

# Witnessing Animal Others: Bearing Witness, Grief, and the Political Function of Emotion

KATHRYN GILLESPIE

*This article theorizes the politics of witnessing and grief in the context of the embodied experience of cows raised for dairy in the Pacific Northwestern United States. Bearing witness to the mundane features of dairy production and their impact on cows' physical and emotional worlds enables us to understand the violence of commodification and the political dimensions of witnessing the suffering of an Other. I argue that greater attention should be paid to the uneven hierarchies of power in the act of bearing witness. Centering the animal as a subject of witnessing allows us to see with particular clarity the ethical ambiguities at work in witnessing while at the same time attending to the importance of witnessing-as-politics. My project here is to lay bare moments of emotional and physical turmoil not seen as such—the lives that are rendered ungrievable—and examine how we can and should respond to them. Thus, this article contributes to feminist conversations about witnessing, grief, and the political function of emotion.*

---

What does it mean to witness, and how does witnessing differ from voyeurism or observation? What are the politics of witnessing in academic research and what responsibility do we have as scholars who witness? What are the complexities and ambivalences of witnessing? How can an acknowledgment of the political function of emotions—like grief—inform the theory and practice of witnessing?

These questions arose as I engaged in nine months of multispecies ethnographic fieldwork on the Pacific Northwestern United States dairy industry, research that illuminated the everyday violence to which nonhuman animals are subjected in food-production. Witnessing has been undertheorized as a method of academic research, and witnessing of the nonhuman condition especially understudied in critical scholarship. Yet witnessing is important for feminist inquiry, in particular, because it has the potential to reveal and document hierarchies of power and inequality that affect the

embodied experiences of marginalized individuals and populations. I argue here that witnessing necessarily entails an emotional engagement and a recognition of the political function of emotion. Indeed, the difference between voyeurism or observation of suffering and witnessing, for instance, is the political motivation and response involved. Voyeurism entails a self-interested mode of seeing, and observation implies an objective, removed, or potentially apolitical viewpoint. Ethnographic method can involve this more observational (sometimes apolitical) approach or it can also be deeply political in nature (Schatz 2009). Political ethnographies can involve witnessing, but they can also dismiss the emotional dimensions of politics that are central to witnessing. Witnessing, as a mode of ethnographic research, requires a political engagement with the subject's embodied experience, and I argue that attention to emotion, feeling with the subject, or what Lori Gruen calls "entangled empathy" (Gruen 2015), is one way of making this act political. In other words, attention to the political function of emotion is one way of distinguishing witnessing as its own unique method of ethnographic scholarship.

My focus here is on witnessing in the context of nonhuman suffering, but this theorization of witnessing is relevant for conversations about witnessing and the political function of emotion more broadly. Animals in the food system are interesting for developing a theory of witnessing because the power imbalance between human and nonhuman animals is so great, as nonhuman animals are fundamentally ownable, commodifiable, and killable in service to human interests. In witnessing animal suffering in the food system, then, even the act of caring deeply for animals becomes a subversive political act of acknowledging an animal's subjectivity and her embodied experience. Because these beings are routinely not seen as grievable in the context of dominant social norms of meat, dairy, and egg consumption (Taylor 2008; Stanescu 2012), witnessing (in contrast to mere observation) involves in this context grieving with and for those animals.

In part, this article responds to the call in feminist scholarship to "write ourselves into the analysis" (Gilgun and McLeod 1999, 185). Though this has been an ongoing project among feminist scholars, Lois Presser argues "that we have not written ourselves in nearly enough" (Presser 2005, 2067). Thus, I have attempted to write myself into the analysis here—both as a witness to other-than-human suffering and as a grieving body. At the same time, I am committed to the posthumanist project of "decentering the human" (Wolfe 2009; Braidotti 2013) and so I have also tried to write the grief of other animals into my analysis. Feminist theorists have developed an extensive literature on the political dimensions of emotion, attending to the particular ways in which emotion and politics are intertwined in both public and private spheres (for example, Jaggar 1989; Ahmed 2004; Butler 2004; 2009; Nussbaum 2013).<sup>1</sup> Following a rich and long-standing "vegetarian ecofeminist" tradition of interrogating relations of power and hierarchy between humans and other animals (for example, Kheel 1985; 1987–88; Adams 1990; Adams and Gruen 2014), my analysis here calls for a greater consideration of the embodied and emotional worlds of other animals as an ongoing project for feminist theorists (Gruen and Weil 2012;

Gruen 2015). In talking about emotion, grief, and empathy, I am drawing from Gruen's concept of entangled empathy, understood as

a type of caring perception focused on attending to another's experience of wellbeing. An experiential process involving a blend of emotion and cognition in which we recognize that we are in relation with others and are called upon to be responsive and responsible in these relationships by attending to another's needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes, and sensitivities. (Gruen 2015, 3)

Bringing together a politics of witnessing and emotion with these multispecies ways of being in the world advances understandings of why and how we might confront other-than-human life and death as a feminist political project.

In what follows, I argue that greater attention should be paid to acts of bearing witness and the complexities of witnessing that involves other-than-human lives. Centering the animal as a subject of witnessing allows us to see with particular clarity the importance of witnessing and the role of emotion in witnessing, as well as the potentially problematic dimensions of witnessing and its power imbalances. As a key dimension of the act of witnessing, I articulate the role of emotion, specifically grief and empathy (both mine as the researcher and the emotional lives of nonhuman animals), in the relationship between witness and witnessed. Thus, this article contributes a multispecies perspective to two key academic conversations: the politics of witnessing, and the political function of emotion through a specific attention to grief. I have chosen to focus my discussion of emotions on grief because that was the predominant emotion I myself experienced and a primary emotion I witnessed in the animals I encountered. My analysis focuses first on the practice of witnessing the nonhuman animal and the emotional toll of this mode of research, followed by an exploration of the politics of bearing witness. Next, I examine the role of grief in the act of witnessing: the grief of other animals and my own grief as the researcher. Finally, I suggest by way of conclusion that witnessing—and its emotional dimensions—in multispecies contexts might inform a radical transformative politics for feminist scholarship.

#### WITNESSING THE ANIMAL OTHER

Witnessing the nonhuman other in spaces of farming is important because animal agriculture is an insidious and hegemonic institution, and the domestication and commodification of farmed animals are social and economic processes deeply implicated in the suffering and appropriation of animal bodies (Gaard 2012; Nibert 2013). The hegemony of animal agriculture creates common-sense narratives that erase the violence of routine industry practice and perpetuate the notion that farming practices, like the production of dairy and eggs, are benign. In fact, violence against the animal is involved in the production of meat, milk, and eggs, and this appropriation is highly gendered (Gruen 1993; Davis 1995; Gaard 2013; Gillespie 2014). In the

dairy industry, for instance, female bovines of reproductive age are routinely artificially inseminated with semen that was forcibly ejaculated from a bull on a breeding farm. After a nine-month gestation period, the cow gives birth to a calf and the calf is removed immediately, generally to be raised for veal. The cow is then moved into the milking herd where she is milked, increasingly by machine, two to three times per day for 300 days out of every year. When she is deemed “spent” by the farmers who extract her reproductive labor for profit, she is sent to slaughter at three to seven years of age (a cow’s natural lifespan is twenty or more years). These cows often appear at auction, some so weak or lame they are barely able to move through the auction pen, and are sold per pound for meat. In addition to this (re)productive trajectory of a cow’s life in the US dairy industry, animals in agriculture are subjected to other routine practices that cause pain: branding, castration, dehorning, and tail-docking, among others. If, instead of accepting the routinization of these practices, we intentionally witness these modes of bodily violence and allow ourselves to empathize with the animals who experience physical pain, loss, and emotional trauma from being farmed and commodified, we might begin to uncover the political dimensions of animal use and the possibilities of witnessing as a political project.

During fieldwork I conducted in 2012 on the lives of cows in the dairy industry in the Pacific Northwestern United States, I sat in the audience at livestock auction yards and watched as animals were auctioned off in rapid succession, their lives blurring through the auction ring as they were commodified for their productive and reproductive potential. At one of these auctions, the sale was delayed and I sat in the bleachers with the other audience members, waiting impatiently. Later, I was told nonchalantly by a woman in the audience that a steer had jumped the fence and escaped from the holding pens behind the auction yard. He ran away, down the country highway, and the auction employees had chased him in pickup trucks and shot and killed him on the side of the road. My eyes welled up with tears and I quickly looked away, self-conscious about the impropriety of grieving for an animal in this space.

The auction began shortly after, and I sat and took notes, watching carefully as each animal passed through the ring. As I watched, I saw cows limping, their bodies worn from intensive milk-production and repeated impregnation. I saw cows and calves auctioned off—some together, and some sold to different buyers as mother and calf called to each other across the auction yard. I saw day-old calves with their umbilical cords still attached stumble through on unsteady legs. I saw cows collapse with exhaustion, too weak to stand. I watched as cows, steers, and calves were auctioned by the pound for meat and per head for dairy-production.

The audience was filled with buyers and spectators talking cheerfully about the animals, prices, their farms and families. For humans who farm and are in the animal product industry, the auction is a jovial place where they can come together for some lighthearted banter and a meal in the auction canteen. The auction is not scripted as a place of human or animal grief. Animals’ lives and bodies in this space are thoroughly commodified, their suffering illegible to the accustomed observer, the violence against them made mundane through its regularity. In acknowledging my own

emotional response of grief in this space, I first began to think about the role of emotion in witnessing. To mourn the animal in that space—the calf smacked in the face with a paddle, the cow and calf calling to each other as they are loaded into different transport trailers, the worn-out cow used for dairy unable to rise from the ground, the steer shot down on the road—reflected a subversive act in a place where the animal was thoroughly ungrieved and abstracted.

#### THE POLITICS OF BEARING WITNESS

Research that witnesses—like sitting in the audience of a farmed-animal auction yard—can be both an intellectual and political project of acknowledgment and protest. Especially as documentation of spaces of animal suffering is silenced through fear and prosecution (Potter 2011), the act of witnessing animals' predicaments, and then sharing their stories, is a political act that resists the erasure of individual animal lives, suffering, and deaths. To participate in the subjugation of the animal and not see it as such is a violence on its own that the act of witnessing aims to work against.

To remain silent is to discount the value of one's own experiences, allowing the media and the historians who may or may not have been there, to interpret these most significant events according to their own agendas . . . . Whether we have experienced lives of privilege or privation, ease or exigency, in the mainstream or on the margins of society, we learn that to tell is to reflect, to interpret, to understand before our voices fade to whispers. We must all bear witness. (Bloom 2009, 14)

But witnessing is more than just watching. Naisargi Dave describes the difference between witnessing and seeing (or voyeurism): “[A] voyeur heightens the affective experience of being alive in his or her own skin (‘I have survived this moment and now I feel euphoric’); in witnessing, by contrast, that skin is shed, so that something in the person ceases to exist after the event is over” (Dave 2014, 440). I read this witnessing as a moment of recognition of the animal subject that attends to the ways in which our conception of ourselves—as observers, consumers, humans—is characterized by grave power imbalances and requires a new understanding of subjectivity that extends beyond the human experience to multispecies lifeworlds. Dave writes that animal activists involved in witnessing describe the “locking of eyes between human and nonhuman, [which] inaugurates a bond demanding from the person a life of responsibility. . . . The moment is uniquely intimate, too, because it expands ordinary understandings of the self and its possible social relations” (434). This moment of locking eyes involves seeing the animal as an embodied individual, rather than as an abstract faceless population, and is integral to the act of witnessing—a Levinasian moment of coming face-to-face that requires a response. As we work to understand and communicate these acts of witnessing, it is important to take seriously our

intimate exchange with the animal as an encounter fraught with complexity and possibility.

Martha Cutter argues that we must do more than merely “inquire, learn and reflect” on violent or oppressive events; “we must also bring experiences into language—we must testify and witness as events of history unfold” (Cutter 2009, 5). She continues: “Like reading practices, storytelling can also become part of the process of witnessing and testimony that partially renovates personal and political histories” (10). Telling the stories of those whose lives often go unremarked is an act of resistance that makes a statement about whose lives matter and have meaning. Powerful discourses operate to convince us of the contrary: religious teachings have been interpreted to claim that animals were put here by “God” to be used by humans, an interpretation that has been challenged by scholars and practitioners of world religions (for example, Kemmerer 2011); scientific research has simultaneously acknowledged other species’ sameness to and difference from humans as it benefits particular scientific agendas (Haraway 1989); and the system of human dominance over animals has been consistently justified and re-entrenched by claims that it is “normal, natural and necessary” (Joy 2011). These discourses operate cross-generationally to create common-sense narratives that are rarely resisted in mainstream dialogues about human–animal relations. Of course, “history is often hegemonic, written by the ‘winners,’ by the dominant society that far too often has control not only of the pen, but also of the paving stones—the building blocks—that compose US history” (Cutter 2009, 11). Indeed, history is written largely by and for (particular) humans, erasing and silencing the social lives and labors of marginalized humans and other species (Hribal 2003). “Yet by testifying to this hegemony and modeling ways of resisting it, [it is possible to foster] a different version of history in which the silences are not so deep and the erasures not so broad—a version of history in which we are all called upon to engage in persuasive acts of witnessing and testifying” (Cutter 2009, 11). Indeed, some scholars have taken up the project of writing animals into history to produce a counter-narrative to the anthropocentrism of most historical accounts (for example, Tortorici and Few 2013).

Bearing witness, then, is importantly about “telling stories of transgression” (Cutter 2009).<sup>2</sup> To bear witness to the plight of animals in the dairy industry and to tell stories that transgress the common perception of dairy-production as benign is to share the plights of those whose lives are otherwise erased. In an act of resisting this erasure, I witnessed a cow’s collapse in the auction ring only to be told later of her death in the rear holding pens. I witnessed cows lying on the ground unable to rise, leaking blood and milk from their udders, saliva foaming at their mouths with the effort of trying to stand. I witnessed a young boy showing a small Jersey heifer at the State Fair’s 4-H dairy show, kissing her face and stroking her ears while he waited—only to have to sell her at the end of the fair. In spaces of commodity-production, I witnessed animals shocked with electric prods, beaten with steel rods, kicked, hit, and yelled at—all mundane features of industry practice. Kelly Oliver writes, “The process of witnessing is both necessary to subjectivity and part of the process of working-through the trauma of oppression necessary to personal and political

transformation" (Oliver 2001, 85). Bearing witness to the plight of other animals is one mechanism through which to bring their suffering into view, and with it, their place in the world as feeling subjects whose objectification devastates their embodied and emotional lives. Indeed, Gruen argues that we are all already entangled in deeply ambivalent relationships of care and power with other species, and that empathizing with other animals is a way to enact a greater ethic of care (Gruen 2015).

Witnessing has a long history of inspiring social change, as witnesses' testimonies have been integral to shaping historical records of trauma, violence, and injustice. In the case of animals and animal advocacy work, witnessing is a frequent motivator for social change and legislative reform. The documentation of animals' experience of the food system or of medical research, for instance, is often obtained through undercover investigations whereby the conditions of animals are recorded, distributed, and sometimes used in prosecuting the targeted institution. These undercover investigations have been important for garnering public support for increased welfare standards and public dialogue about how animals are used.

Even as the act of witnessing has its promises and possibilities as a mode of political transformation, witnessing also has deeply problematic dimensions. Witnessing is often characterized by a profound imbalance in power between "witness" and "witnessed." At the auction, I could shut down my emotional response or turn away from the difficult-to-view animal suffering if it became too much. I had the power to leave the auction yard and return to my life of relative safety and privilege as a human. The animals moving through the auction yard did not have this luxury. Their suffering was not my suffering. I empathized with the animals I encountered, but I did not share their embodied experience, felt so keenly with each prod, kick, and smack from the paddle. Further, my act of witnessing, though motivated primarily by ethical and political concern for improving animals' lives, was also integral to my professional advancement. Witnessing, writing about, and talking about the lives of cows in the dairy industry were key features in the completion of my doctorate, my marketability for academic jobs, and so on.

As a witness in these spaces, I imagined that I would not contribute actively to the violence that was occurring; I would merely watch, take notes and photographs, and bring that information back to use in critiquing the structural conditions that produced this violence to begin with. But because witnessing necessitates emotional and political engagement, this observational role was not possible because of my emotional response and because of the stakes of leaving behind those I witnessed. There are complex ethical and political dimensions of witnessing the suffering of animals, but witnessing can also engender possibility and action. For instance, witnessing can be a moment of feeling with animals, of sharing the emotional burden of their suffering or offering some relief.<sup>3</sup> This feeling with animals can also inspire more direct modes of intervention: removing animals from their conditions of suffering, as in direct action initiatives that release animals from captivity, or individuals who purchase animals in order to let them live in sanctuaries. But more often, witnessing does little for the embodied animals who are the subjects of the witness's gaze. Thus,

although witnessing has the potential to effect future change, it is ethically problematic when those subjects with whom the witness comes face-to-face are left behind.

Clare Hemmings writes, “witnessing has a whiff of innocence about it, one that locates its subject outside rather than caught up in the conditions that make intersubjective recognition impossible in the first place” (Hemmings 2012, 153). In my own research, even as I was engaged in critical examination of the processes under which animals are bred, labor, and die, I also watched and did nothing to change the fates of those hundreds of singular animals passing through the auction yard on their way to slaughter. Further, in the act of witnessing hundreds or thousands of animals, it is difficult not to abstract from the singular, embodied animals. Even as I intentionally tried to meet the gaze of all the cows passing through the auction ring—and to remember them—it was difficult to recall their faces or their unique conditions of embodiment after I left the auction yard. This abstraction and objectification of the cows occurred when I slipped into being an observer rather than a witness. I would like to suggest that there is a relationship between witnessing and emotion-as-politics that strict observation as ethnographic method does not have. Witnessing requires and is enabled by a feeling-with between the witness and witnessed.

#### WITNESSING GRIEF AND GRIEF IN WITNESSING

Witnessing requires a certain level of what Gruen identifies as entangled empathy: shared systems of feeling as an enlarged ethic of care. As I engaged in witnessing, I found that my mode of feeling with other animals was to grieve for and with them. Critical animal studies scholars have theorized Judith Butler’s grievability in multi-species contexts (for example, Taylor 2008; Stanescu 2012). Grieving with other animals is a mechanism through which to honor and make political their embodied experience of the world. Those cows, bulls, steers, and calves whom I grieved and grieved with during my research were the ones whose embodied conditions and stories I remembered and made political through their retelling. In this move, I follow the work of other ecofeminists like Gruen, Greta Gaard, and Josephine Donovan (for example, Donovan 1996; Gaard 2002; and Gruen 2015). This being the case, I advocate here for a consideration of what it means to grieve with other animals as an integral part of bearing witness.

James Stanescu argues that the act of mourning animals—especially those animals used so ubiquitously for food—is a process that is often “completely socially unintelligible” (Stanescu 2012, 568). He writes, “most of us work hard not to mourn. We refuse mourning in order to function, to get by. But that means most of us, even those of us who are absolutely committed to fighting for animals, regularly have to engage in disavowal” (568). Indeed, in order to blend in and function as a researcher in the auction space, I tried to push my grief aside in order to chat casually with the other auction-goers, even as I kept my eyes focused on the animals passing through the ring. I engaged in small talk, I joked and laughed, and I asked questions. I refused to let myself visibly mourn in that space. I told myself I would save it for later. I



could write about my grief, about the animals' suffering, and about the violence of everyday commodity-production. But in that moment, I would not betray my emotions. I would make my expression neutral. I did this because grieving animals was unintelligible at the auction yard, but in so doing, I engaged in a certain level of disavowal.

Grief—and emotion more broadly—is often individualized, characterized as a personal experience, which, if it goes on too long or in nonnormative ways, is pathologized as mental illness (Granek 2014). This individualization of grief also has the effect of depoliticizing the subject being grieved, of making grief the personal problem or failing of the griever instead of acknowledging the ways in which grief signals a political response to broader structural conditions of injustice (Butler 2004; 2009; Granek 2014).

The varied social norms that govern humans' appropriation of animals in the West do important work to depoliticize the violent conversion of living "animal" to consumable "food" (Vialles 1994). This depoliticization, and the accompanying process of making violence against the animal mundane, results in the act of grieving feeling like a personal, individual response. Yet to mourn the unmourned is to make an intentional statement about the violence of species hierarchies. Stanescu writes, "mourning is always a political act. Although it is frequently viewed as a private experience, indeed, an experience that flirts with solipsism, mourning is all about ethical, political, and ontological connections" (Stanescu 2012, 568). Grieving the ungrieved signals to others that the subject in question ought to be grieved; it disrupts the dominant narratives that circulate to reinforce the notion that some lives and deaths simply matter less than others.

Butler's project of centering grief and mourning as politics emphasizes the ways in which grief is mobilized to create hierarchies that dictate "whose lives count as livable and whose lives count as grievable" (Butler 2004). Butler's work is not concerned merely with how we confront loss and death, but with responses to particular conditions that foster injustice and social inequality. Of course, all animals (human and non) live in a certain state of precariousness as we all die, become ill, and suffer at certain points in our lives; however, this precariousness is not evenly distributed across all life. Certain marginalized lives exist in a state of precarity whereby they are unevenly exposed to conditions of risk and violence (Butler 2004). Chloe Taylor reminds us that nonhuman animals are highly vulnerable as they are routinely and uncritically made subjects of extreme violence for food, experimentation, sport, fashion, and entertainment (Taylor 2008).

What I have focused on largely thus far is witnessing that involves grieving for the animals passing through the auction yard. But the other dimension of witnessing—perhaps a deeper and more difficult dimension of witnessing, and what Gruen's notion of entangled empathy helps us to access—is a grieving with or, rather, an attempt to share the other's emotional burden. In order to imagine how we might grieve with other animals as an act of witnessing, it is first necessary to acknowledge and think through some of the complexities of animal grief.

I wrote at the outset that displays of grief were out of place in the auction yard.<sup>4</sup> Human grief was uncommon. Animals' grief was readily visible in that space if you were open to seeing it, expressed, for instance, through the cries and calls between mother and calf. A certain level of acknowledgment of the cow's grief is written into the practices of the dairy industry. At one mid-sized dairy farm in western Washington, I was told by a farmer that it is important to remove the calf immediately after birth to limit the emotional trauma experienced by the cow and calf. As it is, he said, when they remove the calves just hours after birth, the cow bellows for her calf consistently for several weeks. The farmer explained that the longer they allow the cows and calves to remain together, the more bonded they become and the greater the trauma when they are separated. But this brief acknowledgment on the part of farmers of the trauma experienced by animals in the industry is eclipsed by the routine nature of commodification that abstracts from the individual, embodied animal and fuels the increasing efficiency with which the industry operates.

The grief of farmed animal species is a vastly understudied area of scholarship on emotion (King 2013a), though anecdotal accounts of emotion in farmed animal species are plentiful within animal care communities (Masson 2004; Hatkoff 2009). It is not surprising that farmed-animal emotion is not well researched; there are, indeed, potentially profound implications of recognizing emotion in farmed animals. Learning that chickens have been known to die of grief at the loss of a companion, or that farmed animals can help one another heal from past emotional traumas in cross-species relationships of care, may destabilize the socially constructed hierarchies we have created to alienate and appropriate other species for our commercial and consumptive uses.

In other non-farmed animal species, it is now increasingly widely recognized that animals have rich emotional lives. Animals love in intra- and inter-species relations of care. They have a sense of humor and they play (Bekoff 2007); they suffer and they grieve (King 2013b). In 2009, *National Geographic* published a photograph, taken by Monica Szczupider at the Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue Center in Cameroon, of the funeral of Dorothy, a chimp who had died of heart failure (Szczupider 2009). The image shows a man and woman pushing Dorothy's body in a wheel barrow to the site where she will be buried. She is wrapped in a cloth with her head and face left uncovered and visible. The woman in the photograph cradles Dorothy's face in her hands. This scene is witnessed by a group of more than a dozen other chimpanzees looking on from behind a fence. The caption for the photograph describes the chimpanzee residents as "forming a gallery of grief" (Szczupider 2009). This photograph went viral on the internet and can be viewed as a powerful moment of inter- and intra-species grief. The scene is moving because it is not difficult for many humans to relate to this scene of mourning and the funerary practices of watching as our loved ones and our community members are buried, cremated, or otherwise honored in death. We might be moved because of the ritualistic aspect: the viewing of the body, the impending burial, the somber "looking on" as the corpse passes by. But there is also something in the faces of the chimpanzees that we recognize. Those faces, who look not entirely unlike our own, peering through the cables of the fence,

haunt the viewer. Indeed, the editor who chose to feature this image, Susan Welchman, stated, “[The photograph] caught my eye because you just don’t see that much emotion—human emotion—with animals. . . . It couldn’t have been posed or faked; there’s no way to make an animal look or act like that. It’s just so real and true, so pure” (Berlin 2010, n.p.). This statement, of course, reminds us that grief in other species is still overwhelmingly conceptualized as being understood as a human-like emotion, which reproduces anthropocentric notions that humans are the only species experiencing complex emotions.

Public discourses like these treat grief in other animals as exceptional: reserved for certain select species who demonstrate qualities that are more human-like. Elephant grief, for instance, has made it into the public eye because of the likeness of elephant grieving practices to our own. Elephants engage in burial rituals of their dead, they return to the burial site to mourn, and they shed tears as they grieve (Masson and McCarthy 1994; King 2013a). Like the chimpanzees at Sanaga-Yong, images of elephants grieving abound. The image of a baby elephant prodding his mother’s dead body with his trunk or a mother standing over her dead calf evoke grief in the viewer as we witness secondhand the elephants experiencing profound loss (Honeyborne 2013). Discourses about elephant grief show how their grief is recognizable because of its similarity in appearance to human grief: “Allegations that up to ten pygmy elephants were poisoned, perhaps by local farmers, are upsetting—perhaps because elephant emotions seem so like our own, so heartbreakingly close to human sorrow and grief” (Honeyborne 2013, n.p.). Certainly, seeing grief that looks similar to our own can enable us to empathize with other species. Yet it is important not to assess other species’ capacities for grief based on our own experience of grief and what that looks like. Grief may manifest differently in other species—and just because a species does not shed tears or engage in funeral rituals does not mean they do not experience their own devastating form of grief and loss. In fact, recent research suggests that whales and dolphins, for instance, may experience emotions even more intensely than humans, meaning that humans may be able to understand only a fraction of the level of loss and grief they experience (see Blackfish 2013). Just as grieving practices are varied and particular to human contexts, communities, and individuals around the globe, our understanding of grief in other species needs to account for difference and variability. Gruen argues that as we develop the practices of mourning, we should attend to the possibilities of what we can learn from other species’ grieving practices (Gruen 2014, 137).

An impediment to recognizing grief in other species lies in our limited ability to understand how to identify other species’ grief (especially when it does not look like our own) and in human complicity in the conditions that cause this grief in the first place. The preoccupation with charismatic megafauna like the elephant or chimpanzee, and the ability of those in the West to recognize their emotional lives, is at least in part because it is possible to imagine that Western scholars, consumers, and people living in the world are not directly implicated in the suffering of these species. In fact, blame for these species’ suffering is often shifted squarely onto human Others and ecological forces beyond our control (poachers, climate change, and so on)—as

evidenced in the quote above, which blames “local farmers” for the poisoning of the ten pygmy elephants for whom the Western reader of the Daily Mail in the UK can grieve, or the elephants whose deaths were caused by drought. Of course, imagining that readers of *National Geographic* can grieve elephants or chimpanzees without having contributed to their suffering denies the very real ways in which Western industrial society is implicated in the multiple ongoing violences against these lives: consumer-driven climate change and “development” projects that destroy critical habitats; the long and complex history of using chimpanzees for biomedical research; the colonial appropriation of human and nonhuman Others; the global demand for ivory.

To grieve through witnessing those in whose lives and deaths we do not feel implicated is a much simpler task; it requires limited self-reflexiveness or changes in how we live. To grieve the animal Other in a distant place does not require us to grieve the animals with whom we are intimately entangled (the ones we eat, wear, experiment on). Thus, acknowledging the grief of the cow who loses her calves repeatedly in service to the production of milk as a commodity good is a difficult task that may evoke many more emotions than just grief: guilt, shame, denial. In order to grieve these animals in whose lives we are implicated, we might be required to face those complicated emotional experiences and respond. Indeed, Gruen reminds us that “living with other animals requires paying more attention to grief, mourning and maybe shame” (Gruen 2014, 136). As we grieve with other animals—as we feel shame and guilt over our role in their suffering—we can employ the act of witnessing and its entanglement with emotion as a way forward for enacting social change.

#### WITNESSING AND EMOTION AS A TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICS

What is the embodied experience of a dairy cow, and how can we know it? ... If we ... look into her eyes, what can we see?

—Gaard 2013, 609, 613

I met Sadie (a cow formerly used for dairy) at Animal Place in 2012. She had come to the sanctuary after being used first for milk-production on a large-scale dairy farm and then by a university agricultural science program as a teaching tool. By the time she reached the sanctuary, she had experienced the loss of multiple calves (taken as part of routine dairy-industry practice), she had been injured as a result of her use in the teaching program, and she was fearful and distrustful of humans. She was also pregnant. When she gave birth at the sanctuary, the calf was stillborn. For the first time, Sadie was allowed to spend time grooming and caring for her calf, although he was dead. She was given space and time to grieve. And the sanctuary caretakers grieved with her. When she had finished her ritual of tending her dead calf, they buried him at the sanctuary. Following this experience, Sadie became an adoptive mother to orphaned newborn calves who came to the sanctuary. She transformed her grief and loss into a practice of care and love. Shortly after I met Sadie, she died at

Animal Place. The sanctuary community, along with tens of thousands of supporters around the world, mourned her loss.

By contrast, the death of the steer shot down on the road outside the auction yard went largely unremarked. As a mundane and unrieved figure, he was an unfortunate, primarily economic, loss for the auction yard and the seller who brought him to auction, an inconvenience that momentarily stalled the efficient exchange occurring at the auction yard. Bearing witness to, and grieving, his death is an intentional mode of resisting the violence and politics of commodifying life. Allowing Sadie to grieve the death of her calf in her own way, grieving with her for her loss, and then eventually grieving her death are all ways of recognizing that her lived experience and her emotional world had meaning beyond her place in a political economy of commodity-production. Bearing witness to their lives through grieving for them is one mode of transforming emotion into political action. Yet it is possible from varied positions of privilege never to be prompted to action—never to let ourselves feel deeply the consequences of these injustices or inequalities. We grieve what we know and what we care about and what we feel as a loss. Indeed, “grief and loss can be a powerful catalyst toward demanding and instituting positive social change” (Granek 2014, 66).

Donovan writes, “It is not so much. . . a matter of caring for animals as mothers (human and nonhuman) care for their infants as it is one of listening to animals, paying emotional attention, taking seriously—caring about—what they are telling us” (Donovan 2006, 305). In this vein, I argue that turning to grief (caring for other animals and “caring about what they are telling us”) can inform a more deeply nuanced act of bearing witness to animal suffering—one where we grieve with animals as an acknowledgment of the very real ways in which they are communicating their experiences clearly.

Bearing witness to the suffering of other animals—grieving them and taking their grief seriously—enables us to build a transformative politics of shared understanding, care, and nonviolent social relations. The act of witnessing, and the feelings that come with it, become a mode of scholarship that attends to the intimate effects of structural violence. The possibilities emerging from witnessing rely, at least in part, on the recognition and potentialities of emotional connection. In this vein, María Elena García argues, “Grief can heighten these affective possibilities, particularly when the pain is still raw, when the heart is still open. You see and feel during moments of grief in ways that don’t happen later” (García 2015, 170). Even as grief is felt individually, it also connects and creates community with others. Grief—and the longer, ongoing act of mourning—enables one to be in relation with others. Stanescu reminds us that mourning “has all sorts of powers, potentialities, and potencies. Mourning is never just about grief, but it is about celebrations, memories, and stories. Mourning doesn’t just bring with it moments of isolation, it also sets up connections and reaches out for relation” (Stanescu 2012, 580).

As economic logics of efficiency and capital accumulation work hard to discursively and materially erase the lives of nonhuman others, I advocate a counter-narrative that takes into account an understanding—a grieving with—of the suffering

and loss other animals experience as a crucial dimension of witnessing. To be sure, Donovan reminds us,

[u]nderstanding that an animal is in pain or distress—even empathizing or sympathizing with him—doesn’t ensure, however, that the human will act ethically toward the animal. Thus, the originary emotional empathetic response must be supplemented with an ethical and political perspective (acquired through training and education) that enables the human to analyze the situation critically so as to determine who is responsible for the animal suffering and how that suffering may best be alleviated. (Donovan 2006, 322–23)

I argue that this is what witnessing has the potential to accomplish: a mode of making the ethical and political dimensions of animals’ predicaments visible, and thus, actionable.

As a witness, how do we respond when we look into the cow’s eyes and see her grief? To engage in witnessing that grieves with and for other animals is to feel their losses keenly and to acknowledge the ways in which we might be implicated in perpetuating their suffering. But it is not enough merely to feel for or with others as a witness. It is not enough to feel sad or guilty or outraged. In order to politicize these emotional encounters and the possibilities for making other multispecies worlds possible, we also are required to act. Witnessing as a methodological and theoretical intervention, then, requires that scholars do something—whether that is writing, speaking out, teaching about—to politicize hierarchies of power and inequality that work to oppress human and nonhuman others. It is in this emotionally and politically engaged action that witnessing has its transformative potential.

## NOTES

Many thanks to Sally J. Scholz for her keen editorial oversight, to two anonymous reviewers for their invaluable suggestions and critique, and to Katherine Kurtz for her managerial role in bringing this article to publication. I am grateful to María Elena García for her brilliant feedback and support for this article. To Tish Lopez—thank you for your endless hours of conversation and writing about grief, politics, and research practice; for reading and giving me feedback on this article at many stages; and for accompanying me into places I did not want to go. Finally, a moment of recognition, gratitude, and grief for the many animals who labored, lived, and died in the year it took this article to be written and published.

1. Due to space constraints, a fuller discussion of the literature on emotion and politics is beyond the scope of this article. However, key insights from this literature (such as the feminist insights that the personal is political and that emotions inform and are entangled with enactments of political process) form the foundation of my thinking here.

2. It is also important to acknowledge that “the process of representation also carries violence” (Marciniak 2010, 872). Thus, how we tell these stories and the political and

ethical consequences of these tellings for embodied individuals should be subject to constant critical reflection and care.

3. Toronto Pig Save, for example, is an activist group that stands at the entrance to some of Ontario's largest slaughterhouses to bear witness to the trucks full of pigs and other animals being transported to their deaths. In addition to witnessing, they will sometimes give water to the pigs languishing in the hot trucks (Toronto Pig Save 2014).

4. It should be noted that human spectators and workers at the auction yard did not often express grief. This is not to suggest that humans did not feel or experience grief in that space; rather, they did not express it in obvious bodily or verbal ways. Grief, of course, manifests and is expressed in myriad ways, and a more nuanced analysis of whether or how humans felt grief when facing the reality of the auction is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this article.

#### REFERENCES

- Adams, Carol J. 1990. *The sexual politics of meat*. New York: Continuum.
- Adams, Carol J., and Lori Gruen. 2014. *Ecofeminism*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The cultural politics of emotion*. New York: Routledge.
- Bekoff, Marc. 2007. *The emotional lives of animals*. Novato, Calif.: New World Library.
- Berlin, Jeremy. 2010. The story behind National Geographic's viral chimp funeral photo. *Huffington Post*, March 18. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/29/the-story-behind-national\\_n\\_338120.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/29/the-story-behind-national_n_338120.html) (accessed October 27, 2014).
- Blackfish*. 2013. Directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite. Magnolia Pictures.
- Bloom, Lynn Z. 2009. Witnessing. *MELUS* 34 (1): 13–22.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The posthuman*. Malden, Mass.: Polity Press.
- Butler, Judith. 2004. *Precarious life*. London: Verso.
- . 2009. *Frames of war*. London: Verso.
- Cutter, Martha. 2009. Editor's introduction: Witnessing, testifying, and history. *MELUS* 34 (1): 5–11.
- Dave, Naisargi N. 2014. Witness: Humans, animals, and the politics of becoming. *Cultural Anthropology* 29 (3): 433–56.
- Davis, Karen. 1995. Thinking like a chicken. In *Animals and women*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Donovan, Josephine. 1996. Attention to suffering: Sympathy as a basis for ethical treatment of animals. In *Beyond animal rights*, ed. Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams. New York: Continuum.
- . 2006. Feminism and the treatment of animals: From care to dialogue. *Signs* 31 (2): 305–29.
- Gaard, Greta. 2002. Vegetarian ecofeminism. *Frontiers* 23 (3): 117–46.
- . 2012. Speaking of animal bodies. *Hypatia* 27 (3): 520–26.
- . 2013. Toward a feminist postcolonial milk studies. *American Quarterly* 65 (3): 595–618.
- García, María Elena. 2015. Love, death, food and other ghost stories. In *Economies of death*, ed. Patricia J. Lopez and Kathryn A. Gillespie. London: Routledge.

- Gilgun, Jane F., and Laura McLeod. 1999. Gendering violence. *Studies in Symbolic Interactionism* 22: 167–93.
- Gillespie, Kathryn. 2014. Sexualized violence and the gendered commodification of the animal body in Pacific northwest US dairy production. *Gender, Place and Culture* 21 (10): 1321–37.
- Granek, Leeat. 2014. Mourning sicknesses: The politicizations of grief. *Review of General Psychology* 18 (2): 61–68.
- Gruen, Lori. 1993. Dismantling oppression. In *Ecofeminism*, ed. Greta Gaard. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- . 2014. Facing death and practicing grief. In *Ecofeminism*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen. New York: Bloomsbury.
- . 2015. *Entangled empathy: An alternative ethic for our relationships with animals*. New York: Lantern Books.
- Gruen, Lori, and Kari Weil. 2012. Invited symposium: Feminists encountering animals, introduction. *Hypatia* 27 (3): 492–526.
- Hatkoff, Amy. 2009. *The inner world of farm animals*. New York: Stewart, Tabori, and Chang.
- Haraway, Donna. 1989. *Primate visions*. London: Routledge.
- Hemmings, Clare. 2012. Affective solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation. *Feminist Theory* 13 (2): 147–61.
- Honeyborne, James. 2013. Elephants really do grieve like us. *Daily Mail UK*, January 30. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2270977/Elephants-really-grieve-like-They-shed-tears-try-bury-dead-leading-wildlife-film-maker-reveals-animals-like-us.html> (accessed October 27, 2014).
- Hribal, Jason. 2003. “Animals are part of the working class”: A challenge to labor history. *Labor History* 44 (4): 435–53.
- Jaggard, Alison M. 1989. Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology. *Inquiry* 32 (2): 151–76.
- Joy, Melanie. 2011. *Why we love dogs, eat pigs, and wear cows*. Newburyport, Mass.: Conari Press.
- Kemmerer, Lisa. 2011. *Animals and world religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kheel, Marti. 1985. Liberation of nature: A circular affair. *Environmental Ethics* 7 (2): 135–49.
- . 1987–88. Animal liberation is a feminist issue. *New Catalyst Quarterly* 10: 8–9.
- King, Barbara. 2013a. *How animals grieve*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2013b. The expression of grief in monkeys, apes, and other animals. In *The politics of species*, ed. Raymond Corbey and Annette Lanjouw. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Marciniak, Katarzyna. 2010. Pedagogy of anxiety. *Signs* 35 (4): 869–92.
- Masson, Jeffrey Moussaieff, and Susan McCarthy. 1994. *When elephants weep*. London: Cape.
- Masson, Jeffrey Moussaieff. 2004. *The pig who sang to the moon: The emotional world of farm animals*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Nibert, David. 2013. *Animal oppression and human violence*. New York: Columbia University Press.



- Nussbaum, Martha C. 2013. *Political emotions*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Oliver, Kelly. 2001. *Witnessing: Beyond recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Potter, Will. 2011. *Green is the new red*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Presser, Lois. 2005. Negotiating power and narrative in research: Implications for feminist methodology. *Signs* 30 (4): 2067–90.
- Schatz, Edward. 2009. *Political ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stanescu, James. 2012. Species trouble: Judith Butler, mourning, and the precarious lives of animals. *Hypatia* 27 (1): 567–82.
- Szczupider, Monica. 2009. National Geographic visions of Earth. <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/visions-of-earth/visions-earth-2009?image=2#/1109-chimps-714.jpg> (accessed October 27, 2014).
- Taylor, Chloe. 2008. The precarious lives of animals: Butler, Coetzee, and animal ethics. *Philosophy Today* 52 (1): 60–72.
- Toronto Pig Save. 2014. Pig vigil at Fearman's. [http://www.torontopigsave.org/th\\_event/pig-vigil-at-fearmans-3/](http://www.torontopigsave.org/th_event/pig-vigil-at-fearmans-3/) (accessed September 25, 2014).
- Tortorici, Zeb, and Martha Few. 2013. *Centering animals in Latin American history*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Vialles, Noilie. 1994. *Animal to edible*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolfe, Cary. 2009. *What is posthumanism?*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.