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Managing the Borders: Static/Dynamic Nature and the 'Management' of 'Problem' Species

Zoei Sutton  and Nik Taylor

*In the context of animal mass deaths we learn that neither life nor death,
nor connectivity nor kinship, nor earth's own empathy, nor a living
creature's sweet desire to flourish with others is safe. Not safe at all when
the wild monological will goes out to remake the world*

Deborah Bird Rose, *Judas Work: Four Modes of Sorrow*.¹

Introduction

Australia is a culling nation. At the time of writing, for example, a massive '5 Year Action Plan'² is underway that includes the aim of killing 2,000,000 'feral' cats nationwide by 2020 in the name of conservation. Compliance with such undertakings is based, in part, on the idea that the nonhuman animals involved are 'pests', 'dangerous' to existing native flora and fauna, ideas that are routinely expressed (and occasionally contested) in the media. This paper takes the Australian media to be one of the battle zones of the borderlands where 'wild' nonhuman animals and humans potentially meet. Set up by simplistic opposition of good versus bad – 'Australia' vs cats, cats vs 'native species' – such manoeuvres reinscribe notions of human superiority. However, the matter of 'managing' nature is not just a simple 'us vs them' situation. Many nonhuman animals (including 'pet' cats) move in and out of the category of killable, with the deaths of nonhuman animals who are discursively 'massified' (such as 'pests' or 'farmed' animals) less critically questioned compared to those who are constructed as having 'meaningful individual differences'.³ This indicates that particular framings render nonhuman species as either worthy of moral consideration, however limited, and therefore, individual, grievable and non-killable, or unworthy of moral consideration and therefore non-grievable and killable. It is examples of this framing that we consider here in this article, and in doing so we demonstrate that fatal 'management' of other animals is a manifestation of nostalgic nature narratives and human superiority. Thus the borderlands between humans and other animals are constructed and maintained through discursive mechanisms utilised to render nonhuman animals killable.

The project from which this article draws sought broadly to understand the shifting categorizations of free-living nonhuman animals and, specifically, how the print media in Australia reflects and shapes who is made killable and how. In this article we focus on discursive mechanisms used to move nonhuman animals into the

category of killable constructing certain species as risky and in need of fatal 'management'. We discuss the borderland-work that motivates such movement and argue that based on notions of purity that are enacted and utilized by humans, this borderland work serves two main functions. Firstly, it invokes and creates the idea of a utopian 'pure' nature that is static and unchanged, one that we need to kill our way back to. Secondly it encourages the pursuit of an affectively pure human relation to nature that exculpates human guilt and responsibility around colonization, extinction, climate change and pollution when environmental damage done by humans is ignored in favour of that done by 'pest' species. We explore this through a discussion of two case studies of 'managed' species in Australia – 'feral' cats and kangaroos. These species occupy different categories in that cats are 'invasive' and kangaroos are 'native'. As a result, their perceived risk and the (lack of) value given to them as symbols and/or subjects-of-a-life also differ. We include both species in the current discussion as these differences make it abundantly clear that the species 'management' debate in Australia extends much further than a native/invasive dichotomy. Instead, deciding who to kill, and how, is linked to the role of 'media selection'⁴, emotional persuasion, and human egos enamoured of their own ability to create killable beings.

Static Nature and Nostalgic Preservation

Dolly Jørgensen argues that modern conservation efforts are anthropocentric and nostalgic, resting on human designations of what counts as 'degraded' nature and a longing for states of nature from the past.⁵ These narratives of imagined natures are not inherently negative, but as William Cronon highlights any narration of nature is inevitably an exercise of power as the centring of particular voices and events occurs alongside the silencing of others.⁶ According to Sandie Suchet, the 'purification' of nature in Australia rests on particular (Eurocentric) understandings of an 'original' nature, an 'authentic, undomesticated, untamed state' in which biodiversity thrived and cats, foxes, rabbits and other 'introduced' species had not yet been inserted into the environment.⁷ Katherine Wright refers to this understanding as 'static nature', a pristine version of nature that probably never existed, but that is sought nonetheless.⁸ Pursuits of 'static nature' fit within a narrative of restorative nostalgia – a form of nostalgia which seeks to rebuild what is perceived as lost and clings vehemently to the perpetuation of myths in the pursuit of 'total reconstructions of monuments of the past'.⁹ Svetlana Boym highlights that those who engage in perpetuating restorative nostalgia rhetoric 'do not think of themselves as nostalgic; they believe that their project is about truth'.¹⁰ But, as many scholars have argued before us, there is no singular truth in 'management' of species.¹¹ Rather, the categorization of nonhuman animals as native or invasive, belonging or not-belonging, protected or killable depends on the context in which they live and how humans interpret them.¹² These nature narratives perform what Thom Van Dooren refers to as 'a strange kind of 'ethical' work' in the pursuit of 'conservation', as the imagined natures justify and normalise the killing of non-belonging others in their pursuit.¹³ In this article we focus on some of the mechanisms by which these nonhuman animals are constructed as non-belonging and therefore 'killable' – a concept we expand in the following section.

Rendering Nonhuman Animals Killable

In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway advances the argument that ‘there is no way of living that is not also a way of someone, not something, else dying differentially’.¹⁴ Given this inevitability, she argues that there is something to be gained in openly embracing responsible entanglements of killing. It is, she argues, our adherence to rigid ideas such as ‘thou shalt not kill’ that contrarily results in boundary politics as we humans decide who such principles apply to, who counts as an unkillable ‘someone’. It is in this process of negotiation, shifting beings in and out of the firing line, that mass killings – exterminism and genocide – are facilitated by allowing those designated as killable, as ‘other’, to be killed without any real attention given to them. This allows their removal to occur indiscriminately and unchecked. Thus, Haraway concludes, ‘[i]t is not killing that gets us into exterminism but making beings killable’.¹⁵ While Haraway’s work is useful here it is worth noting that her conclusions – for example, that benign instrumental relationships between humans and other animals are possible – are ones we disagree with. Here, we agree with Zipporah’s Weisberg’s critique of the inherent humanism of Haraway.¹⁶ She takes issue with Haraway’s assertion that some instrumental relationships can be non-oppressive (or at least less oppressive than those between humans), instead arguing that ‘as a result of the sado-humanist and techno-capitalist projects, the reduction of other animals to instruments and objects of calculation is inherently interchangeable with their inequality with humans, which is, in turn, inherently interchangeable with their total unfreedom and violation at our hands’.¹⁷

The outcomes of making beings killable are starkly evident in the ‘management’ of free-living species in Australia. Drawing on tropes of a pristine ‘nature’ we fit dingoes with time-activated poison collars and then free them to kill goats.¹⁸ We discuss in self-congratulatory terms the technological ‘marvels’ that allow us to utilize ‘judas’ camels and donkeys, fitting them with tracking collars and exploiting their social natures as they unwittingly lead shooters to feral herds who are then slaughtered en masse.¹⁹ And by doing so, we elide any ethical consideration of the nonhuman animals who lose their lives, or in the case of judas jennies,²⁰ their families and broader herd relationships as they learn to ostracize themselves to protect the herd.²¹

This lack of ethical consideration is facilitated by constructing nonhuman animals’ deaths-through-management as an unproblematic given, employing discursive manoeuvres that serve to create a killable ‘pest’ category that, in turn, underlines human dominance and our ‘rights’ to kill.²² ‘Pest’ species, unlike those killed for their flesh, skin or fur, are socially positioned according to their *disutility* – that is, it is their perceived lack of usefulness (or worse, their harmfulness) that justifies their extermination.²³ This facilitates the perpetration of killing and maiming with little consequence, as painful deaths and injuries are dealt out through aerial culls and poisoning tactics that lessen the burden of killing for humans, at the cost of prolonged suffering for non-human animal victims.²⁴ The null value placed on ‘pest’ species’ lives also

means the validity of justifications for this mass killing is unlikely to be challenged in any meaningful way, so invested entities may quibble over methods or quotas, but rarely the ethics of killing itself or the self-selection of humans as masters of nature.²⁵ As will be seen in the discussion below, the discursive shifting of nonhuman animals into ‘pest’ categories is a curated process but the success with which this is done demonstrates clearly that no nonhuman animals are ever irrevocably included among those we ‘shalt not kill’.

These boundary battles take place for the most part publicly, in the media. Scholars have highlighted the need to take media seriously as an influencing force in attitudes towards, and treatment of all nonhuman animals including those who are free-living.²⁶ Kate Stewart and Matthew Cole, for example, demonstrate how the media was central to the changing status of urban foxes in the UK.²⁷ Usually subjects of protection (discourses), following an alleged attack on two children, urban foxes became cast as ‘killers’ and thus justifiably subject to deadly ‘management’ when they transgressed their usual boundaries.²⁸ Stewart and Cole argue that the media consideration of urban foxes around this incident served to recast them as transgressive and unclean killers, that, in turn, legitimated the human domination of them expressed most completely in their ‘management’ and ‘removal’, i.e. their murder.²⁹ Similarly, Phil Bagust points to the role of the media in determining the fates of koalas on Kangaroo Island.³⁰ A complex web of tensions between scientific pro-cullers and fear of international backlash led to media pressure to halt plans to cull koalas on the island. While the outcome for the koalas in question was not necessarily positive (some farmers opted to kill koalas directly for instance; others were sterilized and relocated), the consternation that arose partly as a result of media coverage is indicative of what Bagust calls the ‘media selection’ of certain nonhuman animals, whose survival is based not on science or fitness, but popularity or the lack thereof.

In the current article we consider how ideas of risks to pure boundaries are used to move two species of nonhuman animals – that figure heavily in Australian media debates about ‘feral’ and ‘pest’ species – cats and kangaroos – into the category of ‘killable.’

Method

This article draws on data from a broader project analysing Australian print media representations of culling nonhuman animals. Using the Australia and New Zealand Newsstream database, we devised search terms that would include species specifically mentioned on government lists of ‘invasive animals’,³¹ as well as broader terms used to indicate nonhuman animals being rendered killable, such as ‘pest’ and ‘cull’ (see [Table 1](#)). We chose to focus on articles published in Australia in the last five years to enable us to identify patterns in attitudes towards, and focus on, particular species at different points in time. Our search terms returned 1796 newspaper articles which we downloaded into an Endnote database. We systematically eliminated duplicates and irrelevant articles (judged to be any that did not mention culling nonhuman animals or were not based in

TABLE 1. Search terms and Sampling

Boolean terms:	cull AND Australia AND (fox OR dingo OR cat OR carp OR kangaroo OR koala OR rabbit OR toad OR camel OR deer OR croc OR goat OR horse OR pig OR buffalo OR corella OR bird OR pest OR "invasive species" OR feral)
Date limit:	1/4/2014-1/4/2019
Language	English
Total articles downloaded:	1796
Minus Duplicates and Irrelevant Articles:	-680
Sample Remaining	1116
Random Sample Coded	600
Minus Second Pass Removals	177
Total coded in sample	423

Australia), leaving us with 1116 articles in the sample. We randomly selected 600 of these to code in NVivo12.

A limitation of the Australia and New Zealand Newsstream database is that newspaper articles do not include extensive bibliographic data. We also found that some articles were reprinted with differing titles which meant that some duplicates made it into the coding sample undetected. We eliminated these as we coded, as well as articles that were found to only mention culling in passing and ended up with a total of 423 coded articles.

Articles were coded for article type (e.g. letter to editor; news story), species (although some mentioned several species and others simply referred to ‘pests’ without specifying species), position on culling (for/anti), method of culling discussed, justification for culling and language used (e.g. emotive versus scientific).³² Findings were then analysed using NVivo12 to generate coding matrices and crosstabs. This paper will discuss findings drawn from those articles relevant to cats (n = 39) and kangaroos (n = 71). In the remainder of the discussion we will specifically draw on the analysis of language themes in order to theorise how and why these particular beings are shifted in and out of ‘killable’ status.

Of Cats and Kangaroos: Tails of Shifting Boundaries

The original database demonstrated that no nonhuman animals are seemingly immune from the human hunger to kill with nonhuman animals as different as crocodiles, sharks, brumbies (Australian ‘feral’ horses), corellas, bats and koalas all being subject to voracious calls to kill. In the current article we focus on cats and kangaroos for the following reasons. They figured prominently in the various media articles giving us a broad array of data to work with. They also have different, sometimes conflicting, symbolism and discourses attached to them, and thus different methods are used to make them killable. For instance, cats in Australia

occupy a myriad of position states, moving in and out of valued 'pet' status depending on the context they are living in. While there is some ambiguity around how cats came to live in Australia, it is generally accepted that they may have journeyed on the ships of Dutch colonisers and were most definitely present in the Australian landscape around the time of European settlement.³³ What we now know as 'feral' cats were sighted from the 1860s onwards, with wild populations tending to appear 10-20 years following the introduction of domestic cats to an area.³⁴ In 1885 in the state of Victoria cats, alongside quolls and goannas, were protected due to their valued status as rabbit hunters (in addition to being ratters and mousers). While this may seem unusual to modern Australians who are used to seeing cats vilified as killers, it is in line with Joan Dunayer's observation that 'pests who kill pestier pests stop being pests'.³⁵ Nowadays, however, free living cats are not granted the same passage out of 'pestdom'. The aforementioned plan to kill 2,000,000 cats by 2020 is very much an accurate indication of their current construction as the main species scapegoated for biodiversity loss regardless of how many 'pestier pests' they kill.³⁶ Alongside these shifting attitudes towards, and treatment of, free living cats, domesticated members of the species continue to occupy the (often) valued position of 'pet' in Australian society.

Kangaroos have an entirely different – though similarly complex – status in Australia to cats. At a simple level this is because they are considered 'native' nonhuman animals, and, as Adrian Franklin reminds us 'if they are from Australia they are natives – different rules apply'.³⁷ Kangaroos might appear to sit comfortably within Franklin's 'native-wild' category, one which demands protection compared to the 'wild-domestic' or 'introduced wild' categories that were/are condemned to 'category annihilation or to individual campaigns of species-cleansing'.³⁸ However, their positioning in society has been complex and changeable in Australia's colonial history, during which they have been (and continue to be) (re)categorised as 'resource' (killed for their meat/fur) and 'pest' animals and treated accordingly. They were, for example, subject to sustainable hunting by Aboriginal peoples for thousands of years, but following the colonization of Australia, over-hunting by British inhabitants saw their numbers dwindle.³⁹ Recreational hunts akin to the fox hunting that were/are common among the upper classes in the UK were evident by the end of the 19th century. By 1880 legislation facilitating the destruction of kangaroos was passed in the Eastern states of Australia and by 1914 at least 640,000 bounties had been paid for their scalps.⁴⁰ Today, the picture is far more complex. Though a protected species to the point that killing them without a permit is illegal,⁴¹ most states and territories in Australia have a strategic management plan that involves killing them in large numbers in order to 'conserve viable kangaroo populations and minimize negative economic, social, and environmental impacts of these populations on grassy ecosystems'.⁴² Additionally, Australia's commercial kangaroo industry saw over 8,500,000 kangaroos killed for the meat and/or skin/fur between 2008-2012, making it the largest wildlife industry in the world.⁴³ Currently in Australia 'harvest' figures from state annual reports for 2018 (that is, the total for commercial harvest areas in NSW, QLD, SA and WA) stand at 1,565,140, up from 1,488,269 in 2017.⁴⁴

For both cats and kangaroos, their categorization as ‘pets’, ‘native’, ‘resource’ or ‘pest’ is not based on any biological quality that renders them inherently suited for particular ‘uses’. Moreover, the discursive shifting of them between these categories has deadly material effects for those positioned as ‘killable’ (‘resource’ or ‘pest’). In the next section we will explore how this discursive shifting was facilitated through the use of ‘risk’ and ‘risk management’ language.

Mechanisms of ‘Making Killable’

The media articles we surveyed demonstrate significant support for the killing of both cats and kangaroos. Media items focusing on cats were overwhelmingly pro-cull (82%) in their stance, with only 5% standing against this idea (the remaining 13% were neutral). The reasons given for this belief in the necessity of killing cats were largely centred on preserving the current state of nature through protecting other nonhuman animals (43%), protecting the environment more broadly (27%) or simply that cats were ‘pests’ (11%). Kangaroos ‘enjoyed’ a more complex status with approximately the same number of calls to kill them (37%) as those against the idea (38%). Environmental protection (26%) was the most common reason given to kill along with the idea that they are a pest species (15%). Interestingly, the welfare of kangaroos themselves was cited as a reason to kill them in 10% of the articles. This notion of risk – to other nonhuman animals, the environment and even themselves – was perpetuated by the use of ‘risky’ discourse that works to shift cats and kangaroos from non-killable categories (‘pet’, ‘native’) to the killable classification of ‘pest’. However, as will be seen in the discussion below, there were key differences in the way ‘risky’ cats and kangaroos were portrayed in the media.

‘Risky’ discourse

The use of ‘risk’ language was a prominent theme in cat-centric articles, with recurring use of emotive language communicating a ‘feral cat as threat’ mythology. Constantly used terms (listed in order of descending frequency) included: threat(ens), killer/kills, hunting, extinct, endangered, problem, pests, control, eradicate, predators, wars, damage, devastating, impact, risk, diminish, genocide. These terms invoke feelings of fear, worry and anger⁴⁵ serving to demarcate these ‘feline killing machines’⁴⁶ from beloved companion cats. For instance:

Feral cats are not just misunderstood moggies, they are the Mr Hydes of the animal kingdom. It takes a very short length of time for a domestic cat (*Felis catus*) to devolve into one of the ultimate killing machines in the animal kingdom.⁴⁷

This passage emphasizes the ‘devolvement’ of these ‘killable’ felines into not just aggression, but prowess in death dealing. The reference to Mr Hyde further underscores this by equating feral cats with the beastly, emphasizing the

need for control and management. Here the use of language to shift cats from 'pet' to 'pest' categories is explicit, obvious from a surface reading of the text. Accompanying this are words scattered through the article to create an atmosphere of risk that underscores the explicit message. Examples of this include 'running rampant'⁴⁸ and 'chewing through'⁴⁹ the country – these words invoke a sense of scale, that is, that cats are everywhere which was a predominant theme in the language itself. Linked to this, these terms invoke a sense of growing urgency and looming threat that begs a response from the reader. Letters to the editor indicate that such a response exists and further reiterate to the reader that general consensus supports this categorization of cats as pests:

The slaughter of our native avian friends cannot be allowed to continue. Feral cats are now responsible for 75 million native species being killed every night (Australian Conservancy) within Australia. Surely our so-called progressive council can eliminate all stray cats from council areas? Council has been very good at getting rid of beloved flying foxes and crocodiles, why not menacing cats and uncontrolled dogs?⁵⁰

Kangaroo-centric articles were less focussed on actively constructing them as 'risky' (as will be discussed further below), however the 'threat' of their presence was still made clear. Pro-cull articles declare that '[w]e are in the midst of a kangaroo plague',⁵¹ pointing to overgrazing and damage to fences and cars as evidence that mass-killing is needed.⁵² While environmental protection was an often-cited reason for culling, this was frequently blurred with protection of agricultural resources as the grass/feed and water framed as impacted by kangaroos' 'path of destruction'⁵³ had often been earmarked for 'farmed' animals.⁵⁴

Risk Management

Not only were kangaroos constructed as 'risky', the 'threat' they posed was stated to be something only humans could neutralize:

The kangaroo has no real natural predator, with nature's only real control being disease, drought or fire. So it falls to human measures. And that means a rifle.⁵⁵

This management was the focus of most of the pro-cull kangaroo-centric articles, introducing the 'risk management' discourse used to render species 'killable'. 'Risk management' discourse shifts the focus of discussion from constructing nonhuman animals as risk, to the technical aspects of managing this 'threat'. Commonly employed terminology included: management, shooting/shooters, control, meat, harvest. For example:

Last year's was the biggest cull since 2011, with 1989 animals shot and another 800 pouch young killed. Each year since 1997, the government has also issued licences to allow kangaroos on rural

land to be culled. In 2015, 80 rural properties were licensed to cull 20,722 kangaroos. They reported shooting 11,130. It was the biggest number to date.⁵⁶

These ‘management solutions’ were discussed using technical terminology, rather than emotive language, e.g. ‘cull-and-bury kangaroo destruction programs’.⁵⁷ They also promoted the ‘use’ of deceased kangaroo bodies for meat, declaring the non-use of ‘pest’ bodies a wasted ‘resource’.⁵⁸

While in some respects cats’ deaths were treated with the same resigned inevitability, ‘they either go to sleep or we shoot them’,⁵⁹ the bulk of cat-centric articles were focussed on the active construction of feral-cats-as-threat. Nevertheless, risk management language was still present, for instance, ‘[a] protracted program of shooting, trapping and gassing culminated in 2001 with the complete removal of cats.’⁶⁰ Others informed the reader that it was necessary to ‘[l]et army handle [the] feral catastrophe’⁶¹ Interestingly, cat-centric risk management discourse tended to be focussed on future tense, rather than focussing on past reports of management like the shooting program mentioned above. This differed from kangaroo-centric articles which used a combination of past, present and future tense, demonstrating little hesitation in acknowledging existing kill-efforts.

Boundary work and species ‘management’

The above findings highlight that the use of ‘risky’ discourse – both constructing nonhuman animals as ‘active’ risks and ‘managed’ risks – is employed to shift previously non-killable beings (pets and ‘native’ icons) to the killable ‘pest’ classification. This discursive shifting of nonhuman animals through categories demonstrates what David Altheide refers to as the ‘meaning career’ of problems.⁶² That is, when reporting of events deemed problems routinely emphasizes particular aspects (e.g., risk/danger), The associated emotions become part of the meaning of the problem. In short, regularly emphasizing the ‘threat’ of free-living cats and kangaroos creates the affective atmosphere required to deem them ‘killable’ and act accordingly. While both species were rendered killable in these discourses, there are differences in the way this was approached. Kangaroos – despite the higher proportion of anti-cull articles – are more likely to be framed as if they are already accepted as killable ‘pests’, with only the technical method of their slaughter noteworthy for discussion. Much more discursive work went into constructing ‘feral’ cats as active threats. While cats *are* currently being culled, they are written about as if this decision has not yet been made – an indication that the reader must be persuaded.

This difference could be attributed to the massification (or lack thereof) attributed to their previous classifications (‘pet’/free living native animal). Much work was done to ‘massify’ cats and once this was achieved much less work was done to neutralize any potential human burdens shouldered regarding killing them. Kangaroos, on the other hand, saw little work done in order

to deindividualize and massify them, yet kangaroo killing was the focus of various neutralization techniques.⁶³ Their prior massification as ‘free-living native animal’ might explain this somewhat – there is simply less discursive work to be done in shifting nonhuman animals from one ‘massified’ category to another as they are viewed as individuals in neither group.⁶⁴ Cats, on the other hand, are highly individualized as ‘pets’, and thus must be de-individualized and disentangled from framings as ‘cute’ and ‘loving’ in order to be objectified and categorized as ‘pests’.⁶⁵

Cole and Stewart highlight that those ascribed ‘pest’ status are likely the most objectified and least sensible⁶⁶ of any nonhuman animal, meaning that the lived experiences of ‘pests’ are rarely depicted or considered.⁶⁷ It is unsurprising, then, that the methods of ‘management’ employed to kill these nonhuman animals en masse (with little regard for suffering) – poisoning, hunting, aerial culls – are specific to the disposal of ‘pests’, whose value is null once they are demonstrably a threat to, and existing outside of, human control. When nonhuman animals transgress the artificial boundaries we have instituted they pay a price. These transgressions may be physical such as moving on to farmers’ properties to destroy crops for instance. They may also be symbolic such as moving from loving companion to native-species killer. Such boundaries are not fixed but, as we have seen in the above examples, require work, require public *labour*, in order to be maintained. The work involved in policing these boundary crossings are most clearly seen when ‘pure categories’⁶⁸ are threatened. At these rupture points various techniques are employed to restore boundaries as when potential companion nonhuman animals are crudely cast as ‘feral’, a maneuver that indicates a lack of belonging⁶⁹ and invites disgust.⁷⁰ As Carol Thompson argues the use of the term ‘feral’ ‘imposes an outlaw status upon cats because it dramatizes the fact that such cats are outside the control and domination of humans’.⁷¹ This is in line with Stewart and Cole’s findings that ‘the physical threat of foxes is not problematic without the discursive foundations of their initial transgressive behaviour bringing their threat into an ‘inappropriate space’’.⁷² The devaluation of nonhuman animals through the negative language of risk then positions them as a ‘problem’ in need of purifying,⁷³ with risk management discourses serving to reassure the consumers of these messages that a ‘solution’ has been found.

Largely absent, though ever present by inference, in these discourses is the categorization of human animals in relation to those devalued as ‘pests’. For to make nonhuman animals ‘killable’ implies that there are bodies at the ready to enact the death dealing. As Suchet states, ‘[b]eing in the position of overlord allows humans to impose practices of intervention such as domination and management’.⁷⁴ The maintenance of boundaries around cats and kangaroos to render their deaths both inevitable and unnoteworthy serves to legitimize another identity position for those who fatally ‘manage’ massified nonhuman animals – that of the ‘ethical land manager’⁷⁵ – through purification of nature. These discursive mechanisms, then, serve to construct and maintain borderlands between humans and other animals, elevating humans

as ‘overlords’ whose death dealing is neutralized as ‘management’ of the beings who are othered as killable. This, then, returns the discussion to the nature narratives driving this fatal management of species.

Killing Our Way Back to ‘Pure’ Nature?

As Deborah Bird Rose states in the quote that opens this article, nothing is safe ‘when the wild monological will goes out to remake the world’.⁷⁶ The monological self is characterized by a narcissistic relation to the world as a resource for self-promotion, while all else (and everyone else) is an obstacle and must be ‘transformed into use or eradicated’.⁷⁷ The ‘wild’, then, is characterized by ‘disconnection and catastrophe’⁷⁸ as Eurocentric ‘management’ exploits or eradicates all that does not serve the narrative of ‘wilderness as sanctuary, wildlife as sacred, wild human as noble savage—or tame and domesticate wild, wilderness, wildlife, wild human in the name of civilization and progress’.⁷⁹ Seen through Boym’s restorative nostalgia, culling appears to be a ‘cure that is also a poison’.⁸⁰ That is, killing nonhuman animals in the name of ‘saving’ the environment perpetuates the same narratives of human mastery and purifiable nature that led to many environmental problems in the first place. It is a fix that furthers the ailment. The question, then, is why these nature narratives persist. Print media narratives of the ‘feral’, the ‘pest’ – nonhuman animals who are chewing up the environment (literally) – perform useful ‘ethical work’⁸¹ for those who favour killing other species designated as pests in that they create nonhuman scapegoats for environmental destruction and absolving humans of their own role in this degradation. Linked to this is the perpetuation of narratives that frame the environment and nonhuman animals within in it as resources, the consumption of whom (by ‘pests’) is then cast as the most significant threat to the survival of biodiversity. This sees ‘killable pests’ murdered with added vigour, their deaths justified as ‘redemptive violence’⁸² in which humans may reach absolution for their environmental sins if they can kill enough ‘pests’ to ‘solve’ the problems we have created. Pushing these ‘pest narratives’ to the fore, then, also serves to invisibilize the human-caused sixth mass extinction and render any attempts to address the threat of humans both unnecessary and misplaced.⁸³ In short, making other species ‘killable’ doesn’t just let ‘us’ off the hook for environmental degradation, it valorizes humans as heroes defending nature against the villainous ‘pest’ species who threaten it.

Moving beyond the nostalgic narratives of ‘static’ nature opens up the possibilities of embracing other ‘truths’ or ways of understanding and relating to nature that may provide less oppressive ways forward.⁸⁴ For Wright, an alternative way forward lies in embracing a dynamic understanding of nature in which ‘there can be no simple or comprehensive directives for how humans should interact with their environments’.⁸⁵ By troubling the oft-unchallengeable narratives of killing for conservation, we can move away from culling practices which have been contested as not only inhumane⁸⁶ and ineffective at protecting biodiversity,⁸⁷ but often harmful to it.⁸⁸

Conclusion

In this article we have outlined two of the discursive mechanisms by which free-living species are rendered killable in the Australian print media. In doing so we have highlighted that environmental ‘management’ practices can be seen as an example of boundary maintenance to preserve and pursue a nostalgic ideal of pure ‘static’ nature, and that human engagement with the ‘past’ of ‘original nature’ can often be selective. The mass culling of kangaroos, for instance, indicates that the native/non-native dichotomy often appealed to has little bearing on the killability of nonhuman animals unless it is being selectively employed to further the myth of ‘risky ferals’. In highlighting the shifting of species between categories – from ‘pet’ or ‘wild non-carnivore’ to ‘pest’, from ‘pest’ to ‘meat’ – we have demonstrated that these categories have less to do with the nonhuman animals themselves and rely more on human social constructions fuelled by purity narratives.⁸⁹ This, then, implies that it is not nature itself that needs to change, but human, Eurocentric relations that rest on ideas of mastery and control to it.⁹⁰ In other words, westernized humans embroiled in capitalist relations with the world and other species in it are the drivers of the wild monological. Our will is remaking the world to ruin. Acknowledging this might allow us to abandon the discourses of purity and control that wed us inextricably to notions of killing-as-management. In turn this then makes room for us to instead consider what embracing the idea of a nature and ‘the past’ as an ‘ongoing, affective presence which is lived and performed’⁹¹ might look like.

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Notes

¹ Rose, “Judas Work,” 66.

² Australian Government, “Threatened Species Strategy Summary.”

³ Stewart & Cole, “Creation of a Killer Species,” 131.

⁴ Bagust, “South Australian Koala Wars.”

⁵ Jørgensen, “Recovering Lost Species.”

⁶ Cronon, “A Place for Stories.”

⁷ Suchet, “Totally Wild?,” 146.

⁸ Wright, “Ethic of Ecological Remembrance.”

⁹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Lorimer, “Wildlife in the Anthropocene”.

¹² Bocci, “Tangles of Care”; Clark, “Uncharismatic Invasives”; Helmreich, “How Scientists Think”; Jørgensen, “Recovering Lost Species”; Van Dooren, “Invasive Species in Penguin Worlds,”

¹³ Van Dooren, “Invasive Species in Penguin Worlds,” 290.

¹⁴ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 80.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Weisberg, “Broken Promises,”

¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 29-30.

¹⁸ Schwartz, Dominique. “Death row dingoes set to be the environmental saviour,” *ABC News*, July 23, 2016. Accessed August 27, 2019. <https://www.abc.net.au/>

news/2016-07-23/dingoes-set-to-become-pelorus-island-environmental-saviour/7652424.

¹⁹ For further discussion on how animals' sociability is used against them see Giraud & Hollin, "Laboratory beagles and affective utopia,"

²⁰ Female donkeys, chosen for the task due to their high sociability which often sees them seeking out the company of wild herds following each slaughter.

²¹ Bough, "Reflecting on Donkeys"; Rose, "Judas Work,"

²² Clark, "Uncharismatic Invasives"; Van Dooren, "Invasive Species in Penguin Worlds,"

²³ Cole & Stewart, *Our Children and Other Animals*; Stewart & Cole, "Creation of a Killer Species"; Wright, "Ethic of Ecological Remembrance,"

²⁴ Holm, "Consider the Possum,"

²⁵ Van Dooren, "Invasive Species in Penguin Worlds,"

²⁶ Bagust, "South Australian Koala Wars"; Molloy, *Popular Media and Animals*; Stewart & Cole, "Creation of a Killer Species"; Wright, "Ethic of Ecological Remembrance,"

²⁷ Stewart & Cole, "Creation of a Killer Species,"

²⁸ For further discussion on the 'fox attack' story and how this pertains to boundary breaching, see Cassidy & Mills, "Fox tots attack shock,"

²⁹ Stewart & Cole, "Creation of a Killer Species,"

³⁰ Bagust, "South Australian Koala Wars,"

³¹ <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia>

³² Articles using persuasive language encouraging a particular emotional response were coded as emotive. Those that did not were coded as 'neutral'. Articles that used scientific data/terminology were coded as scientific.

³³ Abbott, "Origin and Spread of the Cat,"

³⁴ Abbott, "The Spread of the Cat,"

³⁵ Dunayer, *Animal Equality*.

³⁶ Caulfield, *Animals in Australia*; Probyn-Rapsey, "Australia's War on Feral Cats,"

³⁷ Franklin *Animal Nation*, 146.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁹ Boom et al, "Pest' and Resource."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Mehmet & Simmons, "Kangaroo Court?."

⁴² McKinnon et al, "Media Coverage of Lethal Control,"

⁴³ Mehmet & Simmons, "Kangaroo Court?."

⁴⁴ Australian Government Department of Environment and Energy, "Macropod quotas and harvest,"

⁴⁵ Turner, "Emotion in Persuasion and Risk Communication,"

⁴⁶ John Rankine, "Feline Killing Machines can be Controlled Humanely," *The Age*, August 27 2015.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ James Taylor, "Feral Cats Threatening Native Animals, Pets," *Southern Courier*, June 30 2015.

⁴⁹ Robyn Wuth, "Adorable Bilby Triplets Melting Hearts," *Guardian News*, January 13 2019.

⁵⁰ Letter to the Editor, *The Cairns Post*, May 17, 2014. These statistics are often used, yet hard to corroborate due to the way they are reported in the media. For an example of the kind of information circulating regarding these numbers, see - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-13/greg-hunt-feral-cat-native-animals-factcheck/5858282>

⁵¹ Ed Gannon, "Kanga Cull a Tough Choice," *Herald Sun*, April 5 2018.

⁵² *Ibid.*; Erin Jones, "Roo Cull Call as Mobs Rule," *The Advertiser*, November 21 2018; Peter Kostos, "Friend or Foe?," *Stock and Land*, November 16 2017

⁵³ Erin Jones, "Roo Cull Call as Mobs Rule," *The Advertiser*, November 21 2018.

⁵⁴ Ed Gannon, "Kanga Cull a Tough Choice," *Herald Sun*, April 5 2018.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Kirsten Lawson, "Push for annual culling to protect ACT grasslands," *The Canberra Times*, February 9, 2017.

⁵⁷ Michael Delahunty, "Food Resource Wasted," *The Weekly Times*, April 4 2018.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Caroline Zielinski, "Millions of Feral Cats to be Culled," *The Examiner*, January 23 2016.

⁶⁰ Philip Barnaart, Letter to the Editor, *The Canberra Times*, January 24 2017

⁶¹ "Let army handle feral catastrophe," *Courier Mail*, October 22 2014; Des Houghton, "Army May be Asked to Shoot Super Cats," *Townsville Bulletin*, October 20 2014.

⁶² Altheide, "Transforming Terrorist Attacks into Control and Consumption,"

⁶³ Sykes & Matza, *Techniques of Neutralization*.

⁶⁴ Stewart & Cole, "Creation of a Killer Species,"

⁶⁵ The use of these (and similar) discursive mechanisms to move nonhuman animals out of 'pest' categorisation is also important to note but is outside the scope of the current discussion.

- ⁶⁶ Sensibility is described as the extent to which the lived reality of a nonhuman animal is visible or knowable – either through accurate representations or direct experiences.
- ⁶⁷ Cole & Stewart, *Our Children and Other Animals*; Stewart & Cole, “Creation of a Killer Species.”
- ⁶⁸ Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*.
- ⁶⁹ Lien, Marianne. “‘King of Fish’ or ‘Feral Peril’” Tasmanian Atlantic Salmon and the Politics of Belonging.”
- ⁷⁰ Gressier, Catie. “Going Feral: Wild Meat Consumption and the Uncanny in Melbourne, Australia.”
- ⁷¹ Thompson, “The Contested Meaning and Place of Feral Cats,” 84.
- ⁷² Stewart & Cole, “Creation of a Killer Species,” 131.
- ⁷³ Wright, “Ethic of Ecological Remembrance,”
- ⁷⁴ Suchet, “Totally Wild?,” 147.
- ⁷⁵ Author Unknown, Letter to the Editor, *YASS tribune*, December 19, 2018.
- ⁷⁶ Rose, “Judas Work,” 66.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ Suchet, “Totally Wild?,” 146.
- ⁸⁰ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 38.
- ⁸¹ Van Dooren, “Invasive Species in Penguin Worlds,”
- ⁸² Wright, “Ethic of Ecological Remembrance,”
- ⁸³ Ceballos et al, ‘Biological Annihilation’; Doherty et al, “Conservation or Politics?,”
- ⁸⁴ Suchet, “Totally Wild?”; Wright, “Ethic of Ecological Remembrance,”
- ⁸⁵ Wright, “Ethic of Ecological Remembrance,” Section 6, Paragraph 6.
- ⁸⁶ Dunayer, *Animal Equality*; Wright, “Ethic of Ecological Remembrance,”
- ⁸⁷ Bergstrom et al, “Indirect Effects of Invasive Species”; Ewel & Putz, “A Place for Alien Species”; Forsyth & Reddiex, “Control of Pest Mammals,”
- ⁸⁸ See for examples of unintentional poisoning of protected or privileged species in the pursuit of ‘pest’ management: Eason et al, “Alternatives to brodifacoum and 1080,”
- ⁸⁹ Cole & Stewart, *Our Children and Other Animals*.
- ⁹⁰ Suchet, “Totally Wild?,”
- ⁹¹ Wright, “Ethic of Ecological Remembrance,”

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