



# 'Road Trippin': Twentieth-Century American Road Narratives and Petrocultures from *On The Road* to *The Road*

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"'Road Trippin': Twentieth-Century American Road Narratives and Petrocultures from *On The Road* to *The Road*" examines late-twentieth century U.S. road narratives in an effort to trace the development of American petrocultures geographically and culturally in the decades after World War II. The highway stories that gain popularity throughout the era trace not simply how Americans utilize oil, but how the postwar American oil ethos in literature, film, and music acts upon and shapes human interiority and vice versa. Roads and highways frame my critique because they are at once networks of commerce transportation *and* producers of a unique, romantic national mythos that impacts American literary and extra-literary textuality throughout the late-twentieth century. My methodology draws on literary, environmental, and material culture studies, but rather than dwell on the

substance itself, the project traces oil's presence in the aesthetic stuff of our lives: the novels, films, television shows, popular songs, and memoirs that structure conceptions of individualism, freedom, mobility, race, gender, and sexuality. In doing so, I rely heavily upon interdisciplinary lenses derived from literary, film, and affect theories. Petroaffect, or the ways in which oil and oil culture shape and reshape human interiority, reveals how people are in a sense manufactured by oil as psychological or even spiritual beings. Tracing petroculture's trajectory throughout late-twentieth century road narratives—road novels, outlaw trucker movies, popular music, memoir, and apocalyptic fictions—demonstrates that oil's material, ideological, and environmental effects and affects are vital to the formation of the petromodern American.

Scott Obernesser received his PhD in English Literature from the University of Mississippi, specializing in Environmental and Southern Literatures. Scott is currently a visiting lecturer at the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at JGU Mainz.