbers are difficult to accurately count due to a variety of reasons and are probably widely underestimated. These problems include difficulties in extrapolating across studies done in areas with lower/higher traffic densities, particularities of species and habitats within the roadside areas, …and “short carcass persistence” (Ruiz-Capillas, Mata & Malo 2015, 418). All of these variables make it very difficult to achieve a precise number. For example, short carcass persistence means that the road-killed animals’ bodies do not stay on the road for very long, perhaps due to weather like rain washing the body away, other cars driving over and further flattening the animal, or carrion-eating species removing the bodies for food. (Ratton Secco & da Rosa 2014). Other factors affecting carcass persistence include removal of bodies by road maintenance and traffic volume. (Ratton, Secco A da Rosa 2014: 543). One Spanish study which attempted to account for these biases when studying roadkill mortality of small mammals and found mammalian death rates of 190.2-238.3 deaths per kilometre per year (Ruiz-Capillas, Mata & Malo 2015, 42). However, road mortality effects all sizes and species, including birds, reptiles and frogs (Coffin 2007, 400) and their inclusion would undoubtedly raise the number far higher. There is still no systematic method or record of any particular species that dies on roads within the United States, although wildlife biologist Jim Sipes estimates that one million vertebrates are killed there by vehicles every day (Desmond 2016, 143).
Some authors, like Desmond (2016; 142), suggest that human relations to road-killed animals are changing, and their lives are being given more regard since published research from wildlife biologists was first presented in the 1970s. However even the work that has been done has been conducted with certain aims in mind, and mainly been within the fields of road ecology (a term first used in 1998, by Richard T. T. Forman, a landscape ecologist. This work may be biased towards recording the deaths of certain species for various reasons (Coffin 2007, 397). For example, some studies focus on anthropocentric issues that arise through roadkill incidents, that is, those resulting in damage to both human lives and the vehicles and the associated increase in economic costs, not concern for the animals themselves. Other studies have been focused on those identified as being ‘charismatic’ in one way or another, e.g. those that are endangered or flagship species, and these studies lack more detailed information on larger multi-species communities (D’Amico et al. 2015, 234). It is, however, clear that high densities of roadways have a serious effect on wildlife (within Kingston you can only drive a short time before encountering a road-killed animal). Although road-killed animals are the most easily spotted effect these deaths have cascading effects on young or nestlings left to starve or without care. Roadways do not only effect animal population through vehicle collisions, but also through secondary effects, including pollution, habitat destruction and separation, behavioural change, and even obstruction of gene flow (Smith-Patten & Patten 2008, 844-845). That is to say, roadways fragment the landscape in many ways for both animals and plants and this inability for wildlife to move freely through their habitat due to human infrastructure can be referred to as the barrier effect. (Puig, Arino & Sanz, 2012, 1171). An example of behavioural change would be the change of bird calls due to the disturbance of noise coming from the road (Coffin 2007, 400). According to Smith-Patten and Patten (2008, 845), these negative impacts can extend more than 1km beyond the edges of roadways. It has also been observed that animals who live near, or
come into contact often with roads can succumb to higher stress levels, which in turn cause shorter lifespans (Coffin 2007, 400).

As might be expected, animal groups who regularly cross roads, or move slowly are highly susceptible to road mortality due to vehicles and scavengers, coincidentally attracted to carrion on the road due to vehicle collisions, can also be frequently hit by vehicles themselves. Indirect effects can be problematic when species who have site fidelity are moved due to new road building, or their mating sites are erased by road production. This road production can completely rid the area of necessary ecosystems in which plants and animals depend. Roads can also “act as conduits introducing and facilitating the spread of exotic species” (Coffin 2007, 399-400). Further problems include the impediment of migration routes, as well as producing ecological traps for certain species. Ecological traps are defined as habitats that are of “low quality for reproduction and survival but preferred over other available of higher quality” (Ruiz-Capillas, Mata & Malo 2015, 418).

Roads are crossed by animals attempting to access food on the other side, as well as places to drink, hibernate, or access other crucial resources. As some of these actions require different resources at different times in the year, it has been seen by researchers that there is a “temporal pattern to roadkill” (Coffin 2007, 400). In their study, Ruiz-Capillas et al found that there was a higher mortality rate in warmer months, which could coincide with higher levels of activities for certain species (Ruiz-Capillas, Mata & Malo 2015, 423). D’Amico et al, 2015, agree that these temporal patterns occur in conjunction with particular movements of species, such as mating or migrating (D’Amico et al. 2015, 234; Garrah et al. 2015, 874-889). Some species appear to be able to learn new behaviours to avoid moving vehicles while others change their behaviour to avoid human activities, both spatially and temporally (Coffin 2007, 400).

Animals end up on the road because they are crossing the landscape, or because the surrounding landscape is habitable, but also due to some other attractive qualities of roads. These
include previously mentioned scavengers who eat carrion, the heat of the road for basking, particularly attractive for ‘cold-blooded’ animals like snakes and lizards, and the food source of basking animals for predators (Smith-Patten & Patten 2008, 845).

It is not surprising that there is a high frequency of roadkill instances, as the technology of vehicles has increased much more quickly than animals have adapted to them (Smith-Patten & Patten 2008, 847). The higher the intensity of traffic, the higher the mortality rate of all animals (Ruiz-Capillas, Mata & Malo 2015, 424).

Some species of wildlife do find positive effects from roadways, including carrion for scavengers, habitat for small animals living on roadsides, and movement corridors for large animals. Bennett (1991), describes four different movement patterns that occur through roadways. These four patterns are: 1) local foraging movements, 2) local or geographical range expansion, 3) dispersal between separated populations, and 4) long distance migratory movements. Generalist species often find positive connotations with roadways as they are able to maintain lives within a variety of spaces, and this can lead to roads causing invasions of both animals and plants (Coffin 2007, 401). Although this is true for these generalist species, many species’ quality of life and staying power are directly related to “roadlessness” (Coffin 2007, 401-402).

There have been a range of efforts to mitigate these problems caused by roads, including both strategies that influence the movement of animals (e.g. over/underpasses, fences) or influence the movement of humans (e.g. speed reducers, signs) (Bager & Fontoura 2013, 31). Road ecology research has increasingly looked towards mitigation techniques, although there have yet to be substantial studies done on the effectiveness of these techniques after their implementation (Bager & Fontoura 2013, 31). These mitigation techniques require knowledge of movements and habitats of wide varieties of species, as the techniques strive to maintain the roadways while allowing the animal species continue their lives, unharmed (Bager & Fontoura 2013, 31).
Other than roadside crossing signs, such as those for turtle crossings or deer crossing, there seems not to be much thought given to indicating the shared nature of our roadways (Desmond 2016, 144). That said, within the last year or two, areas around Kingston have attempted to increase awareness and information on roadways by adding additional signage beneath the turtle crossing signs.

Figure 1. Turtle crossing sign in Kingston, Ontario. Sign below gives drivers contact information for Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre

These signs, which are only legible from close-up, inform drivers or passers-by how to care for a turtle that is found on or by the road. They also provide contact information for wildlife rehabilitation centre located near Kingston, Ontario called Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre, who, if needed, will aid in taking in the turtles. The way I see it, this information is crucial for saving animals. Although many people might still drive by, many people also want to help these animals but lack the knowledge or resources about what to do. Although they could potentially look up information on their phones, they may be out of service of areas. I would also guess that having the information right where incidents could take place provides the drivers with instant information and therefore boosts the potential for someone to take action. Additional signage may
also boost awareness of an issue that might be somewhat forgotten. Drivers may have become so accustomed to the turtle crossing signs that they may not even notice them anymore, whereas new signs could be a good reminder to pay close attention to the possibility of animals crossing (Pojar 1975, 87).

All of these ‘facts’ about road-killed animals link back to the notion of their (in)visibility. Because we rarely see more than one road-killed individual at a time, and because they are not seen as individuals themselves, the number of mass deaths and their impact upon species numbers and the environment is a topic rarely discussed (Desmond 2016, 142-143). This also makes it easier to be blissfully ignorant of the mass scale of animals killed by vehicles. We have also created a culture in which we see road-killing as collateral damage that occurs when we use vehicles on roadways, something that we deem important enough that these deaths are an acceptable cost (Desmond 2016, 157). We often call these deaths accidental and unavoidable, deciding culturally that roadways and car culture are important enough to proceed regardless, just as, at an individual level we also decide that evasive measures would be too dangerous for the humans road users if we put animal life first.

In the case of humans, although not necessarily seen as collateral damage, we might refer to human road deaths under a title like involuntary manslaughter, which places it within the area of accidental deaths. We do not, however, provide animal roadkill deaths the title involuntary fauna-slaughter. We deny animals their legitimacy as individuals or beings deserving of respect by societally viewing road-killing as both ethical and legal (Desmond 2016, 144). We seem to believe that animals are just in the wrong place at the wrong time, and therefore their deaths are, if anything, their own fault (an odd concept to apply to animals so supposedly different to humans). Society tends to see roadways as being human places, and therefore an animal within this space would be “out of place”. 
Still, the disturbing nature of road-killed animals makes it difficult to begin or maintain public discourse on the subject (Desmond 2016, 158). There is little available information about people’s perception of roadkill they encounter (Desmond 2016, 160). As for claims of recent changes in some human relations to road-killed animals, some of that has, perhaps, been affected by ethical eating movements, and even new ways in which road-killed animals can be used for human food, although roadkill as food is also the butt of many jokes (Desmond 2016, 156). Research has also evolved in ecological studies that are setting roads as shared spaces for humans and animals (Desmond 2016, 144).

3 Emotional Geographies

3.1 Historical Overview

One key aspect that many factual studies of animal roadkill ignore is any account of its emotional impact. Yet emotions are clearly vitally important for those of us that are, despite all the distancing effects, still moved by animal deaths. A standard geography of roadkill might list and locate different intensities of road kill, different species or makes link between the physical geography of squashed animals and the economic geography of transport but it would pay little or no attention to the phenomenology of animal and human geographies involved – especially the emotional involvements that so often trigger the expression of concerns about events such as road deaths. Below is a diary entry detailing the emotional response to an encounter I had with a road-killed animal:

Tuesday, July 12th, 2016 Raccoon, Portsmouth Village, Corner of Union and King
Saw a small raccoon by the side of the road. Had to pull over to check on it, it was not alive, many flies were on it. I’m terrified to see a car or bus run an animal over as I’m approaching it, luckily none did. I always give the animal an apology and brief message in my mind. I took some photos, planning to crop later. I don’t always have enough time (based on traffic) to do detailed shots, nor do I want to look at it for long (which makes me feel badly). I took some that I could crop later and some of the stain. I had a nagging
feeling that came to a head of feeling badly for photographing these animals. It was beginning to feel too routine and like they were subjects or objects. That may be the end of the photos.

Emotional geography is a relatively new field, which takes as its starting point a critique of this lack of attention to emotions (with some notable exceptions in terms of feminist and phenomenological approaches) within human geography. (Davidson, Bondi, Smith 2005) If emotions are a key constitutive part of life and our experience of place and communities, then they are surely a topic worthy of geographical study and need to be addressed academically. Perhaps more radically, emotional geography also criticizes what might be termed the latent positivism within some sectors of geography that excludes emotions from ways of producing geographical knowledge and from the writing of geographical texts. That is to say, geographers, like other disciplines, have often suppressed the emotional aspects of the lives they write about and, in the writing of those lives have assumed a kind of academic detachment from the worlds they describe. Those beholden to such an approach feel a need to be objective, dispassionate, to quantify, and so on that devalues the rawness and intensities of emotional experiences and also excises emotions discovered (and sometimes produced) by research from the final written product. As said in Emotional Geographies, (Davidson, Bondi and Smith 2005, 1) emotions “inform every aspect of our lives”.

Emotional geographies, then explore the connections between human (and sometimes even more than human) emotions in regards to the environments they inhabit and move through. They investigate how emotions developed and express in relation to varying experiences of places, and also how they inform judgements and values (Davidson, Bondi and Smith 2005, 3).

Important texts within the field include articles within the journal Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers by Kay Anderson and Susan Smith (2000), Gender, Space and Culture by Joyce Davidson and Liz Bondi (2004), Emotional Geographies, edited by Joyce
Davidson, Liz Bondi and Mick Smith (2005), and Emotion, Place and Culture, edited by Mick Smith, Joyce Davidson, Laura Cameron and Liz Bondi (2009) (Davidson and Milligan 2004, 523). The field gained impetus through developing the insights of feminist, psycho-analytic and phenomenological geographers about the suppression, gendering, and consequent devaluing of emotions in modern Western society despite its importance to life, especially in terms of experience, memory, and personal interactions, but also in wider forms of social action and practices, the panic of the stock exchange, the anger at political opponents, the sense of alienation from technologies and work etc. (Davidson and Milligan 2004, 523). Exploring feelings within particular spaces, deepens and illuminates our understanding of how individuals respond and how communities are constituted. In order to truly understand places and spaces, it is necessary to examine how the place feels (Davidson and Milligan 2004, 524). A diary entry shows how painful it can be to acknowledge larger community of animals we live alongside, and how place and emotion are so closely linked:

**Wednesday, July 6th, 2016**

Saw something on Bayridge Dr. today. Raccoon, rabbit? Thought I saw its white, cracked skull. I could barely look and closed my eyes each time I passed afterwards. Is it the rawness? I can’t look at the inside. I can almost feel the pain, but of course I can't really.

I read a word today: empath. Animal empath. Maybe that’s why it hits me and stays with me.

**I stress when I drive anywhere, worrying about seeing animals.**

To date work on emotional geography has included examining children’s emotional geographies, emotional geographies of migration, activism and so on (see for example work the special issues on these topics in journals like Emotions Space and Society). However, this work can, and should, also be applied to encounters with more than just other humans e.g. specific attempts to address the ecology of emotions and emotions about ecology and specific work on roadkill (see Smith, and below).
Examining how our emotions come into play when we move through our daily geographies can be useful tools for compassion when applied to our experiences with non-human animals. We can also imagine how non-human animals may emotionally experience the same geography, which could increase compassion as well.

Attending to what is happening outside of our cars and purposefully being aware of road-killed animals and how they affect our emotions can be important steps in becoming compassionately engaged with the world around us. This awareness can also bring to light all of the ways in which our movement affects the lives of the animals with whom we share these geographical spaces. Exploring emotions in relation to these road-killed animal sites and their victims also allows for sympathy and remembrance, and a mirroring of similar human to human experience. This can be beneficial in bringing value to the animal individuals, and, in turn, value to the lives of animals in general. Taking the time to acknowledge these deaths and our involvement urges that we not just drive by and ignore these animals, but that we must take at least a moment in our day to bear witness to their lives and recognize their individual importance. Bringing awareness to our involvement in their lives and our parallel geographies can contribute to a greater understanding and sympathy for the lives of animals.

### 3.2 Animal Geographies

Where responses to roadkill are concerned the emergence of emotional geographies has to be linked to another field, that of animal geographies recognized explicitly in Bennet’s (1960) call for a ‘cultural animal geography’ (Philo and Wilbert 2000, 4). While geography had certainly paid some attention to the presence of animals, for example, as economic resources the ‘first wave’ of animal geographies came in the early 20th century, and was much more canonical in approach. This was followed by a ‘second wave’ in the mid-20th century which began to
examine animal geography from “cultural perspectives examining animals as symbolic sites” (Hovorka 2018, 454). During this ‘wave’, animals were studied as objects as opposed to subjects, and were lumped into the same category as the environment. Animals only really begin to be studied as subjects as opposed to objects within what we might term the ‘third wave’ of animal geography beginning in the 1990s, exploring human-animal relationships within a space and re-imagining the definition of human. (Hovorka 2018, 454; Philo and Wilbert 2000, 5; Wolch and Emel 1998, 53). What could be described as a current ‘fourth wave’ in animal geographies can be defined by its interest in the concept of hybridity, which seeks to combine different viewpoints and approaches to produce something new. Geographers utilizing hybridity to study current animal geographies are “challenging ideas” of how to understand animals, not just from the point of view of humans, but the agency of the animal themselves and how they “may wish to” be “represent[ed]” (Hovorka 2018, 454; Philo and Wilbert 2000, 5).

Animal geography looks to redefine animals’ ‘place’ within the world, particularly their lack of inclusion as beings with agency. Animals must actively be represented, not merely as “passive surfaces on to which human groups inscribe imaginings and orderings of all kinds” (Philo and Wilbert 2000). It is important to consider how animals themselves fit into geographies, and the relationships that emerge within these spaces. This is not an easy task, and the difficulty lies in considering an animal geography in which the animals are considered beyond anthropocentric approaches (Philo and Wilbert 2000, 5; Hovorka 2018 455,458).

Linking emotional and animal geographies begins to open a space for thinking and expressing the physical and the felt consequences of animal deaths on roads. Rather than seeing them as literal examples of the “passive surfaces “Phil and Wolch critique they might be thought in relation to the original multi-dimensionality of their lives, deaths and effects. For example, just as every space that I occupy holds an emotional response and memory for me we might also consider whether this holds true for animals, and what their emotional connection to a space is.
The emotional geographies component of this work can also be linked to our emotional response to what we find in these now flattened spaces. What would be, our responsibility towards animals within these spaces? In my paintings, I attempt to combat these “passive surfaces” by creating a dynamic surface of both texture and colour. Depth and energy are evoked by a mix of vibrant and muted colours. By pouring the colour, the canvas is left with a look of movement and action, which is emphasized by the colour and texture bleeding out the edge of the canvas. The canvas pieces that are adhered to the painting still have a flexibility to them, and the raw edges with canvas threads give the paintings movement.

Through recognizing the importance of emotions and animals we can give voice to a kind of compassion that accessible to others and extends to considerations of ethics and responsibility in regard to our actions within a place (Matthews 2012, 26). Considering road deaths compassionately in terms of urban animals we could also begin to re-imagine how we might occupy spaces.

Being involved in our surroundings and forming attachment to them through emotions helps us to give value to these environments, and create more intimate and meaningful relationships with our environment (Smith 2005, 219). In On Being Moved by Nature, 2009, For example, Smith (2009) in “On Being Moved by Nature”, considers how emotions within a geographical context are helpful in understanding what our ethical role might be among the lives of other living beings (220-21).

3.3 Deathscapes, Mourning, and Art

Another geographical sub-theme linked to those of emotional and animal geographies is that of ‘deathscapes’, a concept coined by Lily Kong and further utilized by Kate V. Hartig and Kevin M. Dunn. ‘Deathscapes’, as used within Avril Maddrell and James D. Sidaway’s (2010)
edited book of the same name refers to places of death and places where the dead are remembered or laid to rest. The geographical place of death and mourning add to the emotional landscape we move through, and can change according to groups or individuals. Maddrell, for example, discusses how sites of memorial become so very important for those grieving (Maddrell 2009, 35). This, of course, includes the development of roadside memorials for human victims of road accidents (c.f. Anne Patersson’s *The Production of a Memorial Place: Materialising Expressions of Grief*). The nature of such roadside memorializations depend, of course, upon many factors, and can vary from public displays of bouquets or crosses, or planting flowers that will bloom for an extended period of time (Maddrell and Sidaway 2009, 145).

These public sites and acts of memorialization are of interest to this project in regard to their explicit acknowledgment of incident and death, as well as indicating a site of loss. This idea of tracing societal or cultural values via methods of remembering could also be considered when exploring values or acknowledgments towards the deaths of animals, particularly at our own hands.

Within human communities, there are ways of death considered more ‘ideal’ than others, and also spaces more ‘suited’ to deaths (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010, 141). For example, Morris and Thomas, (2005) explore the concept of a preference for place of death in the context of the wishes of cancer patients. The concept of a ‘right’ (or wrong) place of death can also be used as an angle from which to examine the vehicular deaths of animals, particularly when considering our role within these deaths and deathscapes. Considering these ideas of “proper place[s] of death” (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010, 141) when applied to animals can perhaps allow us to better imagine ways in which we might acknowledge the deaths of these animals and our role within them. We can also apply this concept in moral and ethical imaginings of more compassionate co-existences with animals. Dying by the side of the road due to a car impact is not dignified, and having the body left there to be continually flattened and disregarded is even less so (Morris and
Thomas 2005, 22). Yet these animal deathscapes of road-killed animals surround us. They do not require any special method to locate: they are found as we drive to work or to the grocery store, and can be seen as furry and unmoving mounds by the side of the road, or flat and ambiguous stains in the centre lane. These unintentional marks are not at all like those memorials for humans which, as Maddrell says, “represent a fixed and concrete record of someone’s life” (Maddrell 2009, 36), something that shows the value of the life of the individual who has died. By contrast the fleeting presence of road-killed animal remains provide no permanent recognition or memorial for these animals. They are largely ignored as most people do not grieve publicly (or perhaps at all) for this loss of life. This practice of turning away is only made easier by not memorializing the animals. and seem to suggest a very different dynamic where their exposed remains might indicate that they are not regarded as ‘someone’ but ‘something’.

Mourning and remembering those who we have lost allows us to keep them alive in our memories and give value to their lives. Community members seen as ‘marginalized’ often do not have their lives or history remembered, and we collectively choose to ignore memorializing or remembering communities that are not deemed important (Hua 2009, 135-137). Vijay Agnew, 2005, says that “memories involve ‘an active process by which meaning is created” (Agnew 2005, 80). In order to provide animals better quality of life within the spaces we share, it is necessary to acknowledge them in life, but also in death. In doing so, they will become a significant part of shared memories and communities, and therefore hopefully granted more compassion. In seeing how our experiences as humans run parallel, and often overlap with animals, we can include them within a group history and future and prevent them from falling to the wayside as marginalized or oppressed communities (Hua 2009, 138).

The work I am doing in regard to acknowledging road-killed animals may not be an obvious practice in mourning, but through attempting to ‘embody’ the deceased animal and acknowledge the life through art, it becomes a process of mourning. The act of acknowledgment
through observation of road-killed animals in an emotional context leads indirectly to an act of mourning. Through my experience working closely with animal individuals and documenting road-killed animals, I have begun to feel the need to give these animals even more acknowledgment than I did prior to this project, and this has resulted in what I call mini-memorialization. This involves taking a moment to closely observe the animal, looking into its eyes and seeing the individual markings in the fur or feathers, and silently acknowledging the death with an apology. I will close my eyes to block out everything around me and offer a moment of silent recognition for their lives lost. Although this may not change anything for the animal involved, this acknowledgment shows respect for an individual’s life lost.

This separation between societal norms and methods of grieving human death versus animal death brings us to the topic of what Judith Butler calls “grievable lives”. Butler says that “An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that, it has never counted as life at all” (Desmond 2016, 107). Within the subject of road-killed animals, this quote could be interpreted in the sense that these animals were barely noticed by humans before their demise, and therefore are barely noticed in their deaths. Desmond (2016, 148) states that we must see road-killed animals as having grievable lives.

Such practices might also be thought of in terms Wood and Smith (2004, 534) refer to in relation to interviewing humans as a kind if ‘participant sensing’ that recognizes that “…understanding emotions is crucial to properly appreciating how lives are lived, histories experienced, geographies made and futures shaped” (Wood & Smith 2004, 533). In one sense I am attempting to sense the (past) emotions of the animal, as well as that of the surrounding humans. Where Wood and Smith are referring to recognizing the physical mannerisms of their interview subjects, and the moods these might reflect, and although my ‘participants’ (the road-killed animals) are no longer alive, my encounters do involve a personal reflection on what the animal may have been feeling during its life, and moments before death. I am also reflecting on
the atmosphere and mood of the space surrounding the deceased, including the road, vehicles, passing people, and whatever terrain exists at the side of the road. This helps to give me a feel for the animal’s home terrain.

Wood and Smith also discuss how feelings within geography are “situated self-feelings” (Denzin 1984; Goldie 2000) and exist within “particular timespaces” (Wood & Smith 2004, 534). Emotions can be used to find new understandings of the world, and, within my work, I hope to open up viewers to a new way of knowing or understanding the lives of other beings around us. Incorporating emotions into research adds a further dimension of information received; there are knowledges that are only exposed via emotional reactions. This ‘information’ is equally important to explore. My work involves using myself as a research subject, and my emotional responses to the subject(s) that matter (the road-killed animals) is the core of my study. These emotions within myself indicate how meaningful these deaths are, and the importance of peaceful and sustainable human-nonhuman animal relationships. These emotional reactions then get poured into my artwork, which is then viewed by others and passes on all kinds of emotions. These emotions, in my view, are crucial to opening dialogue and creating new ideas for the geographies we share with nonhuman animals, and my hope is that they then translate into activism. As Wood and Smith indicate art and emotions are closely linked, and that “artists, more than the rest of us, routinely work with and through the emotional sphere… They therefore play a critical role in provoking and encouraging people to engage with embodied emotional ways of being and knowing” (Wood & Smith 2004, 535). This rings very true to my own experience creating art. In all of my paintings, I hope to translate some emotional response, whether encountered by the viewer in the same way or in a variation of emotions based on their personal encounters and experiences.

As previously mentioned, road-killed animals are often a distressing subject and therefore thoughts of them are often avoided. Art is often used as a method in which to acknowledge
distressing subjects and present them in an accessible way to the viewer. Different types of art can be used to address these issues, whether through storytelling, performance or painting to name a few. In *Ephemeral Art: The Art of Being Lost* O’Neill cites the example of the artist Dadang Christanto who uses performance art to ask viewers what our moral role is in witnessing violence. Art as a mode of access to encounter difficult subject matter can be useful in increasing discussion, thinking critically, and mourning (O’Neill 2009, 145-157). Aesthetics are important in forging positive relationships with nature through interacting in the natural world, and also encourages positive change (Foster 2009, 98). I believe that this can be pushed a step further by using artistic aesthetics of the natural world and issues within it to encourage positive relationships, critical thinking, and change.

We carry our bodies through the places and spaces we inhabit, and through our experiences, connect these spaces to our emotions. This connection of experience to emotion also tie into memory; returning to particular places brings with it memories of our previous experiences in that space (Davidson and Milligan 2004, 523-24). Exploring our emotional reactions to road-killed animals within the geographies we share with animals, we may be able to practice a sympathetic embodiment which could lead to an improved co-existence (Davidson and Milligan 2004, 526).

4 Road-killed Animals and the Ethics of Animal Death

“They coexist beside us, relatively unacknowledged and rarely even seen, until those moments of impact when our lives literally collide”
“What are the numerous rhetorical strategies and ideologies necessary to render indivisible this enormous amount of animal carnage? What might it take to move these roadkilled bodies from the status of the ‘unmourned’ to the ‘mourned’? 

(Desmond 2016, 141)

My concern with roadkill has been ongoing, an upsetting issue that I have seen my whole life. Within the last year, it has become even more obvious to me as I move around the city in which I live. It is a poignant visual representation of our often tragic encounters with animals in the city with whom we share this space. As I pass by deceased animals by the side of the road, I cannot help but imagine the life of the individual, the fear and pain it might have felt. I cannot help but imagine the person who hit it; was it an accident? If so, did they feel remorse or sadness? Did they get out of the car to check if it was still alive?

As I drive down particular, high frequency roadkill roads, I dread seeing either roadkill sites from previous days or new roadkill incidents. I fear seeing a tell-tale lump on or near the road, and tense as I approach, waiting to see if it might instead be a lost glove or blown out tire. A roadkill site is full of emotional responses, and is most likely a reason people avoid looking too closely. The negative emotions that are tied to roadkill, such as sadness and guilt, and perhaps the fear of our own deaths that make it easier to turn away. Does this inability to give thought to these deaths run parallel to a lack of understating these animals as ‘selves’ and ‘beings’, and instead as ‘things’ (Smith 2009, 27-23)?

I see drivers on their way to work, rushing, not even taking the time to swerve to avoid squashing an already dead squirrel or bird. I can hear the impact. Is everyone in such a rush that even a moment of courtesy cannot be taken to show respect? This continuous sight of roadkill during daily commutes and along the roads where we live only emphasizes that our spaces are shared with animal life, animals that may even call our homes theirs as well (roofs, basements,
Although these geographies overlap, there seems to be a shared sentiment among many that these are two very separate worlds (Smith 2009, 21).

Vehicular deaths are an abrasive and rough death, a shocking splat or squash on the asphalt, either an abrupt impact that swiftly finalizes a life, or a lengthened suffering by the side of the road. Mick Smith’s *Road Kill: Remembering What is Left in our Encounters with Other Animals* (2009) is a unique piece of writing that combines emotional geographies specifically with the questions of roadkill, and provided much insight and inspiration regarding this subject matter within the context of human-animal relationships. As already argued, road-killed animals have immediate connections to geography, in regard to their placement on roadways and sites within cities and surrounding areas. Although many people may turn their heads away from road-killed animals, there is an inherent emotional aspect, both for the animal and the humans, whether it is sadness, guilt, or some other emotion. In a world in which emotions are often shrouded, roadkill is a frequent reminder of death and suffering at the hands of humans and their technology (Smith 2009, 21-23). Smith also details some aspects of ‘distancing’ referred to above, both emotionally in terms of drivers attempt to remove their own responsibility and guilt by referring to unavoidable ‘accidents’ and in terms of the physical separation and feelings of safety and control experienced by car-drivers that perpetuates a feeling of the animals being in another world. Smith suggests how the way in which drivers passage through the world is so removed from many aspects of our possible interactions with(in) it (smells, touches, etc.), and only creates a larger gap between us and animal life, something Smith refers to in Heidegger’s terms as a particular form of a “forgetfulness of Being”. Heidegger, Smith argues, might see this as part of a “technological enframing of the world”, a mode of being where the world is reduced to a form of resource, mere material waiting to be used as it suits us. In this case, any feeling of guilt or responsibility drivers may feel might actually problematize the ways their journey is framed only

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as a matter of getting to their destination efficiently. All too often the animals are in the way of this efficiency (Smith 2009, 27).

Smith, however, also points to issues that might emerge with emotional responses to animal deaths, including whether our concerns could, in fact, be seen as an anthropomorphic projection onto them (Smith 2009, 27). Projected anthropomorphism has been a concern within this project, and is most likely occurring during my encounters with road-killed animals in which I attempt to imagine the emotions the animal may have had. I cannot be certain what those emotions would be. Although it is a legitimate concern, I have decided to focus on the potential positive impact that could occur between human-animal relationships through acknowledgment of the devastating deaths of road-killed animals and the role humans play within it, and less on the requirement that what people feel is exactly that which the animal would feel. Even those who do not attempt to feel what the animal might feel might still, of course, have other emotional responses including a personal, and potentially selfish reaction (guilt, remorse, or more selfishly, being late for work, potential damage to their car). A common utterance in regard to drivers hitting animals, is that the animal “came out of nowhere”. This is a continuation of people’s removal of guilt and the role and responsibility that they have in the event. This claim comes along with other reasons to remove responsibility, whether the driver could not stop because they were in fast-moving traffic, or they were running late. The animal becomes part of a series of obstacles on a daily commute, and loses its identity as an individual with life to be valued: “just one more, hardly noticed, stain on the road” (Smith, 2009). The phrase “it came out of nowhere” perpetuates the concept of the animal being an ‘it’ instead of a ‘who’, and creates further problems regarding human’s regard to animals and their view of the world in a larger way, the “enframing of the world” (Smith 2009, 31-32).

Smith, echoing Heidegger, suggests that rather than squeezing concerns about animals into the dominant economic framework we need to find ways to “choose to let other beings be”,

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to let them lead their own lives. We are able to think ethically about how we relate to those around us, whether human, animal, or other, and, in this way, we can give value to the lives of species (and individuals) other than our own (Smith 2009, 30-31).

Smith concludes his piece with a reflection upon a positive emotional perspective, that of wonder. Looking beyond our automobiles, seeing the animals and the geography we share is full of wonder, and realizing the wonder within it gives us appreciation for and value beyond ourselves. We should give further thought to the animals around us, and ponder their existence with emotion, otherwise these deaths from our vehicles will not cease and the lives lost will not be valued (Smith 2009, 33).

This subject matter is disturbing, horrific, sad, guilt-inducing and hopeful all at the same time. Everyone who I talk to has a roadkill story to share. Everyone’s stories are emotional, and everyone’s response to my subject matter is emotional. This indicates that it is a triggering subject that many people are affected by. It is so horrifying that we often hope to forget it. We are devastated and then whip by it in the car, where we no longer have to think about it. Out of sight, out of mind.

5 My Encounters

Desmond states that the act of experience brings together meanings of particular places, times and people involved, as well as the act of “doing, feeling or saying”. In the case of my own encounters, I had first-hand experience of this “interpretation of the meanings attached” through my own history of road-killed animals, animal ethics and wildlife handling, as well as perceived meanings via passing cars, people around and the way animals are viewed in this current time (2016, 16). All of these things add up to form the experience of each individual encounter.
My practice of encounters with road-killed animals would begin by pulling my car over or walking over to the animal to see whether it was still alive. My experience volunteering to care for rehabilitated wildlife at Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre has shown me that many animals who are hit by cars are able to survive, so it became routine for me to pull over and check on any animals by the side of the road who looked potentially still alive. So many animals admitted to the centre have been hit by cars, that they use the acronym HBC on admission forms. There was a particular instance where I checked on a young porcupine by the side of the road, and it was in fact still alive so I brought it into the Wildlife Centre. I also encountered a Canadian Goose who was thrashing beside the curb, rush hour traffic whizzing by without a care. Both of these animals were brought in for rehabilitation, but sadly neither survived. These experiences coming across a still-alive animal, suffering from a driver who had not bothered to stop, stuck with me. From that moment I was even more adamant to stop and check on animals at the side of the road, although I never came across another half-alive animal. These moments of physically holding a near-death animal by the side of a busy road, looking desperately for signs of a rising chest or blinking eyes is nearly impossible to do without experiencing some kind of embodiment, and putting myself in their place. I imagine not only the struggle to breathe, the pain of the pavement across the skin. I wince when I see a porcupine whose skin has been stripped off along with the quills, and the collection of baby raccoons sprawled out every few feet along a stretch of highway. To encounter these animals directly and observe them closely in an emotional capacity makes it difficult to not embody their fate. It seems almost impossible to not imagine being in their positions, and imagine their pain and fear. Perhaps this is, in some cases, anthropomorphizing, but this anthropomorphising may be positive in acquiring a larger spread of compassion and acknowledgment for road-killed animals.

I am trying to figure out why I choose the road-killed animals that I choose to stop at and take a closer look. I would say the most likely reason is that these are animals that could
potentially still be alive. I know that this is because I worry that an animal on the road, however close to death it may be, could be suffering. I wonder if there are deeper meanings, subconscious meanings or reasoning that connect to human and animal connections and emotional ties. Although there are moments where I feel uneasy stepping in, I feel that I have no other choice. I could not leave the animal where it is, suffering. Sometimes my head feels very clear, other times I feel so overwhelmed by emotion. I also am fueled by the lack of empathy of so many of the cars that pass.

In her 2007 article, Hannele Kerosuo explores the emotional side of research fieldwork, a component she states exists in all types of fieldwork. Kerosuo’s view is that emotions cannot really be separated from the field, whether it is in relation to the subject or to the personal experience of those conducting the research (Lofland and Lofland, 1995: 13 in Kerosuo 2007, 56). I agree that emotions must be a part of fieldwork, because emotions are part of every experience a being has. I chose to purposefully explore this facet of fieldwork with my own project, focusing on emotional geographies, and I feel that even if I did not pursue it purposefully, emotions would still have seeped into my study. It is difficult to encounter the topic of human-animal relationships and road-killed animals without some kind of emotional reaction, and my work hopes to tap into just that. The artistic component of my project also connects directly to emotional knowledge.

6 Environmental Art

“Earth, wood, stone, water, plants, light and other organic and inorganic natural matter and processes have provided the material for works falling into the amorphous range of contemporary art forms described as environmental art. ‘Environmental art’, as I use the concept here, refers, largely, to works
generated outdoors, from land art and earthworks to ecological art. These works range from small sculptural objects to grand gestures in the land, and from the impermanent and ephemeral to the permanent.” (Brady 2010, 48).

Aesthetics and the environment are closely linked, as well as in connection to the experiences we have. The link between the two changes over time as we redefine definitions of art and the environment. The current century has seen more and more explicitly environmental art, and this art has become more focused on current environmental issues, such as climate change. This artwork is shown in a wide variety of ways, including non-representational and more representational ways (Thornes 2008, 392). There are many different terms used when describing artwork involving topics about nature and the environment. Ecological art (eco-art) and environmental art are terms often used interchangeably within artistic language. Some artists further define their work with terms such as ‘land art’ (often defined by work made in the outdoors) and ‘art in nature’ (often defined by using natural materials) (Bower, A Profusion of Terms 2010). Ecological art tends to use natural materials while commenting on the state of the environment, being aware of environmental ethics in topic and production (Kagan, Practice of Ecological Art 2016).

There is discussion within the world of ecological art regarding “non-interference”. This means that, if we can avoid it, we should “not interfere with nature or harm nature through interference” (Taylor, 1986). Carlson (2000) who has written extensively on environmental aesthetics, believes that most examples of environmental art “constitute an affront to nature”. Brady (2010) opts for a lenient form of Carlson’s non-interference, wherein environmental pragmatism takes front seat. This approach, coined as an “aesthetic regard” for nature, highlights the relationship of humans to earth and nature, as opposed to dividing the two. Through art and aesthetics, citizens could gain further appreciation for nature and, in turn, care for it (Brady 2010, 48-49).
‘Ephemeral art’ is a type of environmental art focusing on aesthetic regard. Ephemeral artworks are created not to endure forever, but to disappear either quickly or over a longer period of time due to environmental processes. Modern art continues to increase in ephemerality, which Grande (2004) explains as “[…] part of an increasing tendency to define works of art as patterns of thought […]”. These ephemeral pieces of art can be defined as ‘interventions’. Andy Goldsworthy is one of the most celebrated and widely known ephemeral land artists whose works are created completely out of natural materials. Goldsworthy’s work is always site-specific and seen as collaborative with nature and earth. He photographs his works, which is the sole way in which they last. (Grande 2004, xii).

Figure 2. *Ice Arch*, Andy Goldsworthy, 1982 Photograph of impermanent sculpture created from ice in situ

Although my paintings are not seen as ephemeral in the same way, I take a lot of inspiration from Goldsworthy’s artwork (see Figure 2 above). I am inspired to deeply consider the materials I use, and how they not only impact the environment but also how they either contradict or further enhance the meaning behind my work. By using fruits and vegetables as paint, I am avoiding the use of oil-based or acrylic-based paints which are not easily disposed of. Fruit and vegetable material also connect to nature and animals, and might be something eaten by
the very animals I am representing. I have also embraced the changes that occur to the materials when left to oxidize - the change in colour emphasize the changes that happen to the animals on roadways when left out in the elements. This ephemerality also directly connects to the temporary nature of road-killed animals. After being hit by a vehicle, they are left to decompose on the asphalt. Even if the bodies are removed from the road, the stain remains. This body and/or stain breaks down over time until it is a faint mark on the road. I would call this a sad and unfortunate ‘intervention’.

In *Alternatives Journal* (2013) several Canadian artist were interviewed about environmental art. Kelly Richardson, a video artist, states that “all good art makes us see the world around us in a new light”, a statement often true in the activist nature of a lot of environmental art. Sonny Assu, an artist from British Columbia, agrees that art is a useful method to spread a message regarding the need to care for and preserve the planet. Charles Stankievech likens the artist to “an antenna”, indicating that the artist should be “attuned to the world around them, noticing that which the general public does not”. To Stankievech, this includes the “voice of the oppressed. (Belanger 2013). My own work comes directly from a passion for activism. As artmaking is my preferred method of communication, it seems only natural to use painting as a way of conveying my strong feelings on the subject of animal rights. I also believe that art can be useful in imparting difficult-to-swallow information and evoking emotions that might not occur if communicated through other avenues.

6.1 Trans-species Artwork

“Our cultural interactions and representations are ecologically significant: how we treat animals in culture affects how we treat animals in nature”

Malamud (2009, 73),
Animals have long been popular artistic subjects. They range from being shown as live beings, but also in death in still life paintings. Sixteenth century paintings saw status animals featured in the artwork of the time. In historical religious work, certain animals were depicted to represent particular stories or characters. Animals have also been used in artwork to represent particular sentiments or tones, such as cunning foxes. To depict animals for this purpose does not necessarily show the animal for the animal’s sake, but instead in an anthropocentric stand in for humans (Petry 2013, 178).

Animals have also been the subject of artworks that go far beyond solely pictorial representation. A highly criticized piece by Helen Mayer Narrison and Newton Narrison produced in 1971 was titled Portable Fish Farm (see Figure 3 below). It involved the artists showing how fish is harvested, including the electrocution of live fish. They were attempting to examine human-animal relationships as well as human-animal-environment relationships, although this came at the cost of the lives of many fish. Live turtles were used in Ten Turtles Set Free, a 1970 piece by Hans Haacke in which he purchased ten turtles from a pet shop and set them free (see Figure 4 below). He intended to discuss concepts of humanity and human involvement in restricting the freedom of animals (Brady 2010, 50). This piece may have been a positive sentiment around animal freedom, yet what was the consideration of the future of these once-captive, now free turtles? Were they released into their proper habitat, and were they prepared to survive on their own?
When we begin to explore narratives from an imagined animal narrative, it is important to be aware of how they are spoken about, and why (Kirksey, Schuetze and Helmreigh 2014, 3). If including animals in the narrative or artwork is an attempt to bring awareness of and justice to, then the animals’ representation must be carefully considered. An art exhibit titled *Multispecies*
Salon contained creative projects focused on animals other than humans, and was brought together by multi-disciplinary professionals ranging from artists to scientists. Animals within these works ranged from dolphins and birds, to fruit flies. Many subjects were explored, such as food, disease and control of animals. This creative intervention allowed for new and different ways of considering animal issues from a variety of approaches. One particular piece approached human-animal relationships in what, to me, is an ethically tricky method. Kathy High decided to photograph rats as a way of gaining appreciation for a species of animal that she did not enjoy (see Figure 5 below). She was inspired by lab rats who are used in medical testing, and ordered a shipment of transgenic biomedical rats with whom she would interact. Because of the breeding of these rats, they often acquire medical issues. High could relate to the rats in this way due to her own medical issues, and through this approach was able to gain more appreciation for these animals. She titled her work Embracing Animal (2004-2006) and developed a relationship with not only a species she once disliked, but also her own rats as individuals (Kirksey, Costelloe-Kuehn and Sagan 2014, 206-208). On the one hand, I am always pleased when somebody can grow an appreciation for a living being or species of living beings they previously did not like, and I think it is admirable that she took it upon herself to not only revaluate her perception of rats, but also go beyond that and develop a relationship with them. That being said, my personal ethical leanings are against ordering these biomedical rats, because this is perpetuating a supply and demand pattern within an area that I do not agree with. I think that she could have accomplished this result, or a similar result, by adopting rats or interacting with rats that somebody else already had. I think that, often, we get stuck in a position where we think that something is ethically forward thinking, but with a bit of deeper thinking, we can see that there are larger, deeply rooted moral issues. The deeper issue in the case of High’s artwork would be that she may gain a respect for rats, but this respect falls apart when they are still seen as a commodity that can be ‘ordered’.
Michael Petry’s book, *Nature Morte*, explores modern approaches to still life animal subjects within art (2013). Much of current still life artwork containing animals has a message of ecological and environmental conservation, such as serving as a reminder of species extinction. Petry mentions that the animal, as a still life subject, is also of interest because its lifeless body reminds the viewer of their own mortality. There has been a surge of taxidermy use in modern art. Artists are using either whole animals or parts, and some are stuffed whereas others left to the elements to decay. An example of artwork using animal decay is Sam Taylor-Johnson’s *A Little Death*, 2002. In this work, a dead hare is slowly decayed by maggots, shown through time-lapse photography. This artwork is not made specifically to respect or show appreciation of the animal as individual. Shane Mecklenburger created an artwork containing a decaying animal that was designed to show respect. His piece *Roadkill Diamond* from 2012 uses an armadillo that Mecklenburger found hit on the road (see Figure 6 below). He processes it into a diamond in a method that was created for deceased humans. Although this piece uses the animal itself, something that I have struggled to feel at peace with, it is done at least in a respectful way, and brings the armadillo’s death to a dignified end (Petry 2013, 178-179).
Figure 6. *Roadkill Diamond* photograph of armadillo ashes prior to being made into a diamond, Shane Macklenburger, 2012

Klaus Pichler is a photographer interested in taxidermied animals housed in science museums (see Figure 7 below). His project *Plastic Deers*, 2010 consists of photographs of the taxidermied animals, most in storage under plastic, as a way of critiquing the lack of regard and respect for these deceased animals, both as a species and as individuals. His work is an interesting and potentially ironic way of approaching concepts of respect for animals (Petry 2013, 196).
One of the most well-known modern art pieces of art using a taxidermied animal is Damien Hirst’s *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, 1991 (see figure 8 below). This work consists of a 14-foot tiger shark that was commissioned by Hirst to be caught. It was then preserved in a glass tank, held afloat in formaldehyde with its mouth open. The original artwork contained the first tiger shark, which, when it began to decay, was replaced by another tiger shark, also commissioned by Hirst. This artwork may bring forward questions of human-animal relationships, but has also been criticized as being a form of “art crime” due to its harm to the animal and the environment. Hirst admirers have argued that the shark is an important exploration of conservation and raises questions concerning aquariums, captivity, and human responsibility (Brisman 2011, 466-475). By contrast, artist Cindy Wright was able to capture an emotional response for a call to attention of the conservation of the Great Tit, a migratory bird. Her piece *Koolmeesje*, 2010, is an incredibly realistic oil painting of a deceased Great Tit on pavement, so lifelike that it was not necessary to use a real bird (Petry 2013, 192).
An alternative use of animals within artwork is that of collaboration. Olly Suzi are a pair of British artists whose artwork deals with wild endangered species throughout the world. They work to document these animals through tracking, painting and interaction with wild animals (see Figure 9 below). Their work with animals ranging from wild dogs, cheetahs and sharks involves a collaboration, such as allowing animal to step on or bite the artworks (“Art & Photography”). Their work is of interest to me in part due to imagining ways in which animal-centric artwork could involve some type of ethical collaboration, one in which the animal is not only a subject but also a participant. Although I may not wish to use animals in my own work, Olly Suzi’s method gives the animal some choice in participation. My hesitation lies in the ‘use’ of the animals; while they may be able to opt out of participating, they are most likely not fully aware of what it is they are a part of.

Figure 9. *Shark Bite*, paint on paper, Olly & Suzi with Greg Williams

The combination of art and animal rights is nothing new. Artwork has often been created for animal rights organizations to further their views, although there have also been artworks that
are vehemently opposed by animal rights groups. Visual art is a tool that can be effective in confronting us with the separation of humans and animals. Art can focus ‘the gaze’ towards animals and human-animal relations (Cherry 2016, 65-68). I think that not only does it focus ‘the gaze’ to a particular issue or perspective, but visual art also creates a space that is perhaps more allowable for emotional reaction. People may not feel that it is societally acceptable to mourn an animal at the side of the road, but may feel it is allowable within a gallery. Allowing these emotional responses to take place is important to human-animal relationships and can be significant in endorsing conversation and making change. Even if it does not directly result in activism, visual art has the power to evoke empathy which could in turn change mindsets as well as actions. Katherine Everhart (2012) suggests that “art creates mobilizing emotions” and these emotions can lead to “responsibility and familiarity”. Art can erase some of the lines drawn between humans and animals by encouraging the viewer to visually place themselves in place of the animal (Cherry 2016, 69-74).

### 6.2 Road-killed Animal Art

There are a variety of different artists producing work on the subject of road-killed animals, many of whom use the road-killed animals themselves in their artwork. For some, this use of the animal feels poignant, for others, objectifying. Among these artists, the most powerful and inspiring artwork for my own work was that of Shaun Gladwell. His piece *Apologies 1-6*, 2007-2009, is a series of films set in Australia (see Figure 10 below). In these films, Gladwell is seen riding down an Australian highway on a motorbike, wearing head-to-toe protective gear. He stops as he comes across deceased kangaroos and wallabies, which he tenderly carries off the
road. This work is an important and very emotional comment on the many deaths caused by roads and traffic in Australia, but also around the world (Museum of Contemporary Art Australia).

![Image](image.png)

Figure 10. *Apologies 1-6*, film, Shaun Gladwell, 2007-2009 (Gladwell)

The following two artists create their pieces in an effort to raise awareness of road-killed animals, using the animals themselves in the work. Paige Garland is an Australian artist who collects, arranges and frames feathers found on deceased birds at the side of the Brisbane Valley Highway (see Figure 11 below). Her intent is to memorialize the birds and attempt to gain better protection for native wildlife through government protection plans (Caldwell 2015). A Halifax based artist, Nikki Barnett, bejewels found-animal skulls, most of these skulls being from road-killed animals. Her work is inspired by Mexican Day of the Dead traditions, and she sees this process as a way of honouring the lives of the animals (Matteis 2016).
Jamie Roadkill is a Brooklyn artist who uses naturally deceased animals, as a way of exploring “stigmas around death and decay” (see Figure 12 below). Her artwork uses the bones of these found animals, covered in gold (Jamie Roadkill). Although not directly meant to honour the deceased animals, her examination of death could be interpreted by some viewers as an act of mourning. Kimberly Witham uses road-killed animals within her still life photography because they are ethically sourced, but her work is not a direct activist approach to issues of animal deaths on roadways (see Figure 13 below). Rather, she is interested in the combination of beauty in decay and is primarily aesthetic in nature, although she does bury the animals after photographing them which is a sign of respect. She also uses feeder animals, those meant to be fed to pets, as well as garment industry fur remains and bits from butchers (Kimberley Witham).
When it comes to artwork using animals, I can understand the use of road-killed-animals being more ethical since it does not require killing the animal for the purpose of the artwork. That being said, I am still not ethically comfortable using road-killed-animals in my own work. I do not agree with using an animal without its consent for any purpose, and I believe that I can reach my intended purpose with my paintings without using any animals.
6.2.1 Taxidermy

Taxidermy animals are becoming more common within the art world. Artists such as Damien Hirst, as previously mentioned, are using deceased animals in their work in a range of methods and for a range of purposes. One group, called Rogue Taxidermists, use taxidermy in culturally critical methods, leaving the animals’ innards exposed. They also create multispecies taxidermy creatures stitched together. They state that the work they create is for the art world: “These pieces foreground the work of representational praxis through an explicit rejection of conventions naturalism, and, through this self-reflexive rhetorical structure, address a narrower, more elite viewing public” (Desmond 2016, 32). I understand and appreciate their desire to reconsider the norm and play with viewers’ perceptions, but I find it disturbing that they are willing to make use of these animals to do so. In my opinion, it does not feel ethical to use these animals, particularly if there is no direct correlation from the art to a message concerning animal ethics. And, is it worth pushing the boundaries of what constitutes the rights of these animals in order to question animal rights of another type? Is it perhaps true that seeing these animals in person may have powerful reactions for some viewers? I believe that it is possible to evoke these reactions and emotional responses through methods that don’t rely on the use of any animal.

Taxidermy generally wishes to depict realism, yet its theatrical presentation attempts to take the viewer away from the true reality, the reality that requires killing the animal and then the “fictional resurrection”. This aspect is hidden away behind the scenes. The deaths of animals used in taxidermy can be “endorse[d] and take[n] pleasure” in because “their deaths are not deemed too high a price for our pleasure” (Desmond 2016, 51). In terms of road-related deaths of animals, their deaths may not be taken pleasure in, but we still do not seem to consider their deaths too high a price for our pleasure and convenience for using roadways and vehicles.
Along with the effort of hiding how taxidermied animals come to be, there is also the theatrical aspect of choosing and taxidermy-ing each animal to the ideal representation of each species. Desmond refers to this as “an idealized version of an individual” (Desmond 2016, 33-34). I find the use of the word individual interesting in this situation. More often than not, taxidermy is shown as singular animals who are displaying an example of their species. In that way, they are individuals, but not individual in the sense of acknowledging their personality or uniqueness as a being. There are no name plaques next to the display cabinet, stating the individual’s personality, likes and dislikes and so on.

*Animals Inside Out* is an exhibit by Gunther Von Hagnes of *The Body World* exhibit (in which humans are shown without skin, to display their muscles and inner workings). In *Animal Inside Out*, the animals are shown in the same fashion (Desmond 2016, 53). The exhibit includes some text regarding the ethics of the exhibit, which states that animals were not killed for the purpose of the exhibit, but instead donated from places such as zoos and breeders following their ‘natural’ deaths. The text also says that the animals have “chosen during their lifetimes to donate their bodies expressly for the purpose of inclusion in the exhibitions. In this case, the animals are incapable of assent, and so humans must consent on their behalf” (Desmond 2016, 63). This statement is such a definitive example of humans removing any uneasiness from our actions and desire to see these animals on display. We attempt to remove any wrongdoing or even any direct hand in the deaths of these animals, and this statement attempts to put both the viewers at ease. It is almost laughable to suggest that the animals *chose* to donate their bodies, as it is no mystery that they were probably not asked, and were unable to vocalize their choice in a way that would be communicable cross-species. By saying that humans *must* consent, it further removes responsibility, as that wording makes it seem as though there were no other choice, not even to *not* include these animals, or not even create the exhibit in the first place. We could go even further back and examine the ethics of the breeders and zoos that house the animals whose bodies
are donated, but that is too large of a topic for this thesis. Overall, the statement about the ethics of this display come across as somewhat self-serving, designed to lessen any feelings of guilt from the artist or viewers.

Craig Stecyk III is a visual artist who also created temporary roadside memorials for road-killed animals in a 1983 piece titled Road Rash. The piece consisted of a mix of sculpture and “literally add[ed] value to the deaths of road-killed animals” by making the sculpture component out of bronze. He would travel roads until he located particular road-killed animals which he wished to memorialize, and, after removing the skin, cast the animal in bronze before then sewing the original skin over the bronze casting. This artistic creation was done in-situ, as a “quasi-ritual act” which would disrupt traffic as he worked. Steyck would then place these castings where the body had been, which would sometimes be directly in the way of cars, a choice that further emphasized the topic at hand. The visual of the animal as a sculpture made in bronze suggested the value of the animal to the oncoming traffic. Steyck says he finds it ironic that the placement of his work could cause an automobile accident, although he eventually removed his work for that very reason (Desmond 2016, 150-151).

I am very drawn to the concept of in situ art, especially for a topic as site-specific as road-killed animals. I toyed with concepts for artworks within this thesis that could appear on, beside or near roadways, but, for a variety of reasons that are discussed in a later chapter, decided upon paintings on canvas. I think that important emotional and ethical reactions can evolve from placing work depicting road-killed animals in a gallery, a space which is generally considered a ‘human space’. This juxtaposition helps to display issues within the topic, and also coincides with my effort to remove road-killed animals from a space (the road where they died) where they go unnoticed and are quick forgotten. Placing any semblance of their lives in a human-based space brings our lives closer together, closing some of the human-animal relationship bridges, at least in some small way. The most important aspect to artwork and the topic of road-killed animals (and
animals in general) is one that is asked by Desmond (2016): “Can artistic engagements with roadkill engage the aesthetic without anesthetizing the ethical?” (Desmond 2016, 154).

Most people do not question their right to view an animal, whether alive or deceased, although this attitude changes when it comes to humans (Desmond 2016, 41). The interesting juxtaposition of this statement appears when it comes to road-killed animals; most people will do whatever they can to avoid looking at road-killed animals. Most people hardly acknowledge the common sight of animal deaths within society, such as in grocery stores where they are labeled with words that separate them from what they were in life, (i.e. pork for pig or steak for cow). These same people would rarely if ever have seen a deceased human, only in particular circumstances such as natural disasters, war, or in private and culturally acceptable methods of mourning (i.e. open casket funerals). In general, the dead are shielded from the view of the living (Desmond, 2016, 42). In opposition, we see so many dead animals around us that we are basically unmoved by them. Or, if we are moved, we move on.

7 Artworks

I am a visual artist. I work primarily in acrylic paint on canvas, mainly with geometric abstract forms and colourfields. Through form and colour, I hope to evoke a variety of emotional responses to my paintings.

My work incorporates action research within my methods as a way of interacting with the subject matter, placing myself as a subject and acquiring inspiration via this method. This participatory action within research can be divided into different methods, including experiential knowing. Experiential knowing is when “one experiences the presence of the other through body, emotions and imagination. This knowing through participative and empathetic involvement in
something of which we are a part and from which we are at the same time detached” (Rasmussen 2014, 23-26). Experiential knowing is a distinct process within my method, as I am placing myself within the space of the road-killed animal and attempting to feel the emotions of the animal, which I will then attempt to recreate within my artwork.

One of the main goals of the artwork I have created in this research project is to shed light on a purposefully concealed subject that is present all around us: animals. Through my casual chats with colleagues, family and friends, it became apparent that many people try to avoid looking at road-killed animals. I think that people choose to be in blissful ignorance or denial because the subject is too uncomfortable and upsetting. Art can be an alternative way to open conversation about a difficult topic, and by choosing to avoid direct imagery of road-killed animals, I am hoping to explore the topic in an open way I chose to avoid any form of objectification by not using any direct imagery of animals within my own work.

One of the biggest concerns I had within my artwork was animal agency. Cherry comments that often, within artwork, the “…depictions of nonhuman animals, it is more common to see animal agency attributed in a disingenuous or self-serving way” (2016, 79). This determination to preserve nonhuman animal agency within my project as best I could meant continuously checking in on the paintings I was producing and my research methods to be sure it was ethically sound within my moral standpoint of animal rights. I didn’t want to objectify the road-killed animals, therefore I did not photograph them. Most road-killed animal-based artwork consists of either photographs or works created with parts of the deceased (feathers, fur, etc). Although the intention may be to honour and mourn these lives, and bring attention to the issue at hand, it was a not a method with which I felt comfortable.

Derek Attridge asks “What is the relation between the feelings evoked by the work of literature, or more generally the representational work of art, and the feelings we experience directly in response to events and objects in our life?” (2011, 330). This is an important facet
within the purpose of my own project; my paintings are created to evoke emotion within the viewer, which I hope then carries into their everyday life and perhaps even into activism. We must, however, always bear in mind that these reactions can be very different to non-art experience when we are “responding to them as art” (Attridge 2011, 332).

My artwork is designed to push viewers into confronting a topic that might normally be avoided. This can cause unpleasant feelings (Attridge, 2011, 333), but, to me, that is part-in-parcel of my topic; discomfort is due to the fact that we know that the number of road-killed animals and our relationship with these animals is problematic. Overcoming this discomfort to some degree will help to create necessary change.

Marc Narbonne who created a collection of work that consisted of paintings around road-killed animals encountered during his commutes seems to have a similar intention. In a piece by Peter Simpson, written for The Ottawa Citizen, Simpson describes being unable to take his eyes off the artwork, even though they were grisly and distressing. He describes the work as “arresting”, although also “demonstrating a dark sense of humour” (Simpson 2012, 1). I wonder, though, if this perspective of dark humour is used to create a more comfortable barrier between the viewer and the subject matter, or perhaps Simpson uses it to remove some guilt or weight of the topic. I purposefully wanted my paintings to be serious; artwork that didn’t rely on humour to cushion the blow of the difficult subject matter. My use of abstract gives the viewer a slight cushion into the subject matter; they are not immediately confronted with images of deceased non-human animals, and although their emotional reaction may be sudden due to the colours within my work, they can slowly bring themselves into the topic by reading my artist statement.

7.1 Process
Prior to this thesis project, I had been creating three-dimensional paintings from canvas and acrylic mediums. I attempted several variations in textural techniques to find what best suited this subject. I tried using acrylic mediums instead of crumpled canvas to depict abstract versions of gravel and animal remains, but found they were too stiffly arranged. This sense of overly curated pieces was also present because I was painting on the acrylic paint using traditional methods with paintbrushes. This result of this did not feel dynamic or connected to road-killed animals. Because of the dramatic and disjointed subject of road-killed animals, not to mention their organic nature, I wanted to create paintings that allowed for more of their own formation beyond my hands.

The more I worked with acrylic paint, while it offered me a wide range of intense colour, the more I felt a disconnect between my material and my subject. I began to see more satisfying results once I began experimenting with staining techniques, and acquired some vibrant and jarring stains with red acrylic paint. I was achieving the emotional response from viewers (such as my friends and family) that I hoped for, but I was still searching for a material that encapsulated the connecting thread of meaningful and purposeful choices I had been making within the work.

I had several ideas leading up to my decision to use a juiced stain made of fruits and vegetables. My most intriguing idea was to explore aspects of the ethics of care and feminism (and the link between the treatment of women and the treatment of animals) by incorporating menstrual blood as the stain. This would give the work not only a purely organic medium of paint, but would also explore concepts of pain and bloodshed, but also felt like it could create a very personal link to the body trauma of the animals I saw on the road. In the end, I decided that it would be far too large of an undertaking to incorporate the aspects of feminism and ethics of care, but this would be a very exciting and interesting way to continue my research.

Fruits and vegetables seemed to be very fitting materials for my work. They are organic, and I could imagine these might be fruits and vegetables that would be in the bellies of road-
killed animals or in surrounding areas. I chose fruits and vegetables that found primarily within Ontario, although some were from other parts of Canada. The most vivid colours I achieved came from blackberries, strawberries, blueberries cherries, cranberries, and beets. I also sometimes used apples to add liquid to the mix. I juiced a variety of mixes of fruits and vegetables, using an electric juicer. Variations came through in different shades of reds, purples and browns, depending on the mixes.

I am very content with the outcome of the use of fruits and vegetables, although the colours are not as intense shades of red. They are instead varying degrees of reds, browns, and violets, sometimes fading into almost greens or greys with the oxidation process. The change in colour through oxidation further ties the paintings to road-killed animals, as their bodies also change over time through natural processes. These include weather-related changes, but also less ‘natural’ causes such as traffic continually running over their bodies. The continued pressure and crushing movement of cars squashes and smears the bodies until they are no longer recognizable as individuals or species. Eventually, all that is left is a remaining stain that may be mistaken as a car oil spill or almost-dry puddle, and that moment in time is what I am capturing with my paintings. Because I didn’t want to use any animal parts within my artwork, or even photo documentation, the stain felt like the remaining component of the remain of the animal that could be incorporated into my work.

I begin my paintings by cutting up square or rectangular pieces of loose, unprimed canvas. I then use modelling paste to coat both sides of the loose canvas and apply them by scrunching and folding the pieces onto the stretched canvas. I do not begin with a solid plan for where they will go or what size/how many pieces I will place, as I discover their placement while I go. The modeling paste sticks the canvas pieces to the canvas surface of the painting. I allow the modeling paste at least 24 hours to dry before pouring the stain. Usually I prepare several shades of stain prior to my canvas being ready, so once I am ready to pour the stain I first give it a mix in
its container. I then pour the stain directly onto the canvas, choosing general areas I wish to have coloured, and then the liquid flows of its own accord across the canvas and settles into an organic shape. In several instances, I used a small squeegee to direct the liquid in certain directions, and to imitate the squishing movement of a car tire.

My art process involves the importance of process-based work. The act of mixing the colour of stain and pouring it is just as important as the finished piece, and the process of allowing the stain to settle itself and dry however it may fall is equally important. Process is an instrumental component to my paintings, just as much as the final piece. My inspiration comes from many places, but culminates in emotional reactions that I process via the act of painting. While the shapes (eg. angular vs. curved), brushstrokes (eg. choppy vs. smooth), and colour choices (eg. blues and violets vs. oranges and reds) represent particular emotions and meanings to me. I prefer to allow viewers to have their own emotional interactions and create their own meanings. This is one reason that I love abstraction- meanings can be fluid. This said, I may choose colours that I ‘hope’ evoke particular emotions, but I choose not to name individual paintings so as to remove any direct connotations to meaning. At most, I would title a show or collection of works as a whole to indicate some explanation. This would be particularly useful and meaningful in the case of activist-style paintings with which I want to share a general topic, if not precise sentiments.

For the paintings I created within my thesis, I was drawn to the colour red for obvious reasons. It would be the colour of the fresh blood from a road-killed animal. Red is also a colour which generally evokes strong emotions, and often those associated with stress, intensity, anger and shock. These were all emotions that I wished to evoke.

My level of comfort with the materials in my project has been important in dictating how I go about the work and how that informs how I tell others about it. This creates limitations on my methods and what/how I am able to present my message.
I do not wish to use any part of an animal in my work, and this has extended to a discomfort in even photographing the subject. I also feel slightly uncomfortable photographing the stain on the road, but as I am hoping to stimulate discussion through discomfort, perhaps this is necessary in my work and presentation. If I were to limit myself so much, the art would not be created and then necessary discussions may not occur. In final analysis, I have decided to only use the photographic stains for my own reflection, and even then, it is much more about the memory of the encounter than any photographic evidence. It is perhaps then necessary to put forward the art in a way that is the most personally morally sound and to be critically reflective of any concerns.

By using provocative non-representational imagery and large, colour fields in minimal ranges of shades, I hope to grab the audience initially with feelings of unease, tension and questioning. This imagery will evoke the feeling of the subject matter before the audience is fully aware of the subject. As my work is so closely linked to emotions and feelings of personal emotions and emotional reactions, it is important that my paintings move people in their initial interpretation. Does this answer the question of whether it is important to change people’s mind (vs. just forcing them to have to do something that is more environmental without needing to change their opinions)? Emotions come before words, and that is important to my work as well.

Perhaps by tugging at an immediate feeling within the viewer, they will be given a genuine, pure feeling of their reaction to this difficult subject without a preconceived notion or an attempt to turn their heads away. Creating minimalist paintings presents the viewer with the necessity and ability to focus only on the one important aspect of the subject and blurs or removes all other objects and surroundings.

My paintings are non-literal interpretations and emotional responses to my experiences of roadkill research and documentation. Through colour and texture, the paintings imagine not only the marks on the road but through the act of spilling paint and staining canvas, release the
tensions from the subject. Although the act of the animal mark making can never be recreated, it
can be a physical reinterpretation of that moment in time between life and death. The fact that
non-human animals do not ‘speak’ the way that humans do has often been used to discredit their
intelligence and emotional capabilities (Buller, 375). Painting is a visual language, and although
animals may not participate in the practice, this visual method is accessible cross-species.

The images that follow show each of the paintings that I created for this thesis. My
intention is to have the paintings speak for themselves, therefore I will not provide commentary
alongside each piece, but instead will provide a few important thoughts to carry with you as you
view the works.

They are in a variety of sizes. This is to represent the various sizes of individual animals
found deceased on the road. The largest one might suggest a deer, while the smallest might be a
chipmunk or bird; it is up to the viewer to imagine what might have died and left a mark such as
the one depicted. I chose not to make an executive decision as to what species each piece
represents in order to accentuate the fact that, in many cases, we are unable to determine any
defining characteristics of a road-killed individual. Often, they have been run over so many times
that they are an indistinguishable smear on the road. I chose to represent this stage of road-killed
animals in my paintings because I think it is one of the most disturbing aspects of the issue; it is
so far removed from what the animal looked like before death, and shows how forgotten they
have become.

I also chose not to include titles because I wanted to acknowledge that these animals do
not use our method of verbal language or communication. Using purely visual language
acknowledges a cross-species communication. It also attempts to prevent any type of
exclusionary methods that further emphasize the animals as ‘other’.

In observing the following images, please take the time to sit with each painting and take
note of how you feel. Look at the dimensions of the pieces and imagine what animal it might
have been. Have you seen these species in your own journeys? What kind of relationship do you have with these species or individuals, whether direct or parallel? What might their lives look like?
Cranberry, apple and beet juice, acrylic gel medium on primed canvas. 162 cm x 106 cm
Apple and berry juice, acrylic gel medium on raw canvas. 106 cm x 76 cm
Apple and berry juice, acrylic gel medium on raw canvas. 89 cm x 61 cm
Apple and berry juice, acrylic gel medium on raw canvas. 76 cm x 61 cm
Apple, cranberry and beet juice, acrylic gel medium on raw canvas. 50 cm x 45 cm
Apple, cranberry and berry juice on raw canvas. 152 cm x 91 cm
Apple, berry and beet juice, acrylic gel medium on raw canvas. 160 cm x 130 cm
Acrylic paint, acrylic gel medium on primed canvas. 1m x 1.8m
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