



Roadkill Encounters and Affective Solidarity: Exploring Multispecies Fellowship through Disgust, Pain, and Mourning

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ABSTRACT This article examines visual images of roadkill and the bodily affects they invoke. Exploring specifically the affects of grief, disgust, and pain, I suggest they are important modalities in the act of mourning the unmourned, changing the perception of roadkill as merely collateral damage. I explore encounters with roadkill through an analysis of photographs by Steve Baker (2011) which capture animals' corpses on country lanes in the UK. Drawing on a multidisciplinary apparatus, I utilise various tools from affect theory and photography in social and cultural studies. I demonstrate how affective encounters offer an intervention into the prevalent unconcern and indifference to nonhuman suffering and ecological damage – a dynamic of address and rejection that enables possibilities of solidarity and creaturely fellowship.

KEYWORDS grief, affect, pain, disgust, creaturely poetics, photography, automobility

Introduction

In their book *Hope Against Hope: Writings on Ecological Crisis*, the transnational research group Out of the Woods Collective (2020) argue that grief can be an immobilising component when grasping the cascading scales of the destruction of climate change. As they suggest, “the realisation that people, creatures, and entire ecosystems have died, and will continue to die does not immediately lead to determination, but melancholia” (OTW 2020: 2). This article examines experiences of melancholia, grief, despondency, pain, and disgust in response to nonhuman death. I invite the question of how addressing nonhuman death, in this case roadkill, offers an insight into concerns of climate justice more broadly through examining how road and automobility infrastructure directly impacts nonhuman animals.

Specifically, I suggest how certain affects can lead to political and ethical calls for resistance against nonhuman suffering and ultimately ecological crisis. For the Out of the Woods Collective, ecological damage and the death of other species is about attuning our senses to the microscopic, as well as the grand scales of destruction. As they argue, “to really grapple with the scale of destruction involves attending to the slower, less eye-catching processes: the pollution and erosion of the soil; the feeling of forests that bind them together; the extinctions of creatures that feed on and were fed by the Earth” (OTW 2020: 2).

In this article, I address what is considered “the less eye-catching processes”, turning to incidents of roadkill captured on country lanes in the United Kingdom. Unlike previous analysis within the sociology of emotions, explored by Jan E. Stets, I focus on non-anthropocentric modes of grief and feeling. My methodology is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on cultural studies, affect theory, and sociological perspectives and applying these multidisciplinary conceptual tools to analyse the photography of roadkill. Like Gillian Rose’s approach in *Visual Methodologies*, I explore concepts of visibility referring to how “vision is constructed in various ways [...] noting] how what is seen and how it is seen is culturally constructed” (2001: 3). Rose emphasises the act of unseeing, and like the later work of Judith Butler (2020), she is concerned with what is left out of the visual frame or left to the margins and the periphery. I similarly draw on various cultural and sociological perspectives to analyse roadkill images as a way of illustrating what goes unnoticed.

This article intends to bring nonhuman death into dialogue with the impending demands for climate justice, addressing how they are interrelated concerns and thus highlighting a convergence between environmental justice and animal ethics. The expanding energy infrastructure of roads and increasing automobility has consequences rarely interrogated or challenged. I focus specifically on roadkill images as they illuminate how automobile and energy infrastructure has direct consequences on nonhuman life. By having roadkill as the visual source material, I begin to illuminate how fossil capital and its infrastructure, what has been termed energy culture, has ramifications on the lives of nonhuman species. It is also important to note that the images of roadkill I focus on are non-domestic animals, certain species which fall out of the frame of significance, animals which are not considered companions or pets, whose deaths are thus deemed insignificant due to established hierarchical divisions. My intention is thus to frame a discussion between animal studies and energy culture, addressing who and what is often wiped out from consciousness and discussions within both of these academic fields.

Exploring Steve Baker’s (2012) images of roadkill, while attuning to the affects they evoke, opens space for attending to feeling and emotion that do not turn away from the consequences of a world dominated by the automobile. Through exploring affective approaches to images of roadkill, I suggest why affect is important in providing a disruptive antidote to anthropocentrism. I focus on the photographs, their orchestration and composition, and the bodily affects they may produce – I thus combine visual analysis with affect theory, the act of visual creation and the viewer’s bodily response. My specific intervention into the visual analysis of Baker’s photography examines the affects of grief, pain, and disgust in response to these images of roadkill, and what feelings and possible affects they enable. Like Jane Desmond, I look to “what it may take to move these roadkilled bodies from the status of unmourned to mourned” (2016: 141). Moreover, I also examine why we may feel revulsion and disgust in response to such images. By drawing connections between grief, disgust, and pain, this article illuminates the contradictory processes of rejection and address, and how they may inspire a movement towards fellowship, a process of mourning the unmourned, or, conversely, simply a rejection of kinship and recognition.

Conceptually I draw on the burgeoning scholarship on the role of emotions and affect in everyday social practices and institutions (Ahmed 2004; Ngai 2005). Jan E. Stet and

Jonathan Turner have explored how unruly emotions are socially shaped, foregrounding the role of relations in the experience of grief (Stet 2006; Turner 2006). In the *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*, Stet and Turner (2006) argue that grief can often lead to movement and action; in the case of climate destruction and the loss of a place, one is motivated by environmentalism. Sociologist Nina R. Jakoby argues that grief is a social emotion which she analyses through a cognitive-structural model. In contrast, my work moves into the domain of cultural studies, affect, theory, and how these responses from grief, disgust, and pain, are explored in the encounter with images of roadkill.

Sara Ahmed (2004) has focused on the relation between emotions, language, and bodies in everyday encounters – why we feel certain responses to different events or tragedies and, conversely, turn away from others. The study of emotions and affects has significant implications for addressing the climate crisis, the infrastructure of automobility, and multispecies encounters. Pointedly, Ahmed asks the question of how we might come to feel that which we cannot know? Being able to be affected by or recognise nonhuman suffering, or the violence enacted against the environment, is a challenge of attuning our senses and emotions towards forms of violence that are often not considered violence at all. For environmental humanities scholar Rob Nixon (2011), the challenge is capturing and representing what he terms “slow violence”, which often slips from media attention. In order to engage and attend to the effects of a modernity heavily invested in and reliant upon fossil fuel transport and road infrastructure, this article explores the impact of this infrastructure on nonhuman life and the affective encounter that may follow.

Empirically, the article draws on images of animal road deaths captured in photographic series *Roadside* (Baker 2012) that was displayed in Germany, Australia, and the UK, and discussed by Julia Schlosser (2012). The photographs record the animal bodies killed by collisions with automobiles, presenting traces of bodily remains and combining them with images of the surrounding landscape. Photography has long been used in social and cultural analysis (Berger 1980; Butler 2009; Brown and Phu 2014). For Brown and Phu, “photography excites a spectrum of feelings: faced with a violent image, you may respond with both horror and pity” (2014: 1). This spectrum of feelings is ignited by the spectator’s interaction with Baker’s photographs. Paying particular attention to grief, disgust, and “the contingency of pain” (Ahmed 2004), I argue that Baker’s artistic practice can make space for a non-anthropocentric mourning and a sense of what animal studies scholar Anat Pick (2011) describes as a creaturely fellowship by reframing roadkill as something which should be attended to and addressed. Baker in his own scholarship invites the question: “what happens when artist and animal are brought into juxtaposition in the context of contemporary art?” (2013: 3). In my analysis of Baker’s photography I explicitly explore the human and nonhuman encounter, the interplay between artist, subject, and viewer.

I argue that the affective registers incited by Baker’s images open up the possibility of recognising a creaturely poetics, a non-anthropocentric ethics and aesthetics. Pick’s emphasis on the communicative pressures of vulnerability, of “tracing the logic of flesh in examples across image and text” (2011: 6), provides an important modality in my understanding of affect and its ethical and political potential in Baker’s work. Examining the affects of grief, disgust, and pain with Pick’s creaturely poetics reveals

a mode of non-anthropocentric feeling, an encounter with the “flesh and blood vulnerability of beings” (2011: 3). Like Alexander Koelle, I look to roadkill specifically in order to take seriously this form of animal death and contend with the ways bodily affects can offer non-anthropocentric perspectives. As Koelle describes, “Roadkill is an abject topic; affect theory helps one take it seriously” (Koelle 2017: 653). The subject matter of roadkill is chosen due to the perceived neutrality of this type of violence, and by magnifying roadkill through visual art it becomes an affective subject, leading to a process of reframing and engagement.

The article is structured according to the different affects Baker’s images often induce. First, I explore the sociality of grief, how such images draw attention to what is often forgotten and elided, bodies that are not mourned. Second, I move towards the dimensions of disgust evoked through the images, drawing on Ahmed’s and Sianne Ngai’s (2005) critical engagement with disgust, and third I explore the possibilities of pain, inspired by Ahmed’s conception of the sociality of pain. I show that these affects are connected in a dynamic that shifts between address and rejection that can help reconceive nonhuman death as something worthy of attention. In the conclusion I discuss the implications of the affective multispecies encounter in Baker’s photography for a creaturely poetics and their importance in generating political resistance to nonhuman suffering and environmental injustice.

The Sociality of Grief

When encountering roadkill, there is often an absence of recognition of a loss of life. Grief is consequently absent or denied. The corpse is perceived through peripheral vision within the confines of the automobile. The very nature of the term “roadkill” connotes natural inevitability, something and some life which is not considered worthy of grief. As Desmond notes,

The general presumption is not that the driver of the car intended to kill the animal—this isn’t about hunting with a car instead of a shotgun—but rather that the death was unavoidable because of the conventions of highway travel (2016: 144).

In this alleged condition of inevitability, the driver is not responsible but rather the animal’s death is pre-determined, a consequence and convention of the highway. Grief is thus excluded from the scene as the corpse is not a subject but instead a mere externality, backgrounded to a realm of disposability. How then, might such deaths become the subject of mourning, and what does this mourning entail and allow for?

In Freud’s (1940) description of the work of mourning, he suggests

Serious mourning, the reaction to the loss of a loved one, contains the same powerful mood, the loss of interest in the outside world – except as it recalls the deceased – the loss of ability to choose any new love object – which would mean replacing the mourned one – and turning away from any task that is not related to the memory of the deceased (p. 204).

There is a sense of profound isolation in Freud’s description, an act of turning away from the world, rejecting other social bonds and interdependency for a solitary existence, a life shaped by an attachment that is now severed. Like Judith Butler, however, I alternatively explore the “relational obligations” (Butler 2020) that can emerge from the act of mourning,

the sense of worldliness which can arise from caring, loving, and mourning another and sharing this grief with others. Mourning in this context thus becomes a method of fashioning a political community, highlighting sociality and fellowship with those who are within and beyond our sensory field.

Butler (2020) suggests there is an uneven distribution of what she terms grievability, inviting the question of who lies outside the domain of the grievable subject. The structure of the violent disavowal of a life, which, in many cases, was never considered a life in the first place, occurs within the politics of mourning. Mourning is thus a political domain that is organised according to a hegemonic order of what life is and should be worthy of attending to and mourned.

What could it mean to live in a world in which grief is distributed equally, the idea of what Butler terms “equal grievability” (Butler 2020)? Would the slow and invisible violence wrought through road infrastructure move from the periphery to the centre stage? What resides in the margins, excluded from the realm of existence, therefore becomes an important space of attention.

Visual Analysis I

In my analysis of Baker’s photography, I focus on Judith Butler’s conception of the “frame” (2009) and how this serves as a powerful tool of delineation. Through recognising what gets left out of the frame, or how the frame is extended or disrupted, we begin to recognise how photography mediates and structures certain responses, and why this leads to certain lives being mourned over others. In her discussion of war photography, Butler describes the way in which frames are orchestrated: “efforts to control the visual and narrative dimensions of war delimit public discourse by establishing and disposing the sensuous parameters of reality itself – including what can be seen and what can be heard” (2009: xi). Within Baker’s digital photography, however, we witness not an orchestration of the images but a frozen moment in time, a brief encounter with the dead which Baker suggests is unmanipulated but is nevertheless framed to garner attention. As Baker describes in an interview, “nothing at all is staged in the photographs. They’re taken quickly, not least because I’ve no wish to fetishize the aesthetic decision-making that they nevertheless necessarily involve. And they’re never subsequently manipulated, cropped or inverted” (2011). Baker’s photography is engaged in an artistic practice that deals with the problem of framing. As he notes in his scholarship, *Artist|Animal*,

It is that art has the potential to offer a distinct way of framing or unframing issues, not an approach that’s more radical or open-minded or curious or inventive than the thinking found in other disciplines, but one that simply employs different tools for thinking, and one that’s sometimes viewed with suspicion because of their unfamiliarity (2013: 2).

Like Baker’s own reflections on art as a conceptual tool for thinking differently, I read his photography of roadkill as a reframing tool, a process of garnering collective attention to the realities of animal life killed from the collision with automobiles. His photography thus disrupts normative modes of framing, allowing for different affects to form in response to roadkill, the death of the animal.

Baker's collection of roadkill images is arguably left open in the sense that one can interpret them freely, as they were first perceived, rather than as images "actively participating in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality" (Butler 2009: 59). The act of manipulating the images, Baker declares, had never occurred to him "because what I was doing was documenting and mapping what was there, not manipulating it. So even if it lacks a certain 'decency,' I stand by what I was doing because the images aim to convey the sense that this is how it was" (Baker 2011). Baker conveys his own first encounter with the corpses but collates the images of "roadkill" alongside images of rural landscapes and captions of location and time as if to memorialise the dead animal. How might such decisions and details introduce the act of mourning the nonhuman, placing their lives within the realm of grievability? Focusing on the multiplicity of affects in grieving, ranging from disgust to a sense of pain, I examine how the death of the animal is received by the spectator.

Picture 1: Steve Baker, *Untitled*, 2009. Photograph from the series *Norfolk Roadkill, Mainly*. Courtesy of the artist



Dobbs' Lane, 22/9/09

The first image I would like to turn to, titled “Dobbs Lane” and dated 22 September 2009, draws us into this spectral absence of the creature who was once a living being. It is difficult to discern the taxonomy of the species, there is fur and blood splayed across the roadside, elements of bone just about visible. This ghostly stain of the blood captures a life which in Butler’s terms would have never been considered living, a life that in many cases fails to be captured as grievable. Baker’s image alternatively draws the viewer to the traces of violence and suffering endured, magnifying the death. John Berger (1980) suggests that “unlike any other visual image, a photograph is not a rendering or an imitation or an interpretation of its subject, but actually a trace of it” (p. 54). The Dobbs Lane image thus opens us to the traces of animals who are killed by the automobile, part of an expanding infrastructure orientated around fossil fuel consumption and automobility. Baker centres the subject of his work on the death of the nonhuman, providing a new and alternative frame which prevents “the editorializing that removes animals from the epistemic, legal, and emotional frameworks that would make their lives matter ensures that violence continues and animals go ungrieved” (Pick 2018: 5). Baker’s photography works against this editorial removal and forces our gaze upon the violence wrought upon non-human life.

The Dobbs Lane image is paired with a photograph of local artwork which Baker describes as a drapery from the medieval period. Baker’s pairing of each image of roadkill with another image of either the surrounding landscape, church artwork, or different fragments of the environment serve to anchor each photographed corpse to a place and time. The photos of each dead animal serve to illuminate and register the stranger with whom we have never become acquainted. In his book *About Looking*, Berger (1980) distinguishes between the private and the public photograph. Baker’s image is clearly categorised as the latter, and therefore the image is, as Berger suggests, a “memory of the unknowable and total stranger”. Baker’s image attempts to generate a sense of familiarity amidst this unknowability through the compilation of images with captions, date, and montage – a work of memorialisation, and an act of mourning the unmourned. This act of anchoring and exposure of animal bodily vulnerability gives contours to Pick’s (2018) argument for a creaturely poetics. Pick argues that “vulnerability, then, does much more than argue for animal rights or the reduction of suffering. It brings another world into view in which animal are not food. As the frame shifts and perception transforms, different moral arguments are possible” (2018: 415). The shift in Baker’s work is the movement from perceiving “roadkill” as a natural inevitability of fossil fuel infrastructure to a death which is worth mourning and attending to.

Baker’s artistic practice also follows Berger’s ambitions of a form of photography which embarks on alternative practices outside capitalist consumer images, a photographic practice which Berger implies can imagine alternative futures. Thus, if Baker’s work is one of imagining alternative futures, it is one where the death of the nonhuman is not considered simply collateral damage. Berger further outlines:

Photographs are relics of the past, traces of what has happened. If the living take that past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would require a living context, they would continue to exist in time, instead of being arresting moment (1980: 41).

Baker is therefore not simply tracing moments of the past but initiating and enacting a lived encounter with the dead. As observers, we too become confronted with a frozen image that imprints on our memory, which makes it harder to turn away or forget. The task of creating a political and social photography for Berger is not just to record the world, but to act as a recorder for those involved in the events photographed. To be the recorder for those involved is to offer a mode of address to the beings depicted in the image. Baker does just this through the inclusion of his bike in the frame that traces his own encounter with the animal corpse. There is no clear subject or object in each montage, it is rather a record of an address, an encounter between different elements. Baker highlights the power of memory and mourning as he recalls the words of Singer (2011): “The animal, having no grave site, no bodily burial, becomes its own memorial”. Baker’s montage of images thus offers the possibility of memorialising animal life, creating a photography which enables different forms of affect and unravels the conception of roadkill as collateral damage. He helps us construct, in the words of Berger, “a radical system [...] around the photograph so that it may be seen in terms which simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic” (1980: 67). The combination of illegible corpses and medieval textile in Baker’s exhibition defamiliarises the strange, from the mundane to the extraordinary, and exposes the observer to the unique and forgotten traces of animal remains. Baker’s photographic records serve as a portal to the nonhuman worlds – the lives and the deaths – which rarely intrude into our everyday reality and open up the possibilities of grief. This exploration of Baker’s image also resituates Butler’s work on mourning to include nonhuman life in her call for an evenly distributed grievability.

The Ethics of Disgust

The question of how humans are differently affected by certain events, visual stimuli and media has ethical dimensions and implications. As Butler notes, “ethics is less a calculation than something that follows from being addressed and addressable in sustainable ways” (2009: 181). Influenced by Emmanuel Levinas, Butler frames ethics as a mode of address and response, an ethics that is thus foregrounded and made possible through an interaction and engagement with an Other. As I began to argue in the previous section, Baker’s project in *Norfolk Roadkill, Mainly* is to create a mode of address, one in which viewers are rendered capable and open to respond to the death of the nonhuman. The response to the suffering and vulnerability of another, as both Butler and Levinas argue, is not necessarily an ethical one, but can be wrought with violence and rejection. As Pick further notes, “neither Levinas nor Butler envisages the self-other encounter as naturally harmonious. On the contrary, the threat of violence hangs over the encounter with alterity” (2018: 416). The encounter with the animal’s death is shaped by this dual movement, where care and recognition can emerge or, alternatively, a process of deflection and further violence. This complex duality we find in the affective dimensions of disgust (Ahmed 2004; Ngai 2005). Baker’s work induces such polar responses accompanied with sensations of revulsion and disgust.

Crucial to the affective experience of disgust is the element of a paradox, both a bodily intrusion and an expulsion, a fascination alongside repulsion. In Winfried Menninghaus’

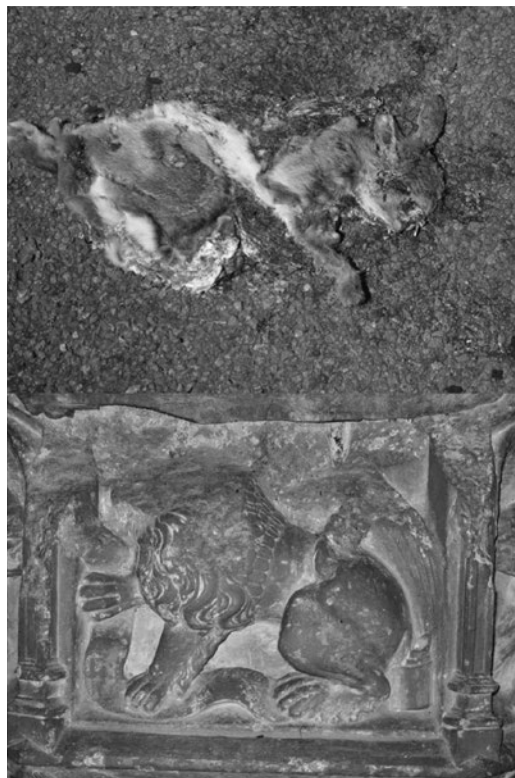
book, *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, he suggests that disgust engenders both “intolerable contact and a union” (2003: 2). It is these contact zones, the force of the encounter which further informs my analysis of Baker’s photography on roadkill. Disgust becomes at once an invitation for the possibility of attention, a moment to linger, to encounter, or alternatively a refusal of recognition and a physical rejection. By exploring disgust and the responses it provokes, I ask after the ethical demands which disgust calls for within our interaction with nonhuman life. In Eleonora Joensuu’s *Politics of Disgust* (2020), she examines the relationality and ethical dimensions of the disgust encounter. She invites the questions: “what others have you encountered in your experiences of disgust? If you were to re-examine a previous disgust encounter, what others—real or imagined—does the encounter evoke? Who is your disgust in relation with?” (p. 118). This reflective re-examination of disgust centres questions of the interaction with another, inviting what Joensuu describes as “the possibility of connecting to experiences beyond our own” (Joensuu 2020: 121). Disgust thus becomes a gateway to an encounter, perhaps even an empathetic engagement with another. Its dual nature, however, of both recognition and dismissal provokes important questions around how we interact with the nonhuman subjects that intrude into our sensory field.

The sense of rejection that occurs within disgust resonates with Pick’s (2011) discussion around exposure and deflection. Pick quotes philosopher Cora Diamond when referring to this complex duality; Diamond suggests deflection “happens when we are moved from the appreciation, or attempt at appreciation, of a difficulty of reality to a philosophical moral problem in the vicinity” (2008: 57). In the encounter with another’s experience – whether human or animal – there is an invitation to a creaturely fellowship or to the process of deflection when exposed to a mutual bodily vulnerability. We find the same dual dimensions occur with disgust, as an exposure or a bodily intrusion that poses the possibility of both recognition and deflection. In my analysis of disgust, I consider the implications of refusing to deflect but rather to stay with the experience of disgust.

Ngai’s (2007) project in *Ugly Feelings* is one of recuperating disgust’s animality, which she describes as a bestiary of affects: “in other words, it is one filled with rat and possums rather than lions, its categories feeling generally being, well, weaker and nastier” (p. 7). By introducing Ngai’s analysis of non-cathartic and often amoral affects, we focus not only on the altruistic emotions and affects but also on moments and sensations which can lead to deflection and repression, the experience of disgust and aversion. Ngai aims to “to recuperate several of these negative affects for their critical productivity” (p. 3). Through exploring disgust, an affective register of averting one’s gaze, I suggest that “the poetics of disgust draws us closer to the domain of political theory” (p. 354) as well as to ethics. As Joensuu suggests, “expanding our understanding of disgust is therefore an ethical question and demand” (2020: 9). Disgust points towards possible movements of action and resistance in the domains of politics and ethics, a way of attuning to the injustices and violence against nonhumans and the environment.

Visual Analysis II

Picture 2: Steve Baker, *Untitled*, 2009. Photograph from the series *Norfolk Roadkill, Mainly*. Courtesy of the artist



Woodbastwick Road, 24/6/09

The montage image titled “Woodbastick Road”, dated 24 June 2009, moves us not necessarily to mourn the loss of life, but to a sensation of revulsion at another animal body atomised and splattered across the road. The blood is fresh, maggots spewing out of its body, the insides completely exposed and revealed. Each limb is discernible but crushed from the weight of a tyre that smashed it into the ground, splattering the insides of the creature’s body across the cemented tarmac. The facial features are blurred amongst the blood and rot. What we have here is a grotesque display of the severe consequences of automobility, a horrifying and revolting image which is rarely visually captured. Disgust is often a blockage of an ethical response, it can be amoral, but in this case staying with the feeling of disgust becomes a way of envisioning how we are affected by and respond to nonhuman life. Such a process of reframing envisions what Joensuu describes as “when the disgust encounter is reframed as a meeting of subjects” (2020: 113). Disgust is therefore primarily to do with contact and exposure, coming into proximity with another.

To borrow Ngai's (2005) term, these "ugly feelings" reflect how one disassociates from the suffering and cruelty that energy infrastructure and automobility inflicts, and roadkill is perceived with neutrality, inevitable collateral damage. Disgust can result in averting one's gaze, but also to stay with and not turn away has powerful implications for understanding visceral and bodily affects and the ways in which they are structured according to hegemonic norms. Disgust, here, acts as a gateway to understanding how affect is directed and manipulated; if we explore these sensations of repulsion, we do not aimlessly devour an image with our eyes but become alert to what is before us, a mode of address that may not be entirely ethical but one in which an address becomes possible. Mourning is not the only political tool and affective marker to instigate a recognition of nonhuman life and death. Exploring experiences of disgust invites a new terrain of interaction, recognising why we might avert our gaze in revulsion or why we may instead linger in fascination. In Ahmed's words, "disgust is clearly dependent on contact" (2004: 85); and it is through these contact zones that a creaturely fellowship may reveal itself as at once "ridiculous, ungainly, carnivalesque even – but solid and unquestioning" (Pick 2011: 188). Disgust in Baker's work open us to bodies exposed over time to vulnerability and brute force, to rot and decay, subjected to pain and death.

A further question that arises within the interaction with and interpretation of Baker's photography is the role of the observer: their political agency, to acknowledge, address, and to resist the violent mechanism of energy culture. As T. J. Demos notes, in their exploration of visual culture and the Anthropocene, "whatever we do, we cannot sit back passively and witness our own destruction as a source of visual pleasure or a neutral observer" (2012: 81). Does Baker's work induce an active engagement, or do we simply become a neutral observer? The previous exploration of disgust suggests otherwise to such a position of neutrality – the grotesque and poignant images are politically symbolic, registering and memorialising the deaths, the mutated and atomised bodies displayed in full rather than briefly acknowledged within our peripheral vision.

Berger (1980), in his discussion of agony and photography in the context of war, claims:

Confrontation with a photographed moment of agony can mask a far more extensive and urgent confrontation. Usually, the wars which we are shown are being fought directly or indirectly in "our" name. What we are shown horrifies us. The next step should be for us to confront our own lack of political freedom. In the political systems as they exist, we have no legal opportunity of effectively influencing the conduct of wars waged in our name. To realise this and to act accordingly is the only effective way of responding to what the photograph shows (p. 44).

Like Butler, Berger discusses photography in the context of war, analysing scenes of violence and suffering, exploring how these frames are manipulated and controlled to release certain desired affects. Baker captures a similar and everyday violence that is waged against nonhuman life but invites alternative affects that are not entirely bound or controlled. Berger's analysis in the above passage, however, points towards the political and social limitations of the observer's response to a photograph of violence and death. However, the act of address enabled in Baker's work, the power of a gaze which is not shaped by power and oppression, but of recognition, ignites a non-anthropocentric ethics, a way of mourning

the lives which go unmourned. This shapes a political movement to ethical action beyond the realm of the human, to not only mourn the loss and death of the non-human, but to register these creatures as a “life” from the beginning.

Baker’s pairing of images of animal corpses with objects and landscapes of the surrounding environment invites the observer to situate and place the lost life within a historical and lived context. In the montage image titled “Buxton Road”, dated 17 November 2009, the juxtaposition of frames includes an image of what could perhaps be a tail of the corpse of an animal. Once again, the taxonomy is unclear but what strikes the observer is the pairing with the track marks of a tyre pressed into the ground. There is an attempt to recapture the event that led to this creature’s death, searching for the traces of violence, illuminating the remnants of what could be coined a crime scene. Baker’s artistic practice thus unsettles the notion that “roadkill” is inevitable, or somehow neutral. Here, the violence is left open and uncovered, it is not buried or discarded but brought to the centre stage. Baker’s photography forms what Butler terms an “intervention into the sphere of appearance” (2020: 202). It conveys “the seriousness of looking” effectively, intervening in the consensus around what is worthy of attention and recognition. In such a project of widening our optics, a new trajectory of affect is formed, one which connects the observer and creates a mode of address to this nonhuman other.

The Sociality of Pain

Both grief and disgust involve contact and proximity, but how, in Ahmed’s words, do “I come to feel that which I cannot know” (2004: 30)? Grief and disgust are forceful encounters which bring us closer to that which I cannot know: the suffering of another. This constitutes the final affect that I will now explore: pain, and specifically Ahmed’s concept of “the contingency of pain” (p. 30). The contingency of pain refers to becoming a witness of another’s pain, of becoming “open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel” (p. 30).

Although the sociality or contingency of pain refers to human experience, the event of being drawn into a time and space one has not inhabited before, connecting to the pain of another, has important implications for conveying nonhuman suffering and environmental injustice. The act of being “moved by what does not belong to me” (Ahmed 2004: 31) brings us closer to a creaturely recognition of other life forms. For Ahmed:

The impossibility of feeling the pain of others does not mean that the pain is simply theirs, or that their pain has nothing to do with me. I want to suggest here, cautiously, and tentatively, that an ethics of responding to pain involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel (2004: 30).

Ahmed suggests that ethics is not so much about feeling the pain of another, but an experience of bearing witness, being open to be affected by another’s pain. Ahmed uses the example of her mother’s endurance of multiple sclerosis where her mother’s pleas were not always a call for action or help but rather a plea to “bear witness, to recognise her pain” (2004: 31). The act of bearing witness has an ethical demand which declares “I must act about that which I cannot know” (p. 31). As we turn to the textual and visual sources, they

present encounters with often unknown suffering and destruction. They ask us to bear witness to the pain which may be in sight but is not fully attended to or perceived. It results in both the widening of attention and an act of exposure, which are crucial experiences in the path to a creaturely fellowship.

Visual Analysis III

Picture 3: Steve Baker, *Roadside VII*, 2011. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist



The final image I wish to address is the ghostly apparition of what appears to be a dead bird – or multiple birds, the wings spread and flattened across the tarmac, a strange spectre, haunting stains of what was a living creature. This image is titled “Roadside, VII” on Baker’s website and, once again, accentuates the encounter with Baker’s bike which is used as a framing device resting parallel to the corpse, or more aptly, the left over remains of a corpse. On closer inspection, one recognises the outline of the bird’s face, its beak slightly protruding out from the ground – the wings, face, and limbs are spread across the road. This atomised body is merged with the mud and soil, barely distinguishable from the ground itself. Without the employment of “looking”, of addressing and pausing one’s attentive capacities to these animal remains, this image would perhaps be lost. Baker thus renders visible a life and death on the precipice of disappearance – the stains of its body just about visible to both Baker and the observer. The act of address this image calls for resonates with Ahmed’s recollection of bearing witness to her mother’s pain. As Ahmed suggests, “sometimes there would be nothing for me to do” (Ahmed 2004: 29), the only action she could take would be to bear witness, to recognise her mother’s pain. Baker’s photographs are also pleas to bear witness

to the violence and suffering endured by the non-human, inviting the question of “What about the pain of others? Or how am I affected by pain when I faced with another’s pain?” (p. 29). The contingency of pain: coming “to feel that which I cannot know” underlies Baker’s images – a work in which the ordinary encounter with roadkill becomes an extraordinary plea to bear witness, to feel with and beyond the human.

The encounter with Baker’s roadkill images is an encounter with vulnerability moving us through a spectrum of feelings from grief, disgust, to a shared sense of pain. An exposure to animal vulnerability reveals the power relations inherent within energy infrastructure, a space that is organised and orientated around the human. Baker attends to who and what is left and abandoned at the roadside, forcing us to encounter the leftovers and animal remains which we leave in our wake. Outside the sealed enclosure of the automobile, Baker’s photography orientates the spectator towards the vulnerability of nonhuman life. By anchoring nonhuman deaths, and placing them within our field of vision, Baker creates the possibility of a non-anthropocentric form of mourning and fellowship with other creatures. Baker’s project is therefore one that can be aligned with the ambitions of a creaturely poetics, a work of attunement, regarding the expansion and limits of attention. The creaturely is concerned with the exposure to vulnerability, as Pick notes “most importantly, perhaps, vulnerability is the tug of reality, an attunement to ‘the difficulty of staying turned . . . toward flesh and blood’ (Diamond 2008)” (2018: 422). Baker’s photographs tug at the unbearable reality of the violence wrought upon the nonhuman. Journeying through Baker’s collection of animal remains gathers the remnants and forgotten lives that are impacted by energy infrastructure, opening us to the disastrous yet normalised aftermath and consequence of automobility.

Conclusion: Nonhuman Encounters and Climate Justice

I have suggested that the multiple affects that can be experienced in encountering Baker’s images can be enduring and enable modes of address and encounters previously disavowed or dismissed. The human animal encounter, witnessing the death of another creature, is brought to the fore, exposing shared vulnerability and finitude of both ourselves and other species – a poignant reminder of bodies that share a common vulnerability, and are subject to pain, suffering and ultimately death.

Pick’s (2011) *Creaturely Poetics* begins with an epigraph from the French philosopher Simone Weil: “The vulnerability of precious things is beautiful because vulnerability is a mark of existence” (Weil: 2004). Using this statement as the basis for ethics and poetics of the creaturely, Pick transforms our ethical questions around animal ethics by focusing not primarily on sentience, personhood, and rights, but on the modality of vulnerability. Like Butler’s work (2009; 2020) that foregrounds the possibility of solidarity and interdependency through our vulnerable and precarious bodies, Pick generates an ethical address to other species through vulnerability as a marker of existence. To perceive the vulnerability of another, beyond the human, is to open ourselves to the violence enacted against ecosystems and the earth.

The magnification of affect in this article and exploring its potential as inspiring ethical and political action foregrounds the importance of emotions and how they might traverse

and move forward into active resistance against the present violence. However, to affect and to be affected is to be engaged within an encounter, which can propel action or, to its antithesis, a refusal or suspension of action. For Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010: 2), “affect is in many ways synonymous with force or forces of encounter”. As Gregg and Seigworth suggest, affect is as much about refusal as it is invitations. Both the possibility of care and further violence arise within the encounter with another.

It is in this space of despair, vulnerability, and mourning in which hope of collective action is built. The aspect of exposure and vulnerability to different life forms further points towards Pick’s creaturely ethics. For Pick,

Creaturely vulnerability opens up zones of “indistinction” (Calarco, 2015), where species identities blur and where different beings, or creatures, are perceived as corporeal and vulnerable. More radically still, creaturely vulnerability, as I understand it, calls for the contraction of humanity rather than its benevolent extension to nonhumans. Creatureliness—the state of being exposed to natural necessity and the ravages of power—does not call for the alleviation of vulnerability via gestures of “humanization” but for more profound forms of “dehumanization”. The creaturely, then, is focused on unseating the structures of human exceptionalism (less on the generation of empathy). By imbuing materialism with a sense of reverence for everything that is, creatureliness encompasses all life, from animals to plants (2018: 414).

Pick notes how a shared vulnerability from animals to plants is a way of building alliances, opening up zones of indistinction. Vulnerability, in this sense, becomes not a plea for paternalism but a path to collective resistance and solidarity. Thus, vulnerability here is a way of becoming together in common, creating unlikely bonds and alliances.

Rebecca Solnit declares that “the climate movement has grown remarkably – but it must grow far more to be adequate to the crisis” (2016). In order to address the anthropogenic damage afflicting the earth, we must contend with how these effects and the fossil fuel dependent infrastructure we have created involve and impact other species. Exploring what is often considered as marginal or collateral damage by addressing the incidents of roadkill, offers entryways to illuminating the impact of petro-modernity and energy infrastructure on other creatures. My article specifically invites us to read animal suffering and death alongside the violence and injustices wrought upon the environment from extractive industries and the growth of fossil fuel capitalism and its infrastructure.

The exploration of grief points towards the political dimensions of mourning, the question of who or what attains grievability, and why certain tragedies and events are mourned instead of others. Butler (2020), in their later work, *The Force of Non-Violence*, describes the myriad of affects which push towards a non-violent resistance. As Butler suggests,

Whether we are caught up in rage or love – rageful love, militant pacifism, aggressive non-violence, radical persistence – let us hope that we live in that bind in ways that let us live with the living, mindful of the dead, demonstrating persistence in the midst of grief and rage, the rocky and vexed trajectory of collective action in the shadow of fatality (2020).

Affect, as Butler suggests, binds us to others in ways that are precarious yet unquestioning – our fundamental dependency on other lives, our environments, and the earth generates or revives solidarities and new or perhaps forgotten alliances across species lines.

Pick's creaturely fellowship is forged through the recognition of these permeable and precarious borders, as affect creates ruptures and opens up connections and kinships to other species that initially might appear unfamiliar and distant. The interrelations of human and nonhuman bodies that are both material and temporal are what leads us towards the creaturely order, "into the anonymity of perishable matter" (Pick 2011). This recognition of the materiality of bodies, human and nonhuman, produces spaces and zones of indistinction and thus offers a way of attuning ourselves to similarities across species lines. Yet, as I have explored, recognition and address do not inevitably lead to care but can result in violence, rejection, and revulsion. Affects allow us to feel beyond our subjectivity, to reveal the harm another faces. The complex relation of disgust, grief, and pain show multiple paths from despondency, care, solidarity, and deflection. Building solidarity across differences between human and nonhuman lives can engender relations of care, address, and recognition in opposition to the present violence wrought on nonhuman species.

Acknowledgments

Greatest thanks goes to my fellow co-editor Dr. Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer and for the workshop on Technoecologies from which this special issue arose. I would also like to thank Dr. Danielle Sands for her mentorship and guidance. Thank you to Royal Holloway, University of London's scholarship to enable my PhD research and subsequent publications.

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