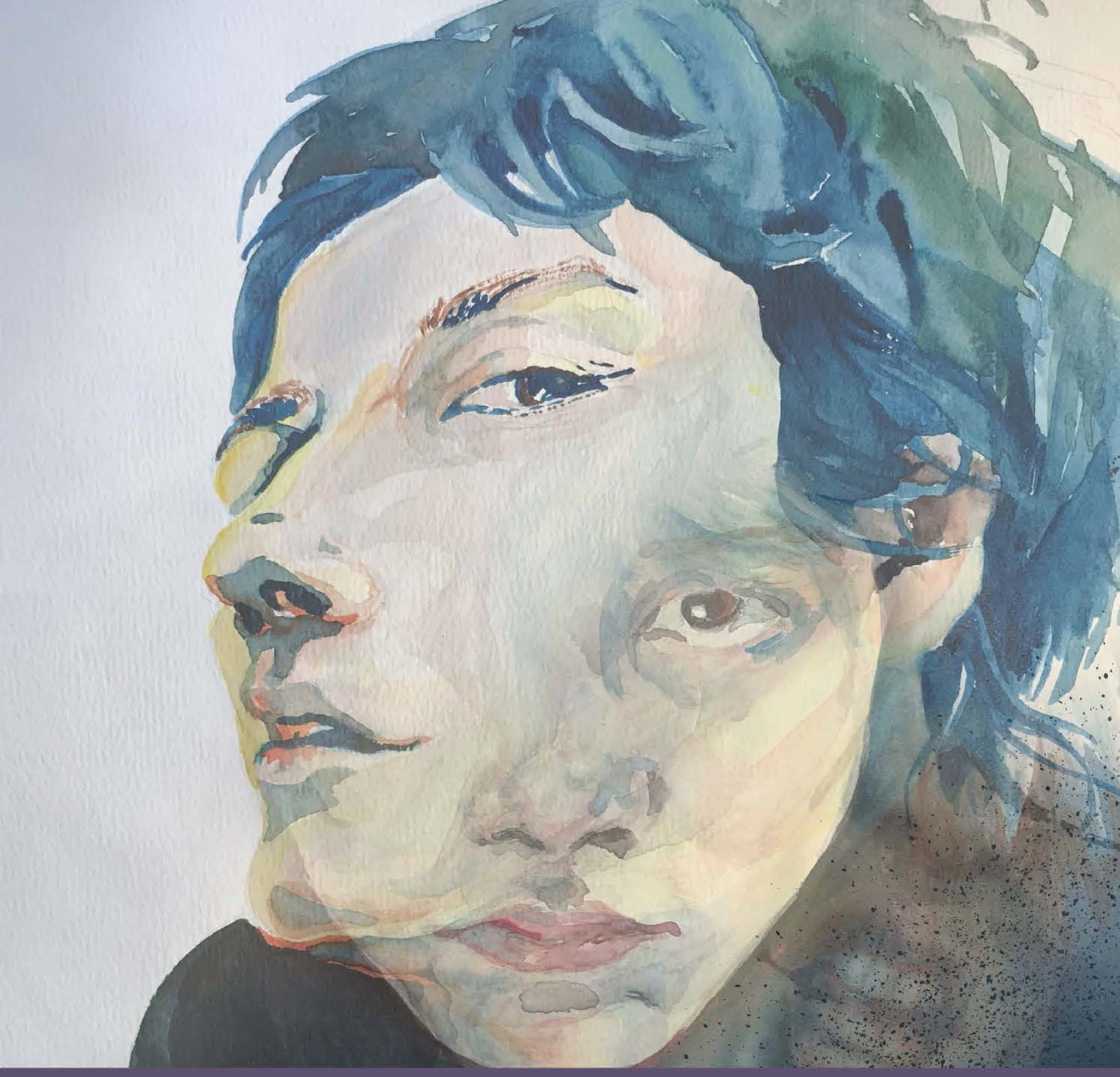

ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN ART AND VISUAL STUDIES

CULTURAL APPROACHES TO DISGUST AND THE VISCERAL

Edited by MAX RYYNÄNEN, HEIDI S. KOSONEN, AND SUSANNE C. YLÖNEN

ROUTLEDGE

Cultural Approaches to Disgust and the Visceral

This edited volume traces cultural appearances of disgust and investigates the varied forms and functions disgust takes and is given in both established and vernacular cultural practices.

Contributors focus on the socio-cultural creation, consumption, reception, and experience of disgust, a visceral emotion whose cultural situatedness and circulation has historically been overlooked in academic scholarship. Chapters challenge and supplement the biological understanding of disgust as a danger reaction and as a base emotion evoked by the lower senses, touch, taste and smell, through a wealth of original case studies in which disgust is analyzed in its aesthetic qualities, and in its cultural and artistic appearances and uses, featuring visual and aural media.

Because it is interdisciplinary, the book will be of interest to scholars in a wide range of fields, including visual studies, philosophy, aesthetics, sociology, history, literature, and musicology.

Max Ryynänen is Senior Lecturer of Theory of Visual Culture at Aalto University.

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Cultural Approaches to Disgust and the Visceral

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Acknowledgements

The idea for this book arose from within the activities of the Disgust Network, an interdisciplinary research hub founded by Kosonen and Ylönen at the University of Jyväskylä in 2018. Kosonen, Ylönen and Ryynänen also worked on organizing a conference on disgust at the University of Jyväskylä in March 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference had to be canceled on short notice, but it nevertheless fueled our thinking around the theme and propelled the book project. In putting together this anthology, we drew on the aforementioned network, conference, and an open call for papers. We were privileged to have many interesting propositions to choose from, and we lament not being able to accommodate all of them.

As with the Disgust Network and the conference, the purpose of this book, *Cultural Approaches to Disgust and The Visceral*, has been to create synergy into understanding the varied ways in which disgust is generated, resisted, mobilized, and consumed in various fields of culture. The book that you are holding in your hands seeks to shed light on the ways in which disgust is and has been studied within the humanities.

Work on this anthology has been made possible by the support of various universities, foundations and research projects. The University of Jyväskylä, Aalto University, Witwatersrand University, The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (grant number 435–2019–0691), The Finnish Cultural Foundation, The Finnish Academy (grant number 340650) and Kone Foundation (grant number 21000052161) have all made our work on this book possible.

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Introduction

1 From Visceral to the Aesthetic

Tracing Disgust in Contemporary Culture

Max Ryynänen, Heidi S. Kosonen, and Susanne C. Ylönen

We recoil at the thought of eating rotten meat or moldy strawberries and feel uncomfortable with the bad breath of a person we do not specifically like. We may feel disgusted when Divine, one of the protagonists of John Waters' film *Pink Flamingos* (1972) eats dog feces – or when Akwaeke Emezi, in her debut novel *Freshwater* (2018), describes how the protagonist, in veterinary school, mutilates cadavers, separates skin from muscle, and lifts "delicate sheets of fascia" with the scalpel (Emezi 2018, 41). Disgust is, alongside surprise, sadness, happiness, fear, anger, and contempt mentioned in the list of so-called universal emotions (Ekman 1970). It is often visualized as a wrinkled nose. According to Winfred Menninghaus, who terms disgust "one of the most violent affectations of the human perceptual system" (2003, 1), disgust is probably the most visceral of these basic human emotions. From psychologists (Angyal 1941) and epidemiologists (Curtis 2013) to philosophers (Korsmeyer 2011), scholars have recognized the way disgust has the potential to turn our bodies upside down through a spasming stomach and gag reflex. Disgust extends, though, far beyond the visceral. When disgust is discussed, the attention is often on the extremes, but there is a broad variety of levels and types of disgust one could focus on (Korsmeyer 2011). There is shallow disgust as much as there is violent.

The affects, sensations, and reactions that we associate with "disgust" tend to be very varied in origin, intention, and intensity. A similar scope and variety touches upon the broad array of objects that tend to be associated with disgust (see e.g. Curtis 2013, 1–11). According to Sianne Ngai (2005), disgust is only the outer limit, or threshold, of "ugly feelings" such as envy, irritation, anxiety, and paranoia. Ngai claims that the language of repulsion is much more narrow and restricted than the language of attraction: often disgust is supplanted by weaker styles of "indignation and complaint" – especially in the bourgeois world, where she argues "the vocabulary of indignation is exclusively moral" (2005, 338).

Without forgetting the variety of possible forms, origins and levels of disgust, or language games associated with it, this anthology presents studies from a variety of methodological and theoretical perspectives and traditions. The scholars of this volume work in the fields of, among others, cultural studies, art education, folklore, sociology, history, and philosophy – and we, the editors, have not aimed to package all thoughts under one stylistic or professional umbrella, but rather desired to keep the work truly interdisciplinary. This book thus offers a continuum from visceral reactions to rotten or tabooed foods (see Section IV) to the way disgust can be mobilized as a moral and symbolic emotion (see Section III).

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Within biological accounts – those that give disgust its universal and visceral reputation – disgust is seen as a danger response traced to an organism's preservation (Curtis 2013). This danger function does ring true when we think of the bodily recoil related to harmful foods (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008) and infectious diseases (Oaten, Stevenson, and Case 2009). Dangerous foods, feces, and sexual activities dealing with bodily excreta, diseased-looking and dying humans, and dead carcasses of animals all are instances that are related to disgust's function against shielding humans from disease and death (Curtis 2013, 1–17; see also Curtis, Barra, and Aunger 2011). Since disgust is so rooted in this visceral danger reaction, the scrutinizers of disgust have argued it engages foremost the so-called "lower senses": taste, smell, and touch (Korsmeyer 1999) – the ones that assume proximity (Menninghaus 2003, 5). The earliest accounts especially notice how "the strong repugnance" of disgust is tied to dis-taste (from Latin dis + gustus "taste," OED 2021): the avoidance of things that are offensive to the taste, i.e. not good to eat (Darwin 1965).

At the same time, disgust is one of the recognized "moral emotions" (Kolnai 2004) that relate to cultural taboos and hierarchies (Kosonen 2020a) and function symbolically on social and cultural scales (e.g. Miller 1997). For Georges Bataille, and several other scholars studying disgust from a psychological or anthropological perspective, society "is grounded in disgust" (Bataille 1970, 321, see also Bataille 2002). Disgust, along with other moral emotions, like shame and guilt (Haidt 2003), empowers collective rules and taboos, and allegedly stops society from going to ruin under the threat of primitive desires (see also Freud 1981b). But disgust stretches from regulating the possibly infectious and "antisocial" eating, sexual relations and contact with death to prejudices toward women (Joensuu 2020; Nussbaum 2017, 165–196), foreign cultures, and various minority groups (Korsmeyer 2011, 5; Tyler 2013). It even strays into such phenomena as the sound of chalk being drawn across a board, that cannot easily be related to any danger to either the biological organism or the "social body" – which are interconnected through the human body's symbolic potency for sociocultural threats (Douglas 1970). Other instances in which people might feel disgust or closely related affects can include phobias of various kinds; encounters with phenomena, people, objects, and foods that are strange and unfamiliar; transgressions against good manners, such as lewd remarks or chewing with an open mouth; various pleasures, from the overconsumption of sweets to diverse artistically mediated forms of disgust; and cultural products or activities that are not only frequently labeled "trash" but also seen as unclean and dangerous, such as horror movies, popular music, or subcultural habitus.

In addition, some disgust-objects assume dimensions that are more sociocultural than intrinsic. It is hardly possible to sever the treatment of the diseased, the aged, and the dying (see Hakola's chapter in this volume) from the cultural discourses and symbolic representations participating in creating and reinforcing the distasteful and shunned role of aging and death in the Western cultures (e.g. Crawford 1980; Elias 1985; Walter 1991). It is also difficult to miss the instrumental uses of disgust, as they are directed at perceived threats related to the family and nation in political discourses (Nussbaum 2017). Similar political use can be detected in different instances, such as discrimination against gender and sexual minorities (Joensuu 2020; Nussbaum 2009), or the populist political rhetoric of the twenty-first century (see Saresma and Tulonen's chapter in this volume), which sometimes connect the dangers of the grotesque "oozing" female body (Russo 1994) to the threat posed by the ethnic Other (Pantti 2016).

In relation to COVID-19, the global pandemic prevailing throughout 2020–2022 when this anthology was in the making, we have seen disgust mobilized in Western discourses in attempts to blame Chinese food markets and foodways for the pandemic (Kosonen 2020b).

Disgust, manifested not only in humans' and other animals' instinctive recoiling from danger and decay but also in the different kinds of symbolic discourses and cultural products that aim to normalize thought-patterns and behaviors, mobilize people, or bring about enjoyment, is in a variety of different ways more than a biological mechanism seeking to protect organisms from particular kinds of dangers, or a negative emotion negatively felt. It is also culturally constructed, reiterated, and performed. As, for instance, Sara Ahmed (2014) and Judith Butler (2011) note, cultural norms and the affective economies of arts, cultures, and media hold great power over our material day-to-day existence – our emotions and affective reactions included. Thus, we should not forget the way disgust is also a matter of ideas, used to control bodies and minds. Self-protection can be stretched to cover moral contamination, but then it is already socially and culturally driven, not a biological given.

Our purpose in this book is not to deny the truth of the biological explanation models, however, but rather to increase the catering of alternatives for the way disgust has been used in essentializing or "naturalizing" (Barthes 2009) culturally constructed or mediated disgust as "instinctual," "universal," "moral," or "wise." The dangers of disgust's naturalization as an intrinsic given are particularly prominent in some of the moral treatises that study disgust as an instinctual reaction against that which lacks goodness or wisdom, where disgust is seen to somewhat show evidence that something is intrinsically harmful (e.g. Kass 1997). Disgust can exist as a deeply rooted, biological, somatic, and nearly universal reaction as we study it in its sociocultural chains and symbolic reiterations, but no "instinctual wisdom" guides its symbolic circulation. There often exists a complex yet situated chain of sociocultural production next to the visceral repugnance. For instance, even if the prevailing disgust toward Euro-American females' hairy underarms, legs and pubic area has been explained with a human fear of parasites, this aversion has been layered with centuries' worth of discourses associating body hair with bad moral character, criminality, and deviance from norms (Herzig 2015), and these discourses, rather than "instinctual recoil," have bolstered and accelerated the hairless standard for Western women. And even if recoiling from bad food can be considered a reaction to potential danger (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008), this recoiling contains elements of cultural learning, too (Korsmeyer 1999, 93). Tanja Plasil's chapter in this volume, for instance, shows how our disgust reactions to food have changed significantly since we started to have expiry dates on products.

Moreover, one must not forget the several instances where disgust reactions are purposefully sought or overcome, whether this is a question of the pleasures related to arts or popular culture (see Sections II, V, and VI, and the following subchapter), or the many spoilt or even poisonous delicacies of the food table, from fermented cheeses to alcoholic drinks, that people have educated their palates to tolerate or enjoy (see Skubii and Manley's chapter on overcoming food-related disgust in famine). In several counter-hegemonic movements, such as punk, artistic avant-garde, or other subcultures united by habits of consumption (see Spencer's chapter in this volume), as well as in children's cultures (Maase 2002), disgust and varied kinds of disgust-objects from torn up clothes to disgust-evoking sweets even serve as sources

of pleasure precisely because they are not accepted by the prevailing hegemony (James 1998; Wilson 2002). Flirting with disgust has been a particular practice in the radical margins of German and French philosophy (e.g. Nietzsche, Bataille, Klossowski), making it a tool for testing and analyzing cultural categories (see e.g. Perniola 1998). In a deconstructive vein, disgust has, hence, also facilitated the criticism and resistance of prevailing norms and hierarchical constitutions (Wilson 2002).

The examples and perspectives listed above invite many thoughts. Firstly, they remind us of the complexity of disgust, tying bodily instincts, psychic desires, societal pressures, acculturated habits, and affective economies into a tangle of push-and-pull instincts. Secondly, the examples illuminate the fact that disgust is often a matter of perspective, an attitude bound to societal, cultural, and familial positioning, related to acquired tastes, personality traits, and humans' relationship to natural phenomena. This renders disgust situated, as it is attached to varied objects and actions depending on the eyes of the beholder and draws attention to the fact that we can stretch the limits of disgust and also unlearn some of its effects. Thirdly, the examples suggest disgust may also be related to things that are experienced via sight and hearing despite their confinement to the "lower senses" in Western philosophy (see especially Peltola's chapter in this book). As we, in the title of this book, call disgust a topic of interest "for cultural approaches," we refer to all the aforementioned layers that disgust assumes in its various cultural circulations and uses, from contemporary arts to social media. Within a multidisciplinary research anthology shaped by the interests and fields of study of the authors, it is impossible to tackle the curious phenomenon of disgust in its whole range, even when approaches tied to the humanities alone are considered, but we hope that this book offers a multifaceted starting point for further discussions.

A Culture (and Art World) of Disgust

Besides threatening the biological body, the society's moral constitution, or the hierarchically constituted social body, disgust has proven to be a welcome enhancement to spectacle-seeking entertainment in art and popular culture (e.g. Ryynänen 2019). In his philosophical account of the aversive feeling, Winfred Menninghaus (2003) argues that the entire Western theory of art and aesthetic pleasure is reversibly built around disgust, to disgust's fervent (if not neurotic) negation as the opposite of beauty, indifferent judgment, and good taste. This rests on disgust's argued position as the only kind of ugliness that cannot be "represented conformably to nature without destroying all aesthetic delight" (Kant 2007, 141; see also Korsmeyer 2008, 368). Kant, along with his similar-minded contemporaries, clearing the philosophical ground for the, at the time newly wedded, art system that had originated, roughly speaking, in the continental upper class (Ryynänen 2020), of course discussed "art" by following the institutional development that had already left out the lower strata of society. Folk culture has a prolific history of artistic activity filled with grotesque inversions and carnival laughter (Bakhtin 1984; see also Greenhill and Tye's chapter in this book on oral folklore). The omission of disgust from the sphere of fine art was being lamented already by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Karl Rosenkranz, who in his 1853 book *Aesthetics of Ugliness* was disappointed with the way the system of fine art, "the legislation of good taste, the science of aesthetics . . . propagated among the civilized peoples of Europe for over a century," (Rosenkranz 2017, 50) had left the

concepts and questions related to ugliness behind by concentrating on beauty alone. Rosenkranz even claimed that the art system, with its aspirations to reach beauty and harmony, had done harm to philosophical reflection on the aesthetic reality.

In Indian aesthetics, the role of disgust has been central right from the beginning. Sage Bharata (200BC – 300AD) analyzes disgust as one of the eight *rasas*, the "emotive sentiments" of stage art (which were later also applied to music and, for example, painting) in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (1984), the "science of the drama." Bharata's treatise is one of the oldest theories of aesthetic experience that has survived, and in it disgust, *bībhatsarasa* (also called "the odious sentiment"), has a key role. Bharata's basic idea was that the rasas are cultivated artistically/aesthetically on everyday sentiments, taking a distance from them but providing the audience with reflective staged counterparts of them. Everyday sentiments thus serve as resources for the experience of what is seen and heard on stage. Through witnessing, for example, heroism, romance, or something disgusting on stage, played out by high-level performers, the audience has the essence of their fragmented experiential resources elevated onto a higher, more reflective plane, into a kind of meta-experience.

Theorists of the rasa, the 11th century Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta at the forefront, followed Bharata in thinking that works of art had only one meta-sentiment – disgust, for example – which then served as the key for the whole work. Sucharita Gamlath (1969) describes "represented" and "expressed" sentiments, e.g. disgust, to be reduced but uplifting versions of everyday experiences. If modern aesthetic experience in the European fine arts was marked by concepts like disinterestedness, the classical Indian arts were more about experiences that could be labeled "amazing" and "awesome," so it was natural for a strong experience such as disgust to make it into the early theories (see e.g. Chakrabarti 2016). Bharata also wrote that *bībhatsa* referred to phenomena which *disturb* the *mind*. This was to be expressed by, for example, leering with the mouth and holding the nose. (For more, see Bhuvaneshwari's chapter in this book.)

In the contemporary Western context, disgust as *bībhatsarasa*, the uplifting quality that encourages reflection, does not dominate cultural productions, whether we are discussing abject art or films like Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò* (1975), David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) or Tom Six's *The Human Centipede* (2009). In these examples, reactions to disgust, not a reflection of it, often dominate. Here, disgust is raised through psychological violence, graphic sexuality, scatology, and body horror. The gross-out effect of literature, visual arts, and audiovisual culture (see Korsmeyer's chapter in this volume) does not allow distance from disgust, but rather encourages visceral revulsion. Works of art meant to shock the viewers, or readers have grown increasingly common.

In his *Art and Its Shadow* (*L'arte e la sua ombra*, 2000), Mario Perniola writes about the interest in shocking and disturbing that today's art often embodies. He claims that through the work of contemporary artists the category of disgust, often discussed via the concept of the "abject" (defined as "that which disturbs the self, by provoking either disgust, fear, loathing or repulsion," Oxford Reference 2021; see also Kristeva 1982; Abject Art 1993), has increasingly entered the field of aesthetic reflection – and provided us with experiential surplus. Watching, for instance, Paul McCarthy's obscene installations, that make a display of sexual perversions, or witnessing Zhu Yu's *Eating People* (2000), a series of photographs in which the artist has allegedly documented himself eating a real fetus, one must say that Perniola is onto

something. One can ask, like Carole Talon-Hugon who in her *Goût et Dégoût* (2003) discusses the "disgusting turn" in art of the late twentieth century, if we are already at the limits of what can be aestheticized. When Bharata wrote about corpses, he could never have imagined that we would now watch torture porn and body horror movies, or that reality TV programs provoke people by showing people eating worms, spiders, and other insects (see also Kosonen's chapter in this book).

While we cannot argue that the interest that writers and thinkers feel toward the disgusting is a contemporary phenomenon (see, for instance, Samalin 2021 on disgust in the Victorian era), we can argue that disgust is, today, culturally more central than ever before (see also Hennefeld and Sammond 2020): what was once pushed to the margins of cultural production or to the horror shelf in the video rental store, has drifted into the center of production and consumption (see Contesi's and Bradfield's chapters in this book). Arguably, contemporary representations of disgust are also more realistic due to technological innovations, especially in audiovisual culture. Cynthia Freeland writes about our responses to bugs in horror films as something predictable, and very somatic, "like reflex jumping at sudden movement" (Freeland 2019, 58). The films' ability to cause strong reactions arguably stems from the activation of the mirror cells in our brain, as Vittorio Gallese, Michele Guerra, and Frances Anderson propose in their *The Emphatic Screen: Cinema and Neuroscience*: "(t)he discovery of mirror neurons in the brain of the macaque, followed by that of mirroring mechanisms in the human brain . . . has shown that there is a neurobiological foundation for a direct modality of access to the meaning of the behavior and experiences of others" (Gallese, Guerra, and Anderson 2019, 3). While our minds might be aware of the fictional, or geographically or timewise distanced, nature of what we see, our bodies are not that "wise." Contemporary visual culture is flooded with very naturalistic experiences that thrive on film's ability to fool our body-mind. Understood like this, seeing a wet insect-like alien stuck on a human being's face (in Ridley Scott's *Alien*, 1979) is not just about stimulating our imagination. Our bodies react to it emphatically.

This does not mean, however, that the presence of disgust-objects in art and culture is uncontroversial. Rather, even in its centrality, disgust, as it is represented, expressed, or stirred up in art and culture, continues to fuel debates (see Bradfield's and Ylönen's chapters in this book). This centrality and ability to start discussions, as well as the change from varied amounts of distance toward an ability and aim to provoke or experience visceral reactions through arts and culture, are some of the reasons for our need to revisit the topic of disgust today. In its centrality to not only political discourses but also to contemporary cultural production and consumption, disgust provides a philosophically important and fruitful entrance point to analyzing various social, psychological, and political phenomena.

Some Approaches to Disgust in the Humanities (Introducing the Chapters in This Collection)

One thing has to be said before we move onto our sweep of disgust theories and chapter descriptions. Few of the writers in this anthology aim to define disgust in-depth, and most rather draw on a theory or two in order to set their premises before departing on excursions that illuminate the range and working area of disgust. Furthermore, in the case studies presented, disgust has a more or less central role. It seems that

although disgust is currently being subjected to an increasing amount of academic interest, it is still a topic not commonly discussed beyond very general philosophical or psychological accounts. One reason for this might be the fact that disgust and disgust-objects have the ability to infect even the scholars studying them with their sticky affects (see Clark and Fessler 2015; Herzig 2015; Menninghaus 2003; Miller 1997). Yet ever since Charles Darwin's 1832 field work encounter with the Tierra del Fuego native, who famously touched Darwin's food, pulled a disgusted face in feeling its texture, and caused revolt in Darwin with his touch (1965, also discussed in Ahmed 2014, 82–83), disgust has been subjected to academic analysis.

In the approaches of Darwin (1965) and Freud (1981a, 1981b), whose take on disgust followed Darwin's, "orality," "olfaction," "touch," and "proximity" were seen as universal qualities that explained disgust. Yet serious and extensive treatment of disgust in Western philosophy saw daylight as late as 1929, when Aurel Kolnai, who was a trained psychoanalyst, published a phenomenological take on disgust in his essay "Der Ekel" ("On Disgust"). If phenomenology today is mostly known in the form of exegetic work on its own classics and/or their careful and timid application, in Kolnai's time it was commonplace to boldly search for new topics and create new concepts. One of the foundations of phenomenological thinking was, and still is, the idea that consciousness is intentional, i.e. directed toward something. According to Kolnai, who here went against the strain of his own school of thinking, disgust has the capacity to overshadow intentionality. While hate is intentional, thrown toward a phenomenon by the subject, disgust is a genuine reaction. It happens when an individual is "taken over" by the object of disgust.

Kolnai was interested in the rapid impact of disgust and the defense reaction it fuels – as well as in the way specific triggers of disgust seem to vary from place to place. He claimed that disgust is always about sensory experience and that it is more aesthetically determined than fear. But Kolnai was also interested in studying the qualities of moral disgust next to those of the visceral disgust reactions caused by physical events. He stressed disgust's attraction, temptation, charm, spell, and fascination. This allure of the disgusting has also been a point of departure for Carolyn Korsmeyer, one of the major contemporary theorists of "aesthetic disgust." In *Savoring Disgust* (2011), Korsmeyer argues that disgust feeds curiosity, and thus, provides pleasure. In Korsmeyer's words, disgust draws us close and holds our attention, creating absorption and fascination despite the aversion that we might feel (2011, 118). Hence, there is a specific kind of magnetism in disgust, an interplay of attraction and repulsion that makes disgust something that people love to hate: disgust pulls us into proximity with the disgust-object, makes us take double takes of it while we reject it.

In aesthetics and art criticism, the ambiguous push-and-pull feeling that unpleasant phenomena exert on us is often discussed through the "paradox of tragedy." This paradox, which is also termed the "paradox of fiction," describes the seemingly absurd or contradictory phenomenon that we seem to enjoy in fiction things that would repulse or otherwise displease us in real life. Of course, not only fiction produces this. Plato already describes in the *Republic* (439e – 40a) the story of Leontius, who, when passing corpses from a public execution, had "an appetite to look" while simultaneously being disgusted by what he saw (see Liebert 2013). But fiction has its own dynamics. Aristotle discussed this in his *Poetics*, claiming that the source of pleasure in tragic poetry was to be found in imitation and catharsis; that is, skillful presentation on one hand and a sort of psychic cleansing or physical purge on the other

(Morreall 1968, 1; note also the connection to Bharata's thoughts). In contemporary art philosophy, this paradox has been discussed by, for example, Noël Carroll (1990), who focuses on it in the context of the horror genre (for more on this, see Contesi's chapter in this book).

The first section of this anthology brings together three different ways of approaching disgust in the field of aesthetics. In "Overcoming Disgust," Carolyn Korsmeyer considers when, why, and whether overcoming disgust is warranted and discusses examples of art and entertainment, where intensely negative, reactive emotions also attract audiences. Korsmeyer argues that many artworks require the arousal of disgust, and to overcome it altogether would be to lessen a reader's appreciation of the meanings that disgust can deliver. Next, in his chapter "The Affective Nature of Horror," Filippo Contesi discusses the paradoxical aesthetic appeal of disgust and fear in horror films. While "art-horror," to follow Noël Carroll's expression (1990), is often thought to be an affect distinct from horror in real life, the relationship of these two has not been solved in a satisfactory manner. Contesi argues that horror and disgust are common to both real life and art and that they are primarily typically individuated by a set of affective reactions. These takes on disgust and its role in delivering meanings is complemented by S Bhuvaneshwari's study of the place of disgust in Indian art philosophy, namely the rasa theory. In "Illustrating Disgust as an Aesthetic Sentiment," Bhuvaneshwari studies the rasa theories of Bharata and Abhinavagupta and applies their aesthetic principles to eight cases of Sanskrit plays and poems in order to tease out the potentials of aesthetic disgust in Indian stage arts and the theories written about them.

The second section of this book consists of three chapters that all study the instrumental use of disgust in contemporary discourses involved in "othering." In their "Childish, Self-centered and Cruel!" Armi Mustosmäki and Tiina Sihto study disgust as it is directed at the maternal body of a Finnish-Australian online blogger and microcelebrity Sini Ariell. In Mustosmäki's and Sihto's sociologically oriented analysis, the disgust performed in the online discussions incited by Ariell's blog post about the difficult sides of motherhood takes both class-based and gendered dimensions, as the discussants seek to regulate Ariell's norm-defying maternal complaint. In "Performing Disgust," Tuija Saresma and Urho Tulonen continue this manner of scrutinizing the performative uses of disgust in populist rhetoric. They analyze the Finnish far-right alternative media site *Partisaani.fi* and point out how disgust is used in homophobic, transphobic, and xenophobic contexts with the purpose of othering certain groups of people. Lastly, in "The Yuck Factor," Heidi Kosonen studies Anglophone news articles discussing entomophagy, the practice of eating insects, from the perspectives of both disgust's cultural construction and its performative uses in building differentiations between the West and the Global South.

While these chapters draw on different research frames related to class-related disgust, populism, and gender studies, as well as foodways scholarship, they all share an interest in the performativity of disgust as discussed by Sara Ahmed (2014) and Martha Nussbaum (2009, 2017). Ahmed and Nussbaum both consider disgust a performative emotion built on the reiteration of certain qualities and affects in cultural discourses, through which distinctions between us and others are constructed and maintained. These discourses also resonate materially in the lives of those who are tendentiously, "stickily" (Ahmed 2014), rendered disgusting – depending on the context e.g. women, the working class, non-Westerners, and both BIPOC and

2SLGBTQI+ individuals. In relation to this, some of the chapters in this anthology also draw on William Ian Miller (1997), who discusses disgust as a societal form of drawing distinctions between self and others, especially in the context of British class society. According to Miller, disgust has gained momentum from the cultural hierarchy and hegemony, so as to be more easily hurled toward those in the lower strata and margins of society.

The third section is devoted to food disgust. First, Tanja Plasil's study "Disgust by Association," explores the changing conceptions of freshness and edibility from the everyday perspective of date labels. As Plasil argues, the legal implementation of the use-by and best-by date labels in Norway and elsewhere in Europe has increased the distance between consumers and the actual state of the food products. Consumers no longer rely on their senses to determine the freshness of food, which has resulted in growing food waste. In contrast to Plasil's contemporary study, based on social and cultural anthropology, Rebecca Manley and Iryna Skubii provide a historical viewpoint on food taboos and circumstances in which people are forced to overcome them. In their "We Did Not Shrink from Eating Carrion," Manley and Skubii study how Soviet-era famines pushed conceptions of edibility as they forced famished humans to consume rotten and foodstuffs labeled tabooed under traumatic and traumatizing circumstances. Noting the dehumanizing effects of famines, they conclude that expressions of disgust served as affirmations of the humanity of the hungry. Next to these two studies grounded on interview data, "Cannibals and Kin" by Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye offers a folkloristic take on disgust as it traces the ways Newfoundland folktales discuss the ultimate food taboo: cannibalism. In their analysis, folk tales, similarly related to memories of famine and death, offer another way to study the cultural and personal complexity and disgust related to consuming taboo foods. Thus, Greenhill and Tye argue that fairy tales, along with other fictional forms, can both reinstate and contest ideologies naturalizing taste and disgust as biological matters.

Explorations of (food) taboos often draw on Mary Douglas's anthropological work on the conceptions of pollution and the taboo. In *Purity and Danger* (2002), Douglas connected disgust to the natural-cultural classification as a quality of the "anomalies," the irregularities, deviations, or exceptional conditions that threaten the order of things. Through the "taboos" established to regulate these anomalies (Kosonen 2020a), for instance in the form of religious rules (Bataille 2006) or through the socialization process (Freud 1981b), disgust could be connected also to breaches of these symbolic rules. Influenced by Douglas's theory and the Freudian idea of the unconscious, Julia Kristeva (1982) likewise discussed the relationship of disgust with the symbolic, although in a psychoanalytic frame, where it aligns with the field of the semiotic and reminds one of a primal, unlimited existence.

The fourth section of this anthology consequently directs the attention to audiovisual consumption and the experience of music, visual arts, and audiovisual culture. First, Henna Peltola explores the aversive experiences relating to music listening in her chapter "The Kind of Music That Makes My Skin Crawl," noting that music's ability to incite negative feelings has been neglected in musicology and claiming that music enjoyed by some may elicit a strong negative response called *misophonia* in others. Studying disgust in the context of constructivist views on emotion and cognition, Peltola connects musical disgust to ASMR experiences and sees it as a dynamic process of meaning-making (with intersubjective qualities) rather than a universal basic emotion. This exploration of disgust is followed by Edward Spencer's "Music to Vomit to,"

a study of expressions of disgust in and around the North American dubstep scene. Through field work undertaken at the Lost Lands festivals, where the genre's consumption has been conjoined to conspicuous sexual taboo acts, Spencer studies how the dubstep drop, the bass face, and the so-called "ass-eating competition" of the 2017 Lost Lands event are entangled with the online-offline attention economy. By focusing on these entanglements, Spencer offers an alternative narrative to dominant views that see music and dancing as returns to a primordial, infantile, or uncivilized state. In her chapter "Generative Disgust, Aesthetic Engagement, and Community," which ends the fourth section, Erin Bradfield studies the ability of aestheticized disgust-objects to generate both productive and destructive actions in audiences. In Bradfield's philosophical analysis of Andres Serrano's controversial artwork *Piss Christ* (1989) and Bryan Fuller's NBC thriller-horror series *Hannibal* (2013–2015), disgust's ability to generate reactions is discussed as "extreme engagement" and its role in community-building is highlighted.

The last section of the book discusses disgust in the context of laughter and pleasure. In her chapter "Producing Disgust," Susanne Ylönen takes a look at the terminology that we have for describing "turns toward the disgusting." By applying the terms of profanation, carnivalesque, and queering to the deliberately noncorrect, parodic, and controversial performances of the South African rap rave trio Die Antwoord, Ylönen argues that norm-breaking acts may be used as tools of inquiry. The humorous use of disgust is next studied in more depth by Outi Hakola, who treats the uses of dark comedy in her "From Intimacy to Abject." As the title suggests, Hakola draws on the concept of the abject, which according to the psychoanalytic approach of Julia Kristeva is the rejection that draws distinctions between the self and its "others." This psychoanalytically inspired line of thought is complemented by Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) ideas of grotesque laughter and incongruity theories of humor in Hakola's account. Lastly, in "A Cultural Approach to Sex-related Disgust" Hiroshi Yoshioka examines disgust in terms of historical changes in the image of the body from a Japanese perspective. The historical *Shunga*, the erotic painting tradition, which shows visual representations of genitals and sexual intercourse (sometimes with awkward objects), is viewed as being connected to a way of experiencing which has now become history. Although loaded with potentially disgusting sceneries and events, sometimes inherited by *manga* and other contemporary cultural forms, *Shunga* images, Yoshioka claims, were experienced also beyond eroticism and disgust, as an object of laughter.

Altogether, the writers in this anthology study the role disgust plays in human relations and social policing, popular culture, literature, music, and visual arts, as well as news and social media. Moreover, they ask how and why disgust is mobilized in these diverse fields, and what role it plays in the construction or deconstruction of cultural norms. Noteworthy in all these contributions is that the examinations of disgust, its aesthetic pleasures, and its political mobilization, all defy disgust's simple confinement to the so-called bodily senses and physical proximity initially emphasized by Darwin. Beyond gustatory, olfactory, and haptic disgust, disgust can also be caused by the auditory and visual.

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Section I

Aesthetic Approaches to Disgust

2 Overcoming Disgust
Why, When, and Whether

Carolyn Korsmeyer

Emotions and Their Control

"I assign the term 'bondage' to man's lack of power to control and check the emotions," Spinoza declares, "For a man at the mercy of his emotions is not his own master but is subject to fortune, in whose power he so lies that he is often compelled, though he sees the better course, to pursue the worse" (Spinoza 1982, 153). With this sentiment he joins the populous ranks of philosophers who offer general directives to get our emotions under control. The allegiance to rationality as the highest human trait and the one that should guide action lies at the heart of this advisory, for strong emotions such as fear, anger, and grief are also called *passions*, which can overwhelm us and undermine the cooler *actions* that reason dictates. Emotions can disable one's better, dispassionate self, sometimes rendering one so out of control that it seems an external force has taken over.

Fear and anger are probably the two emotions most frequently targeted as requiring control. The Stoic Seneca called anger a "brief madness," not a bad description of a burst of temper after which one feels embarrassed and remorseful. Less austere philosophers such as Aristotle admit the benefits of such emotions only when they are experienced in measured doses – the famous mean between extremes of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Fear and anger also happen to be emotions that readily transmogrify into undesirable character traits, making one timid or irascible (Goldie 2000, Ch. 6). Judicious habits to form the right disposition for both emotions are central to the development of two of Aristotle's cardinal virtues: courage and justice. On the other hand, the equally powerful emotion of grief tends to be targeted to a terrible event and to subside after enough time goes by. Even so, Epictetus advises that knowledge of the nature of things forestalls the anguish of grief, for if we truly recognize the fact of human mortality, death distresses us no more than does breaking a fragile object. "If you are fond of a jug, say 'I am fond of a jug!' For then when it is broken you will not be upset. If you kiss your child or your wife, say that you are kissing a human being; for when it dies you will not be upset" (1983, 12). This brief review mentions only theorists of the Western tradition, but belief that emotions require careful management is to be found in many philosophical cultures. In an epigraph to his groundbreaking book *The Passions*, Robert Solomon quotes a Hindu proverb: "Control your passions and you conquer the world" (Solomon 1976, n.p.).

What exactly does it mean to overcome, control, manage, or otherwise handle an emotion? When, why, and whether overcoming an emotion is mandated varies with circumstances, and another interrogative needs to be added to these three: *How*.

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Emotions are not easy to overcome, and strategies for doing so are limited in their effectiveness. Roughly speaking, the goals include: not to experience the emotion whatsoever (for shorthand, call this the Stoic solution), to experience it in a relatively mild form appropriate to the occasion (the Aristotelian solution), to experience it but tolerate it so that important action can be taken (the practical solution), or even to enter into the experience and explore it fully (call this the aesthetic solution). The last approach might seem unlikely if the emotion in question is an aversion like disgust, but certain narrative fictions will prove otherwise.

Disgust

Where does disgust figure among these many directives? Although disgust is now classed alongside fear and anger (and sadness, surprise, and happiness) as a so-called basic emotion, it is almost completely absent from traditional disquisitions about the passions. Spinoza, whose *Ethics* is permeated with an extensive catalogue of different emotions, mentions disgust only once and in passing. In fact, it wasn't until the twentieth century that philosophers turned full attention to this visceral, disturbing aversion. When Aurel Kolnai wrote his long essay on disgust in 1929, he noted the paucity of predecessor treatments. "The problem of disgust has to my knowledge been thus far sorely neglected . . . disgust – although a common and important element of our emotional life – is a hitherto unexplored sphere. At best it has been occasionally discussed as a 'higher degree of dislike', as 'nausea', or as 'reaction following a repression of urges'" (Kolnai 2004, 29).[1]

Kolnai targets a feature of disgust that might account for its earlier marginalization, namely, in its fundamental, core form it almost equally qualifies as a type of sensory reaction rather than a true emotion, perhaps rather like the startle reflex (Robinson 1995). Terrible tastes and noxious stenches – and even certain visual displays – cause immediate, automatic recoil, often even before one has fully identified the object of aversion. In its strongest forms, disgust is manifest in uncontrollable gagging or retching. Despite these bodily reflexive traits, disgust is now also squarely recognized as a basic emotion, at least among theorists who maintain such a category (Ekman 1992). "Basic" emotions are those that are pancultural, manifest characteristic facial displays, and are shared with many nonhuman animals. Disgust still remains an outlier, however, for although it is triggered by a sensory apparatus that has evolved along with those of other creatures on earth, disgust appears to be a full-fledged emotion only among human beings (Miller 1997, 12). Animals manifest distaste that makes them turn away from toxins and bad tasting food, but in humans the disgust response has an enormous range that far exceeds responses to unpalatable foods to include bodily wastes, signs of infection, violation of the bodily envelope (infestation, gore, mutilation), rotting corpses and other signals of recent death – comprising the heterogeneous range of objects that Kolnai calls material disgust and psychologists such as Paul Rozin label core disgust (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 1993).

What is more, the powerful quality of this aversion promotes extension beyond its core triggers into more abstract regions of evaluation. "Disgust is an unusually promiscuous and multifaceted emotion, cropping up in a bewildering array of contexts: food, disease, manners, rituals, social status, sexual mores, injustice" (Strohminger and Kumar 2018, 6). For expressions of disgust migrate into the moral realm as well, being prompted by filth, depravity, sexual perversion, anti-social practices, and –

dangerously – by groups to whom such traits are attributed. In this latter role, disgust can be summoned as a means of social control to impose conformity of behavior and to exclude outsiders and those who are regarded as misfits, whether or not they deserve that classification.

The extension of disgust into moral realms remains a point of controversy. While some philosophers regard disgust as a sound starting point for the formation of ethical judgments, others believe it to be untrustworthy because of the ease with which it can be mustered to exclude cultural outsiders (Nussbaum 2006; Kelly 2011).[2] Psychologists differ as to why disgust extends into moral regions, some arguing that moral disgust is not a clear instance of the emotion at all; assessment of evidence on the matter is tricky (Strohminger and Kumar 2018). Whether or not moral disgust is better described as strong disapprobation, it clearly should be overcome when it is deployed unjustly, for history has shown that marginalized groups whose cultural, religious, dietary, or erotic practices are unacceptable to the mainstream are often categorized as disgusting. Moral disgust rests on a complicated bed of assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs about the persons, groups, and customs of others. Hence overcoming disgust of a moral sort enjoins altering false beliefs about its objects.

No such cognitivist remedy is available for the response to objects of material disgust, however. An emotion that proceeds chiefly from a background of belief is susceptible to change if the grounding beliefs are changed. But a response that is triggered initially as a bodily reaction is far more impervious to adjustment; and core disgust, with its visceral, reactive character, is especially resistant to control and management. Disgust, that most commanding of aversions, causes us to draw back from things that stink, ooze, infect, infest, putrefy, contaminate, corrupt, deeply offend or appear vile. Why should one even to try to overcome disgust at objects if they merit such descriptions?

Most obviously, there are practical reasons, as nurses, doctors, first-responders, forensic scientists, sanitation workers, and home caretakers well know. Their jobs require dealing with the malodorous wreckage of organic materials, whether human or not, and being overwhelmed with disgust prevents getting on with the task at hand. The body might not obey the command of reason, but over time, it is possible that what would cause a novice to faint from repulsion is hardly noticed – which would represent the practical solution to overcoming disgust. However, this is probably not a case of volitional overcoming but a benefit from another physical response called adaptation. Adaptation refers to the reduction of sensory sensitivity owing to an adjustment that the brain makes upon extended exposure to, say, an obnoxious smell. "A new odor smells strong when we first experience it, but the longer we're exposed to it, the more it fades into the background. In the extreme, the smell may become undetectable for a while . . . The longer you are exposed to an odor, the more you adapt to it" (Gilbert 2014, 84–85). However, unless exposure is ongoing, the adaptation wears off and one returns to the state where visceral disgust is inescapable.

What I have labeled an aesthetic solution for handling disgust is the reverse of the Stoic solution. Not only is the actual expunging of emotions psychologically – and in the case of disgust also physically – difficult, the sacrifices of sensitivity it seems to entail are not appealing. This is obviously the case with emotions such as grief, sorrow, love, and pity. In addition, I would like to make a case that disgust can command attention and invite insight, for material disgust registers some profound aspects of life and death. Recognition of this fact helps to explain the extraordinary degree to which contemporary art and entertainment exploits the disgust responses of audiences.

Disgust and Aesthetic Engagement

The so-called aesthetic solution might seem a peculiar way to overcome disgust, because it invites indulging in the emotion, fully experiencing it, maybe even savoring it (Korsmeyer 2011). Admittedly, it sounds like an eccentric, even aberrant task. After all, disgust is a thoroughly negative aversion, the proximate cause of rejection, which is seemingly the very opposite of a positive aesthetic response. Indeed, Kant singled out disgust as the only emotion that cannot be rendered in art in an aesthetically positive way. As he states in an oft-quoted passage:

> There is only one kind of ugliness that cannot be presented in conformity with nature without obliterating all aesthetic liking and hence artistic beauty: that ugliness which arouses *disgust*. For in that strange sensation, which rests on nothing but imagination, the object is presented as if it insisted, as it were, on our enjoying it even though that is just what we are forcefully resisting; and hence the artistic presentation of the object is no longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of this object itself, so that it cannot possibly be considered beautiful.
>
> (Kant 1987, 180)

As Kant notes, disgust is easily aroused even by representation, such that what is disgusting in nature is almost equally disgusting when rendered in art. He is correct that images of revolting objects can arouse disgust almost as readily as the objects themselves, although viewers, readers, and audiences are spared the stenches that would be present in real life. But he is surely incorrect that there is no aesthetically positive outcome of the arousal of disgust in art.

Deliberate arousal of disgust characterizes many forms of art from ancient tragedy (such as *Philoctetes*), epic poems (Icelandic sagas), Jacobean dramas, Gothic tales, and contemporary horror, all of which overflow with scenes of mutilation and gore. Our own time is one in which revulsion prevails, for current film, graphic art, and prose literature are engaged in an escalating exploration of scenes, images, and descriptions that are intended to disgust. Visual forms such as movies, videos, and television are especial adept at presenting scenes that shock and revolt, although the form that interests me here is literature, partly because of the ease of quotation, but also because disgust is easily aroused by prose in the absence of direct sensory stimuli. Moreover, when authors arouse disgust they induce readers to dwell on the aversion and its role in a plot, for the pace of progress through a novel is controlled by readers themselves. They might skim or even skip disturbing scenes, but equally, they might take the opportunity to return to those scenes, even to read over and over passages that revolt. This pause to "savor" the aversion permits meanings to emerge that include moral, political, and existential significance, as we shall shortly see.

Philosophers argue about how the deliberate arousal of unpleasant emotions such as fear, disgust, horror, and so forth can be also a source of satisfaction, with different analysis offered by the likes of Aristotle and Hume as well as contemporary afficionados of horror (Korsmeyer 2011; Freeland 2000; Carroll 1990). Much of the debate involves disputes over what counts as satisfaction, pleasure, or appreciation. A point of general agreement is that disgust can be a means of achieving valuable insights, whether or not it should itself be considered an affect to indulge or savor rather than the unpleasant price to pay for cognitive gains. Those insights suggest

that overcoming disgust – in the sense of actually quelling it – is far from a generally sound directive, which we can see with some explorations into narrative artworks that deliberately arouse repulsion.

Forensic and detective fiction, notably the genre known now as Nordic Noir, excel in disgust arousal, not only with depictions of gore and mutilation but also of morally revolting situations. When a crime – almost invariably a horrendously gruesome murder presented with grisly detail – arouses disgust in the reader, that sentiment extends to the perpetrator. Only a moral monster could wreak such havoc on another living creature, so awareness of material and moral disgust converge in the reader's appreciation. In addition, horror and supernatural genres featuring aliens, zombies, vampires, and devouring predators invite disgust when the threat and contamination posed by such beings is revealed at points of suspense.

It must be admitted that often these sorts of scenes amount to simple gross-outs, testing boundaries to see just how deftly an author can violate sensitivities. (To clarify: the gross-out refers to the arousal of disgust with no other purpose than to revolt in as graphic a manner as possible.) Perverse it may be, but it must be acknowledged that there is a large audience for this particular relish. So a word must be said about the gross-out (which author Stephen King implies is a last resort for a horror writer: "I recognize terror as the finest emotion and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find that I cannot terrify, I will try to horrify, and if I find that I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross-out" (cited in Neill and Ridley 2008, 293)). An amusingly revolting almanac of every type of material disgustingness – putatively directed at children – summarizes nauseating examples and anecdotes of horrible things to eat, worms that invade us, distortions of nature, a catalogue of contaminations, and unsettling revelations of what goes on inside our very bodies (Elfman 1994). It includes a section on the "Grossest Things on Screen," listing ten movies that stand out for scenes that have actually made audiences vomit, such as *The Exorcist* (US, 1973) and *The Tin Drum* (Germany, 1979). (To these we might add *The Human Centipede* (Netherlands, 2009), *Raw* (France, 2016), *Martyrs* (Canada, 2008), or virtually any film by David Cronenberg.) The author is at a loss to explain the allure of the disgusting, speculating feebly that maybe we prefer to see others humiliated by the power of their sensory responses (61). It's a weak surmise.

Frankly, I don't think that any explanation of the appeal of the gross-out fully explains it. Possibly, immersing oneself in disgusting scenes is just a challenge to see how far one can go before revulsion drives one away – a test of both mind and body. Possibly, the gross-out is a preliminary exercise for the more subtle and profound exploitations of disgust in art. But in truth, I doubt that examining human nature is going to yield a fully satisfactory explanation, and perhaps attention to the objects of disgust affords more illumination. That is, consider not why we might want to dwell on them, but rather, what power they exert over us – despite ourselves. It may well be that the allure of the gross-out is another example of the external force that emotions exert, to use Spinoza's anxious term. That which disgusts just pulls us into its orbit. The meanings we derive from it follow rather than precede a motive to investigate.

Kolnai's phenomenological analysis comes close to this approach. He refers to the way that disgusting objects taunt us, press upon us in spite of our initial recoil. In his vivid description, disgust exhibits "shameless and unrestrained forcing itself upon us. The disgusting object grins and smirks and stinks menacingly at us" (2004, 41). This phenomenon is related to what he calls "the eroticism of disgust," and because

of the preoccupation with the sensory impressions of disgusting objects, he also concludes that disgust is an "eminently *aesthetic* emotion" (60, 100). That disgusting objects exert a grisly attraction is often observed. William Ian Miller notes that "the disgusting has an allure; it exerts a fascination which manifests itself in the difficulty of averting our eyes at a gory accident, of not checking out the quantity and quality of our excretions; or in the attraction of horror films, and indeed of sex itself" (1997, 22). And although current art and entertainment seems unusually obsessed with the revolting, we should not assume that our own century is simply degraded in its taste for the vile. The venerability of the allure of the disgusting is evident with Plato's Leontius, who cannot resist his unwelcome desire to investigate the corpses of executed criminals.

In short, engaging with disgust is not a rarified taste, and popular fiction – thrillers and detective stories as well as literary novels – is filled with intriguing uses of disgust. While some novels might only produce the grisly recoil of the gross-out, others also deal with significant subjects. The integration of disgust arousal into a complex work that has a serious point to make commands attention and thought. Not only can a narrative provide descriptive detail of characters who confront revolting situations and their various responses, a deft author can arouse in the reader sufficient mirror disgust that the emotion is both felt and explored. Such works challenge us to tolerate the intolerable. How is this accomplished, and what does it suggest about the phenomenon of overcoming this emotion? Let's now consider some passages from two literary narratives that, I hope, will be usefully stomach-turning.

Disgust and Love: Challenging a Truism

Philosophers who distrust disgust often maintain that this emotion distances one from its objects, placing one morally and existentially above its objects, canceling sympathy and affection. The disgusting object threatens contamination, prompting erection of a zone of both physical and psychological safety. When that object is another human being, disgust obstructs compassionate attitudes (Nussbaum 2001, 222). Miller asserts that disgust and love are incompatible: "Disgust opposes love . . . We can love and hate the same object at the same time, but we cannot love and be disgusted by the same object in any non-deviant, non-masochistic sense of love" (1997, 33). But what seems unexceptional in the general case is often belied in the particular, and deft prose awakens us to the fact that this assertion is false: disgust by no means always drives love away.

Like many novels with medical themes, Abraham Verghese's *Cutting for Stone* (2009) contains passages vivid with blood, pus, amputated limbs, and other bodily affronts. The setting is a mission clinic in Ethiopia that serves the poor for many miles around. The combination of disgust and love is strikingly evoked in a section where a father brings his daughter to the clinic. About twelve years old, she is suffering from a vesicovaginal fistula, a festering infection originating in genital mutilation and exacerbated by forceful sexual intercourse, which causes the bladder to erode to the extent that urine cannot be contained.

> They crept forward like snails, while other visitors sped up when they neared these two, as if father and daughter created an animating field. When she reached us, I understood why. An unspeakable scent of decay, putrefaction, and something else

> for which the words remain to be invented reached our nostrils. I saw no point in holding my breath or pinching my nose because the foulness invaded instantly, coloring our insides like a drop of India ink in a cup of water.
>
> In the way that children understand their own, we knew her to be innocent of her terrible, overpowering odor. It was *of* her, but it wasn't hers. Worse than the odor (since she must have lived with it for more than a few days) was to see in her face the knowledge of how it repulsed and revolted others. No wonder she had fallen out of the habit of looking at human faces; the world was lost to her, and she to it.
>
> When she paused to catch her breath, a slow puddle formed at her bare feet. Looking down the road, I could see the trail she left behind. I'll never forget her father's face. Under that peasant straw hat he burned with love for his daughter, and rage against the world that shunned her. His bloodshot eyes met every stare and even sought out those who tried not to look. He cursed their mothers, and cursed the gods they worshipped. He was deranged by a scent he could have escaped.
>
> (280)

In this vivid description, disgust is experienced by the two doctors who watch her progress toward their clinic, the father, and the reader. The object of disgust is the girl, her terrible medical condition, and by extension the practice that produced her suffering. In the fictional world, both the doctors and the father experience sensory assault, and there is no avoiding it. For the narrator, "the foulness invaded instantly," but even so, he does not reject this patient. His brother, who will later devote his practice to women similarly afflicted, approaches her and takes her inside.

One could reply that there are more intentional objects here that need to be considered: one can be disgusted by a girl's medical condition but not the girl – they recognize that the odor "was *of* her but it wasn't hers." Neither the father nor the physicians consider the girl herself to be disgusting, but this means only that the disgust is not a moral rejection of the person. Still, disgust is inescapable because reaction to the overwhelming stench of rotting flesh cannot be overcome. But neither does it obstruct love or compassion. The father is described as "deranged by a scent he could have escaped." And yet love kept him by his daughter's side. Love did not cancel the visceral repulsion, and the fact that his beloved daughter was so putrefied put the father on the brink of madness. But neither did his disgust override his love.

What about the response of the reader of this passage? Here is the aesthetic solution at work: the reader benefits from dwelling in the disgust aroused by reading. The odor is not there, which makes that dwelling far easier outside of the fictional world. In its place is an eloquent, extended description that presents an image where disgust brings potent understanding to the situation. But without the tinge of revulsion at the situation so described, that understanding is only of the mind; it misses the heart. Another way that compassion and disgust, far from driving each other apart, are mutually enhancing. This is far more complicated than testing the limits of one's emotional toleration. It is an affective and effective way to begin to understand grievous bodily conditions – that are inflicted on the young and innocent; and that are indications of practices that produce such hideous outcomes for girls and women. Being revolted by scenes in prose that is beautifully and eloquently written arouses not only compassion but also political insight.

Disgust and Social Malaise

Here is a different example of a novel that manipulates disgust to serious ends, now in the particularly popular genre of detective fiction. Author Frank Tallis has a series of mysteries set in the early years of the twentieth century in Freud's Vienna. His books present a vivid picture of the city and its complex cultural organization at that period of history. The Hapsburg empire is on its last legs, although only the reader knows for sure that this is true. Vienna's long-standing anti-Semitism is on the rise, and again only the reader realizes just how vicious it will become. Immediately, the reader is immersed in a fictional world perceived with a sort of double-vision, because the main characters, while not oblivious to these ominous signs, love their city and believe its cultural virtues override the political discomforts that they acknowledge are growing around them; we know better.

The chief protagonist, Liebermann, is a young doctor, a secular Jew and a disciple of Freud, who applies his psychoanalytic insights to assist the police solving crimes. And of course, the crimes are horrendous: mutilated corpses in despicable poses, set in areas of the city freighted with meaning, and described in sickening detail. Constables called to the scene frequently vomit at what they discover.

The horror of an event indicated by vomiting on the part of novice policemen is not an uncommon plot device. It foregrounds a difference between giving into disgust and overcoming its power, for seasoned officers – especially those who are our main protagonists – are appalled and repulsed, but their dignity is rarely compromised by the loss of control that vomiting indicates. Giving into extreme disgust relinquishes power over one's own body, embarrassing and undignified, even if perfectly understandable, for even reading about the abominations is challenging. Just how do the more experienced officers overcome what would be a natural disgust response? Rarely do they fail to respond at all; the emotion is not simply suppressed. Habituation helps, although it is not Aristotle's advice to aim at a mean between extremes that is successful. It seems more likely that adaptation (though unnamed) is at work, whereby exposure to horrid stenches produces lessened sensitivity over time. Thus these scenes underscore the sensory triggers of disgust and the weakness of volitional control over the emotion. Repeated exposure to the smells and the scenes of mutilation temporarily reduce the response, though it is not quashed or suppressed as such, nor are the younger officers condemned for their inability to control their stomachs. Rather, with woeful practice, disgust is felt but managed so that it can be set aside and the business at hand efficiently conducted.

That pertains to the characters on the scene. They are appropriately horrified by what they confront, and part of that horror is a disgust response. Not to feel it at all would suggest baffling insensitivity rather than strength of emotive character. But we the readers are also disgusted – deliberately so, as part of our appreciative reading. Consider the following passage, which appears in the opening pages of the novel, priming the reader for the mysteries and horrors to come. We are on a dark, damp street, just after dawn, a cold, dim atmosphere strobed by photographic flashes.

> Liebermann advanced and made his way – somewhat warily – around the expanse of congealed blood. He squatted and looked directly into the truncated stump of the monk's neck. The dawn sky provided him with just enough light to identify the remains of the key cervical structures; however, what he observed was nothing

> like the cross sections that he remembered from his anatomy classes, which had resembled the fatty marbled meat of a freshly sliced joint. The aperture of the trachea was displaced, as were the hardened remnants of cartilage. The vertebrae were fractured, and the muscles ripped and twisted. A rubbery length of artery hung out over the trapezius, still dripping. Something purple, veined, and lobulated was lying on the ground close to the monk's right shoulder. Liebermann guessed that it might be a piece of the thyroid gland . . .
>
> He stood up and moved toward the severed head. It seemed to take him an inordinate amount of time to travel the relatively short distance – and all the while the horrific object exercised a curious fascination.
>
> (Tallis 2009, 5–6)

We the readers are spared the stenches of decomposition, splattered blood, and the foul spillage from eviscerated organs, but this passage is still pretty revolting. We might well be tempted to skip a few pages to avoid the nastier descriptions. But should we? By *should* I mean to ask whether by failing to participate in the fictional disgust-arousing passages, we bypass full understanding of the plot, or refuse to take in important moral issues, or ignore artistic and aesthetic qualities of the narrative. These questions arise: need one overcome disgust to read, should one overcome disgust to appreciate, should one savor the disgust to understand? In these questions, epistemic, moral, and aesthetic considerations mingle.

What does one come to know from lingering over this description? Obviously, information about the plot and what is to come, but what else? Consider the fact that the protagonist here is a doctor, and he summons his medical knowledge in his examination: "what he observed was nothing like the cross sections that he remembered from his anatomy classes, which had resembled the fatty marbled meat of a freshly sliced joint." This observation expands the reader's disgust not only to the horribly mutilated victim, but also to the human body itself in all its vulnerable indignity, for we are reminded that cross section of our muscles appears little different from what we find in a butcher shop. An indication, incidentally, that disgust does not always distance us from its objects; far from it. In this case, it reminds us that we number among those objects (a point made by both philosophers and psychologists).

As Liebermann makes his way to the head of the victim, which has fallen some distance from the body, "the horrific object exercised a curious fascination." This fascination describes not only this fictional character but also the reader (provided the latter has not skipped the page altogether). It is a more sophisticated and nuanced version of the gross-out, and it reminds us once more that at least some of the strong emotions that we are enjoined to suppress, overcome, or control are more than simple aversions. They are affects whose objects are of considerable significance that, in the midst of repelling, also invite. This paradoxical aspect of disgust is at work as Liebermann approaches the severed head, noting its "stretched and contorted musculature, identical displacements and splintering. The macabre skirt of paper skin was particularly disturbing" (6). Curiosity is certainly part of the allure of the disgusting, indicating that certain objects of this emotion promise to tell us something about that most mysterious of human experiences, death. Which, of course, is arguably not an "experience" at all but an anticipation freighted with dread as well as curiosity.

The reader is probably also experiencing a degree of disgust when encountering this passage, but while Liebermann's attraction matches the descriptions of Kolnai

and Miller, there is an additional factor in the more distanced disgust of an audience. Being attracted to the disgusting in real life can be a state of capture that one would also like to avoid or at least reduce. For the reader, it can also be a kind of savoring, what we could label aesthetic disgust. Aesthetic disgust takes advantage of the insights this emotion affords, enters into the horror of its objects, and thereby gains a glimmer of understanding of things one would rather not think about. It is a form of overcoming, but rather than suppressing or reducing the aversive feeling, it accepts its inevitability, enters into the aversive affect, and appreciates it.

The inescapability of mortality is an existential insight that disgust arousal promotes, but there is more. This novel is set in one of the gems of European culture, a city approaching catastrophic downfall from events that will soon destroy the empire it oversees. Vienna is also fraught with an increase in its venerable anti-Semitism, which will prepare the way for another world war, facts that readers soon realize are central to the book's plot. The anti-Semitic resonance is relatively slight at first, for the main character is Jewish and suffers snubs and snide remarks. But we soon discover that the murders in *Vienna Secrets* are not only horrific, but they are also staged to suggest that the perpetrator is none other than the legendary golem – the mud man crafted by the renowned Rabbi Loew of sixteenth-century Prague – to serve the Jewish people in their times of need. The victims of this story are not only decapitated, but their heads are wrenched off in a way that is at first inexplicable, for no man is strong enough to twist off a head with such violence that it leaves behind a trail of torqued tissue. Such depredation could only have been produced by something inhuman.

An autopsy at the pathologist's lab reveals the unusual effects of the removal of a head by a ferocious twist. Rheinhardt, although a hardened police inspector, finds it difficult to look at the mangled remains. ("An instinctive revulsion had made him gloss over the arabesques and flourishes of human flesh. He had only registered an impression of gory redness and felt with it a sympathetic horror, a vague tingling of imaginary pain" (114).) But now with the body on a slab, the pathologist Mathias forces him to realize what has been done:

> Look at these muscles. See how thick they are . . . and look at this tissue here." Mathias pulled at a flap of rubbery white gristle. "See how elastic it is? Have you ever seen a fat man hang? No? Well, the neck often stretches. It doesn't tear." Mathias released the elongated sinew, and it snapped back, wetly. "What are you doing, Rheinhardt? Don't look away. I'm trying to explain!
>
> (115)

In addition to magnifying the horror the reader already experiences, this forensic diagnosis enhances curiosity about this supposed golem, propelling the plot to its finish (which I shall not reveal). Moreover, the pathologist's command could equally well be directed to the reader: don't look away, don't skip this passage, listen to the explanation, consider what it means. Consider what your disgust brings into the light.

I have quoted fairly extensive passages from two books, both of which exploit meticulous descriptions of ravaged human bodies to evoke disgust in the reader. Even with only two examples, it is clear that disgust comes in forms that, while challenging to read, do not entirely repel. The emotion is aversive and fascinating, its unpleasantness impels recoil, but its meanings induce approach and embrace. Kolnai concludes his long essay with the comment that we should see disgust

> as something meaningful and legitimate in itself, which when yielded to in an uncontrolled way may also bar us from many of the values of life and hinder us in the performance of many noble deeds, and which should, accordingly be subjected to repeated scrutiny, to repeated honing and illumination.
>
> (90)

While uncontrolled disgust can render us helpless when we should act and hard-hearted when we should care, it also opens territory that demands understanding and that does not require that it be overcome entirely. When that understanding is affectively aroused with an engaging novel, it is both repellent and welcome.

Notes

1. The neglect was not quite as thorough as Kolnai claims, however, as he omits consideration of the targeted discussions of disgust and art that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially in Germany (Menninghaus 2003). Granted, those were not general examinations of the emotion.
2. Kolnai, who considers disgust to have an important role in the formation of ethical judgments, notes that disgust "does not attain normative certainty . . . it can only serve as a signpost towards a subsequent ethical judgment and cannot be its immediate determining factor" (2004, 83).

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3 The Affective Nature of Horror

Filippo Contesi

Perhaps contrary to appearances, the nature of horror is in many ways a poorly investigated issue in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind and cognitive science. To be sure, a substantial amount of work has been published on the horror genre in art and its effects on audiences. However, the nature of horror as an affective phenomenon has been much less investigated.[1] My aim in what follows is to probe this latter issue further. My approach will be to find the most coherent and widely applicable notion of horror that makes best sense not only of common uses of the word but also of the way the affective phenomenon works in the relevant contexts. I will start from a critical take on the discussions that have been conducted within aesthetics, before applying some of the lessons we learn there to an understanding of horror more generally. I will also argue that there is no good reason overall to distinguish between horror in art, or in the artistic genre, and horror elsewhere. I will argue against the view that horror, both within and outside art, is an emotion that in all occurrences is always (or even typically)[2] marked by fear or disgust (let alone a combination of the two). Nor, I will argue, is horror a mood as has been suggested more recently. Finally, I will sketch an alternative account according to which horror is primarily, typically individuated by a set of (output) affective reactions characteristic of a number of other affects which include fear and disgust.[3] My aim throughout will be to get clearer on the nature of horror as an affective phenomenon, with the hope that this may provide more solid foundations for future investigations into all sorts of issues connected with horror, both within art and outside of it.

Art, Reality and Genre

Horror has a long and famed history as an artistic genre in literature, and more recently film, as well as in other forms of art.[4] Customarily, the genre is described as an evolution of 18th-century Gothic fiction, especially in English, and traced back to novels such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The list of the genre's characteristic features is a matter of no small controversy. However, among the most plausible candidates is certainly the presence, in the fictional narrative, of supernatural or preternatural phenomena, and of physical violence and death. Especially in the philosophical literature, though, the horror genre is frequently defined more in terms of the effect that artworks in the genre have (or are intended to have) on appreciators than on their characteristic themes. This is for instance the approach that Noël Carroll's (1990) foundational discussion takes. According to him, the "cross-art, cross-media genre" (Carroll 1990, 12) of horror "is essentially linked with a particular affect – specifically, that from which it takes its name" (15).[5]

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Indeed, if the genre is called after the affect, then it is likely that that is because the affect is (perceived to be) characteristic of the genre. Nonetheless, Carroll appears to deny this latter claim. Although he acknowledges an essential link between the affect and the genre, he also insists that the affect that is characteristic of the horror genre must be distinguished from other referents that the word 'horror' has in common parlance. He calls the former (i.e. the affect that the horror genre is designed to elicit in audiences) 'art-horror' and "presumes" that it is an emotion (1990, 15). Moreover, the emotion of art-horror, is, according to Carroll, different from two other affective phenomena. Firstly, it is different from the affect that is appropriate to real horrific events such as the Holocaust. Carroll calls the latter 'natural horror'. Secondly, art-horror is, for Carroll, distinct from the affective response that is appropriate to horrific stories or imagery in art that lies outside the horror genre, especially those that precede what Carroll calls the "coalesc[ing]" of the horror genre in the 18th century (1990, 13).

Although these distinctions might be understood as aiming at methodological caution in the investigation of the horror genre, they also run the risk of providing an unnecessarily partial angle from which to investigate horror (certainly as an affect, but perhaps also more widely as a genre). It is, for instance, unclear why we should hold that the genre and the affect are essentially linked, without drawing the consequence that the affect is one of, or perhaps *the* characteristic response that is appropriate to works in the genre. Indeed, the essential link seems to be justified by the following just-so story:

> **Horror Just-So Story (HJSS)**: There existed an affective response named 'horror' that some things warrant in real life. Then came representations, some of them artistic, of real-life horrific events, which also elicited horror. Finally, an entire artistic genre developed to elicit horror in those appreciators who seemed to find some value in that kind of experience.

On HJSS, one and the same affect is the link between Carroll's "natural horror" and the affects warranted by art within, as well as outside the horror genre (and both preceding, and subsequent to, the genre's formation). Indeed, that would also explain why the horror genre is named after the affect, i.e. by understanding the genre as expressing or eliciting the affect in an especially poignant way.

If, moreover, works in the genre were (intended)[6] to warrant an emotion that is exclusive of the genre (as Carroll says), then that of horror would look like a unique case. In particular, it would be a different case from that of other genres that are ordinarily defined in terms of the affects they warrant. Take the definition of tragedy on which Carroll models his account, i.e. the one in terms of fear and pity often attributed to Aristotle. On that definition, the characteristic affects of tragedy are the ordinary emotions of fear and pity. Similar is the case of comedy, which shares humour with both real life and other art genres.

Here, one might suggest the possibility that perhaps the affects elicited by (representational) artworks are, as a rule, not of the same kind as those elicited by real-life events. If that were true, it would perhaps be easier to accept that the horror genre should warrant a distinct affect from the one warranted by real-life counterpart events or characters. There are three main problems with such a possibility, though. First, it would still not explain the difference between the case of horror and those of other

artistic genres such as comedy and tragedy. Also unexplained would remain the difference that Carroll postulates between the affects warranted by art within and outside the horror genre. Thirdly, and finally, there are serious problems with the view that artistic representations warrant a different kind of affective response from the one warranted in real life. Although such a view has sometimes been defended (e.g. for fear),[7] it is a view which is difficult to embrace whilst holding a view of the relevant affects as relatively stable and evolutionarily useful mental mechanisms. One who holds such a view, in fact, faces the challenge of having to explain the evolutionary usefulness and feasibility of the development of multiple kinds of affects sharing such a great number of physiological, phenomenological and behavioural features.[8]

Horror, Disgust, Fear

The upshot of the previous discussion is that the investigation into the affective nature of horror should look within the horror genre as well as outside of it, and both in art and in real life. So, what is horror? Disgust and fear are perhaps the two affective phenomena most often associated with horror. Indeed, according to what might be called 'the received view' in analytic philosophy of art, horror fictions are designed to warrant a combination of fear and disgust. Carroll (1990, 27) holds such a view, and many others have since agreed with him.[9] Although widespread, however, the view is not especially well-defined. The affective response that is warranted by horror fictions is often cashed out as if it is a mixed emotion, or an "emotion blend", composed out of (some of) the (features of the) two emotions. If that were true, however, its features, including its typical intentional objects and its physiological, phenomenological etc. responses, would be quite difficult to characterize.[10] To start with, it is unclear whether the features of the two emotions would add up to one another, or instead merge and hence produce different features.

Moreover, as for instance Jenefer Robinson notes, features of different emotions can be insufficiently compatible and hence unable to blend (2014, 74). In the case of horror, it would be difficult to tell what, for instance, the physiological reactions of a fear-cum-disgust emotion blend would be like. For one thing, in fact, fear and disgust are typically associated with opposite heart-rate patterns: one increasing, the other decreasing (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008, 758–759). Furthermore, fear and disgust have different kinds of things as their typical intentional objects, and each of them likely evolved for different purposes. Fear is a defence mechanism against more clearly identifiable, imminent threats, such as attacks from predators or other physical accidents. By contrast, disgust primarily protects us from longer-term and less immediately identifiable threats posed by a set of potentially pathogenic substances. Again, it is unclear what the intentional object of an emotion blend of fear and disgust would be like. The two kinds of objects have such different features that it seems quite difficult to make them compatible. Indeed, most things in real life are either fearsome or disgusting, although there are some that can be construed as objects of both fear and disgust: e.g. crawling or slithering objects such as spiders or snakes (cf. e.g. Vernon and Berenbaum 2002). Even in these latter cases, however, it seems far from clear that the response they warrant is a blend of fear and disgust, rather than simply the co-occurrence, or juxtaposition, of fear and disgust. Of course, fictional creatures can, by definition, push the boundaries of the real. As we will see later, however, there are also cases of horror fictions that are not easily characterized as being both fearsome and disgusting.

The alternative to fear and disgust being blended in horror is that horror fictions do not warrant a single emotion but two distinct kinds of affective response concurrently. This latter is indeed a more plausible alternative than the emotion-blend hypothesis, and might well be the one Carroll and others have had in mind (Contesi 2020, 49). One immediate issue with such an option is that it might initially sound as a little odd to call two distinct emotions with a word in the singular: 'horror'. Indeed, that may appear as even more problematic given what I argued for in the previous section, i.e., that we should aim to preserve the unity of the affective phenomenon of horror across real life and different artistic genres. If horror fictions typically warrant fear and disgust, and the affect we ordinarily call 'horror' just is the affect that horror fictions are characteristically meant to elicit, then horror as an affect actually turns out to be two emotions we already have distinct names for. Although a little counter-intuitive, that is not an obviously unviable option. Consider for instance how a knife is, in a sense, the combination of a blade and a handle.

So, is horror really just the co-occurrence of fear and disgust? Carroll argues that audience reactions to horror fictions parallel the reactions displayed by many of the characters in those fictions, and in particular those we might call 'victims' and 'bystanders'. Those characters, he notes, recurrently display fear and disgust for the horror monsters. However, the last part of Carroll's picture here is notoriously controversial, as many have argued that horror fictions do not necessarily have monsters as protagonists (see Gaut 1993).

I do not want to take sides on the necessity of monsters for horror fictions, as that is not, at least for my purposes, an especially consequential issue. For a start, the notion of a monster (generally speaking but also, in particular, as Carroll defines it as a being "whose existence is not countenanced by science" (Carroll 1990, 68)), allows Carroll sufficient room for manoeuvre in many of the alleged counterexamples raised against his theory. It has for instance been argued that psycho-slasher fictions, such as those in the Hannibal Lecter horror saga, have apparently normal human beings as protagonists. Carroll has responded that Dr Lecter actually appears to have such unusual features for an ordinary human being (e.g. powers of memory and psychological insight, almost superhuman strength etc.) to stretch his categorization as such (Carroll 1995). Secondly, it is possible to reframe Carroll's point about fear and disgust being the characteristic audience reactions to horror fictions, without requiring that the object of such reactions always be the monster. One can simply posit that fear and disgust are the characteristic audience responses that horror fictions aim to elicit, as directed at various elements of the fiction (or of the ways in which these are represented).

A greater problem with the fear-cum-disgust theory is that there are some horror fictions that do not involve either fear or disgust in any significant way. One case in point are fictions where disgust does not play much of a role if any. Consider for instance Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843), *The Black Cat* (1843), *The Premature Burial* (1844), *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846), or Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). The horror sub-genre these works are usually classified in is "psychological horror". The same point can be made about some classic films adapted from some of the above novellas, such as *The Innocents* (1961).

Similar cases are some Val Lewton films – for instance Tourneur's *Cat People* (1942). The film tells the story of a woman who fears (with good reason, considering the way the story unfolds) that she belongs to a race of people who turn into aggressive felines when they are angry, jealous, or sexually aroused. The film involves some violence

and aggression towards humans by felines (including a killing), but it always stays very far from the kind of gruesome displays that one is accustomed to encountering in many other horror fictions. Moreover, the "monster" herself, the woman-feline Irena Dubrovna, is hardly disgusting in either feline or woman form.

Indeed, many of these examples of horror without disgust are from earlier stages of the horror genre. The closer we come to our days, the more disgust appears to play a role, and the fear component to recede. However, fear rarely disappears completely from fictions in the horror genre.[11] However, there are exceptions. Some splatter films, such as Herschell Gordon Lewis's cult classic *Blood Feast* (1963), reduce the fear component to an insignificant level to emphasize the display of gore for gore's sake. The film's plot is sufficiently standard for a horror. A serial killer, the owner of an Egyptian-inspired catering business, is on the loose torturing and killing several women in gruesome ways. He is eventually identified by police and dies whilst being chased. However, the audience early on (even before seeing the film's title credits) learns about the seriality of these murders and discovers the identity of the killer. This dramatic device in itself reduces the audience's surprise and fear at the handful of murders occurring subsequently on screen. Similar effects are reached by other filmic devices: the relative slowness of dialogue and action, often very artificial-sounding, the relatively abundant humour, the sudden, abrupt ways in which the murders occur, as well as the unrealistic sounds that play over them. Finally, another way in which *Blood Feast*, and other horror fictions, moderate fear elicitation in the audience is by, in various ways, hindering audience sympathy for horror victims.

Other cases of horror without fear can be found outside film. Consider for instance, paintings of religious or mythological violence such as *The Martyrdom of Isaiah the Prophet* (1470), or Jaume Huguet's *Martyrdom of St Bartholomew* (ca 1480); or Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (ca 1620), or some of Géricault's "Anatomical Pieces", such as *Heads of the Executed* and the *Study of Arms and Legs for The Raft of the Medusa* (ca 1819). Beyond art, there are cases of (images of) real-life horror. Consider for instance photographs of guillotined men such as some of those taken immediately after the infamous Pollet brothers' execution in France (1909). Or, finally, think about the case of someone coming across the dead body of their cat which had disappeared months before (Solomon 2004, 117), or of the common use of 'horrible' to refer to someone or something that we find very ugly.[12]

The Affective Nature of Horror

I have argued that a good understanding of the affect that is distinctive of the horror genre requires a careful and broad examination of horrific phenomena, both within and beyond the artistic genre. By means of this kind of examination, I have shown that neither of the two components of the standard philosophical account of horror, i.e. fear and disgust, are necessary components of the affective response of horror. Horror does not coincide with fear nor with disgust, nor is it an emotion whose necessary constituents are either fear or disgust. In this final section, I will sketch an alternative understanding of horror.

This alternative understanding of horror starts from acknowledging that both fear and disgust often co-occur with horror, both within and outside art. The occurrences of each of them, in fact, often include the affective response of horror as part of their responses. Indeed, I will argue that horror is primarily, typically individuated by a

particular set of physiological, phenomenological and behavioural affective reactions, which are shared by different affects including fear and disgust (as well as possibly some others such as shock).

The set of affective reactions that primarily individuates horror is best described as a freezing, or freezing-like reaction, in the face of something we are deeply shaken and distressed by. In what is probably the most famous foundational critical text on horror, Ann Radcliffe thus distinguishes terror from horror:

> Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them.
>
> (Radcliffe 1826, 149)

More recently, literary scholar James Twitchell's celebrated monograph on the topic states that in horror "we pause momentarily . . . frozen between fight and flight" (1985, 10).

This kind of reaction is sometimes an (extremely early or late) component of the fear response. As such, it is also referred to by such terms as 'tonic immobility' or 'playing dead'. Such reactions are often warranted in those moments, during confrontations with imminent threats, when the threat is either not yet fully comprehended, or when neither fight nor flight appear feasible response strategies. In the former scenario, freezing-like reactions facilitate readiness to action, while also allowing for maximum acuity of attention. In the latter scenario, by contrast, the same reactions can be useful when the best hope of defusing a threat is to appear to the source of the threat as completely inoffensive to it (or even dead) (Bracha et al. 2004, 449). In even more extreme scenarios, tonic immobility can turn into collapsed immobility (or "fainting"), which is characterized by such symptoms as (even) less mobility than is the case in tonic immobility, loss of muscle tone, lower to suspended consciousness, and hypoxia. Indeed, although sometimes associated with fear, such immobility responses diverge in some respects from fight-or-flight or more standardly investigated fear responses. Physiologically, for instance, tonic (and, even more, collapsed) immobility are associated with bradycardia, or a decrease in heart rate (see Kozlowska et al. 2015).

So, I propose to understand horror as primarily, typically[13] individuated by the set of physiological, phenomenological and behavioural reactions like, and connected to, the immobility responses just described. However, this latter set of reactions is not exclusively a component of fear episodes. It can also feature as a component of disgust (and possibly also of other affects such as shock). These are reactions that often feature in horror fictions, as well as in other horror-warranting scenarios. Moreover, as I argued, neither fear nor disgust are necessary components of horror. Finally, the immobility reactions in question often have enough differences with what are considered as typical responses of fear (such as in their abovementioned hear-rate patterns), to make them compatible with different affects such as disgust.

Some support for the view I am putting forward comes from a founding figure of modern emotion theory. In Chapter XII of his classic essay on expressions of emotions, Charles Darwin (1965/1872), says he "endeavour[s] to describe the diversified expressions of fear, in its gradations from mere attention to a start of surprise, into extreme terror and horror". In doing that, he introduces two photographs of different facial expressions from Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne's *Mécanisme de la physionomie*

humaine. Darwin labels them, respectively, "Terror" and "Horror and Agony" (Darwin 1965, fig. 20–21). He explains his choice of labels by reporting a little experiment in which he showed the latter "photograph to twenty-three persons of both sexes and various ages". The results of his experiment were that thirteen respondents answered "horror, great pain, torture, or agony", six answered anger, three extreme fright, and yet another one of them answered disgust. Although Darwin takes these results to support the view that horror is a combination of extreme fear and pain, a more sensible interpretation of the results of his experiment, I suggest, would be that the facial expression of horror is attributed to *a variety* of negative affects: from pain, to fear, to anger and disgust.

The view of horror I am arguing for also bears resemblance to a couple of contemporary views. First, Solomon (2004) argues that the real affective phenomenon of horror is not the one experienced in response to horror fictions, but the one that is warranted by real-life events. In this latter sense, for Solomon, (real) horror is an emotion (or emotional experience) to be understood in primarily cognitive terms. This emotion is distinct from fear, disgust, dread or other affects, even though it often appears mixed with them. At the same time, continues Solomon, it is an experience so irredeemably unpleasant that it is not compatible with any degree of pleasure. Indeed, the affective response to horror fictions is different from real horror. In line with what I have been arguing, I agree with Solomon that horror is present in a multiplicity of eliciting situations and should not be reduced to other affects such as fear, disgust etc. Nonetheless, I question Solomon's primarily cognitive understanding of horror, as well as his view that "real" and "artistic" horror are fundamentally different affective phenomena.

First, I will examine in some detail what Solomon's categorization of horror as an emotion amounts to. At different points in the text, Solomon says he does not think it is important to distinguish between the categories of "emotion", "emotional experience" and "emotion-related phenomenon". This is mainly because:

> The category of emotion is sufficiently indistinct, part [sic] from a small set of "basic" emotions (including fear), that I do not think such a question is either interesting or decisively answerable.
>
> (Solomon 2004, 264)

In general, Solomon's indistinctness worry about the category of emotion strikes me as a little too pessimistic, perhaps especially if seen with the benefit of hindsight (almost two decades after he was writing). Both in emotion theory generally, as well as in the philosophy of emotions in particular, nuanced accounts are available of different categories of affects: emotions proper, moods, sentiments etc. Similarly, there is quite a wide mapping of the different types of emotions, moods etc. At the same time, however, I share Solomon's worry as it pertains to the particular case of horror. The boundaries of horror do appear to be a little more blurred than may be the case with other affects.

Nonetheless, I disagree with Solomon about the appropriateness of his "predominantly . . . 'cognitive'" (2004, 113) analysis of horror. Indeed, Solomon appears to resist my own preferred understanding of horror in terms of a set of affective reactions:

> [We do not] have to retreat to the merely physiological (the goosebumps that give "horror" its name: the word "horror" comes from the Latin *horrere* and the

> French *horror* – to bristle or to shudder). It may well be that such physiological symptoms of both fear and horror may be produced by fictional representations (even when one knows that they are fictional), but such symptoms alone are not any emotion at all.
>
> (Solomon 2004, 117)

Besides his general commitment to cognitivist theories (cf. Solomon 2003), his reason for rejecting an account of horror in terms of a set of affective reactions might be found in his claims that horror requires a substantial level of cognition. For instance, he claims that:

> [Horror] can indeed be a "primitive" emotion, one that is barely articulable and in that sense noncognitive (or cognitively impenetrable, in the latest jargon). But it nevertheless consists of a horrified recognition that things are not as they ought to be, which in turn requires an implicit comparison (if only as "seeing as") and an evaluative judgment or appraisal.
>
> (Solomon 2004, 119)

And, later on, he adds that horror "is an extremely unpleasant and even traumatizing emotional experience that renders the subject (victim) helpless and violates his or her most rudimentary expectations about the world" (Solomon 2004, 129).

I agree with Solomon that horror is often accompanied by cognition. After all, horror is in my view a set of reactions that are often components of other affects, such as fear and disgust. These latter affects have substantial cognitive aspects to them, which inevitably end up accompanying the emotional experience of horror. In large part for this reason, I avoid *identifying* horror with a set of affective reactions of immobility or immobility-like states, and talk instead of horror being primarily, typically *individuated* by those reactions. Nonetheless, I do not see a coherent and precise way of outlining horror's cognitive features, e.g. its formal object. Indeed, Solomon's (already cited) attempts in this respect are either circular or too broad: horror "consists of a horrified recognition that things are not as they ought to be", or "renders the subject (victim) helpless and violates his or her most rudimentary expectations about the world".

The second point of disagreement I have with Solomon concerns his claim that there is a fundamental difference between real and artistic horror. Indeed, he claims that "pretend horror, or what Noël Carroll nicely calls 'art horror,' is derivative" (Solomon 2004, 108). I find his argument for this latter claim a little difficult to pin down with precision. However, his main reason seems to be that, contrary to artistic horror, (real) horror is not compatible with pleasure. In turn, that is because:

> horror is necessarily an overwhelming emotional response to what is horrible. But the fact that horror is overwhelming . . . also means that it is not one of those emotions which can be "mixed," and, in particular, it does not mix with pleasure. While fear and pleasure combine in various ways, horror, by contrast, does not.
>
> (Solomon 2004, 123)

But why does real horror need to be overwhelming? Consider for instance Solomon's own already cited example of one's horrified discovery of the dead body of one's own cat that had disappeared for a long time. Is that a necessarily overwhelming

experience? I submit that it is not, as all affects seem to admit of degrees, including horror.[14] Indeed, in general, affects likely need to be moderated in their intensity to be compatible with pleasure in art; and so does horror (see Eaton 1982; Morreall 1985).

I have pointed to a lack of coherence in the cognitive components of horror. A similar observation appears, in part, to drive another contemporary view. Whilst maintaining Carroll's distinction between natural horror and art-horror, Andrea Sauchelli's (2014) view starts from the observation that the horror genre in art is broader in scope than one might think. In particular, Sauchelli is worried about the narrowness of Carroll's view that works in the horror genre are designed to warrant the emotion of art-horror as directed at horror monsters. Instead, he proposes to understand art-horror as a mood, which he labels "the H-mood", that works of horror are designed to evoke by the "artistic means peculiar to the form of art" such works belong to (Sauchelli 2014, 43). The difference between such an H-mood (as moods more generally), and emotions is that the former is not directed at a specific intentional object.[15] Moreover,

> the H-mood is characterized by a feeling of tension related to a morbid inclination of our attention toward a set of unpleasant aspects of reality that, in the case of horror, include mostly death, murder, and evil forces.
>
> (Sauchelli 2014, 43–44)

To defend his view, Sauchelli discusses a number of putative cases of works of horror in various art forms, from film to painting, from poetry to music. Some such cases might indeed justify a move away from horror monsters as a defining feature of works in the horror genre. Especially interesting in this respect are Sauchelli's cases of non-fictional works of art such as the "horror shockumentary" *Traces of Death* (1993). Nonetheless, such cases are not sufficiently compelling to justify an understanding of horror as a mood. Even though they may challenge a view of horror as directed at Carrollian monsters, such horror shockumentaries still arguably warrant, in their depiction of real violence and deaths, emotional responses directed at the (real) victims they portray.

Better suited to support his account of horror as a mood are non-representational works of art, which for their nature do not directly feature any obvious intentional objects of horror. Indeed, Sauchelli mentions some putative instances of horror music, such as songs by the metal bands Carcass, Cannibal Corpse and Mayhem, Krzysztof Penderecki's instrumental composition *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960), and Simon Heath's Atrium Carceri. Although one might argue about the inclusion of musical works in the horror genre, at least some of the works cited by Sauchelli can be construed as suggesting horrific affects. Nonetheless, Sauchelli's musical cases still present two difficulties when used as evidence for the view that horror is a mood.

Firstly, many if not all of them are not pure instances of non-representational art. The songs by the metal bands mentioned, for instance, feature lyrics that talk about horrific characters and events. Moreover, whilst Penderecki's *Threnody* and Atrium Carceri are works of instrumental music, they, too, have titles that make obvious references to potential as well as specific objects of horror: e.g. the consequences of the Hiroshima nuclear attack. Secondly, it is a commonplace puzzle about music that it can move us emotionally. Indeed, many have argued that even absolute (i.e. purely instrumental, non-representational) music often evokes, or even expresses, emotions such as fear and sadness.[16] To accommodate affective responses to (non-representational)

music, in other words, one needs not move away from emotions and replace them with moods as the affects it is intended to evoke or express.

Finally, even assuming that an account of art-horror in terms of moods can accommodate such non-representational cases, the account would not easily accommodate a wide swath of more standard cases (e.g. the Frankensteins, Aliens but also shockumentaries etc.), our experiences of which intuitively feature intentional objects. Sauchelli would probably respond to this objection by suggesting a reinterpretation of these latter cases in terms of moods. Besides its counter-intuitiveness, however, it remains to be seen whether such a reinterpretation would really succeed in providing an alternative mood-based understanding. Indeed, it is not obvious that the analyses Sauchelli suggests of specific artworks generally depart from more traditional accounts. In his discussion of Francis Bacon's *Head I* (1948), for example, Sauchelli says:

> What is left of the human face is a pile of white material that is eating and regurgitating itself through a mouth with uneven sets of teeth. The expression of the mouth resembles that of a patient in agony. The entity depicted in the painting does not seem to have any possible escape route. The background is dark and empty, and there is no hope or friendly figure who may, in an act of mercy, put an end to the despair shown. Whatever the painting is supposed to mean, suggest, or evoke – the agony and despair of the human condition, or perhaps the inescapable loneliness and pain of our existence – the image can be sensibly taken as an example of art-horror.
>
> (2014, 43)

The mauled and detached head depicted in Bacon's painting (perhaps, in fact, resembling more an animal than a human head) does appear as featuring a face expressing agony as well as ideas or feelings of loneliness and inescapability. Whilst one might well not consider it a monstrous head – at least not in Carroll's sense – it is either an object of horror directly, or it empathetically points the viewer's horror to the horrific predicament in which its owner is. Indeed, both such a predicament and the head itself fall into traditional types of intentional objects of horror. Still, the ambiguity between which one of them would be most relevant in understanding the horror warranted by Bacon's painting can be seen as suggesting the need for a departure from a traditional understanding of horror as an emotion. However, that ambiguity cannot be resolved by eliminating any role altogether for an intentional object but is, in my view, better taken as pointing towards the account in terms of (output) affective reactions that I have defended in this essay.[17]

Notes

1. This is, in some sense, less true elsewhere in the humanities, for instance in psychoanalytic circles influenced by Kristeva's (1982) work and in less cognitively inclined film studies (e.g. Aldana Reyes 2016). Also more discussed in critical theory and other sections of Continental philosophy is the nature of "affects". From the point of view of the present chapter, the problem with these broadly speaking Continental approaches is that they are not always compatible with analytic philosophy and cognitive science approaches. Indeed, the two different types of approaches sometimes appear not to be concerned with the same phenomena, even while they use the same labels. Thanks to a reviewer for their kind help with this point.

2. Horror, as well as affective and mental phenomena more generally, are very complex phenomena, difficult to account for in terms of strict necessary and sufficient conditions. Accordingly, it has been typically studied in terms of paradigmatic conditions (Carroll 1990, 38). In this essay I do not intend to depart from this approach, which I see (not too dissimilarly from the way scholars such as Carroll sees it) less as a different approach from the traditional one appealing to necessary and sufficient conditions, than as a reasonable adjustment of it. Thanks to a reviewer for pushing me to be clearer on this issue.
3. In what follows, I tend to follow the convention of calling 'affect', 'affective response', or 'affective phenomenon' instances of the general category of which emotions, moods, sentiments etc. are sub-categories. By contrast, I reserve the expression '(output) affective reactions' to refer more specifically to one part of the former entities, i.e. the physiological, phenomenological, behavioural etc. components of an affect's response (e.g. the facial expression of disgust, or the rush of adrenaline in fear, or the urge to retaliate in anger etc.). Finally, I refer to the affective phenomenon when I speak of 'horror' simpliciter (i.e. without qualifying it with 'fictions', 'genre' etc.).
4. It is typically the case that artworks in the horror genre are assumed to be fictional works (e.g. by Carroll 1990). I will follow this assumption where it does not affect my argument. Please note, however, that, as e.g. Sauchelli (2014, 41) points out, some horror artworks are non-fictional.
5. In what follows, I will discuss Carroll's view in large part as an example of a view of the nature of horror that many have adopted. Accordingly, I will leave aside for the most part his own stance on neighbouring issues, that are in principle independent from his main view or have proved less influential.
6. Carroll talks about *intentions to warrant* to avoid cases in which intentions go awry: e.g. horror films that fail to be horrific. Nonetheless, provided that the range of cases discussed is restricted to successful horror films, then it does not change things much for my purposes to talk about the affective reaction that works in the genre *typically* elicit or warrant. Similarly coherent with my purposes would be to talk about affect expression. According to a view such as Peter Lamarque's (2014, 185–200), for instance, what counts in art appreciation is not what affects art elicits, but what affects it expresses. Such a view, in turn, can be seen as a contemporary incarnation of Wimsatt and Beardsley's (1949) influential attack against criticism's "affective fallacy".
7. See Walton (1978, 1990). It is perhaps worth noting that, although Walton explicitly talks of fear, his main example (Charlie's green slime) appears to be from a horror movie (see e.g. Solomon 2004).
8. Carroll himself is a prominent defender of the sameness in kind between the emotions elicited by real life and in art. In Chapter 2 of Carroll (1990), he defends what he famously labels 'thought theory'. Such a view, initially defended by Lamarque (1981), is now mainstream in analytic philosophy, due in large part to Carroll's influential discussion.
9. In his chapter on "Horror" in the *Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, Aaron Smuts (2009, 505) presupposes, without ever questioning it, the view that horror fictions warrant fear and disgust. Or, to mention another example, Katerina Bantinaki (2012, 383) assumes the same view as "pretheoretical".
10. I argue for this at greater length in Contesi (2020, 49).
11. This is true, at least if one discards horror comedy as a subgenre of horror (whilst maintaining a definition of the latter in terms of a characteristically elicited affect).
12. I am grateful to Greg Currie for this suggestion. One might worry here that appeal to linguistic usage puts the argument on slippery ground. The worry would be that occurrences of 'horror', 'horrible' and their cognates are in this case only extended uses of the words, and hence that one should not conclude anything about the nature of horror from such occurrences. After all, we often say, e.g., that "we feel horrible", when we really are only exaggerating a much milder feeling of pain or discomfort. Moreover, I certainly agree that linguistic considerations are only partial evidence in the kind of investigation I am engaged in here. However, linguistic evidence, including concerning extended uses of words, cannot be discounted altogether. One can very often reconstruct with some plausibility the derivation of extended uses of words from their literal origins. In the case at hand, there is no obvious reason to prefer a connection between ugliness and fear to a connection between ugliness and other affects, such as disgust or general pain. It is certainly conceivable that

one could draw a link between, say, an ugly face and the fear one might experience in encountering it. But the link between ugliness and disgust (or general pain) seems much more natural. Many thanks to Daniel Molto for raising this concern to me.

13. I add the qualification 'typically' here to insulate my claim from counterexamples that appeal to non-standard means of provoking the same affective reactions, such as drugs or surgical stimulation. Thanks to a reviewer for their kind help with this point.
14. Korsmeyer (e.g. 2011, 97) responds in a similar manner to the criticism that disgust is too intense to be compatible with pleasure. Cf. also Carroll and Contesi (2019).
15. Although Sauchelli does not cite her, Cynthia Freeland (2004, 189) hints very briefly at a similar suggestion: "Some recent movies herald a change in horror films during the past decade or so: *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999), *Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999), *The Others* (Alejandro Amenabar, 2001), and *Signs* (Shyamalan 2002). In these films the horror is subtle and lingering, a matter of mood more than monsters."
16. See Davies (1994) for an influential account of how music does this.
17. I am very grateful, for all their help and support, to the editors of this volume and two anonymous reviewers for it, as well as to the following other people and institutions: Aarón Álvarez-González, Emily Brady, Greg Currie, Susan Feagin, Manolo García-Carpintero, Matthew Kieran, Carolyn Korsmeyer, Uriah Kriegel, Peter Lamarque, Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis, Aaron Meskin, Daniel Molto, Stephen Müller, Cecilea Mun, Joulia Smortchkova, Enrico Terrone and Antonio Vassallo; audiences at the LOGOS Research Group in Analytic Philosophy, the American Society for Aesthetics, the Jean Nicod Institute and the Universities of Parma and Turin; and, finally, the European Union and the Generalitat de Catalunya, the University of Barcelona, the LOGOS Group and the Barcelona Institute of Analytic Philosophy.

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4 Illustrating Disgust as an Aesthetic Sentiment

Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* and Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabhāratī*

S. Bhuvaneshwari

Concept of *rasa* and Disgust as One of the *rasas*

Sage Bharata, said to have lived between 200 BCE and 300 CE, is a theorist on theatrical principles. He is the author of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a treatise on science and art of dramaturgy. A closer study of *Nāṭyaśāstra* gained momentum in the 9th century CE, when Udbhaṭa (c. 800), one of the earliest aesthetic thinkers of Kashmir and the author of the poetic work *Kāvyālaṃkārasārasaṃgraha* (Compendium on the Essence of Poetic Embellishments), brought the discussion on the concept of *rasa* to the centre stage. The literal meaning of the word *rasa* is "taste," "flavour," "juice," or "essence." In the realm of aesthetic theory, *rasa* is an aesthetic sentiment or experience particularly related to the experience of a dramatic art.

Following the tradition of Kashmiri poeticians and aestheticians such as Udbhaṭa, Abhinavagupta (fl. 975–1025 CE) (Pandey 2018), the famous non-dual Śaiva[1] philosopher of Kashmir, continued the debate centring on *rasa*, in his commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* on *Nāṭyaśāstra*. This is the only complete commentary extant on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. According to Bharata, the purpose of drama is to motivate people to realize their goals of life (*puruṣārthas*), viz., righteousness (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), sensual pleasure (*kāma*) and liberation (*mokṣa*), by creating an *impact* in the minds of the audience through the choice of themes and ways of acting (Ghosh 2009, 10). Abhinavagupta identifies *rasa* as the primary catalyst that is said to accomplish Bharata's objective of drama, which is realisation of goals of life (Krishnamoorthy 1992, 261). Abhinavagupta's thought concerning the relationship of *rasa* and the purpose of drama have dominated the views of both the literary aestheticians as well as the dramatic art practitioners until now.

Bharata, without explicitly defining *rasa*, speaks of the method of arousing *rasa* in a dramatic art. He provides a formula in his famous aphoristic statement, viz., "*Rasa* is established (*niṣpattiḥ*) [in a dramatic art] because of the combination (*saṃyogāt*) of aesthetic stimuli (*vibhāva*), ensuant (*anubhāva*) and transitory emotions (*vyabhicāribhāva*)." We can understand in general that *rasa* signifies *that experience*, especially occurring in the mind of the connoisseurs (Pollock 2016, 48–49), created specifically by a dramatic work of art. In this sense, *rasa* also includes the meaning of creating an *impact* in the minds of the connoisseurs through a play, i.e., a drama. This *impact* is important for Bharata, since it is the contributing element for realisation of higher values of human life, which *impact* continues to linger in the mind of the connoisseur even after disengagement from that play. Thus, *rasa* does not cease with creation of an emotive atmosphere, but it continues to operate, driving an individual to ponder

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on deeper layers of human life. Therefore, the concept of *rasa* indicates the purpose as well as the goal of art.

Among the eight *rasas*, viz., love (*śṛṅgāra*), humour (*hāsya*), pity (*karuṇa*), anger (*raudra*), valour (*vīra*), fear (*bhayānaka*), disgust (*bībhatsa*), and wonder (*adbhuta*), Bharata unhesitatingly accepts "disgust" as a *rasa*, whose corresponding stable emotion (*sthāyī-bhāva*) is "abhorrence" (*jugupsā*). For the first time, in the history of Indian aesthetic thought, we find a systematic presentation of the role and significance of "disgust" in Bharata's aesthetic theory. The role of aesthetic disgust has been further elaborated by Abhinavagupta through his theory of philosophical aesthetics (see Masson and Patwardhan 1985). Indian art forms such as poetry, classical dance, and theatre have explored the expression of disgust as the fully realized *rasa*, as well as in the state of stable emotion. However, aesthetic disgust hardly takes the position of being the primary *rasa* of any piece of art, especially a work of drama. It does, however, play a significant role by accompanying other aesthetic sentiments, such as love, fear, humour, and so on, which are identified as either the primary or secondary[2] *rasas* of a play.

To illustrate this, I will cite an instance from a Sanskrit play *Mālatīmādhava* of Bhavabhūti (eighth century CE) (Telang 1936), that powerfully utilizes aesthetic disgust in service of primary *rasa*, i.e., sentiment of love. *Mālatīmādhava*, a ten-act play, is a love-story of Mālatī, daughter of minister of Padmāvatī kingdom and Mādhava, son of minister of Vidarbha kingdom. Mādhava falls for Mālatī at first sight and longs to consummate his desire. He is intensely passionate and blindly in love with her. He goes to the extent of offering fresh human flesh to the goblins in the cemetery to gain their (magical) powers to attain her. He enters a cemetery ground and describes the horrid scenes in soliloquy; one such is as follows:

> Having first, repeatedly tore off the skin,
> [then] eating the fetid flesh,
> that is abundant due to expansion and inflation,
> [and] which is readily available in parts,
> such as the shoulders, hip and back,
> the hungry ghost eyes darting back and forth,
> teeth protruding, is undisturbedly eating
> from the skeleton lying on its lap,
> the raw flesh situated within the bone,
> even when [that raw flesh] is in uneven parts,
> [such as joints of the bones].
>
> (Telang 1936, 121)

The dramatists' description of the hungry ghost in general invoke disgust. Descriptions such as "tore off the skin" and "eating the fetid flesh" indicate the aesthetic stimuli, which are heightened by the description of the gory details of the corpse and the act of eating of raw flesh. The expression and appearance of the hungry ghost further "nourishes" the sentiment of disgust. The arousal of aesthetic disgust in this context reveals the desperate condition of Mādhava, who in love with Mālatī, would tolerate anything to win her. By this juxtaposition of disgust and love, the dramatist wants to create a complex impression in the mind of the connoisseurs. Here, Mādhava is not the locus of aesthetic disgust, since he voluntarily ventures into the

cemetery and describes the scenes in soliloquy, without hesitation, fear or revulsion. He is, in fact, the locus of sentiment of love. The arousal of aesthetic disgust in the minds of the readers or connoisseurs, in this context of the play, is with a specific purpose to heighten its primary *rasa*, i.e., the sentiment of love. This instance exemplifies the application of aesthetic disgust as an enhancer of the primary aesthetic sentiment of the play, i.e., love.

According to Bharata, the potentialities and capabilities of aesthetic disgust can be realized when it is associated "appropriately" with other "relevant" aesthetic sentiments. I propose to explore the characteristics of aesthetic disgust in relation to other aesthetic sentiments, especially connected with poetry and play, by pondering over two basic aspects, viz., the purpose of depicting "disgust" in art and the method of depicting "disgust" in art. I intend to present this study of purpose and method of depiction of "disgust," as one of the ways to realize the flavour of "disgust" in art. In this background, I seek to explore the first aspect by studying the relationship between aesthetic disgust and sentiment of peace, (the ninth *rasa* accepted by some aestheticians) by drawing three examples from works such as *Śivāparādhakṣamāpaṇastotram* (Hymn Seeking Forgiveness for Offence Against Lord Śiva) of Śaṅkarācārya (fl. 800 CE), *Daśarūpaka* (Ten Plays) of Dhanañjaya (tenth century CE) and *Buddhacarita* (The Story of Buddha) of Aśvaghoṣa (c. 80 – c. 150 CE) (published in Chinmayananda 1999; Musalgaonkara 2000; Johnston 2015). Here, I shall illustrate how the method of reproach has been employed to establish the relationship between disgust and peace. I shall then investigate the second aspect by analysing the relationship of aesthetic disgust with sentiments of fear and love.[3] I shall examine instances from *Veṇisaṃhāram* (Binding of Tresses) of Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa (fl. before 800 CE) and *Mahāvīracarita* (Tale of a Great Hero) of Bhavabhūti (eighth century CE) (published in Deshpande 1953; Ratnam, Rangachariar, and Kasinath 1892) to illustrate how the mutually related disgust and fear result in the sentiment of valour through the method of balance. I shall explore instances again from *Veṇisaṃhāram* and *Kumārasaṃbhava* (Birth of Kumāra) (published in Sastri 1971) of Kālidāsa (fl. fourth-fifth centuries CE) to illustrate how the opposing relationship between disgust and love is depicted through the method of propriety. I conclude that the Sanskrit dramatists and poets, perhaps taking the cue from Bharata and later from Abhinavagupta, have been exploring the potentialities of aesthetic disgust for several centuries only in relation to other aesthetic sentiments. If (Indian) contemporary artists, challenging Bharata's aesthetic theory, venture to invoke aesthetic disgust as the primary *rasa*, then I consider that the starting point would be to address the "purpose" and "method" as illustrated in this paper with regard to the secondary nature of aesthetic disgust.

Disgust as an Enhancer of Peace

We mentioned that dramatic works of art, according to Bharata, serve the purpose of realising human goals. According to Abhinavagupta, this purpose of realising human goals through a dramatic art is accomplished by the concept of *rasa*. In this framework, aesthetic disgust is said to convey the goal of liberation. But how is "disgust" associated with liberation in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*? Bharata identifies three factors (Ghosh 2009, 90) that are said to be the causes of disgust. First is disgust caused

by agitation (*kṣobhaja*), as in the case of sight of blood. Second is disgust caused by disturbance (*udvegī*), as in the case of sight of faeces, worms and so on. Third, he mentions "pure" (*śuddha*) disgust.[4] Bharata does not explicitly clarify what he means by "pure" disgust. But this category of "pure" disgust, offers Abhinavagupta a window to introduce his philosophical aesthetics. He associates "disgust" with the aesthetic sentiment of peace (*śānta*),[5] which in turn, he connects with the human goal of liberation.[6] In this context, we shall examine three instances, which while not influenced by Abhinavagupta's theory, still exemplify this relationship of disgust with the sentiment of peace.

According to most of the Indian philosophical systems, attachment is an expression of bondage. Therefore, attachment is considered as a hurdle in the journey towards liberation, which is characterized by an unshakeable quality of peace. Philosophers point out that the most intense form of attachment is attachment to the body, and it is credited as the cause of repeated births, which entangle beings in vicious cycles of suffering. Detachment from exclusively identifying with ephemeral realities such as the physical body, is considered a necessary condition of liberation. Hence, "disgusting" narrative descriptions of the physical body, involving censure, hatred, contempt, reproach, and so on, can be found in Indian poetic and dramatic works, wherein, disgust is introduced in order to evoke aesthetic sentiment of peace. For instance, Śaṅkarācārya (fl. 800 CE), a philosopher, in one of his poetic works, subtly conveys the idea of developing detachment towards the physical body by describing the loathsome condition of assuming birth:

> O Great Lord, Śaṃbhu! Śiva! The Auspicious One!
> Forgive my offence, (for not remembering you, because),
> in the beginning, due to my association with (past) karmas,
> I was situated in the mother's womb,
> in the midst of faeces, urine and excrement,
> that impels (me to suffer) filth,
> I was intensely scorched by the digestive fire.
> Who can explain,
> the other kinds of intense pain I experienced there?
>
> (Chinmayananda 1999, 1–2)

In this passage, the philosopher-poet, seeks pardon from Lord Śiva for not propitiating Him owing to his preoccupation with the pathetic situations of conditioned existence, encapsulated in the travails of birth, life, and death in a state of ignorance. The philosopher-poet describes the early state of childhood, from the moment of conception in the womb. By describing the impurities in the locus of conception, the philosopher-poet attempts to heighten the notion of disgust. Since the disgusting description in this poem is ultimately didactic, it can be classified as "pure" disgust, as identified by Abhinavagupta, which is in service of cultivating the spirit of detachment, eventually leading to sentiment of peace.

Dhanañjaya (tenth century CE), a contemporary of Abhinavagupta from Kashmir, is the author of the treatise *Daśarūpaka* (Ten Plays) (Musalgaonkara 2000), written based on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Unlike Abhinavagupta, Dhanañjaya does not accept the association of "pure" disgust with the sentiment of peace. This is because he does not

recognize peace as an aesthetic sentiment. He defines "pure" disgust as aversion born of dispassion and illustrates it with the following example:

> People, who are "sick" and under the grip of lust
> consider saliva as wine,
> lumps of flesh as breasts,
> and slabs of flesh and bone as thighs.
> (Musalgaonkara 2000, 466)

According to Dhanañjaya, this poem reveals the idea that what was an object of delight at one time for a passionate person becomes an object of disgust at another time for a person who has cultivated dispassion. Dhanañjaya does not associate expression of censure due to dispassion with the sentiment of peace, even when it functions in much the same way as Abhinavagupta's explanation. For Dhanañjaya, the purpose of such poetic expressions is to simply reveal aversion caused by dispassion, driving home the point that "lust" is an immature attitude that is one of the causes of human suffering.

In the early life of Buddha, as a young prince Siddhārtha, he is said to have been deeply disturbed upon witnessing the inherent hardships of human life, namely old age, sickness, and death, the contemplation of which inspired him to renounce his lavish princely life and adopt a life of mendicancy in search of "truth." Aśvaghoṣa (c. 80 – c. 150 CE), in his epic-poem *Buddhacarita*, "The Story of Buddha," narrates this formative episode in the life of Buddha (Johnston 2015). As a young prince Siddhārtha, he is said to have been ignorant of human suffering. Aśvaghoṣa captures the young prince's response to human suffering by representing his mental condition as he is enthralled by various hues of disgust:

(i) expression of disturbance causing disgust after seeing suffering due to senility:

> . . . . what pleasure can there be for me in garden-place?[7]
> . . . . gripped by that very anxious thought, [the young prince appeared] as if he were fallen into emptiness.[8]

(ii) expression of agitation causing disgust after seeing sickness:

> . . . . he was mentally dejected, trembling like the moon reflecting in waters with ripples.[9]
> . . . . and after hearing about fear due to disease, my mind, as if recoiling, withdraws from pleasures.[10]

(iii) expression of despondency after seeing a dead man:

> . . . . upon learning about death, he sank. . . . instantly dejected.[11]

Aśvaghoṣa reveals Buddha's common expression of disgust, in all these three stages, to be a contraction of mind, a withdrawal from the external world and a state of contemplation or going deep within as an act of inner reflection. The life of Buddha symbolizes the journey of letting in and understanding subtler and subtler layers of suffering as a dynamic confrontation with the mysteries of embodied existence. In fact, many early Buddhist works enjoin contemplation on the repulsive, including meditations on physical impurities and corpses, wherein disgust is introduced as pathway to detachment and peace.[12]

In the above three instances, i.e., in the poem of Śaṅkara, as well as in the writings of Dhanañjaya and Aśvaghoṣa, we see that aesthetic disgust is employed as a precursor

for cultivation of dispassion, which supposedly culminates in the sentiment of peace. All these three poems cited above, adopt the method of reproach or condemnation, but disgust functions differently in them. In the first instance, birth is described with disgusting expressions for generating dispassion, which results in the contemplation of the very purpose of human existence. In the second instance, disgust is invoked by describing the lustful mind, which is expected to cultivate dispassion for the sake of examining the impact of human indulgences in sensory pleasures. In the third instance, disgust expressed in the form of mental disturbance, agitation, and despondency, is said to have generated the dispassion, which led Buddha to contemplate on the cause of human suffering. Such contemplation on the purpose of human existence, indulgences in sensory pleasures, and cause of human suffering, paves way to the re-discovery of inner peace, that is said to nurture expressions like compassion. From these instances, we derive that through the method of reproach, disgust initially assists in recoiling the mind. Subsequently, disgust helps to fathom the inner meanings of life and paves way to emerge as an instrument to promote peace. This process exemplifies Abhinavagupta's theory of associating "pure" disgust with the sentiment of peace. We have so far examined the first aspect related to the purpose of invoking disgust in art.

Disgust and Fear as Enhancers of Valour

We now turn our attention to the second aspect related to the method of depicting "disgust" in art. Bharata refers to the relationship of disgust with other aesthetic sentiments.[13] For instance, according to Bharata, disgust and fear are mutually related as cause and effect. That is, disgust is the cause and fear is its effect (Ghosh 2009, 84). We find that thinkers such as Aurel Kolnai (1900–1973), a philosopher and a political theorist, recognize the relationship of disgust and fear along with loathsome. In both "Disgust" (1929) and "The Standard Modes of Aversion" (1998) Kolnai assiduously distinguishes disgust from fear and loathing, even while recognizing that in actual experience these emotions often come in bundles (Smith and Korsmeyer 2004, 18). Abhinavagupta further explains the cause-effect relationship of disgust and fear. He says that all those elements, such as "blood" and so on which invoke disgust also invoke fear (Krishnamoorthy 1992, 291). Thus, there would be an overlapping of aesthetic elements related to fear, while depicting disgust and vice-versa. We find that dramatists have utilized this mutual relationship of disgust and fear in order to invoke the sentiment of valour through the method of balance. Below, we examine two instances to illustrate this idea.

Let us begin with a scene from the play *Veṇīsaṃhāram*, "Binding of the Tresses" of Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa (fl. before 800 CE) (Deshpande 1953). This play adapts its main plot from the *Mahābhārata*, one of the two great epic-poems of India (the other being the *Rāmāyaṇa*), that narrates the family feud between the royal cousins, the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas of the Kuru race. The following verse comprises a description of the horrific and gruesome appearance of Bhīma after slaying his cousin, Duḥśāsana in the great battle at Kurukṣetra:

> Stop the forces fleeing from the battlefield,
> whose weapons are slipping away out of fear,
> because of the sight of Vṛkodara, i.e., Bhīma,
> who having drunk [the blood] of slayed Duḥśāsana,
> appears hideous, bathed with the remaining blood.
> (Deshpande 1953, 100)

The dramatist's description of the gory scene of Bhīma (the protagonist) drinking and smearing blood, is a disgusting act that powerfully portrays the intensity of his vengeance, hatred, and anger towards Duḥśāsana (the second villain). The soldiers are frightened, who flee the battlefield, and the readers or the viewers of the play, in turn, are left with a sense of horror. The disgusting and frightful appearance of Bhīma portrays his wrathful heroism. The dramatist subtly brings out the cause-effect relationship of aesthetic disgust and fear by describing their common stimulus viz., "blood." That is to say, the description of "blood," stimulates disgust, which becomes the cause of fear. The dramatist, through the disgusting appearance of Bhīma, invokes fear in the soldiers, in order to enhance the primary sentiment of the play, which is valour (according to Abhinavagupta). Thus, in this instance, the cause-effect relationship of disgust and fear is employed in service to the primary sentiment of valour.

The other instance is from the play *Mahāvīracarita*, "Tale of A Great Hero" of Bhavabhūti (eighth century CE) (Ratnam, Rangachariar, and Kasinath 1892). This play adopts its main plot from the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, which is the other epic-poem of India (pre-dating the *Mahābhārata*), that narrates the life episodes of Rāma, the prince of Ayodhya. Following is an instance where Lakṣmaṇa, younger brother of Rāma, describes the appearance of demoness Tāṭakā to sage Viśvāmitra.

> Adorned with huge skulls and femurs,
> with terrible sound of ear-ornaments,
> who by the fierce noise of her other ornaments,
> makes the sky resonate;
> whose torso is wet with clots of blood due to vomiting,
> having drunk it in vast quantities,
> whose frightening body with heavy breasts is shaking.
> Who is she, who is running towards us,
> with puffed up arrogance?
> (Ratnam, Rangachariar, and Kasinath 1892, 25)

In this instance too, we see expressions such as "skulls, femurs, blood, vomit" that are common stimuli of both disgust and fear. The dramatist places more thrust on the "disgusting" appearance of the demoness to convey the idea that demoness Tāṭakā is someone who should be vanquished at once and who does not deserve any compassionate regard. Though her appearance is frightening, Lakṣmaṇa's description primarily arouses disgust. Lakṣmaṇa, the second hero of the play, is not frightened by the terrific appearance of the demoness, he is ready to confront her. The dramatist communicates the "devilish" appearance of the demoness by invoking disgust.

In the first instance stated above, the disgusting act in the form of smearing and drinking blood by Bhīma causes fear in the soldiers, who flee from the battlefield. Here, the act of disgust is located in the protagonist, i.e., Bhīma and the sentiment of fear is conveyed by the fleeing soldiers. According to Bharata, the sentiment of valour, which is invoked by a hero or a heroine of a play, is opposed to fear (Ghosh 2009, 88). Here, the dramatist heightens the sentiment of valour in the protagonist through the method of balancing, i.e., distributing the sentiments of disgust and fear by situating them in two different characters. That is to say, Bhīma evokes disgust, terror and valour, while the fleeing soldiers embody fear.

In the second instance, the frightful appearance of the demoness Tāṭakā, that implies power and valour of the antagonist, is picturized by invoking disgust. Here, disgust and terror are evoked through the same character, i.e., the demoness, Tāṭakā. But there is no fear either in the demoness (Tāṭakā) or in the second hero of the play (Lakṣmaṇa). This second instance illustrates that disgust depicted by the antagonist, invokes the sentiment of valour in the protagonist (the second hero), without the intervention of the sentiment of fear. The power and valour of the demoness is subject to destruction at the end; hence it does not develop into the aesthetic sentiment of valour. The dramatist balances disgust accompanied by terror, on one hand, with the expressions of confidence and zeal, on the other hand, to heighten the sentiment of valour in the second hero of the play. In both these instances, the dramatists apply the mutual relationship of disgust and fear for the sake of heightening the sentiment of valour by balancing or distributing the contrary sentiments such as fear and valour intervened by disgust in different characters.

The Opposing Nature of Disgust and Love

In Bharata's aesthetic structure, disgust is inimical to love. That is, disgust cannot give rise to love and love cannot exist in presence of disgust. Hence, portrayal of disgust must be totally avoided while depicting the sentiment of love (Ghosh 2009, 85, 112). For Bharata, the locus of sentiment of love is a man and a woman, who are of "superior" nature (*uttama-prakṛti*) (Ghosh 2009, 85). Furthermore, aesthetic love should be aroused in a dramatic work of art through the hero and heroine who are in the prime of their youth. Bharata further hints that disgust should not be introduced in the context of depicting the sentiment of love (Ghosh 2009, 85, 112). Disgust and love cannot co-exist in the same character, according to his theory. This implies that depiction of disgust and love in the same character is aesthetically inappropriate. For instance, when the hero of a play expresses his love, the heroine is to respond to the hero's expression of love. On the contrary, if the heroine expresses disgust, then this episode would fail to arouse the intended aesthetic sentiment of love. This is because aesthetic love and disgust are purportedly inimical to each other. It is also important to note here that the quality or nature (*prakṛti*) of the character portrayed in a play is also a vital ingredient in relation to depiction of aesthetic love. That is to say, the full development of aesthetic love should not be mediated through negative characters (say a villain), a negative and a positive character (e.g., a villain and a heroine), positive characters categorized as of a middling nature (say a second hero and a second heroine) or those of an inferior nature[14] (say characters with "horrific" appearance). However, there is space in poetry or play for the depiction of semblance of aesthetic sentiment (*rasābhāsa*), which is the gesture of love between these configurations of characters, like Rāvaṇa's affections for Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but it is not in a way that leads to the full flowering of aesthetic sentiment of love.

Bharata tries to demonstrate that aesthetic disgust obstructs the arousal of aesthetic love by pointing out to their opposing nature. However, poets and dramatists employ aesthetic disgust in the context of sentiment of love, often violating Bharata's aesthetic principle. In the beginning, we cited an instance from Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava*, wherein aesthetic disgust was introduced to heighten the sentiment of love. Now, we shall see two other instances illustrating the relationship of disgust and love. First is an instance, again from the play "Binding of the Tresses" of Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa, discussed

above. The plot of this six-act play revolves around the scenes of the great battle of the epic-poem, the *Mahābhārata*. An attempt to settle the dispute between the royal cousins fails as Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, rejects the proposal of a peace treaty. The first act hints at the commencement of the great battle leading up to the twelfth day of war. The second act opens with an excited Duryodhana, eager to convey the death of Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna (on the thirteenth day of war), to his wife Bhānumatī. Bhānumatī is in the process of worshipping the Sun-god, when Duryodhana seizes this opportunity to approach her. In this context, the dramatist, includes Duryodhana's amorous advances towards his wife Bhānumatī, in the course of which he says:

> "O! damsel with a tapering, soft thighs,
> the pair of my thighs,
> with the end of its garment disturbed by the wind,
> which is attracting your eyes,
> are quite adequate and definitely so,
> for your broad buttocks to rest upon for a long time,
> [your broad buttocks] with its garment fluttering and hence,
> extremely striking to my eyes.
>
> (Deshpande 1953, 51)

Ānandavardhana, (ninth century CE), a Kashmiri aesthetic theorist and the celebrated author of *Dhvanyāloka* (Light on Suggestion), argues that the dramatist of this play introduces Duryodhana's amorous act simply to follow Bharata's dramatic principles (Ingalls 1990, 437).[15] Abhinavagupta, in his commentary *Locana* (Eye) on the *Dhvanyāloka*, further notes that, in the framework of Bharata's aesthetic theory, a dramatist introduces an amorous act (in the second act) only when the play has sentiment of love as its primary *rasa* (Ingalls 1990, 440). But the primary sentiment of this play "Binding of the Tresses," according to Abhinavagupta, is valour. Hence, he implies that the depiction of Duryodhana's amorousness in the second act, violates the law of aesthetic propriety, since it is not of service to valour, the primary *rasa* of the play.

But according to Bharata, the sentiment of valour is to be invoked in the positive character, that is the hero or heroine of the play. Duryodhana, in this play, is portrayed as the main villain against Bhīma, the main hero. We cannot argue that the dramatist is introducing Duryodhana's love-act, either to follow Bharata's aesthetic theory (as considered by Ānandavardhana) or that the dramatist is attempting to present it as a means to enhance the primary sentiment of the play (as held by Abhinavagupta). I consider, that the dramatist here is, in fact, employing aesthetic disgust in the guise of love,[16] through the negative character, in order to heighten the negativity of the negative character (Duryodhana). When Duryodhana approaches Bhānumatī, while she prepares to offer salutation to Sun-god, her female companion seeing Duryodhana's behaviour, becomes alarmed by his untimely advances, which obstruct Bhānumatī's religious observance. Thus, through the female companion's expression, the dramatist has brought in the element of aesthetic disgust. The dramatist heightens aesthetic disgust through Bhānumatī's reaction, who is perplexed by her husband's approach at an inappropriate time. As a chaste wife, even when she was mentally unprepared and reluctant to respond to her husband's amorous acts, she succumbs to his wishes.

Further the expression "thighs" in this cited passage only reminds the connoisseurs of Bhīma's vow to break Duryodhana's "thighs" in retaliation to appease the insult that Duryodhana caused to his wife (Draupadī). In this way too, this passage invokes and heightens aesthetic disgust, which is attuned to the development of plot, in the guise of delineating aesthetic love. The dramatist has, in that sense, employed the principle of contrary nature of aesthetic disgust and love, in the antagonist, to enhance the development of plot that invokes valour as the primary sentiment, which is centred on the protagonist.

Let us now see a second instance delineating the opposing nature of aesthetic disgust and love from another perspective. This is an instance from *Kumārasaṃbhava* (Sastri 1971), "Birth of Kumāra," a poetic work of the celebrated poet and playwright, Kālidāsa (fl. fourth – fifth centuries CE). The gods prayed to Brahmā for creation of a person who could be their commander-in-chief and lead their forces to destroy the demon Tāraka. The only solution that Brahmā could offer was the birth of a son by the union of the universal parents, viz., Śiva and Pārvatī, who can lead the gods' forces because of the details of Tāraka's boon. The task of drawing Śiva's attention towards Pārvatī was entrusted to the god of love, Kāmadeva, who attempts to infiltrate Śiva while he is meditating. Śiva, out of rage for the disturbance of his penance, envelops Kāmadeva in a blaze of fire emitted from his third eye, reducing him to ashes, which comes to serve as a symbolic trope of his mastery of all forces of desire. Now, it became the sole task of Pārvatī, who was deeply enamoured in him, to draw his attention. She embarked upon an extremely severe observance of austerities, famishing her body, and sitting motionless in the summer heat surrounded by fires. Śiva appeared in the form of a young brahmin, put her steadfastness and resolve to test. He tries to dissuade her by describing the "disgusting" appearance of Śiva (i.e., himself) in the following manner:

> . . . . how can you endure,
> . . . . the holding of Śiva with his hands that has serpents as the bracelets?
> . . . . whose garment is the elephant hide dripping with blood?
> . . . . who resides in cemetery strewn with hair?
> . . . . who smears the ash of funeral pyre on his chest?
> . . . . who has an aged bull as his vehicle?
> . . . . whose body is possessed of ugly (three) eyes?
>
> (Sastri 1971, 100–108)

The poetic description of the "disgusting" appearance of Śiva here is not to invoke the sentiment of disgust, but to enhance and heighten the sentiment of love. There is neither scope nor a locus for invoking aesthetic disgust in this episode. That is, neither the hero, the heroine nor the readers of the poetry can be the locus of aesthetic disgust. The purpose of this episode is to bring together the hero and the heroine, which is desired by other characters of the poem as well as the readers of the composition. However, the poet employs factors related to aesthetic disgust only for the sake of strengthening the bond of Pārvatī with Śiva and vice versa.

In both these instances, what we see is the employment of the aesthetic method of propriety in the delineation of the interplay of mutually opposing aesthetic sentiments, viz., disgust and love. And interestingly, they do so in an inverse manner. In the first instance, which has valour as its primary sentiment centred on the protagonist,

the dramatist skilfully invokes aesthetic disgust, through the description of love in the antagonist (Duryodhana). In the second instance, the poet skilfully arouses aesthetic love, through the description of disgust, in order to heighten the sentiment of love in the protagonists (Pārvatī and Śiva). Thus, in both these instances, apparently contrary sentiments, viz., disgust and love, are brought together for affecting the development of the plot.

Concluding Remarks

I have illustrated in this paper three relationship, i.e., the relationship between disgust and peace, wherein disgust enhances peace, the "mutual" relationship between disgust and fear, and the "opposing" relationship between disgust and love. By examining the role of aesthetic disgust in relation with other sentiments, we have demonstrated Bharata's observation that the flavour of aesthetic disgust is best savoured when it is associated with other aesthetic sentiments. An analysis of these (eight) instances suggests that "disgust," as a primary *rasa*, cannot yield an aesthetic experience. That is to say, aesthetic disgust is relished in association with other aesthetic sentiments, such as peace, fear, valour, and love, as illustrated above. As far as I know, Sanskrit playwrights and poets have not ventured into the endeavour of delineating "disgust" as the primary *rasa*. However, this long-standing traditional approach, beginning with Bharata, could be challenged by (Indian) contemporary works of dramatic and poetic art. In this case, this chapter could serve as a model to contemplate on the manifestation of "disgust" as the primary *rasa* by scrutinising the "purpose" and "method" of delineating the primary status of aesthetic disgust.

Notes

1. Śaivism, in general, refers to a religious-philosophical system that upholds Śiva, one of the trinity gods of Hindu pantheon, as the supreme god. The non-dual Śaivism, that flourished in Kashmir between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries CE, advocated that the individual consciousness, i.e., the individual being is not different from the universal consciousness, i.e., Śiva.
2. The relationship of aesthetic disgust with secondary *rasas* is not illustrated in this paper due to want of space.
3. The relationship of disgust and humour is not discussed in this paper due to want of space.
4. The "Abhinavan" edition of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* reads as Bharata is mentioning a two-fold division of the aesthetic sentiment of disgust. One as the pure (*śuddha*) kind born of agitation (*kṣobhaja*) and the other as the disturbing kind (*udvegī*), which Abhinavagupta identifies as the "impure" type (*aśuddha*) of aesthetic disgust. See Krishnamoorthy (1992, 326). On "Abhinavan" and "Non-Abhinavan" editions of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, see Bhuvaneshwari (2020, 299–312). Chakrabarti wrongly credits the classification of "pure" disgust to Abhinavagupta. See Chakrabarti (2016, 158).
5. Bharata himself does not identify "peace" (*śānta*) as one of the *rasas*. This is introduced by later thinkers like Ānandavardhana (ninth century CE), Abhinavagupta and others. Some modern scholars impose it on Bharata. Abhinavagupta maintains that some commentators introduce "peace" as the ninth *rasa* in Bharata's text and himself belongs to that school. However, Abhinavagupta does not say that Bharata enumerates "peace" as the ninth *rasa*. He distinguishes the text of Bharata that "originally" enumerates only eight *rasas* from the text followed by other commentators which include "peace." See Krishnamoorthy (1992, 261–262).
6. For further details, see Krishnamoorthy (1992, 292, 325).
7. udyānabhūmau hi kuto ratir me (Johnston 2015, 3.37cd).

8. tadeva cintāvaśaḥ śūnyamiva prapede (Johnston 2015, 3.38d).
9. sa viṣaṇṇacetāḥ prāvepatāṃbūrmigataḥ śaśīva (Johnston 2015, 3.45ab).
10. śrutvā ca me rogabhayaṃ ratibhyaḥ pratyāhataṃ saṃkucatīva cetaḥ ((Johnston 2015, 3.47cd).
11. śrutvaiva mṛtyuṃ viṣasāda sadyaḥ ((Johnston 2015, 3.60b).
12. For an extensive treatment of this topic, see Li (2020).
13. Korsmeyer identifies varieties of disgust as humorous, horrid, and the tragic. See Korsmeyer (2012).
14. Bharata categorizes and grades characters based on their characteristics or *prakṛti*. See Ghosh (2009, Chapter 34) or Krishnamoorthy (1992, Chapter 24).
15. According to Bharata, amorousness (*vilāsa*) is to be introduced during the "development" (*pratimukha*) of the plot, which generally occurs in the second act of a play.
16. This is different from semblance of love (*śṛṅgārābhāsa*). See also Deshpande (1953, x).

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Section II

Disgust and Othering

5 "Childish, Self-Centered, and Cruel"

Classed Disgust, Maternal Complaint, and Mediated Morality in an Anonymous Online Discussion Board

Armi Mustosmäki and Tiina Sihto

> FUCK THIS SHIT that this day-to-day real life is with a newborn. It's so true, your home becomes a prison. . . . Being awake is a continuous struggle while you try to figure out why it is whining or screaming this time and nothing really makes it easier . . . Not a lot of eye contact yet so it's mentally very tiring to hang out with a living doll. . . . You have milk running out of your tits continuously and all your clothes need to be planned so that you can breastfeed.
>
> Everything is about the baby. When you finally make it out of the house for two hours, you pour wine down your throat with both hands and everyone that comes over to talk asks how things are going, even discussions with strangers are all about the baby shit!! Then you call a taxi so you can get back to the shushing. Yay.
>
> Your belly bulges in your own clothes, you look like you're still pregnant, and your hair and face are in need of some care and soon. Your face is decorated by a couple big liver spots due to hormones and you look like you've aged 10 years in two months. . . .
>
> I've always said I don't like babies, they are useless whining creatures that have slime of all colors oozing out of all holes. I was right about that. . . . The best part of course is that you can't under any circumstances say that you hate this stuff.
>
> – Two hours after posting this –
>
> Now that the media seems to have again torn this post into their news, I'll add here that the most beloved thing in the world is my little Penny girl ❤
>
> Don't send me hate mail, I'm not going to read it or react to it. I don't give a fuck about any sanctimonious bullshit about this.

These are extracts from a 2017 blog post by Finnish celebrity Sini Ariell. Ariell lives in Australia and is known for her work as a tattooist and in the pinup modeling industry as well as her reality TV appearances (e.g. *Tattoo Studio HelsINK* and *Australia's Cheapest Weddings*). In the post, Ariell described her experiences as the mother of a newborn. It quickly went viral, sparking heated discussions in various Finnish digital media forums. In this chapter we engage with public responses to Ariell's post on the anonymous online discussion board *Vauva.fi*. Focusing on motherhood and family life (*vauva* is Finnish for "baby"), *Vauva.fi* resembles forums in other countries, such as Mumsnet in the UK (e.g. Jensen 2013). Taking an affective-discursive approach, we are interested in the controversy Ariell's post spawned and the moral and value positions it generated through the reactions of disgust and its circulation in the discussion.

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Public "maternal complaint" (cf. "female complaint," Berlant 2008) has become increasingly visible in the media in recent years. In TV (*Catastrophe*, *Motherland*) and cinema (*Bad Mothers*), mothers are behaving "badly," rebelling against the norms of "perfect" motherhood (Littler 2019). These cultural representations might suggest that it has become more acceptable to express and discuss the "negative" emotions of motherhood – to say that motherhood is not always wonderful or fulfilling. However, heterosexual nuclear family life is still very much a "happy object" (Ahmed 2010) loaded with expectations of happiness, stability and reciprocity. Although some cultural representations portray mothers as exhausted and at times even unhappy, they remain relentlessly invested in good mothering and the ideal of happy family life (Littler 2019).

At the same time, Finland's birth rate has reached an all-time low (OSF 2019), leading to a fervent public debate about the causes and potential solutions. One constant topic in this debate is maternal complaint and whether the "oversharing" of negative experiences and feelings has damaged the "brand" of family life (e.g. HS 2017). Consequently, it has been argued in the media that family life should be "rebranded" in order to boost the country's fertility rate, and that new parents – particularly mothers – should therefore emphasize the positive aspects of family life. Thus, Ariell's blog post and the discussion surrounding it emerged at a cultural conjuncture where moral anxiety circulated regarding the "damaged brand" of family life, pronatalist discourses, and affects related to the family as a "happy object."

To analyze the mediation, mobilization, and circulation of disgust in online discussions, we draw on previous sociological scholarship on disgust (e.g. Lawler 2005; Moore 2016) and feminist scholarship on disgust as a classed affect (Ahmed 2004; Skeggs and Wood 2012; Tyler 2008). This scholarship has shown how disgust is attached to and directed at the "lower classes," and how social divisions are (re) produced through the policing of morality in the realm of culture (Skeggs and Wood 2012; Tyler 2008). By tracing the reactions, objects, and circulations of disgust, our analysis contributes to discussions about how disgust is mobilized to maintain or challenge the existing moral and social order regarding reproduction and motherhood.

Social Class, Motherhood, and Moral Disgust

Finland is often characterized as a Nordic welfare state that strives for egalitarianism and seeks to even out the inequalities embedded in social hierarchies. Thanks to its welfare state ethos, Finland has a history of the "illusion of classlessness": it has often been thought that the country's free education and extensive social services and benefits make equal opportunities available to all. Consequently, social class has been a sensitive issue insofar as it contradicts the ideals promoted by the welfare state. For decades, Finns were commonly described as being – or at least becoming – "one big middle class," and it was claimed that class differences no longer existed. However, since the 2008 economic crisis, discussion and research about social class has revived in Finland (for reviews, see e.g. Erola 2010; Kolehmainen 2017) – "one big middle class" no longer seems to be the reality, if indeed it ever was.

Social class is a much-debated concept with different definitions. We understand social class as a discursive, historically specific construct that centrally influences access to economic and cultural resources (Skeggs 2004, 2005). Thus, class cannot be understood in terms of economic capital or labor market positions alone: inequalities

are (re)produced through processes of distinction whereby middle-class identities are marked as normal and desirable, while working classness is marked as abnormal and undesirable (e.g. Lawler 2004, 2005). The middle-class gains value by attaching negative value to the working class; for example, middle-class subjects aim to make themselves tasteful by judging classed others as tasteless (Skeggs 2004, 2005). Consequently, class is also an emotionally mediated (Tyler 2008), moralized position (Skeggs 2004) that usually involves making somebody "the other" – "immoral, repellent, abject, worthless, disgusting or even disposable" (Skeggs 2005, 977).

Previous studies (e.g. Jensen 2013; Skeggs and Wood 2012) have pointed out that norms and hierarchies related to class are often articulated through affective judgments. This connection between affect and moral judgment is exemplified in perceptions of the desirable and the damaging. Class-based affective judgments are particularly present in discussions surrounding contemporary motherhood. Parenthood, especially motherhood, is a site where classed ideals and norms are (re)produced and maintained. Contemporary parenting culture and ideals regarding motherhood, which highlight practices of "intensive mothering" (Hays 1996), can be seen as thoroughly middle-class (e.g. Perrier 2013). These practices are characteristically time-consuming, child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive – and thus out of reach for those who do not have sufficient temporal and financial resources.

On the other side of the coin, there is the public scrutiny and mockery of working-class mothers who are labeled "white trash" and associated with disgust and waste. Writing about the UK context, Tyler (2008) argues that the white trash "chav mum" is an affective figure produced through reactions of disgust, embodying contemporary – and historically familiar – anxieties about working-class women and "excessive" and "irresponsible" reproduction and fertility. Arguably, however, the judgment of the "chav mum" not only targets "lower-class" mothers but also establishes and tightens the norms around middle-class motherhood, with the expectation that middle-class women will want to distinguish themselves as strongly as possible from "chav mums" in order to be seen as good, respectable mothers (Tyler 2008). While "ideal" motherhood is also classed in Finland (e.g. Berg 2008; Hiitola 2015), Finnish societal realities differ from those of Anglo-Saxon countries, and those differences should be taken into account when one is applying Anglo-Saxon research to Finnish contexts. However, previous research has shown that cultural markers of social class in Finland bear striking similarities with those found in Anglo-Saxon countries – e.g. individual attributes which are seen to represent forms of excess, dirt, and lack of (self-)control are seen as signs of "lower-class" (Kolehmainen 2017).

Disgust can take two different forms: physical and moral. Physical disgust involves sensory modalities, and it occurs reflexively when one comes into proximity with objects that elicit bodily revulsion (e.g. rotten food, excrement, blood). Although it bears some resemblance to physical disgust, moral disgust is a more complex, ambivalent, and multifaceted emotional constellation, as it can be accompanied by a range of other emotions, such as sadness or anger (Abitan and Krauth-Gruber 2015). Indeed, moral disgust can be so closely tied to anger that it is often difficult to separate the two (Russell and Giner-Sorolla 2013). However, what distinguishes disgust from anger is that disgust involves evaluations of "the other" (an individual or group) as inferior, and it contains moral judgments regarding others' failures or moral transgressions (Pantti 2016).

In this chapter, we focus on disgust as a social sentiment that plays "a motivating and confirming role in moral judgements" (Miller 1997, 2). We are also interested in the relationship between moral disgust and social contamination. Disgust is often seen as concerned with the fear of becoming contaminated, infected, or polluted by proximity to, contact with, or ingestion of the disgusting object (Miller 1997). As Moore (2016) notes, when we recognize our own disgust and proximity to the disgusting object, we also recognize the risk of being contaminated and thus becoming disgusting ourselves. Disgust is about being "too close" to the object of disgust and thus to the risk of contamination, for which reason the object of disgust has to be "pushed away" (Lewis 2012). However, as disgust is deeply ambivalent, it can also involve desire for the object of disgust (Ahmed 2004).

Moral disgust is not born or maintained in a vacuum. It is tied to social agreements and power (Tyler 2013), and to middle-class fears of social contagion (Wood 2018). Moral disgust expects some degree of social concurrence (Miller 1997; Tyler 2013), as it demands that others share a similar affective relation to the object of disgust (Lewis 2012) and "seeks to include or draw others into its exclusion of its object" (Ngai 2005, 336). As Tyler (2013, 23) notes, "there is no disgust without an existing disgust consensus." Consequently, "ugly feelings" such as disgust also have their own social and political functions (e.g. Miller 1997; Ngai 2005; Tyler 2013), and disgust reactions are often revealing of wider social power relations. Those who have access to economic, social, and cultural resources often have the power to determine what is seen as morally disgusting (Lawler 2005). Therefore, disgust is often about establishing and maintaining difference and boundaries between the self and "contaminating" other(s), with those who fall on the "wrong" side of the boundaries being negatively defined and excluded (Ngai 2005; see also Miller 1997).

Data and Methods

Ariell's post was published in Finnish on her personal blog as well as on her Facebook page on 11 December 2017. She mainly writes in Finnish, but the posts are translated into English. The translation appeared online the following day. The extracts at the start of this chapter are from the English version of the post. The data analyzed for this chapter came from a discussion thread on the anonymous online forum *Vauva.fi*. This is one of Finland's most popular websites, reaching around 500,000 visitors every week (a relatively high number, as the population of Finland is only 5.5 million). Comments on the site are moderated to ensure legality, good manners (e.g. no hate speech), and functionality (e.g. no trolling) (Vauva.fi 2021).

For our analysis, we chose the discussion thread that contained the most comments about Ariell's post. The thread was user-generated, with 499 comments written between 11 and 22 December 2017. This was one of the site's most popular threads, and it appeared on the main page. We interpreted this popularity and the intensity of the reactions as a sign of the intensity and "stickiness" (Ahmed 2004) of the affects that circulated around Ariell's post. However, like the "scandal" itself, the thread was intense but relatively short-lived: most of the comments (343 in total) were posted within 24 hours of the thread's appearance online.

Vauva.fi's terms and conditions state that all content published on its site is the sole property of *Vauva.fi*, and the reproduction of any parts without approval is prohibited. We therefore obtained consent from *Vauva.fi* to use the discussion forum

data for our research purposes. The terms and conditions also stipulate that *Vauva.fi*'s discussion forums are public spaces, and users are responsible for the content of their own posts. In the thread, some comments were pseudonymous, but almost all were anonymous. This made it possible for users to discuss sensitive topics without links to their own comment histories. To further protect participants' anonymity, we have ensured that none of data extracts used in this chapter include identifiers such as comment numbers. By translating the extracts from Finnish into English, we have also made it more difficult to track down individual comments.

Because of their anonymity, securing the commenters' informed consent would have been impossible. Some argue that informed consent should always be obtained, while others suggest that participants who post on public forums have already given consent automatically (e.g. Roberts 2015). This study follows the approach taken by previous research where informed consent was not sought from participants in online forums that were considered to be public spaces (Jaworska 2018). It is also important for researchers to access spontaneously generated data so as to be able to study emerging societal phenomena as they appear, without the researchers' interference. Internet methods are particularly fruitful for studying sensitive topics and groups that are difficult to reach (e.g. Hammond 2018). Online discussion forums are important sites of meaning-making, as they collectively produce affective atmospheres and sensibilities that reflect our current cultural conjuncture. Berlant (2008, viii) suggests that social media platforms are increasingly important sites "of consolation, confirmation, discipline, and discussion about how to live as an x."

We study these sensibilities by analyzing affective-discursive practices in the discussion thread, drawing on Wetherell's (2012) perception of the interwovenness of discourse, emotions, and affect (see also Ahmed 2004). In this framework, affective practices are seen as social processes that are shaped not only by social orders but also by a site's digital technologies and architectures, which involve bodies, feeling states, and discourses that aim to make sense of the world. Anonymous discussion forums have their own specific affective circuits, logics of functioning, and public allure. The dynamics and interactions in threads often appear nonlinear, hectic, chaotic, and filled with moments of emotional intensity. Anonymity can invite highly polarized and emotional styles of discussion and commentary. Thus threads are often "soaked with affect and antagonism," and exchanges can be "petty, spiteful and bullying" (Jensen 2013, 128). In such discussions, intense affects – disavowal, irritation, disgust – and ideas about immorality, dirt, and contagion are often directed toward and attached to classed others (Jensen 2013; Kolehmainen 2017). Practices of trolling and flaming are also widely recognized.

Before we started our analysis regarding disgust's role in the discussions dealing with Ariell's blog post, we were already familiar with the data, which we had analyzed for a research paper on the negotiation of boundaries of acceptable maternal emotions (Mustosmäki and Sihto 2021). While conducting our analysis for that paper, we noticed that particular affective intensities (Paasonen 2015) circulated around expressions of disgust in the thread: comments containing disgust seemed to arouse strong reactions, with large numbers of responses from other commenters as well as upvotes and downvotes. Comments that contained disgust also seemed to steer the discussion into new and sometimes unexpected directions.

In this chapter, we are particularly interested in tracing reactions of disgust and emotions that are closely aligned with disgust, such as anger, contempt, and hatred.

In line with Ahmed (2004), we ask: what are the objects of disgust? What triggers disgust, and where is it directed? What does disgust do? While conducting the data analysis, we did not restrict our focus to clear and direct reactions of disgust but also included related emotional reactions, such as contempt, anger, and hate. Although these emotions all have different triggers, psychologists (Izard 1977) and cultural theorists (Ahmed 2004) perceive them as strongly moral emotions that maintain moral and social boundaries. These boundaries are blurry in social media discussions: moral disgust appears alongside related emotions (e.g. Pantti 2016), and they often blend with and reinforce one another. Moral disgust, contempt, and anger – the "hostility triad" (Izard 1977) – share similarities, as they all involve rejection and evaluation of the other as inferior. They function to maintain social divisions, particularly in relation to social class and race (see also Ahmed 2004).

At the first stage of our analysis of disgust, we directed our attention toward the disgust reactions and judgmental gaze directed at Ariell as a public figure and the mother of a newborn. We also noticed that Ariell's act of revealing her negative emotions and making them public further triggered disgust and contempt. Disgust and related emotions were expressed in online communications in varying ways. Sometimes the expression was direct and verbal, as in "yuck!" or "I'm repulsed/sickened/disgusted by . . ." Contempt and hate were often expressed indirectly through sarcasm and irony, but also in rather straightforward language that had a moralizing and contemptuous tone. Sometimes emotional intensities were heightened by the use of capital letters or emotionally loaded words.

In the second round of analysis, we analyzed the data in more detail to examine the objects of disgust. We found that disgust was also attached to figures other than Ariell, such as other mothers, and to societal norms and discourses. Here it was evident that commenters sought to generate certain emotional responses in order to push the discussion in new directions (e.g. Paasonen 2015). While we remained aware of the normative aspects that affective reactions and emotions entail, our analysis also demonstrated that emotions and affects were recruited for nonnormative purposes. Although emotions are closely aligned with the reproduction of social norms and relations, emotional reactions are not wholly determined by those norms and may take unexpected directions.

In line with MacLure (2013), during our analysis we were particularly interested in movements and entanglements within the data. Consequently, the expressions of disgust that caught our attention were not "representative" of the data, insofar as the data also contained a variety of other emotional responses (Mustosmäki and Sihto 2021). Rather, we understood these expressions of disgust as affective "hotspots" (MacLure 2013) that glowed in the data. However, in addition to our affective-discursive analysis, we also pinpointed affective intensities by examining upvotes and downvotes, which allowed us to evaluate the popularity of particular views.

Disgust Toward Ariell

In the discussion, disgust was often directed toward and attached to Ariell, who was labeled an unfit mother and located outside of the realm of respectable, middle-class maternal femininity. A recurring trigger of negative affective evaluations was Ariell's body and appearance. There were references to her large visible tattoos, heavy makeup, and revealing clothing, which were treated as features that

made her an unfit mother who focused on her looks instead of her child. These reactions paralleled the visual and affective invitations that are familiar from reality TV: commenters based their judgments on small details ("close-ups") of Ariell's body parts, and on revelations about her personal life (Skeggs and Wood 2012). The reactions to Ariell's physical appearance were dense with classed affect (cf. Kolehmainen 2017; Tyler 2008). References were made to excess, inauthenticity, and lack of taste (cf. Lawler 2004) that contradicted the normative, middle-class ideals of ordinariness, naturalness, and authenticity (e.g. Åberg 2020). As Lewis (2012) points out, part of the making of middle-class femininity is to render women who display the "wrong" kind of femininity disgusting. Commenters engaged in an evaluative process that Skeggs and Wood (2012) call "metonymic morality," scrutinizing Ariell's body parts and practices so that those details came to represent the whole person:

> The fact that her Insta account is filled with pictures of her ass and tits is shocking in itself, but then she also has to underline that _she has never liked babies_. . . . Of course when you spend time putting on that face and taking pictures of whatever body parts, then the baby's hunger, wet diaper, etc. will disturb you.
>
> (606 upvotes, 61 downvotes)

Ariell's appearance was seen as a signifier of selfishness – she prioritized her looks and her own needs over her child. This then came to signify "bad motherhood," as the strong moral imperative is that mothers should always prioritize their children. Ariell was seen as failing to meet this imperative, and thus as failing at motherhood (e.g. Berg 2008). In the extract above, the intensity of the disgust and disapproval was further highlighted by the large number of upvotes – this comment was among those that received the most upvotes in the thread. However, to some extent the number of upvotes was partly explained by the comment's being one of the earliest in the thread, as comments posted at the beginning of a discussion usually garner more attention than those posted later.

In the thread, Ariell was also judged for excessive alcohol use and for not doing housework:

> According to the story, sometimes she goes to bars and drinks with both hands. Apparently someone else takes care of the baby every now and then. How much [does] the dad participate in childcare? I assume Sini does not clean or do housework.
>
> (Votes unavailable)

This comment exemplified the process of metonymic morality, as details about Ariell's private life were extended to signal other private shortcomings: she lacked proper maternal behavior, therefore she failed at proper homemaking. These aspects of maternity were affectively attached to each other (Ahmed 2004), although the blog post itself did not make any direct references to housekeeping practices in Ariell's family.

Ariell was also deemed to have failed at appropriate maternal feelings, as she was interpreted as not liking babies and being disgusted by her child. Some commenters were disgusted by Ariell's description of babies as "useless" and with "slime of all

colors oozing out of all holes." Ariell's own disgust toward the baby's bodily fluids was greeted with irritation, contempt, and even anger. Babies' needs were naturalized, and it was considered a mother's duty to control her own feelings of disgust. Furthermore, Ariell was interpreted as expressing hatred toward her child, which prompted anger and dismay:

> [It is] childish, self-centered, and cruel toward one's own child to vent one's hate for babies publicly. . . . She should stop bawling. That is extremely childish as well.
>
> (22 upvotes, two downvotes)

Consequently, moral disgust was directed toward Ariell's presumed failures at "proper" maternal behavior and bonding with her child. The disgust and dismay were often intertwined with worries about the child's future. In order to distance themselves from Ariell's mothering practices, the commenters drew distinctions between themselves and her, underlining that they themselves had never had such problems (see also Skeggs 2004, 2005).

Disgust Toward Public Maternal Complaint

In some of the comments, what was seen as disgusting was the act of sharing difficult maternal experiences and feelings publicly. Moral judgment and contempt were expressed through sarcastic expressions, while some comments manifested disgust in more straightforward expressions of revulsion (such as "oh vomit!") (see also Pantti 2016). Ariell's blog post was dubbed "public vomit," "churning out," or "defecation," and was thereby framed as an uncontrollable public outburst:

> Oh vomit! Everyday life with a baby is tough, but does one have to defecate this all onto social media?
>
> (15 upvotes, three downvotes)

In addition to disgust, related emotions of contempt and anger were also to be found in the comments. Here again, it was the act of sharing one's feelings publicly that violated the norms of motherhood, rather than the feelings themselves:

> It is ok to feel that way. It is ok to speak about one's feelings openly to one's spouse and friends. It is NOT ok to write all of one's private business publicly on social media. Nice for the child to read them when she's older. Not. Shame on you, Sini Ariell.
>
> (21 upvotes, three downvotes)

Shame, like disgust, is a response to something that is perceived as morally wrong, and it involves the judgment of others (Ahmed 2004). Ariell was shamed for publicly expressing her feelings. Moral judgment was especially present when attention was directed toward her child. Ariell was seen to have crossed a line between public and private that should not have been crossed for the child's sake. A recurring theme in the thread was the worry that Ariell's child might find what her mother had written about her and be traumatized by it when she was older.

These reactions to Ariell's crossing the line between public and private could be interpreted as classed. Keeping the difficulties of family life private has been considered part of the ideal of the middle-class family (e.g. Nätkin 1997). Although the act of publicly sharing supposedly private matters mostly attracted disgust, there was also a plethora of supportive reactions that recognized the existence of difficult aspects and feelings of motherhood (for more detail, see Mustosmäki and Sihto 2021) and applauded Ariell's bravery in stepping forward. However, commenters that voiced such support for Ariell then became targets of dismay, contempt, and disgust themselves:

> Nice that a group of a similar kind [of women] go along with this full-mouthed broad on FB [Facebook].
>
> (19 upvotes, four downvotes)

Supportive commenters became affectively attached to Ariell, forming a group of a "similar kind of women" whose feelings and behavior were judged. Similarly, Ariell's blog became affectively aligned with the wider public discussion of motherhood, and was seen as representing public maternal complaint and the "negative discussion" of family life. In some comments, a "culture of negativity" was seen as having permeated all spheres of life:

> I rather feel that there is a right to complain about everything these days, and to bring out the negative sides, but when it concerns for example children, it is supposedly hypocritical to say that children – including teenagers, whom everyone seems to find appalling – are for me an enormous source of joy.
>
> (40 upvotes, four downvotes)

This type of comment claimed that complaining had become so widespread that there was no room for positive discussions of family life. As mentioned above, Finnish media constantly blame the "negative branding" of family life for the country's low fertility rate, which has become an object of moral anxiety (HS 2018, 2021; IL 2018). Consequently, some commenters expressed anxiety that Ariell's blog post might mobilize affects among childless people that would negatively influence their intention to have children. Thus, it was feared that the affects Ariell's blog mobilized would spill over into wider society (Ahmed 2004; Wood 2018), threatening the "brand" of family life. In some comments, contempt and disgust were attached not only to Ariell but also to mothers who were seen as similar to her, who were framed as bringing shame to the nation (cf. Tyler 2008):

> All I can say is that I don't understand "mothers" these days. . . . The biggest threat to the future of Finland is not Russia or any kind of economic recession, but the stupidity and laziness of people.
>
> (29 upvotes, 11 downvotes)

The intensity of negative affects attached to mothers and public maternal complaint was heightened by references to contemporary cultural phenomena as well as nostalgia for the past. In these comments, mothers were seen as unable to put their own needs aside and were labeled flaky and lazy. The intensity of negative affects attached

to contemporary mothers and their presumed weakness was heightened by allusions to Finnish history and grand narratives of the national crises the country had faced.

Disgust Toward "Perfect Mothers" and Pronatalist Discourses

When we followed the trajectories of negative affects as the discussion progressed, we found that some commenters also reacted with disgust and irritation to comments that criticized Ariell. Some were disgusted by those that sought to silence public maternal complaint, and some were disgusted by overtly positive discourses of family life, which they perceived as fake:

> Just let it go, you hypocrites. I'm more sickened by the mamas who churn out some dreamy over-the-top love bullshit.
>
> (11 upvotes, 19 downvotes)

In these comments, negative feelings were seen as inherent to motherhood. These commenters further questioned whether "perfect mothers" might actually be hiding their true feelings:

> Oh come on . . . I say that she [Ariell] is healthier than some mother who has forced herself to be calm, who with her lips clenched into a thin line sings a lullaby to her child thinking that the child does not sense her inner anger. Finland is full of these angry mamas and depressed children.
>
> (Votes unavailable)

While some comments saw Ariell's feelings, and her public sharing of them, as threatening, here the repression of negative feelings was interpreted as an even more serious threat. Disgust and moral anxiety were directed back at, and thus attached to, these "perfect mothers." These mothers were deemed to be performing a role and being inauthentic. Their investments in motherhood and choices were moralized, as they were seen to be using their children as objects for self-validation:

> I'm disgusted by this type of mother. They are not good mothers, they just put on an act, and [for them] children are just objects on display, used to seek approval and closeness. Love is not the first thing that springs to mind in connection with these moms. Sini will be a real mother who will give real love, not a poser who just performs some mama role like these hypocrites on this thread.
>
> (19 upvotes, 23 downvotes)

This change in the tone of the discussion, whereby disgust became attached to and directed at "perfect mothers," arguably reveals that the value system of the middle classes is not completely accepted, and that respectability as a mother continues to be a site of struggle. As Skeggs (2004) has documented, being pretentious is a sin for the working-class, while authenticity is seen as a moral virtue. Through these affects, which directed hate and disgust back at "perfect" and presumably middle-class mothers, commenters were trying to generate value for themselves and their own practices, which might diverge from middle-class norms (see also Ahmed 2004; Skeggs and Wood 2012). However, these comments often received more downvotes than upvotes,

indicating that disgust toward "perfect mothers" was met with more mixed responses than disgust toward Ariell or public maternal complaint.

The affects set in motion by "perfect mothers" were also seen as causing women to hesitate over whether to enter motherhood. The idea of having to align oneself with "perfect mothers" or their lifestyle was deemed disgusting:

> This is exactly the group of mothers that is one of the reasons why I'm not sure if I want to have children at all. I'm disgusted with the idea that I should identify with them.
>
> (Votes unavailable)

Many commenters recognized a pronatalist affective atmosphere that encouraged or pressured women to have children and to accept the changes that motherhood would entail. However, disgust, contempt, and annoyance were further directed toward commenters who essentialized motherhood or emphasized the cultural narrative that "normal women" would eventually grow into motherhood even if they became pregnant unintentionally (e.g. Shelton and Johnson 2006). These reactions of annoyance at pronatalist discourses shed light on resistance:

> I think this text is a good opening for voluntary childlessness. Many who become pregnant by accident feel pressure to keep the child and "grow up," "give up navel-gazing," etc. I wish that after this kind of statement, people with the mentality of Antti Rinne would think twice before they started to demand that those who have chosen childlessness should start a joint effort to have babies or some other crap.
>
> (14 upvotes, zero downvotes)

This commenter emphasized that it might not be wise to pressure women into motherhood. Although the comment contained disdain for Ariell's blog post, more intense affects of irritation and dismay were directed toward figures that engaged in pronatalist discourses. Pronatalism was affectively attached to Antti Rinne, a member of parliament and former leader of the Social Democratic Party. This was a reference to another media upheaval that had taken place earlier in 2017, when Rinne expressed his worry over the declining fertility rate and called on citizens to make an active contribution. His speech was seen to assume that childbearing was a national duty, and in social media it was even compared to the politics portrayed in the dystopian novel and TV serial *The Handmaid's Tale* (MTV3 2017). This intertextual reference further intensified the disgust and negative affects directed at pronatalist discourses in the thread. By attaching negative affect – namely, disgust – to pronatalist attitudes, commenters aimed to push the discussion in new directions.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have traced the reactions of disgust that Ariell's blog post generated on an anonymous online discussion board. Our affective-discursive analysis revealed that Ariell was made a vessel for anxieties and moral judgments circulating around contemporary motherhood: the disgust, contempt, and hatred directed toward her clearly sought to reinforce hegemonic middle-class norms of motherhood. These

judgments further highlighted the ambiguous nature of disgust: while the disgusting other was rejected, the affective practices in the online discussion invited others both to share that affective relation to the other and to gain pleasure from the judgment (Ahmed 2004; Ngai 2005).

Our analysis also revealed the cultural unease around public expressions of negative maternal emotions. The discussion around Ariell's public account of her difficult experiences and emotions as a mother can be read as symptomatic of an explosion of anxiety about increasing public maternal complaint and dropping fertility rates in Finland. The moral disgust at Ariell's blog post seemed to emerge from the fear that her openness would be contagious and contaminate (m)others (Ahmed 2004; Wood 2018), undermining the "brand" of family life and leading prospective parents to opt out of having children due to the "unrealistically" negative public discussion of family life and motherhood. Moral disgust was mobilized to silence public maternal complaint and maintain the existing social order and social hierarchies.

Interestingly, the disgust expressed toward Ariell's post was mostly triggered by what commenters perceived to be moral and social transgressions. The commenters did not react with disgust to the parts of the original post that contained common, visible markers of bodily disgust, e.g. the "leaky" maternal body ("milk running out of your tits") or physical changes such as liver spots. Instead, the disgust was more often directed toward Ariell herself, who was interpreted as being disgusted by her own leaking body and the leaking body of her baby. These reactions recalled another social media uproar that had taken place the year before. In 2016, another Finnish celebrity had faced a backlash after expressing disgust toward public breastfeeding. As Lehto's (2019) analysis of this "scandal" showed, disgust was more often and more intensively attached to the celebrity who had expressed disgust toward the "leaking" maternal body than it was to leaking maternal body itself. Our findings also underline the normative and social aspects and functions of disgust: the maternal body per se is less uncontrollable or threatening to the social order than "improper" maternal behavior or public maternal complaint, which are perceived as contagious and dangerous.

However, disgust also took other directions. It was attached to "perfect mothers" who highlighted the positive sides of maternal experience and demonstrated their own investment in normative maternity and the "happy object" of family life (Ahmed 2010). Disgust was further directed toward pronatalist discourses and the figures that promoted them. Thus, disgust was mobilized to challenge the existing moral and social order. Consequently, disgust not only functioned to protect what was seen as good or pure, but was also mobilized as a form of resistance (Kosonen 2020). These "revolting tactics" appeared in the forum thread discussed in this chapter: those deemed disgusting sought to redefine the category of "disgusting." However, as Kosonen (2020) points out, it is important to ask how far these tactics succeed in challenging the social order, as such signs and affective practices do not have the same historical and affectively sticky genealogies of meaning that make majoritarian emotions so powerful. Similarly, in our study, the assignment of negative value to "perfect mothers" and the expectation that negative maternal feelings should be kept private had less "disgust-ability" than public maternal complaint or the figure of Ariell herself (Kosonen 2020). This can also be seen in the distribution of upvotes and downvotes in the thread: comments that expressed disgust toward "perfect mothers" received more

mixed responses. As Ngai (2005, 353) elegantly puts it, "disgust does not so much solve the problem of social powerlessness as diagnose it powerfully."

Our analysis of disgust reactions around Ariell's blog post reveals the broader cultural conjuncture we are living in, as well as struggles over the norms of contemporary motherhood, which include anxiety and discomfort around questions of care and reproduction. Yet public exposure to the unhappy effects of the promise of happiness (Ahmed 2010) can be affirmative, since it can provide us with alternative ways of imagining what might indeed be a good or better life.

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6 Performing Disgust

Affective Intersections of Misogyny, Racism, and Homophobia in Radical-Right Online Discussion

Tuija Saresma and Urho Tulonen

A populist Zeitgeist manifests itself in contemporary societies as an attraction to charismatic or strong leaders (Mudde 2010; Donovan 2020), as political polarization (Prior 2013; Palonen and Saresma 2019), as hardening rhetoric and an upsurge of hate speech targeted against women, minorities, and marginalized groups of people (Mudde 2000; Sundén and Paasonen 2018; Saresma, Karkulehto, and Varis 2020). Populism is fundamentally based on constructing an imaginary 'us' and antagonistic groups of hostile 'others.' We suggest that populist rhetoric utilizes disgust in the process in which populist logic produces a division between us and the others. Populist communication includes means such as simplifying topics, evoking emotions (as opposed to appealing to reason), and continued repetition of certain messages (Rautio 2019).

Populism is not a clearly identifiable ideology itself, but, according to Ernesto Laclau (2005), is an empty signifier that attaches itself to other ideologies. For example, populism does not necessarily connect with racism or extreme nationalism, but it can be attached to far-right fantasies of white supremacy. Nationalism refers to an ideology in which people understand themselves as belonging to a clearly defined nation. Following Benedict Anderson's (1983) definition, however, a nation is always an imagined community held together by a belief in the unity of a geographically or ethnically defined group of people who, in reality, may have no connection to one another. A shared national identity of 'us' is produced via varying methods, processes, and representations that enable an understanding of 'us' as a nation. One of the central platforms where the nation as an imagined community is produced is in the media. In contemporary culture, online media, in particular, is the medium where nationalist fervor is incited.

One manifestation of extreme nationalism is the radical right movement. It is inherently against immigration, and its affective anti-immigration discourse is used to arouse emotions sometimes conceptualized as negative or harmful, such as disgust and shame (Nikunen and Pantti 2018; Saresma and Tulonen 2020). Social media is an increasingly important tool for the dissemination of nationalist radical-right messages. As xenophobic modes of communication spread on the internet and trickle into societal discussions, affective, polarizing communication also becomes normalized in traditional media and everyday discussions (Pettersson 2017; Saresma 2020).

In this chapter, we trace how disgust as an affect becomes politicized in radical-right populist rhetoric online. Disgust directed at the female body is typical of texts published in online environments described as "the manosphere" (see, e.g., Ging 2019; Nurminen 2019). We are interested in how repulsion toward women affectively

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intersects with repulsion towards other gendered, sexualized and racialized others, and how it works performatively on a far-right online site. We analyze the role of disgust as an affect that is "normatively constructed, reflecting, and reinforcing social hierarchies and inequalities and . . . therefore, problematic" (Moore 2016, 1.5). We focus on a particular website: *Patriootti.com* [Patriot]. This far-right Finnish website is an example of transnational affective rhetoric that fuels disgust, hatred, and violence against those constructed as others, and is a part of a larger network of malicious far-right sites. Contemporary white supremacist nationalism appears on these sites as a gendered and racialized ideology in a neoconservative right-wing climate, where the nationalistic performance of 'us' manifests as a need to exclude disgusting 'others,' and, as Pantti (2016, 363) suggests, "the vocabulary of disgust serves to draw boundaries between 'us' and 'others.'"

Our analysis draws on research on populism and Sara Ahmed's (2014) affect theory. We pay attention to how adversarial groups are constructed, helped by affective mobilization, and enquire who are the us and who are the others (cf. Norocel et al. 2020). By mobilization, we mean the way affects are used in organizing certain groups of people for action against others. Disgust as a moral emotion, we suggest based on our empirical findings, serves as an instrument for mobilizing people with populist rhetoric used in promoting racist and even fascist politics.

Disgust as a Performative Affect

Generally, disgust is "reserved for those things that remind us of our animal bodies" (Moore 2016, 6.2). Disgust may be understood simply as a primal affect that is related to survival: it shields us from poisonous foods and other dangers; it makes us beware of threats and helps us decide what is edible and what is not. For Charles Darwin (cited in Ahmed 2014, 82–89), disgust, or repulsiveness, is something that is against a certain person's taste or liking. It is noteworthy, however, that disgust is not only a primal gut feeling; it is also a complex and even paradoxical affect that also incorporates desire or fascination toward disgusting objects. The objects of our disgust simultaneously inflict rejection and capture our attention (Ahmed 2014, 84). As Martha Nussbaum (2004, 72) suggests, it is a social emotion that culturally marks some groups of people as bearers of contamination. Contamination is socially, culturally, and historically constituted. Thus, disgust can be a powerful mode of disapprobation that "serves important ideological objectives of reinforcing and reproducing social order" (Moore 2016, 6.2).

In this chapter, we are not interested in the biological or essentialized aspects of disgust. Our focus is on how affect functions on a social and symbolic level. We are interested in how disgust is not only experienced bodily but is also cognitively and culturally constructed. Thus, we follow Ahmed's approach to disgust as a performative affect. The performativity of disgust as an affect refers to the fact that disgust arouses reactions and produces action, such as the nervousness someone may suddenly experience while in the proximity of the body of an 'other.' Performativity means that affects are consciously aroused (e.g., far-right digital media sites also make readers *react* to the texts on a bodily level and mobilize them to *act* in concrete ways). Ahmed (2014, 82–84) emphasizes that affect – here, she referred to hate – is not an act *done* but something that emerges as a chain of effects. In Ahmed's example, hatred toward a certain black body "sticks," so every black body is assigned a certain negativity.

In the *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), Ahmed describes how affective texts organize us both as individuals and as members of groups. Affects are not innate, and they do not even *exist* inside us or in the texts themselves but are brought into being as they are *directed toward* someone or something: we become moved by the affects the texts arouse. Emotions are socially, culturally, and historically produced; they are experienced in relation to others, and they are oriented intentionally toward others. Affects are not inherently something that belongs to an individual, but they *produce* both their subjects and their targets (Ahmed 2014).

Affects (e.g., disgust) are particularly effective when aroused and circulated in social media. Certain affective communities are born of and held together by, for example, misogyny, or racism based on hate or anxiety (Nurminen 2019; Vainikka 2019; Saresma 2020). These affective communities are constructed through recycling certain ideological contents, such as fervent nationalism and xenophobia, and discursive conventions, such as irony (Nikunen 2015). Like Ahmed (2014, 10), we think that the emotions evoked and performed in texts circulate and spread in a contagious manner. For Ahmed, the stickiness of feelings means that affects directed at certain bodies stick to all similar bodies, and they stick to people who come into contact with them. Stickiness refers to the bodies of the 'other,' which in this chapter means the bodies of racialized, sexually marginalized, and gender-non-binary people, and which become the objects of disgust.

These bodies, marked as others, do not belong to 'us' and thus become loathsome. Something despicable is easily made *abject*. Abject, as Julia Kristeva (1982, 2), famously suggests, threatens the subject and confuses its identity. The 'other' that becomes an abject causes aversion and nausea. The only way to escape the threat the abject poses to the self is to deny its existence and repel it. For Kristeva, then, the abject is a cast-off object. Moving from psychoanalysis to political othering, there is the same tendency to construct the other as a stranger who is not like us. In populist rhetoric, the other is then performed as a threat, and this threatening other becomes the object of repulsion and an abject who deserves loathing.

In what follows, we examine the workings of online right-wing populist rhetoric, both empirically and contextually, as suggested by Maussen and Grillo (2014, 178). We analyze online stories, the pictures used in them, and the readers' comments that accompany them.

Online content is interpreted as an "important 21st-century tool in the shaming and humiliation of those who have transgressed gender norms" (Moore 2016, 1.5), or otherwise crossed the border between what is traditionally understood as "normal" and what is deemed a disgusting deviation in the context of a conservative white hetero-patriarchal gender, sexual, and racial order. By combining our analysis with the theoretization of right-wing populism, nationalism, affect, and rhetoric, we demonstrate how affects in general and disgust in particular work in a performative manner.

The *Partisaani* website illustrates the performativity of affects because, like other misogynous far-right sites (e.g., *Breitbart*) it is based on tireless repetition of the publisher's core message through texts and images. Repeating disgust toward others, whether they are women, homosexuals, or racialized foreigners, is an effective tool for propaganda. With our analysis, we aim to demonstrate that the combination of arousing affects (e.g., disgust) and constructing a threatening other as its target is powerful.

By analyzing manifestations of disgust on the *Partisaani* website, we show how disgust is used to support and undermine various causes. Following Ahmed, we understand the evocations of disgust as affective and performative. We ask what emotions

and affects in general and disgust in particular *do*. We analyze how disgust is *used*, and we suggest that disgust is used strategically to either support a phenomenon under discussion or to work against it. Our premise is that news and discussions on online websites are affective and performative; they mobilize us and yield tangible results. We show, via case analyses, how this is done.

Through close readings of a selection of articles published on the *Patriootti.com* website, we demonstrate how seemingly nonaffective and allegedly rational and objective news-like argumentation can be used to incite negative affects. We analyze the stylistic and rhetorical means used on the website, and we pay attention to the affects expressed and performed in the texts (understood here in a broad sense, encompassing both textual and visual expressions), particularly disgust. In doing so, we understand disgust as a social, shared emotion experienced in certain affective communities rather than as something psychological or individual. Affects and emotions are shared and experienced in relation to other humans.

Partisaani.com as a Platform for Extremist Othering

Partisaani.com is a Finnish far-right alternative news site founded on 3 May 2020. It states that it has no ties to any certain political party or organization, and that its goal is simply to be a "force that connects nationalists with each other," and a "platform for in-depth cultural analysis and radical attacks against the decadence of the contemporary elite" (*Partisaani* 2021a). Numerous articles posted on the site promote contemporary Finnish far-right organizations and actors, such as the neo-fascist political organization Sinimusta Liike [Black and Blue movement] and Veren Laki [The Law of Blood], a neo-nazi fight club. The site also hosts advertisements from far-right businesses, such as Kielletyt Kirjat [Forbidden Books] and No Compromise Clothing, and nationalist projects, such as Operaatio Kotkanpesä [Operation Eagle's Nest] – a project that aims to improve the infrastructure of nationalist activist groups (Hommaforum 2021).

The articles published on *Partisaani.com* consist mainly of brief news stories, often based on citations from or references to content from other news sites. The news sites cited are often other far-right sites, both Finnish and international, but more traditional outlets are cited just as frequently. Some articles are based on original reporting, while others are based solely on tips from readers or news taken from social media.

The articles published on the site deal with a wide variety of topics pertinent to far-right ideology, from aggressive reporting that targets so-called political opponents (e.g., left-wing politicians, climate activists, the LGBTQIA community, and the Muslim community) to COVID-19 denialist content, antisemitic articles, and violent and sexual crime and pedophilia, which are usually tied to political opponents or nonwhite individuals. The site also publishes columns and opinion pieces, mostly written by far-right agents, and reports on the activities of various Finnish far-right groups.

All articles published on the site are illustrated with graphics. The imagery used on the site includes stock photos, political cartoons, meme imagery, photos taken from social media, and photoshopped graphics. Mostly, the imagery is provocative, and in conjunction with the texts of the articles, it is used to amplify the emotional responses that readers have to the site's content.

The articles analyzed in this chapter were chosen from an initially larger set of approximately 40 articles, which was made by gathering PDF copies of all the articles

present on the front page of the *Partisaani.com* website on 21 September 2021. This set was narrowed down to include only articles that were thematically pertinent to our research questions and that included clear connections to other far-right media outlets.

Mobilizing Disgust: The Workings of Gendering, Sexualization, and Racialization

"The vagina is the perfect representation of the nature of females. An empty vessel, a hole, a void with no identity of its own. Without a man to fill her with his essence, she is as useless as a crabapple rotting on the sidewalk." (Anti-defamation league 2018, 6.) This misogynous comment by an alt-right blogger illustrates the disgust-laden quality of the rhetoric of the manosphere. The writer suggests that without a vagina, a woman is nothing but a piece of garbage comparable to feces. It is not uncommon to belittle women in the manosphere and claim that a woman has no value without her counterpart, a man.

Misogyny is also a common characteristic of online right-wing or radical-right political discussion forums (Sundén and Paasonen 2018; Saresma 2020; Horsti and Saresma 2020; Saresma, Karkulehto, and Varis 2020). However, women are not the only targets of loathing, contempt, and disgust. In what follows, we present cases found on *Partisaani.com* where misogyny is intertwined with other reactionary ideologies, particularly racism and homo- and transphobia. We also discuss climate denialism as an ideology that draws from loathing the others.

By closely reading articles published on the site, we wish to demonstrate that disgust is one of its modus operandi. We aim to show how disgust is produced and performed using words and visual juxtapositions that are purposefully derogatory, value-laden, and offensive. Exaggeration, distortion of facts, and misinformation are utilized in portraying the other as abject. In doing so, the abject is differentiated from 'us' as a norm. This supports Nussbaum's suggestion about the relationship between the stigmatization and humiliation of individuals and characterizing the others as having less moral worth (cited in Moore 2016, 7.5).

Holy Heteronormativity and Its Filthy Others – the Workings of Homophobia and Transphobia

Hegemonic understanding about the connectivity between sex, gender, and sexuality is easily interpreted as evidence of the immutability of the category of sex and acceptable ways of 'doing' gender that conforms to the heterosexual matrix (Moore 2016, 1.4). This traditional understanding of the gender system as a rigid and hierarchical bipolar system based on strict heterosexuality is the fundamental basis of extreme nationalism that builds on reproducing the white nation, ethnonationalism, and white supremacy. Within this understanding of gender and sexuality celebrated in neoconservative movements, such as the "anti-gender" movement, the fundamental premise is a hetero-patriarchal ideology in which the two sexes complement each other but are simultaneously hierarchically organized: the man is superior to the woman, whose main responsibility is to take care of reproduction both in the family and the nation by breeding.[1] Everything that is considered in opposition to this hetero-patriarchal regime, understood as 'natural' and 'holy,' is doomed wrong and filthy. Thus, it is not

only women's rights and gender equality that are understood as threats to the system. Also – or even more so – the prominent emergence of and the demand of rights to sexual minorities and gender-non-binary people are seen as a menace.

An article published on *Partisaani.com* on 18 September 2021, titled "A Swedish gay priest refuses to join hetero couples in marriage" (Partisaani 2021b), illustrates how liberal values are discordant with the ideology promoted on the website. The article reveals an openly gay priest whose name and parish are also mentioned; the priest announced that he would not marry hetero couples, thus wishing to amend public discussion and demand that the church not consecrate priests who think homosexuals are inferior to heterosexuals. In Sweden, priests may refuse to marry gay couples, so some priests demand the same right to refusal regarding hetero couples.

This brief article is accompanied by a photo collage of two images: a wedding picture of a white young heterosexual couple and a clownish image of a middle-aged man sporting a priest's garment and wearing makeup. The couple in the wedding picture looks happy and healthy, and the bride is wearing a traditional white wedding dress that signifies innocence and purity (Rossi 2011). There is a thick, bright-red cross drawn over this happy image. The image of the priest, in comparison, is an amateurish, blurry quickshot of a middle-aged man, obviously an enlargement from another photo, complete with messy cropping. The caption in its entirety reads "[the name of the priest] on the right. He is really a priest." Juxtaposing these two photographs may arouse disgust in those who have a strongly negative attitude toward LGBTQIA rights because the neat and tidy wedding picture is inconsistent with the picture of the priest, who is represented as a clumsy and clowning rainbow person. This juxtaposition seems to highlight a certain moral superiority associated with heterosexuality compared to dubious homosexuality.

The laconic article offers only hints to arouse disgust in readers, who seem to take the bait. This discussion demonstrates how mobilizing people with affects works in practice. In a suitable context, just the simple caption "He is really a priest" triggers readers to have strong reactions, such as via the comment that suggests he is not a real priest but "a false priest of the church of Satan." In the comments, disgust is the mobilizing force incited by affective references to contamination and slurs that emphasize the allegedly deviant quality of homosexuality and bolster heteronormativity. The readers consider the priest's announcement a misapprehension that is "as hallucinatory as Greta [Thunberg] and other people with climate anxiety" and "an example of how the Christian church is polluted by the followers of Lucifer." Thus, the gay priest is interpreted as a polluted and misled loser who even "looks crazy." He is, in many ways, an abject to the normalcy of 'us.'

In the comments, the priest is called a 'faggot,' emphasizing his alleged abnormality. Two discussants who comment on the article claim that no healthy person or hetero couple would want this man to be their wedding priest. In one comment, we are reminded that certain people, such as fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, slanderers, and cheaters, are not welcome to the Kingdom of God. The longest comment in this discussion starts with asserting that "the aim of matrimony is to create a family" and that "a family consists of a father, a mother, and children," thus expressing a conservative attitude and echoing the discourse of the anti-gender movement that opposes what it refers to as "gender ideology," women's reproductive rights, and LGBTQIA rights.

The article under discussion is based on an article published in the Swedish tabloid *Expressen*, which is based on an article published by the Russian *Sputnik News*. It is noteworthy that, whereas Sputnik International describes itself as "a global news agency keeping you updated on all the latest world news 24/7," many media professionals and experts in Russian politics have taken a cautious view of this site. Independent news outlets, such as *Suomen Kuvalehti* (Kivioja 2015), describe it as a propaganda site maintained by the Russian state. It is also worth noting that *Sputnik News* employs a former *Breitbart* reporter (Gray 2017).

Both the article itself and the comments it spawned are tinged with disgust. It could be interpreted that disgust is both the underlying affect that motivated the publishing of the article and the affect that it has produced. However, while the commentators distinguish themselves from the priest whom they describe as a "dirty freak," they also seem drawn to the object of their scorn. They appear to feel the urge to comment on his actions and remind others about his inferiority just because they are given the possibility to loathe him. As Ahmed (2014, 84) suggests, it is hard not to take another look at something that disgusts us. To apply Ahmed's theory, people are driven by the opposite impulses of desire and disgust. In this case, the strengthening of the orientation toward and away from the figure of the priest as an object of disgust may make the commentators feel that the object – this man – has a grip on them through their disgust. They may, then, because they recognize this fascination, feel the need to express an opposite affect, a strong disgust, and thus emphasize their moral superiority to this 'fallen priest.'

Besides homosexuals, trans people are also seen as threatening holy matrimony and the sacred gender order. They do not neatly fit into the categories of men and women constructed by transphobic online commentators; thus, they, too, are doomed as unnatural and abject.

The next article we analyze reports on a fine imposed on a blogger who was mocking a German trans politician. This article, "Germany: 24,000€ fine for mocking a tranny politician," published in *Partisaani* on 13 September 2021 under the tag 'decay culture' (Partisaani 2021c), was originally published in Free West Media (2021). The word 'tranny' is a derogatory, insulting term for trans people. This article mocks a trans woman who is an active politician in the Green Party (*Die Grünen*) – thus already poisoned by 'wrong,' multiculturalist ideology to start with (about the green-leftist traitors of the nation, see Saresma and Tulonen 2020).

This article begins by provocatively claiming in a satirical tone that "it is not allowed to mock politicians in the free and democratic West." It then observes that a German blogger was imposed a 24,000 euro fine for mocking the "Green party tranny member of Parliament and two other 'women;'" the word women was put in quotation marks to emphasize the alleged unnaturalness of their gender. The blogger wrote that this woman is the object of ridicule in German politics. It is also claimed that "these three trannies should be placed as warnings on a cigarette packet." The repetition of the derogatory word 'tranny' demonstrates how the power of the politics of naming discussed in trans studies (Halberstam 2018) can be used for negative and even violent purposes.

In the picture that illustrates the article, a skinny woman with long hair looks like she is about to say something. The caption reads, "[The name of the MP] Nobody laughs at them without punishment." The disparaging of the MP and her looks continues in the comments. In all the comments, there is moral and aesthetic disapproval

of this person who does not fit into the naturalized category of a woman and who is then made abject, an object of scorn, something that does not belong to 'us,' that violates 'our' norms with their existence, and whose existence and value as a woman must be denied. Freedom of speech is mocked in the title of the article, and commentators continue it. Again, in this discussion, the alleged 'freakiness' of the protagonist of the article refers to her disgusting characteristics and abjectness. Again, it could be interpreted that the writers tackle to distance themselves from her by portraying a sense of moral superiority, yet they are also intrigued.

Again, the complex and paradoxical quality of disgust as an affect that simultaneously enthralls and nauseates is perceptible. Many commentators loathe a contemporary society that demands equal treatment of all, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Not surprisingly, the so-called value liberals are seen as the culprits of this moral decay associated with the visibility of trans people, who are then referred to and described as disgusting objects, feces, and vermin.

Circulating Suggestive Photos – Racism Enacted

Partisaani.com frequently publishes articles that report on violent and sexual crimes. These articles are, without exception, focused on the alleged perpetrators of the crimes who, due to the ideologically biased curation (i.e., cherry-picking) of the contents of the site, are always racialized as non-white. As racialized others, they are portrayed as either political enemies or otherwise abject. Many articles use misleading and unrelated imagery to further spin their narrative and strengthen the negative emotional responses evoked in a reader.

One example of this can be found in an article that covers the reported promise of German foreign minister Heiko Maas to 'bring in' 70,000 Afghan refugees after the Taliban attack on Afghanistan in Spring 2021. The article has an image of a plane full of male refugees supposedly fleeing Afghanistan under Taliban rule (Partisaani 2021d). This image is used in the article to build a narrative according to which refugees are mostly males who abandon their families in crisis zones and seek only to exploit the welfare of their target nations.

The narrative of the 'cowardly' refugee males allegedly fleeing from their responsibilities, protecting their women and nation, is often used by anti-immigration and far-right actors who wish to frame asylum seekers as having dishonorable motivations (see, e.g., Maasilta and Nikunen 2018, eds.). This connects to another racist narrative, also spread by *Partisaani.com*, in which male refugees are framed as predisposed to commit crimes, often of a sexual nature. The article is labelled on the site with numerous tags that relate to sexual violence and other violent crimes, despite the article having no connection to these topics. This narrative, arbitrarily strengthened by the use of false tags, also connects to the conservative and far-right narrative where white males have a duty to protect white females from the racialized 'invaders' (see e.g. Saresma 2018) that in this article are represented as the male refugees sitting on the plane.

The photo used in the article dates back to 2018, and the refugees shown in it are being returned from Turkey to Afghanistan, not fleeing from Afghanistan to Germany. The same image was circulated in a similarly misleading way on various social media platforms during the recent crisis in Afghanistan, with many of those who shared the image being especially outraged at the perceived gender disparity of refugees (McKenzie 2021).

A similar use of misleading and provocative imagery can be found in an article that reports a violent incident of street crime in Italy in September 2021 (Partisaani 2021e). In its article, *Partisaani* cites a version of the news story published by *Breitbart* (Zindulka 2021), which cites the original article on the subject published in the Italian news outlet *Il Mattino* (2021). The *Breitbart* article is faithful to the original story published by *Il Mattino*. A comparative reading of the articles published by *Partisaani* and *Breitbart* showed significant similarities between them. Every paragraph of the *Partisaani* version of the story has an almost identical counterpart in the *Breitbart* article, and it appears that the article is an abbreviated and simplified translation of *Breitbart's* version, accompanied by a different image.

The image used in the version of the story published by *Partisaani* depicts a hooded black person against a pitch-black background with his back turned to the camera, wielding a hidden blade. The image is obviously staged, and a reverse image search shows it is a photo that originates from a stock photo site called WallsHeaven (2021).

Partisaani uses similar staged photos in other articles dealing with racialized crime as well. For example, another commonly used stock photo depicts a close-up of a white female's mouth being forcibly shut by a black hand. A reverse image search revealed that this image has been used in several articles published in *Partisaani* and was even used on the website of the now-defunct *Kansallinen Vastarinta* [*National Resistance*] (*Partisaani* 2021f; *Partisaani* 2021g; Kansallinen Vastarinta 2019, 2020).

The use of these suggestive photos not connected to the events that the articles describe can be interpreted as an effort to arouse in the audience suspicion, hatred, and disgust toward racialized others. This is an enactment of the politics of fear (Wodak 2015). It is suggestive that countless invaders are coming from the outside and will endanger 'our' safety and threaten 'our' ways of life.

Anti-Semitism and Accusations of Rape and Pedophilia – Perceived Enemies Framed as Racialized, Perverted Criminals

The open anti-semitism on *Partisaani.com* is part of the continuum of disgust and loathing that supporters of radical-right ideologies feel toward practitioners of other religions, racialized as non-white and contrasted with white Christianity. Historically, a stereotypical representation of Jews as disgusting, referring to their appearance, religion, and behavior, has been circulated in Christian Europe. Anti-Semitism as a repulsion for and discrimination against Jewish people has functioned performatively throughout the centuries and culminated in the Holocaust.

This aversion, in the form of anti-semitism, is still alive and well in the far-right sphere. An example can be found in a *Partisaani* article that reports on a recent surge of child-sex lawsuits filed against Jewish institutions based in New York (Partisaani 2021h). The article is based on one originally written by the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (Shalev and Rockart 2021), and, for the most part, *Partisaani*'s reporting remains faithful to the original version. However, some key parts of the article are omitted, such as the statistics stating that thousands of lawsuits have been filed against Catholic institutions. However, *Partisaani*'s article notes that the Boy Scouts of America were served with approximately 1,000 lawsuits. Regarding this, Partisaani states that "little boys were raped for years after the organization began to accept gays as Boy Scout troop leaders." This added homophobic implication would suggest that leaving out the information about Catholic institutions as representatives of 'our' Christian

values was a strategic choice and that *Partisaani* consciously cherry-picked the information from the article that best suited its ideological motives.

The article comes with an image depicting a rabbi and two small children and entices affective reactions. The rabbi is drawn in a traditionally antisemitic caricatural style with a sly expression and grotesquely exaggerated facial features, and the image seems intended to represent the rabbi as a sexual predator. The same image was also used by the Finnish far-right media outlet *Magneettimedia* as part of an antisemitic article similarly connecting rabbis and pedophilia. *Magneettimedia*'s article is itself based on a piece published by the Canadian far-right news site *Rebel News* (Pike 2016). It can be concluded that this imagery is repeated time and again to incite feelings of repulsion to a group of people who have been and continue to be stigmatized and labelled as the disgusting other.

Aggressive and malicious articles that target the political opponents of *Partisaani* are also common on the site. These articles aim to direct negative attention to activist groups, political parties, and politically active individuals that the site actively frames as its political enemies. Those whom the site deems as its political enemies are often connected with highly negative topics in a misleading way, or otherwise reported in a way that arouses the negative a reader's emotions toward them (Partisaani 2021i). For example, following the #punkstoo campaign, in which many cases of sexual abuse within the punk scene were uncovered and brought to public discussion, *Partisaani* exploited the phenomenon to arbitrarily label the punk festival Puntala Rock as a "rape festival" (Partisaani 2021j) and misleadingly frame individuals from the scene as having "defended pedophiles" (Partisaani 2020).

The 'pedophilia' tag is extensively used by the site to label numerous articles that cover the LGBTQIA community (Partisaani 2021k) and the punk scene (Partisaani 2021m), regardless of their actual contents, often in cases where there is absolutely no connection to the topic. One instance where the term 'pedophilia' is arbitrarily used can be found in an article that is based on nothing but hearsay on social media, which warns readers of a "dark-skinned" pedophile that has been spotted in Tampere and advises readers to form street patrols (Partisaani 2021l). The article is used to scare readers and evoke negative emotions to mobilize them to take to the streets to fight.

The aforementioned are examples of aggressive reporting, which is not a new phenomenon in the sphere of extremist activism and communication. It belongs to the continuum of aggressive targeting of political opponents, which often utilizes negative affects, such as disgust, resentment, and fear (Wodak 2015; Saresma 2018), and is based on racist and homophobic prejudices that often but not always intertwine with misogyny.

Conclusion: Performing Othering with Disgust

An examination of the uses of populist rhetoric and the performativity of affect is increasingly important in the contemporary societal situation, where politics is polarized into the radical right and the value liberal left. Concentrating on affects, and especially on the mobilizing forces of hatred, disgust, and fear, our article continues the research on negative or harmful emotions (Kivimäki, Kolehmainen, and Sumiala 2010, 4). Its additional value lies in the systematic examination of right-wing populist rhetoric as it becomes manifest in the corpus of text and images of the website *Patriootti.com*.

In our analysis, we aimed to illustrate how these textual and visual discursive representations incite and use affects, such as performative disgust, to mobilize people. Affects are used as ammunition in the escalating ideological struggle in social media. Our analysis, from the perspective of affects and particularly disgust, focused on an extreme right-wing website, *Partisaani.com*, and its intertextual references and concrete connections with other far-right sites.

We demonstrated how disgust functions as both the fundamental affect motivating the publication of selected news stories that present 'the others' as revolting and how it aims to mobilize readers to experience affects and even to take aggressive action against these others. Disgust is a powerful mode of disapprobation that fulfils ideological objectives: helped by disgust and the connotations of purity and contamination, superiority, and inferiority, social order is reinforced and reproduced (Moore 2016, 6.2) on *Patriootti.com*. The rhetoric used may be interpreted as hate speech that aims to destabilize societal order and silence certain individuals and groups, preventing them from participating in political discourse, and thus weakening the democratic system (Saresma et al. 2020).

Disgust is often routinely expressed in debates on divisive social issues, such as racism, and the expression, incitement, and management of emotions "play an essential part in the crafting of public morality and reproducing social hierarchies" (Pantti 2016, 364). Interestingly, this mediated morality, with disgust as its driving force, is used in defining and maintaining boundaries between 'us' and others,' no matter whether the 'us' is anti-immigration-minded people, as in this chapter, or those in solidarity with asylum seekers, as is the case in Pantti's article.

The paradoxical character of disgust, as Sara Ahmed points out, is in line with the website's insistence on focusing so heavily on violent, graphic, and overall negatively charged themes and content. There seems to be an attraction or even fascination toward the others who are constructed and described as disgusting. It almost seems obsessive how such reprehensible phenomena as pedophilia or rape are dealt with repeatedly, and how certain groups and individuals are compared to vermin and feces and, in doing so, described as disgusting.

As we showed, both in *Partisaani.com* article texts and in the discussion section, disgust is the modus operandi of rhetoric. It also functions to distance the allegedly repulsive 'other' from the pure and morally superior 'us.' In the examples we analyzed, gender, sexual orientation, and race became the basis of contempt and loathing targeted at the deviations of normative identity positions: whiteness, maleness, masculinity, and cis-gender heterosexuality. Additionally, reactionary ideologies attached to these social categories, namely misogyny, racism, homophobia, islamophobia, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, etc., intersect. What connects the use of these ideologies on the transnational web of (fake) news sites like this is the way disgust is harnessed to position the 'others' as repulsive, dirty, and disgusting. The presumed evil nature or moral inferiority of others threatens 'our' purity by making visible the vulnerability of the allegedly normal gender, sexual, and racial order. Thus, badness, immorality, and corruption are assigned to that other, who is sexually or racially debased.

The opposition of immigration and multiculturalism, the emphasis on the homogeneity of the white nation, and racism in the form of disgust directed at other or "wrong" ethnicities are at the heart of nationalist ideology. Related to these tenets is the idea of a woman as the embodiment of a nation and a man as the protector of a woman and a nation. In this misogynist patriarchal ideology reproduced via

heterosexual monogamy, a woman is a pure and virtuous emblem of a nation worthy of protection and admiration, and a man has unquestioned authority. No other gender or other sexualities are tolerated.

The far-right ideology is, besides drawing from male supremacy, based on the idea of white supremacy. On the website analyzed in this chapter, another focal issue is that of 'race.' Disgust is not only directed at non-heterosexual or non-cis-gender people but experienced and expressed repulsion expands so that feared and loathed characteristics are projected onto other vulnerable groups from whom the dominant group – white heterosexual men – wishes to distance itself. The racialized 'others' coming outside 'our' nation and our culture are marked as faulty.

The dynamic of disgust drives misogyny, racism, and homophobia. Affective online communities are often formed around these repressive ideologies, built on articles combining a judgmental or sarcastic tone, a moralizing attitude, and excessively repugnant visual images. The message of these articles is strengthened by comments that repeat, echo, and fortify readers' disgust and moral superiority. The collective dislike of or aversion toward the qualities of the 'other' who is interpreted as deviant and disgusting is the glue that sticks these communities together.

Our findings indicate that even locally acting far-right media outlets can have a plethora of connections with other local and international actors. Internationally affluent sites, such as *Breitbart*, have a well-documented interest in branching out their franchise internationally, and it seems that smaller far-right actors have also found that internationally sourced synergy is an efficient communication strategy for the dissemination of their ideology. While smaller media outlets, such as *Partisaani.com*, may not engage in explicit or publicly announced cooperation with other actors, it is clear that, to some extent, these sites work in tandem, as they share, redistribute, mimic, or become inspired by each other's publications and try to direct readers deeper into the ever-growing nebula of the online far-right and its affective communities, where performing disgust toward those who have been othered is the driving force of affect-based mobilization.

Note

1. Anti-gender movement was originally founded in Catholic Christian circles, but it has been adopted by the populist radical right around Europe (Bellé and Poggio 2018; Kumar and Paternotte 2017; Saresma 2019).

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7 The Yuck Factor

Reiterating Insect-Eating (and Otherness) Through Disgust

Heidi Kosonen

In Bong Joon Ho's 2013 apocalyptic science fiction film *Snowpiercer*, the revelation that the "third class" citizens are fed ground insects as food paints a visceral metaphor of the class society. Making their way through the circumnavigational train housing the last remnants of humanity, conveniently segregated into separate cars by armed forces, the rebels from the train's "tail" learn that their sustenance consists of cockroaches ground into jelly. Thus their daily protein bar, rendered inedible and disgusting by the climactic revelation of what it is made of, works as a striking criticism of the oppression and dehumanization of the lower classes. Then, imagine willingly eating mealworm spaghetti or a protein bar made of ground grasshoppers, eating "bugs" allegedly so repulsive to a normal human being. No wonder that in 2018 Prince Charles's shocked expression made tabloid covers as his royal highness was offered "green ants on barramundi" (O'Connor 2018). This re-imagined version of the British national dish, fish and chips, was presented in one of the globally popular competitive cooking game show franchise *Masterchef Australia*'s invention test challenges.

Entomophagy, the practice of eating insects, has increasingly been proposed by scholars as a solution to the environmental crisis as a substitute to other meat-eating, recognized as a threat to climate (e.g. van Huis et al. 2013). As a result, crickets, larvae, and other insects have been turned into appetizing snacks in the Western world, which has long gazed upon insect-eating with disgust. In the spectacle-seeking frames of reality television (Gordon 2006), shock reactions similar to Prince Charles's, purveyed to viewers in close-ups, have historically been connected to insects served as food. Now a change is taking place in the news media and popular cultural discourses related to insect-eating. Scholarship reflects this move, predicting new food markets and seeking ways to alleviate the revulsion against entomophagy among Western consumers.

In this chapter, representing critical cultural studies and visual studies, I consider entomophagy's media portrayals by employing discourse analysis, semiology, and visual analysis methods. I conduct a qualitative analysis of the textual and visual elements in selected media portrayals of entomophagy. The focus is on Anglophone media iterations between 2013–2020, discovered online through Google searches Spring 2019 and Spring 2021.[1] I am particularly interested in disgust's role in mediating entomophagy to mass audiences. Through theories of this visceral emotion, I discuss the main ways historical Western representations of revulsion against insects and insect-eating resurface despite the food industry's attempts at presenting entomophagy as appetizing. The theoretical backbone of my analysis lies in the paradigm

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of socio-cultural construction, which explores how cultural discourses and representations shape emotions, conceptions, and norms (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Butler 2004; Hall 2013) – including thoughts related to what is disgusting. My take on entomophagy is here affected by anthropological and post-colonial perspectives on food and foodways, which render poignant not only disgusting foods' socio-cultural construction but also their socio-cultural and moral functions in drawing boundaries and distinctions between groups of people.

Considering food origins and production chains (Curtin and Heldke 1992, 17) and the livability (Haraway 2008) of insects and animals, some scholars have also noted how the moral questions related to farming living creatures for food have been forgotten in the rush to introduce entomophagy as a more ethical and sustainable practice in a food market marked by overconsumption (e.g. Santaoja and Niva 2018). This beckons me to discuss disgust's purported moral role and its constructed nature in my concluding section.

Foodways in Transit: Entomophagy in the Bizarre Food Market

As entomologist Richard Vane-Wright notes (1991, 1), western Euro-American cultures are unique in that they do not use insects as food, unlike so many cultures across the world. While the argument is partially faulty – the Western cultures are far from unique in their food taboo against insect-eating – it is true that juxtaposed with the Euro-Americans, a noticeable wealth of Indigenous peoples and cultures situated in Africa, the Americas and Asia use insects as food. More than 2100 insect species, from larvae to worms, Orthoptera (grasshoppers, locusts, and crickets), ants and termites, to dragonflies and wasps are consumed (Halloran et al. 2018; Vane-Wright 1991). Furthermore, insects' position as highly prized delicacies in these continents (e.g. Gordon 2006, 356) counters views that render insect-eating a mere survivalist strategy or habit caused by food scarcity (van Huis et al. 2013, ix): against the Western presumptions, insects are not eaten just because "better food" is unavailable.

Vane-Wright's commentary participates in one of the earlier waves of trying to introduce insects as alternative protein in the West. These attempts date back to 1885 to Vincent M. Holt's *Why Not Eat Insects?*, a manifesto in which the British entomologist seeks to alleviate the "long-existing and deep-rooted public prejudice" (5) against insect-eating. Yet, by the end of 2010's attempts to introduce entomophagy as a veritable option had not seen the disappearance of Western prejudices but rather entomophagy's frequent reduction into a "titillating spectacle . . . transgressing boundaries to provide entertainment" (Gordon 2007, 51).

After 2013,[2] varied insect species have been introduced to Western diets with renewed strength: with a growing industry and prolific scholarship looking for solutions to the population growth, food scarcity, lack of farmland, and the environmental crisis from entomophagy, conjoined with changing legislature helping to bring a wide variety of insect-products to the food markets.[3] These discourses introduce insect protein as a healthy, economical, and both ecologically and ethically sustainable alternative to cattle farming, which demands a lot of land and burdens the environment through carbon dioxide emissions and water wastage (van Huis et al. 2013). In Finland, I have followed how several options featuring crickets, from chocolate bars to granola, quickly made their way to advertisements and local supermarkets as exotic, protein-rich additions to the more regular diet. By 2021, the trend appeared

to have died out without catching fire, reiterating entomologist Adena Why's fear of entomophagy getting stuck in a so-called "bizarre food movement" of one-time tries of foods sold mostly because of their shock factor (Bryce 2014), and environmental social scientist Minna Santaoja's accusation that insect food markets are driven by "curiosity culinarism" presenting insects as exciting treats valuable for their newness and exoticism (cited in Jämsen 2017).

Both public prejudice (Holt 1885) and entomophagy's representational history (Gordon 2006) appear to doom insect-eating to being relegated to bizarre foods and curiosity culinarism. Itemizing insect-eating's history as a spectacle-seeking element in game shows, like global franchises *Fear Factor* (first aired 2001) or *Survivor* (first aired 2000), Gordon describes:

> Bugs have become a Reality TV staple, a commonplace in "docu-stunt" and "docu-real" television. Bee swarms, scorpion pits, pizza with grub worms and coagulated blood, cockroaches passed between couples' mouths, clear plastic coffins full of giant Madagascar hissing cockroaches, live dragonflies, roach blender drinks, worm wine, and worm sausage, and a cricket eating contest have all appeared much to the disgust and titillation of the TV spectator conditioned to seeing playful and transgressive eating in reality and culinary television.
>
> (2007, 52)

In such representations, insect-eating is usually introduced through playful and sensational discourses (Gordon 2006, 353). While both employ the unthinkability of insects as food, the latter seeks to arouse horror and disgust in viewers (358), often achieved through breaking Western food taboos and presenting insects as horrifying masses of "creepy crawlies" (Brown 2006; see also Hoyt and Schultz 1999 (eds.)). Exemplifying insect-eating's cultural position as a spectacle has included nudges at consumers' daring, as in the following ice cream advertisement: "Salt & Straw's latest flavors . . . may not be for even the most adventurous of eaters. That's because they have actual blood and real meal worms [sic] in them" (Chayes Wida 2018).

Disgust: A Danger Reaction and a Constructed Emotion

As has been noted in marketing studies, one of the most vital factors hindering the consumption of insect-based food items is the disgust related to insects as food (Heinä 2020, 78; see also Halloran et al. 2018). Disgust might be the most visceral of basic human emotions because it has been associated with human defense mechanisms (e.g. Curtis 2013) and the so-called lower senses: smell, taste, and touch (Korsmeyer 1999, 11–37). As a biological danger reaction disgust may protect organisms from threats to their existence, such as spoilt food or poisonous animals (e.g. Oaten et al. 2009) or infectious diseases (Curtis 2013). However, in the humanities and social sciences, disgust has been connected to varied kinds of symbolic differentiations between "self" and "the world", "us" and "the others." In the psychoanalytic framework, Julia Kristeva (1982) sees disgust instrumentalized in the creation and maintenance of a separate self. Similarly in social sciences, several scholars study disgust's use in the construction and preservation of the ways societies, nation-states, and cultures are ordered and hierarchized (e.g. Miller 1997; Nussbaum 2017). As "brazenly and uncompromisingly judgmental (Kahan 1998, 1624)" emotion, disgust also serves

moral functions in several cultures and their legislative systems (Kolnai 2004; Nussbaum 2006). In these social functions, disgust connects to threats to the organism and gets its power from bodily defenses against death and disease but is also constructed separately from them as a cultural, hierarchizing, and highly symbolic emotion.

There are various reasons why insects cause disgust in humans or Westerners in particular. In his pioneering work on this emotion, philosopher Aurel Kolnai lists physical qualities that can be related to insects and the disgust they evoke: undesirable proximity; association to disease, death, and decay; 'viscous' or slimy appearance; excessive fertility; and swarming (2004, 52–62). He enumerates:

> Their crawling stickiness; their appearance of being as it were 'pasted over' their substrate . . . ; their pullulating squirming, their cohesion into a homogenous teeming mass; their evocation of decomposition and decay.
>
> (57)

Similar qualities are included also in social philosopher William Ian Miller's cognitive binaries for making sense of disgust (1997, 38–58). Those connectable to insects include plenitude (one vs. many) and movement (still vs. wiggly); in his understanding, insects are disgusting especially in "their teeming nocturnal multitudes" (44). Especially the connection between pests and contagious diseases (health vs. disease) and entomophagy's perceived primitivity (us vs. them) (38) can help explain why insects precisely as sources of protein invoke several food taboos in the west. Insects also easily appear as monstrous (beauty vs. ugliness) (38) in their "invertebrate shape" (Kellert 1993, 57–58) so far removed from the anthropomorphic considerations of beauty.

Yet like other "disgust-objects," the aversion related to insects and their consumption as food cannot be understood without paying attention to their cultural representation next to their "observable" physical qualities. For instance, their "teeming multitudes" mentioned both by Kolnai and Miller invoke insects' threatening excessive proliferation as monstrous and feminized "egg-laying machines" (Sleigh 2007, 290), "feed[ing] into the most insidious anxieties about unnatural copulation and births" (Braidotti 2002, 158; see also Grosz 1995, 187–205). Insects' exclusion from the Western diet especially reflects their position in cultural categories through which they have been associated with dirt, disease, and death. Nicky Coutts discusses insects' enduring association to death and decomposition, forged in medieval discourses where the discovery of carrion insects threatened the human material body, the temple of the soul: "Insects in their seemingly infinite varieties of form were witnessed writhing, teeming and feasting on decaying human remains, threatening not only the external but also the eternal wholeness and integrity of the human body" (2007, 32). Charlotte Sleigh maintains that the negative image of insects also has roots in a strategic early-twentieth-century attempt to establish entomology as a serious discipline through insects' connection to crop damage and infectious human diseases, like malaria or typhoid (2007, 282). All these associations speak of a long Western history of representing insects as dangerous, disgusting, contagious, avoidable, and Other.

Despite the effective circulation of these productive, macabre, and cryptid associations and imageries, the aversion towards entomophagy rests also on insects' symbolic utility in representing otherness and in their instrumentality in the differentiations between groups of people. Cultural scholar Jay Mechling, for instance, studies the

cockroach as a powerful symbol that "nicely condenses into one symbol a great many social and psychological anxieties, some of which are human but most of which may be characteristically (if not uniquely) American" (Mechling 1991, 122). In this line, Braidotti (2002, 148–171), Sara Ahmed (2004), and Christopher Hollingsworth (2007) recount insects' metaphorical instrumentality in patriarchal, racist, and xenophobic Western discourses seeking to dehumanize certain groups of people to justify their oppression, deportation, or even genocide.

Since insects are so symbolically laden in themselves and as food, environmental health expert Val Curtis emphasizes the processes of naming and representing insect-based products in attempts to present them as appetizing food to consumers (cited in McCoy 2019). Curtis reminds the readers that unlike elsewhere in the world, the terminology used in the West fails to distinguish between edible insects and pests and proposes: "If you're going to market insects, you take them as far away from anything slimy or crawling or creepy or too leggy" (ibid.). For insects' too leggy, winged, and alien look Curtis also discourages using images of insects on food packages and in advertisements (ibid.), in similar chains of displacement with which a distinction between slaughtered animals and sanitized "meat" has been achieved (e.g. Adams 1991). In a 2018 empirical study, Sebastian Berger et al also argue that emphasizing the pleasures, luxuriousness, exotism, and trendiness of entomophagy appeal to consumers better than highlighting their purported health or environmental benefits (2018). In his pioneering essay, Holt proposes that making entomophagy an accepted practice would require positive examples by the prevailing social elite (1885, 29), which is hardly met with Prince Charles cringing at edible ants.

In the following sections, I focus on disgust's role in representing entomophagy in Western mainstream media during the latest, post-2013 trend of introducing insect foods, businesses, and markets to consumers. I draw up exemplary case studies from news media and discuss the ways disgust governs the way the phenomenon has been represented.

The "Yuck" Factor: Insect Foods in Media

The frames and illustration images in news media, gathered based on Google searches of news items published between 2013–2020, reveal that the attitudes related to insect-eating are heavily in flux. On the surface, they appear to aspire to matter-of-fact depictions and might achieve this when the textual elements are considered. In news articles, neutral frames related to industry and small businesses involved in insect products and entomophagy have in part replaced the sensational frames studied by Gordon a decade earlier. For instance, the articles deal with the environmental or health benefits related to entomophagy or the increased production of insect-based foods and their marketing. However, the yuck-factor pertinent to reality-TV remains especially in the visual and terminological choices through which entomophagy is reported. For instance, in two articles published by *CNN Health*, edible insects are termed "maggots" and "bugs", blurring the differentiation between edible insects and pests ("To feed the world, begin with maggot sausage and insect ice cream, scientist says", 2 May 2019; "The food that can feed, and maybe save, the planet: Bugs", 25 October 2019). These frequently reiterated terms, reminiscent of cadavers and ruined crops, reference insects' disgusting origins in death and infectious diseases. A playful tone, remarked by Gordon (2006), is often evident in the terminological play in the titles.

The illustrations for the news articles, often made available to the press by image depositories like Shutterstock, are more blatantly spectacle-oriented than the texts. Even matter-of-fact news can be adjoined by revolting images of insects and entomophagy. The "bugs" (most often crickets or mealworms) are featured in plenty: as a mass of cooked or raw insects that could be either dead or alive, and easy to imagine in movement. Considering that both plenitude (mass, many) and movement (wiggly, swarming) are among the primary observable disgust-features of insects, these types of images connect straight to the "teeming nocturnal multitudes" (Miller 1997, 44) that according to Miller and Kolnai horrify humans in insects. Their teeming continues in some of the headlines and lead paragraphs, which often highlight insects' wiggle in imageries of pan-fried crickets still floundering, or feature mealworms writhing all the way from between the teeth to the pit of the stomach. In a playful tone, *Ozy* for instance recounts the 2013 FAO report (van Huis et al.), which "urges Westerners to open their minds and mouths to the 10 quintillion insects that are buzzing, wriggling and crawling at any given moment" ("Heap some bugs on your plate", 13 February 2014).

In an article by *Undark* ("To Save the Planet, Eat More Bugs?", 10 July 2017) both the visually evoked teeming multitudes and the naming of the edible insects in ways reminiscent of pests are exemplary. Even if the article discusses crickets and mealworms, specifically, in the title they have been categorized in the general category of "bugs", which can also include insects generally perceived as inedible and unsavory, such as cockroaches. In the recipes mentioned in the text, the mealworms have been ground into flour as one component of "meatballs", yet in the illustration, they appear as a gushing heap of uncooked mass of hundreds of mealworms, which have been captured amid movement. Some appear to attempt an escape from the bowl containing them, thus echoing their swarming despite the limitations of still images.

Next to wriggling masses, some articles conjoin texts with images that make a point of eating the insect whole and/or unprepared, countering Val Curtis' notions of (naming and) representing insects in ways that reject their many-legged, crawly, and slimy stereotypes. For instance, out of the 18 illustrations in *CNN Health* ("The food that can feed, and maybe save, the planet: Bugs", 25 October 2019), seven feature insects in masses and six focalize individual insects (cooked or uncooked) with their numerous legs, feelers and antlers sticking out: a water beetle on chopsticks, fried grasshoppers on top of sushi rolls, a grasshopper in a spoon, fried tarantula on the palm of a hand, deep-fried scorpions on a stick. In an article in *The Conversation* ("Review: Bugs on the Menu at the Environmental Film Festival", 5 October 2016) the image displays a mouth held wide open with a chocolate-covered yet intact cricket entering it.

To anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the binary opposition between raw and cooked carries universal symbolic utility in raw food's association with what is "natural", and often dangerous and forbidden. Cooking, in contrast, marks food's (and its referents') transition from "nature" to "culture" (1964, 164) in a process through which it is rendered fit for human consumption. In this regard, the illustrations' frequent tactic to display the "bugs" in their teeming, uncooked state works as a testimony of their inedibility in the Western context, wherein Mary Douglas argues the "creeping, swarming, teeming creatures abominably [to] destroy the taxonomic boundaries" (1975, 269) of food "that divides edible [animals] from inedible" (273). On the other hand, the close-ups of fried yet otherwise unprocessed insects tap into the representational history of insects' monstrous, alien otherness, that has

featured them as nightmarish crawlies in Western entertainment (e.g. Braidotti 2002, 148–171; Freeland 2000; Leskovsky 2006). This is particularly evident in displaying the Orthoptera (e.g. crickets), whose legs and wings are in many cultures considered inedible and removed before eating (e.g. Gahukar 2011), yet which are in the illustration images displayed with all aforementioned "excessive" body parts sticking out.

The Spectacle of the Other: (In)Edible Bugs and "Primitive Others"

The disgust associated with entomophagy in these frames and illustration images is hardly surprising considering the Western history of taboos and reiterating prejudices that the food industries must battle to present insect products as appetizing. As emphasized by the scholarly investigation of food customs, how and what we eat is often a question of how we identify and affiliate ourselves culturally and as individuals. This process is accomplished in relation to varied food rules, taboos, and symbolic structures (Counihan 1999, 19–20) that are culturally constituted (Douglas 1975; Leach 1979; Levi-Strauss 1964) and culturally maintained (Barthes 1997). Because of the symbolic force of food and foodways, they not only reflect the social group but also marks its borders (Eräsaari and Uusihakala 2016) – both internal and external, perpetually shifting and endangered – in the varied judgments pertaining to the "inedibility" of certain foods (Douglas 1975) or the "disgustingness" of particular foodways (Roth 2005). As Maggie Kilgour thus suggests, food is a "symbolic system used to define personal, national and even sexual differences" (1998, 239), of which both the gendered implications of meat-eating vis-à-vis vegetarianism (Adams 1991; Sobal 2005) and the instrumental position of cannibalism in the colonial politics (Arens 1979; Kilgour 1998), serve as examples.

These theories of food and foodways enforce the idea that from the aesthetic judgments about the edibility and savoriness of particular foods to the dietary choices of individuals, food's consumption – or indeed, representation – cannot be dissociated from the "social body" and its border- and biopolitical mechanisms. These seek to maintain the internal purity of the group through "pure" choices and "proper" consumption and the abjection of others' foods and foodways. Anthropologists Matti Eräsaari and Katja Uusihakala state: "food taboos . . . do not tell us so much about the avoided animal as of the human ways of self-definition as members of particular groups and separating from others through food preferences and aversions" (2016, 14).[4]

In this line of theory, the ideas of disgustingness and inedibility evoked in entomophagy's media illustrations could be argued to play a similar double role of not only marking the insects consumed as disgusting but also sullying the individuals and groups of people consuming them. In the images, this function is evident particularly in images that represent the act of eating insects and often do so through exaggeration. For instance, in the header for the aforementioned article in *The Conversation*, a certain amount of disgust is evoked by the gaping mouth, and through the mouth, associated with the individual about to eat the cricket. The act of consumption is still in the Western world surrounded by cultural taboos and rules of propriety, against which the represented gaping mouth – one of the guarded orifices to the human body – transgresses. Researchers from different fields recount that too loud eating, chewing with mouth open or indeed just the "sight of other bodies eating" (Probyn 2000, 7) can evoke moral or class-related (Miller 1997, 242), or even phobic disgust reactions (Kumar et al. 2017).

Gordon repeats the oft-cited saying "you are what you eat"[5] and proposes insect-eating to register as a transgression against social norms more easily than most foodways: "Entomophagy, more so than consumption of other foods, can serve to embody social transgression, symbolic taboo, or even spiritual sin" (2007, 52). These notions connect to affect scholar Sara Ahmed's recognition of emotions' (including disgust's) "stickiness," wherein contact (or association through mere likeness) with the disgust-object alone is enough to make something or someone disgusting: "An object becomes disgusting through its contact with other objects that have already, as it were, been designated as disgusting before the encounter has taken place" (2004, 87; also Miller 1997, 5). In this sense the images, making an exaggerated spectacle of the act of eating insects, or of eating them obnoxiously, are on the brink of serving a warning "you are as disgusting as the insect you eat." Similar images to *The Conversation* headline are featured for instance in the article images of *Youmatter* ("Will We Start Eating Bugs? Are Insects More Sustainable Than Meat?" 17 January 2020) and *Medical News Today* ("Grub's up! How eating insects could benefit health", 22 June 2016). Some of these – widely common – article images even feature a recognizable disgust face (Rozin, Lowery, and Ebert 1994), as in the *Multibriefs* article ("Eating insects could help save the planet", 16 August 2019) in which a white Caucasian man is eating a scorpion.

In discussing entomophagy, in particular, Vane-Wright proposes that "the very fact that eating insects belongs to the hunter-gatherer stage of human evolution may be a major factor in their rejection by Western people: we may unconsciously reject entomophagy as primitive" (1991, 2). But he fails to mention the ways the idea related to the primitivity of insect-eating has reflected the power relations between Global North and South, and how so-called "primitive" foodways like entomophagy have been instrumentalized in the colonial differentiations between civilization and primitivism, development and regression, and hygiene and filth. As anthropologist Julie Lesnik notes, the history of eating insects in the West is "stained by the colonial exploitation of native peoples" (2019, 560). She argues that the disgust response to eating insects has been taught to Europeans and Colonial Americans through narratives of the foodways of the colonized "primitives." She writes: "Although these tales of how only beast-like people would eat insects are exaggerated and/or fabricated, they became very real in Europe's collective memory." (564). Similarly, Grabowski and colleagues note the origination of a certain portion of the current food legislation from colonial times and suggest that "the omission of edible insects . . . may be part of the entomophobia of the colonial rulers" (2020). This is reflected also in the comment by Vane-Wright: the "civilization" of the Euro-Americans is suspended on their perceived (but imaginary) uniqueness of *not* eating insects *like* the peoples they colonized. Of course, as Holt reminds the readers, entomophagy has a history in the colonizers' past too, including Greek and Roman foodways (1885, 47).

While the "colonial others" themselves are not featured in the illustrations, it is rare that a news article would fail to mention – like Vane-Wright – how *unusual* the Western food customs are in not including insects, or how abundant the countries seen as less developed are in their variety of *exotic* insect delicacies and entomophagous foodways. There is a strain of othering in the articles' insistence in framing entomophagy as a third-world custom while it is marketed to Western consumers as a bizarre novelty and an ecological yet slightly disgusting act. Seen in relation to foodways' and taboos' (Kosonen 2020) role in drawing distinctions between self and others, in

subtle ways the verbal and visual choices of the articles participate in the othering discourses, where entomophagy, among other purportedly "disgusting" foodways, has been utilized in differentiating between the (developed) Euro-American countries and the (primitive) Global South. And in some instances, the "curiosity culinarism" and entomophagous spectacle even sell insect products with entomophagy's primitive image and the otherness of those who eat insects. For example, in the advertisements for a product called "Larvets" by an online store specialized in "curiously awesome gifts" (*Vat19*), insects are eaten by lizards and hillbillies with bad teeth, reiterating conceptions of the animality that grounds insect-eating's primitive image and the cultural evolutionary distinctions of the colonial project.

These representations' relationship to colonial differentiations is more evident when they are set in the continuum with the reality TV spectacle discussed by Gordon that, along with the entire history of discourses and representations on entomophagy, still informs our relationships to insect-eating. For instance, early twentieth-century backpacker adventure realities, like *Madventures* (first aired 2002) or *Man vs. Wild* (first aired 2006), frequently feature encounters with foreign foodways. These shows follow White European Male globetrotters in neo-colonial frames of experiencing the wilderness and the cultures in far-away continents. To take an example of this representative regime, in an episode of Discovery channel's *Man vs. Wild* (season 2; episode 8; aired 2008), adventurer Bear Grylls is visiting Zambia and scavenges "a local delicacy", a giant rhino beetle larva, from a hollow tree trunk. In a similar line with the spectacle Gordon describes, the scene emphasizes the disgustingness of what is eaten to highlight the "daring" it takes: to the white adventurer, eating the local delicacy is a way of highlighting his masculinity and dominance. Despite his disgust – evident in his expression and verbal interjections – Grylls eats the larva with a crunch so that its bodily fluids fly all over. As Grylls himself narrates before taking a bite of the raw and wriggling larva, the local habit is to cook the larvae before consuming them. His decision to eat the larva raw continues to carry the symbolic utility of marking whatever the food attaches to, here the Zambian culture depicted only in its "uncivilized" elements, as primitive (Lévi-Strauss 1964).

'Cricket's Crackle:' Disgust from Different Perspectives

From Holt's notions in 1885 to current research seeking to introduce entomophagy to the Western diet, scholars agree that in normalizing entomophagy it is important to pay attention to how insect foods are discussed and represented: as luxury foods removed from associations to their easily revolting origins (e.g. Berger et al. 2018). To a certain extent, a transition from the affective reality TV spectacle Gordon itemizes towards edible food has happened. For instance, over several seasons the mystery box -challenges of the cooking reality game *Masterchef Australia* have seen amateur cooks preparing haute-cuisine dishes from insects based on one of its celebrity chefs' advocacy for entomophagy (PTI 2018). Yet news media lags far behind with their frequent decision to title the edible insects playfully as "bugs" or "maggots", and in their illustrations, join the – more or less neutral – texts with swarming masses of larvae, uncooked crickets with their numerous limbs sticking out, or revolting images of insects' consumption that easily render disgusting also the individuals eating them.

The prejudices these frames reflect are rooted deep in Western food taboos and conceptions of insects. It is dubious if the relationship towards entomophagy can even

be changed within the generation that is witnessing the transition in foodways. After all, as Carolyn Korsmeyer writes in her analysis of taste: "It can be hard to educate both the palate and the digestive system away from disgust and prohibitions that are inculcated early in life" (1999, 93). Especially problematic media's yuck factor and focus on the stereotypes of insect-eating's primitivity could be argued to be when they associate to ideas about otherness. In the mass-mediated global society of today, representations play an important role in shaping ideas of other cultures and peoples. From this perspective entomophagy's revolting representations are not without ethical concerns, especially when considering both foodways and disgust's instrumentality in building social identities (e.g. Eräsaari and Uusihakala 2016) and drawing borders between "us" and our others (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Miller 1997). Dean W. Curtis further argues that food taxonomies, separating edible foods from inedible ones, recognize food as "something made to become part of who we are" (1992, 9). Thus, against the history (and present moment) of Westerners getting horrified at the Global South's insect delicacies and entomophagous customs, the frames, and images encouraging viewers to feel disgusted by the thought of eating insects and by the people consuming them are never innocent.

Perhaps based on this history of insect-eating-related disgust and entomophagy's otherness, the latest turns in discussing its future in the Western world have seen insects as more fit for animal feed than human food (e.g. Halloran et al. 2018). In this context the spectacle of disgust over entomophagy is at its most untamed as the following excerpt from yet another BBC article ("How insects could feed the food industry of tomorrow", 3 June 2014):

> Millions of maggots squirm over blackened pieces of fruit and bloody lumps of fetid flesh. A pungent stench of festering decay hovers over giant vats of writhing, feasting larvae. It's more than enough to put most people off their lunch. Yet these juvenile flies could soon be just one step in the food chain away from your dinner plate.

While recognizing the connection between what one eats and what one is, noted by philosophers from Feuerbach to Brillat-Savarin (1949) and here causing revulsion one food chain away, the article implies that the need to know foods' and feed's origins only applies when insects are in question. For instance, similar questions are not related to humans eating pork, or pig feed that does *not* consist of insects. And of course, there are many ethical dilemmas also in farming insects. In the rush to add insects into the Western diet because "the cruelty we inflict on millions of animals fills many of us with sadness" (PTI 2018), as the insect-eating advocate Gary Mehigan comments, we do not think of the cruelty that humanity will inflict on insects if they are farmed (rather than foraged) for human food or animal feed. Sustainability does not go hand in hand with ethics.

Concerning this, Finnish journalist Elisa Jämsen asks a vital question: "When a cricket crackles between your teeth, do you feel like you are making an ecological decision or a sting in your conscience?" (2017). Here disgust – the unappetizing crackle – is given a function quite different from the disgusting frames studied elsewhere in this chapter, labeling as disgusting lifeforms farthest removed from humans and "exotic others" to the White Western hegemony. Disgust appears in its purported status as "moral" emotion. Like in its status as danger reaction, as moral emotion disgust has

easily been essentialized and severed from its social contexts and processes. Bioethicist Leon Kass (1997), for instance, argues that disgust conveys instinctual knowledge against that which lacks goodness or wisdom. Yet the aforementioned example of the abhorrence over a pig eating insects – not because of the pig's suffering over such "unbecoming" food but because the insects are feared to render the pig itself less tasty to humans – proves the ways the borders and the entities that disgust protects as intrinsically good, wise or pure are culturally constructed. And, as has been witnessed in the designations of entomophagy as disgusting and inherently other, disgust often punches downwards in hierarchies (Miller 1997; Wilson 2002), denying its targets humanity or livable lives (Ahmed 2004). Jämsen's disgust, instead, does not stick to anything, a bug or a human – only to the unappetizing sound – which makes it an interesting starting point in thinking disgust's uses in varied hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses.

Notes

1. One thing that must be mentioned in studying Anglophone "Western" material is that the so-called West is, in effect, a mélange of varied cultures with quite different histories. This is particularly relevant when a concept as volatile as colonialism comes into the picture.
2. The new wave started with the publication of van Huis et al's FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) report *Edible insects: Future prospects for food and feed security*. Starting in 2014 the numbers of entomophagy-related publications have steadily risen from 1–4 to 65 articles per year, according to the archives of Elsevier's Science Direct (searched 19 January 2021).
3. In many countries, the process is slowed or halted by legislation that prohibits or restricts insects' sale as food, as well as feed for non-human animals, based on their "impure" status (e.g. Mariod 2020).
4. All translations from Finnish to English are my own.
5. Often attributed to French gastronomist Brillat-Savarin (1949). In this form, the anecdote is by German religious scholar Ludwig Feuerbach (Cherno 1963), however.

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Section III

Foodways and Disgust

8 Disgust by Association

Date Labelling, Standardization, and Freshness

Tanja Plasil

Most European food health and safety regulations demand that the majority of food items bear a label with either a *use-by* or a *best-before* date.[1] These dates must consist of day, month and, if applicable, the year of the product's expiration. The *use-by* date is used for highly perishable products, for example fresh chicken or fish, and contributes to food safety. Once the *use-by* date has passed, food should not be considered safe for consumption as the danger of food poisoning or foodborne disease increases considerably. The *best-before* date is thus an indicator of quality, informing consumers that some of the product's properties (for example taste, smell, color, texture, or vitamin content) might have deteriorated. The *best-before* date indicates to consumers that the food item may no longer be at its best but can most likely still be consumed without any danger to a person's health.

These two different date labels, one relating to safety, the other to quality, become confused in many consumers' minds because they understand the quality indicator *best-before* as an equally strict cut-off date as the *use-by* date (e.g. Evans 2012; Evans, Campbell, and Murcott 2013; Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2015; Stilling Bilchfeldt, Mikkelsen, and Gram 2015; Yngfalk 2016b; Plasil 2020a). This common misunderstanding leads many consumers to throw away food based on the *best-before* date alone (rather than using their senses), creating large amounts of avoidable food waste (e.g. Bloom 2010; European Union Committee 2014; Yngfalk 2016b; Närvänen et al. 2020; Plasil 2020a). In this chapter, I will consider how the date label has altered Norwegian consumers'[2] ideas and perceptions about what is understood as fresh – and therefore edible – and what is considered old – and therefore inedible – food. I will discuss how people come to feel disgust towards food products that neither ooze nor smell bad, nor are in any other way offensive to the senses. They are simply *out-of-date*.

Based on my study of date labelling of food in Norway, I question ideas about food safety and quality, freshness and disgust. From 2017 until 2019, I conducted more than 30 interviews with food producers, retailers, local and national food and hygiene authorities, food researchers and anti-waste activists. Furthermore, I surveyed consumers (n=373) about date labelling and food waste within their homes. This survey included open questions about participants' understanding of the *best-before* versus the *use-by* date, ideas about risk and safety, and their personal experiences with expired food. Quotes by consumers in this chapter are drawn mainly from the answers to these questions. My research question going into the study was date labelling – not disgust – but I found that perceptions of which foods were experienced as fresh versus disgusting continuously surfaced in the answers (both the interviews and

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the survey). Therefore, in this chapter, I explore how modern food production and the date label system influence consumers' needs for freshness and disgust-avoidance. Through the regulation of the *natural lifespan* of food products into *standardized shelf-life*, the date label standardizes disgust as it becomes associated with the expiration date rather than sensory experiences or the natural lifecycle of food. In the minds of many consumers *best-before* turns into *not-edible-after*.

What Is Disgust? Naturally Given or Culturally Constructed?

According to cultural psychologist Paul Rozin, humans divide the world of food into "the Yum and the Yuck" (Rozin 1999, 27) – edible and inedible, pleasant and disgusting. When looking at the roots of disgust several scholars see it as biologically determined, predating culture and history (e.g. Curtis 2007). They argue that disgust is a remnant of our animal past with biological and evolutionary functions (Curtis 2007). Behavioral scientist Valerie Curtis argues that the evolutionary development of disgust is connected to the avoidance of infectious diseases while others focus more on the "ingestion" part of disgust (2011). Reflecting on embodiment, sociologist Nick Crossley states that food is eaten and therefore "becomes part of the body, so that the latter is made up of the former" (2006). This act of embodiment of food leads several scholars of psychiatry and psychology to assume that disgust has an important function in preventing the oral ingestion of potentially spoilt and poisonous food among other things (e.g. Rozin and Fallon 1987; Egolf, Siegrist, and Hartmann 2018). Here, at the moment of possible ingestion, disgust and risk (avoidance) interrelate as feelings of disgust towards (potentially poisonous) food lead us to avoid the risk of eating it.

However, disgust cannot be explained by psychological or biological functioning alone. Even adherents of the biological explanation of disgust do agree that disgust is an "adaptive system, whereby individual responses vary according to an individual's personality and learning experience, as well as by local cultural effects such as norms about manners and the symbolism of pollution and purity" (Curtis, de Barra, and Aunger 2011). What is disgusting is transferred as knowledge between people, as one person's disgust is detectable by others. Disgust is visible in the face and in other body reactions, and can therefore be taught and learned (Miller 2004, 3). Further, some of our food aversions "rest as heavily on symbolism, social learning, association, and psychological defense as on genuine nutritional concerns (14)." Disgust therefore is as much culturally constructed, as it is biological, as much learned, as it is genetic.

All societies have a dietary system that has not been scientifically developed but is based on "a set of categories classifying foods within a particular framework" (Poulain 2017, 73). Food is yum or yuck, edible or inedible, pleasurable or disgusting according to culture and circumstances. According to anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966), phenomena seen as dirty or disgusting are not unique or isolated events but by-products of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, insofar as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. Dirt, impurity, and disgustingness are classifications determined by one's social group, religion or society. To these I would also add personal experience, geographical and temporal location, economic situation and upbringing – as the examples below shall demonstrate. Disgust stands on the boundary between conscious patterns of conduct and unconscious impulses (Menninghaus 2003, 2).

Seen in this light disgust often protects our ideas about security rather than our true physical security (Miller 2004, 6). Ironically the more secure and safe our modern food products have become, the more insecure and risk-avoiding consumers become (Hadden 1986; Sassatelli and Scott 2001; Kjærnes 2007; Eden, Bear, and Walker 2008). Furthermore, an excessive supply of food, coupled with the hyperbolic use of the word disgust for phenomena that do not deserve such a rejection (see also Menninghaus 2003, 5), leads to what could be seen as an inflation of the feeling of disgust towards older food items. Here, at the cross-roads of modern consumerism and industrial food production is where disgust and the date label intersect.

Time, Risk, and the Need for Date Labelling

In many Norwegian offices, people come together on Friday for a shared lunch or coffee where one member of staff brings a cake or some other treat to share with colleagues. The following account describes the sad outcome of one particular Friday office gathering:

> A few years ago, we had our Friday coffee at the office. One of us had gone out to buy frozen strawberries to make smoothies. The next day I woke up and I was so sick. Then it turns out that thirteen of us got sick.[3]

What makes the story most peculiar is that it happened at the Norwegian Food Safety and Hygiene Authorities office in Oslo. It shows that the risks of food poisoning are real, persistent and exist anywhere – even at the very heart of food safety and hygiene regulation. Besides the obvious microbes and bacteria that cause food poisoning, time is an important factor when it comes to the safety of food. The older food gets the more time the microbes have for multiplying: a raw oyster, fresh from the sea can be a wonderful delight, yet one having spent a long time on land might be a danger to one's health or even life. When it comes to time, the "matter of food plays an active role in its own status, not least through the changes that it does and can undergo" (Watson and Meah 2013). All food is perishable, changing its properties over time. Some food items (like oysters) deteriorate very quickly; others lose their constitution very slowly. It is (almost) *inevitable* that food loses its edibility as time passes, however, the *speed* and *duration* of this process are unpredictable (Moran 2015; Mattila et al. 2018). Food is "bloody-minded in its reluctance to be tamed and essentialized" (Atkins 2011, 74).

This unstable matter of food means that humans run the risk of acquiring and ingesting old, and therefore potentially disgusting, or even dangerous food. This was so at the time when most humans hunted, gathered, farmed, or produced their own food, and it continues to be so today, in spite of our modern capacity to keep food fresh and safe thanks to technology like refrigeration, preservatives, pasteurization, and packaging. No matter how safe food has become, the ephemerality of food still poses a dilemma to modern day consumers who have to continuously decide if their food is safe enough to eat.

Furthermore, due to novel production and storing methods, the globalization of food markets, the "supermarket revolution" (Olsen 2010) and new packaging technologies, the distance between *field and fork*, of food production and consumption, has increasingly widened in the last 150 years (e.g. Sassatelli and Scott

2001; Poulain 2017; Kjærnes, Harvey, and Warde 2007; Eden, Bear, and Walker 2008; Zachmann and Østby 2011). This distance is not only practical – production and consumption have become separated – or geographical – food production happens far away from urban "consumption" centers – but also increasingly a cognitive one. In becoming progressively estranged from the origins and production of food, consumers are increasingly alienated from the materiality of food itself, which has led to a diminished ability to judge the freshness of food, due to a lack of knowledge, experience and opportunity. People know, for example, that milk will go sour over time. This change of state is inevitable due to the properties of milk as a substance. However, with industrialized, opaquely packaged and sealed food sold in impersonal supermarkets, consumers do not know how close to sourness the milk in front of them is, and have no means to judge the state of the product they are about to buy.

So how can consumers be protected from buying old and potentially spoiled food? The European Union Food Authority answers this question on their website: "Science protects consumers from field to fork." Based on the knowledge provided by scientists and experts, in many countries national rules and regulations standardize unruly food matter into predictable food products. Nature (food) is being reshaped into measurable and calculable units (Asdal 2004, 2011). The date label, which standardizes unruly, ephemeral, natural food lifetime into calculable, predictable shelf-life time, is one example of these protective tools (Plasil 2020b).

Many European countries implemented date labelling in the 1970s[4] due to the aforementioned challenges for consumers to judge the safety and freshness of food.[5] Not only were there great changes in the production and sale of food after WW2, the role of consumption and consumers changed as well. The years around 1960 marked a "watershed" in consumer history (Myrvang 2009, 22) with continuously expanding consumer rights. The regulated expiration dates were the outcome of a combination of the actual need for necessary information due to the growing distance between field and fork, and the legal framework governing the right of consumers to receive this information.

However, when establishing date labels to satisfy the need for proper food safety and quality information, the creators of the expiration date could not have foreseen the consequences of this seemingly simple label. Here the misunderstanding between *best-before* and *use-by* date plays an important role. One example of a change in labelling which (understandably) leads to confusion is milk. Until well into the 20th century, milk was often associated with disease and epidemics (Atkins 2016). Milk, due to its high nutritional value, water content and neutral pH, serves as "an excellent growth medium for different micro-organisms" (Claeys et al. 2013). Due to these properties, in Norway and many other countries, milk was considered a highly perishable product, dangerous to human health when past the expiration date and therefore *needing* a *use-by* date. However, in past decades this classification was rendered increasingly obsolete due to pasteurization, refrigeration, packaging, enhanced hygiene during production, transport and retail. Consequently, in 2008 milk was re-classified from a highly perishable item to a regular product for which a *best-before* date would suffice. From this point onwards, people would be informed about the quality rather than the safety of milk. The problem is that many consumers treat milk as if it still had a *use-by* date, throwing away out-of-date milk that is still usable without checking the product's material state.

Being increasingly dependent on the date label to judge the quality and safety of food creates problems when it comes to discarding and wasting of food. Research shows that younger people who have grown up with the date label are more prone to throwing out food based on the label alone (e.g. De Hooge et al. 2017). This due to a lack of knowledge about the properties, durability, and materiality of food, as this quote from an informant in her early 30s shows:

> At home, my father knows – I don't. I had rice at home and did not know if it was still good, so I googled it and they said it keeps this and that long. So, I threw it away.

This quote shows the normative strength of standardized shelf lives over sensory experience. Rather than checking the rice itself, the informant trusted Google more than her eyes or nose to judge the product's edibility and safety. Here the misunderstanding between the safety related *use-by* and the quality related *best-before* leads consumers to throw away products that are still perfectly edible.

In the next section, I will describe how ideas about freshness, quality and the expiration date became entangled in consumers' minds leading to a growing need for freshness and connecting the date label to feelings of disgust.

"Fresh Today, Bad Tomorrow": A Growing Need for Freshness

"Fresh today, bad tomorrow", this quote by the manager of a large supermarket store exemplifies how ideas about freshness and quality are directly connected in the minds of modern-day consumers. With the exception of a few food items where controlled maturity is hailed (for example wine and cheese), freshness has become a synonym for goodness and food that is old is often considered to be bad or disgusting. Several authors, including food historian Rachel Laudan, argue that this "latter-day creed" for "fresh and natural has become an article of faith" (2001, 36).

While some scholars identify certain needs as universal (e.g. Maslow 1943) others argue that even basic needs are neither naturally given nor static. Needs change over time and are dependent on context, culture, political ideas, and will (Soper 2006; Graber 2007; van Lente 2010). The need for fresh food, mediated through the date label, is an example of how even supposedly basic needs are socially and culturally constructed and dependent on many factors like time, location, circumstances, availability and taste. Fresh equals good for many consumers in the Western world, but this need for freshness is a recent development constructed by modern food production and consumption.

I do not want to argue that consumers in earlier times did not prefer fresh food to old produce; instead, I wish to point that what is considered pleasant and edible changes over time. The quote below taken from an interview further exemplifies this point:

> In the old days we put milk into the window so with the heat of the sun it would get sour and then we ate it with honey. Then we wanted to have the milk that way. Today they throw sour milk away.[6]

This shows how the taste for milk has changed over time. Using sour milk as an ingredient was a practice also used outside Norway. One example is the German

Herbstmilchsuppe (autumn milk soup) where sour milk is mixed with flour, water, salt and cream and served with boiled potatoes. Today the idea of eating products made of sour milk is at least strange, if not outright disgusting for many people.

Besides subjective taste, availability is an important factor for which foods are experienced as fresh and therefore of acceptable quality. In times of scarcity, people more readily accept older products as edible as this quote describes:

> You must remember that up to the 1970s Norway was a rather poor country . . . People might not have had much to come by. And then in the shops out here, the potatoes were old and everything was old like that, but people bought it anyways.[7]

Acceptance of less-than-perfect products may persist even when times of frugality have passed as the following personal anecdote shows. My grandmother, who had to "feed" three little boys during the period of food scarcity brought on by WW2 would regularly offer me strawberries that were half-covered with mold. She would just cut off the worst parts and serve the rest. While I was disgusted by the idea of eating moldy strawberries, for her it made perfect sense that a half-rotten strawberry would be a strawberry that could be half-eaten and should not entirely be put to waste. This kind of behavior, learned in times of limited available resources and want, disappeared after WW2 in the Western world as "in a world of excessive and cheap food, it is not difficult to imagine frugality and careful household management offering a poor fit with the 'zeitgeist' of the Cold War food regime" (Evans, Campbell, and Murcott 2013, 15). In the abundance of today's supermarkets old products are perceived as inferior and "not good" as the quality manager of Norway's largest supermarket chain explains:

> Quality is a tricky balance. It is an illusion to think that consumers would eat food that they do not think is nice. We are such an affluent society that I do not believe that Norwegian consumers would eat food that they do not experience as good. And if you have a shop that is full of old products, it is another supermarket chain that will survive.[8]

As the examples above illustrate, our perceptions of *freshness* have changed over time not only due to increasing availability and 'zeitgeist' but also due to the industrialization of food production and new technologies for packaging, storing and processing: "processed and preserved foods kept well, were easier to digest, and were delicious" (Laudan 2001, 38). According to geographer Susanne Freidberg (2009) traditional ideas about "freshness" and its benefits changed at the beginning of the 20th century (due to the discovery of bacteria and the existence of vitamins). Therefore, we have come to see freshness as "a quality that exists independent of all the history, technology, and human handling that deliver it to our plates" (Freidberg 2009, 17). Freidberg shows that what most Western people today consider as *fresh* food is the outcome of historical processes and depends on technological inventions like pasteurization or refrigeration. Today, consumers' perception of what is fresh is generally based on the appearance of these industrially produced, refrigerated, pasteurized and date labelled products.

Most consumers prefer fresh and spotless food and do not want to buy sub-optimal products (De Hooge et al. 2017). Food that is considered sub-optimal, hence that is

expired or close to the expiration date, funny shaped, marked or enclosed in damaged packaging, can often only reach consumers at reduced prices. Even then, it is not easy as a Norwegian campaign called "Do not let one rotten apple destroy it for the rest" shows. In 2017, a supermarket chain moved fruits and vegetables that did not correspond to standards of freshness and aesthetics to a special box and sold these items at a reduced price. Consumers, however, did not seem convinced that they could trust the "rotten apple" and the campaign stopped after only a few months.[9]

The date label, telling us which product is fresh and which one is not, played an important role in enhancing our *need* for freshness. In the highly competitive world of food production and retail, it is the fresh (and short-lived) product that wins over the buyer as this example shows. During an interview, a store manager told me that he knows of marketing techniques whereby producers deliberately shorten the shelf life of products to make them artificially appear "fresh":[10]

> This has to do with consumer expectations and how they are guided by the producers. If you present yourself as the producer of 'fresh' products, you cannot sell products with a shelf-life of four months or so. So, they reduce the time to make them seem 'fresh.'[11]

This and the examples from above show that this modern-day *need* for fresh products is neither universal nor static; it has developed over time and been influenced by producers and supermarket chains and modern consumer culture. Times of frugality have been replaced by abundance where disregard towards food that might have been considered edible in earlier times is fostered by an unprecedented availability and cheapness of food. In Norway, private consumption almost tripled during the 1950s and 1960s while expenses for basic goods like food declined steadily: from two thirds of the household budget in 1947, to 35 to 40 percent in the 1960s, to a little over 10 percent today (Lange 1998; Eriksen 2012). Furthermore, the "industrial logic" of today's consumerist world leads many to discard products before they are "used up" (Myrvang, Myklebust, and Brenna 2004, 203). The date label is hereby a useful servant. The legal implementation of the date label has freed consumers from possible encounters with unpleasant food. Simply following the label enables consumers to shop, eat, and throw away food without making sensory-grounded decisions, which could potentially lead to smelling a foul odor or ingesting a small amount of sour milk. In the next section I will describe how the growing need for freshness, combined with our current inability to judge food properly has led to a phenomenon of "disgust by association" where consumers are disgusted by food they have neither smelled, touched, or tasted.

Disgust by Association

Our modern (food) world is shaped and guided by standards. According to sociologist Lawrence Busch, standards are central to our lives as they "order ourselves, other people, things, processes, numbers and even language itself" (Busch 2013, 3). Standards profoundly influence our understanding of the world and how we act within it. Without knowing how food is actually produced, many consumers – especially in Norway – trust food standards because they trust the state that has set such standards (Kjærnes, Harvey, and Warde 2007). Therefore, the standardized expiration date is

able to influence food choices and habits, and people have come to depend on it to the extent that the date label is often trusted more than an individual's own senses, as this quote from the survey suggests:

> My sister does not trust her eyes or nose, she does not know how to look and smell and she says: we cannot afford the doctor.

This quote conveys how trust for judging a food item has been transferred from the human sensory apparatus to be the responsibility of the date label, overruling sight and smell. Being afraid that the incorporation of old (hence possibly bad) food could lead to a (potentially expensive) visit to the doctor leads this person to put more trust into the label than her own senses. "When I was young, food did not expire," my mother-in-law once told me, and she was right: "expired food" only exists to the extent that it is produced by the expiration date. Otherwise, it would be called "old," "deteriorated," or in the worst case "rotten." However, when encountering a food label with an expiration date that has past, these words (rotten, old, disgusting) come up in the mind of many consumers.

What is important is, that as much as disgust might be rooted in biological instincts to prevent food poisoning and infectious diseases, the disgust that people feel towards "expired food" is neither entirely biological, nor purely concerned with food safety. Consumers' disgust towards expired products is often about quality rather than safety, triggered by the confusion of *use-by* and *best-before* dates. Reports show that milk, cream and yoghurt (*best-before*) are thrown away more often than fresh meat, sausages or ham (*use-by*) (e.g. Elstad Stensgård et al. 2018). This shows the easiness with which products that are not dangerous to health (hence a *best-before* date) are thrown out only due to the passing of the expiration date.

Affect scholar Sara Ahmed argues that disgust depends on contact, on proximity to an object. According to her, one does not feel disgusted in the abstract, instead one "feels disgusted by something in which the thing itself seems to repel us" (2014, 85). However, when it comes to date labels, a passed expiration date on a food package can repel and trigger disgust almost in the same way as contact with an oozing, viscous, or smelly product. Sometimes this disgust is based on a previous negative experience that is then triggered by the expired date. One informant describes that ever since she accidently took a big sip of "rotten" orange juice from a carton, she has difficulty trusting or even tasting juice that is out-of-date. The one-time disgusting experience comes to mind every time this person encounters out-of-date orange juice and prevents her from daring to smell or taste what is inside the carton. Therefore, she discards the whole product without testing it (even though she feels very bad about wasting food). As Ahmed argues, disgust pulls us away from the disgusting object (Ahmed 2014, 84), and in this case, distance between the disgusting object and the self is achieved by throwing away the offensive carton.

There are consumers whose learned reliance and trust in the date label is so strong that, even if there has been no previous experience of incorporating (or smelling or tasting) rotten food, a food product is experienced as disgusting by sheer association as this quote from the survey illustrates:

> I am one of those who throws away food immediately once it is out of date. I know I can smell it, and I do that, but once it is expired, I feel it smells bad and the carton looks blown up.

This consumer experienced the food product as gone bad ("the carton looks blown up") and disgusting ("smells bad") by association with the expiration date. Rather than using the senses to find out if the product has factually gone bad, the mere passing of the expiration date triggers a sense of disgust that cannot be overcome by engaging the senses. The date label becomes the expert that changes food from edible to inedible (Stilling Bilchfeldt, Mikkelsen and Gram 2015) offering a mediation of anxieties (Milne 2013). It fills gaps of trust, responsibility and control and gives clear indications, leaving minimum space for the reader's interpretation (Watson and Meah 2013). Like this, the date label shields consumers not only from potential risks but also from potential disgust, giving them a reason to put a distance between themselves and the disgusting object by throwing it away without smelling or tasting it.

By association, expired products are deemed disgusting where the resulting revulsion has little to do with safety or hygiene and more to do with context and meaning (Miller 2004). The roots of disgust might have been to avoid ingesting possibly toxic or infectious substances yet, the modern turn of disgust has more to do with "protecting and maintaining the self" (Miller 2004, 5) rather than the body. Some authors see the date label as controlling consumers who "then fail to make the right choice or act in a rational manner, which is not only a failure towards the self but also society and meanwhile mountains of waste grow" (Yngfalk 2016a).

These mountains of waste created by throwing away edible food are increasingly problematic on many levels. Being disgusted by food merely because the expiration date has passed, and therefore throwing the item in question away, rather than smelling or tasting it, is something that has become integral to consumer behavior in Norway and elsewhere. Recent research in Norway shows that 58 percent of food is wasted at the household level (Elstad Stensgård et al. 2018). This wasteful behavior is not sustainable either in Norway or globally. Therefore, Goal No 12 of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals states that by 2030 the per capita food waste on the retail and consumer level should be halved. Here the role of the date label in triggering disgust by association is important as is to reconsider our need for fresh and perfect food.

Needs can be "contested by those to whom they are imputed" (Soper 2006, 359). Dumpster divers, defying expiration dates, contest the normative and standardized idea of what is waste and what is still edible, valuable food (Evans, Campbell, and Murcott 2013; Yngfalk 2016a). Ironically, it is dumpster divers who actually follow the date label most rigidly. They generally do not contest the idea of food safety and are not diving for out-of-date *use-by* products. They do however take the *best-before* date literally as being a quality recommendation rather than a cut-off date. By literally following the date label they expose the concepts of fresh and edible versus disgusting and non-edible as being a result of competitive quality management in modern supermarkets. Legally, products past the *best-before* date are allowed to be sold in supermarkets, yet this is seldom practiced in Norway due to image concerns, as relayed by the interviewed supermarket and quality managers.

This food waste crisis asks for a substantial un-learning of waste behavior among consumers. Here disgust by association plays an important role. The date label has not only standardized the lifetime of food, but it has also taken control over our senses and even standardized feelings of disgust towards food into *best-before* and *not-good-after*. This research shows that more information and education is necessary, not only by the state and its institutions but also by the food industry so that food is not unnecessarily wasted in the future.

Conclusion

Biologically and psychologically seen, the risk of food poisoning explains disgust reactions among humans when confronted with decaying, rotten and therefore potentially dangerous food. As the chance for food poisoning rises with the age of food, old food is more often associated with risk and danger than fresh food. The subjective experience, however, if food is fresh or rotten, pleasant or disgusting, is not organically determined but depending on many different social, cultural, historical and geographical factors. Taste, quality, and freshness are neither universal nor time-less but depend on time, place, personal experience, inclination, trust, and knowledge.

As described above the need for freshness and its association with quality increased due to industrial food production and modern consumer culture. Being unable to judge most food items, consumers then came to rely on the date label to tell them about the freshness of the product in front of them. Here is where the date label and disgust meet; by standardizing consumers' ideas about what is fresh and what is disgusting. In this way, the date label did not only standardize the shelf-life of food but also in a way standardized the feeling of disgust for many consumers, replacing repulsive smell or taste as warning-signs for quality with a date on the package. Being a quality rather than a safety label the *best-before date* then came to protect consumers' ideas about safety rather than their real physical safety leading them to throw away perfectly edible food.

In order to let this standardized disgust not take the upper hand in our food consumption and disposal practices it is necessary that consumers get back their senses and rather than trusting the date on the label use their eyes and nose to determine the freshness of the product in front of them.

Notes

1. Exempted from the regulation are: fresh fruit and vegetables, bread and pastry products (which are normally used within 24 hours), vinegar, alcoholic drinks with an alcohol content above 10%, sugar, cooking salt, or chewing gum.
2. Consumers are of course not a homogeneous group. They differ widely according to age, gender, location, culture, religion, economic status, education level, etc. It would go beyond the possibilities scope of this chapter to include an analysis of different disgust behavior among different consumers groups. Therefore, for the sake of the argument presented in this chapter, l address consumers as one entity, meaning consumers in Norway, where I conducted my research. For an account how different consumer profiles influence different waste behaviors, see for example Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2018).
3. Interview with Norwegian Food Safety Authority (Mattilsynet), Oslo, July 2016.
4. The United States for example does not have a federal regulation for date labelling. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) does not require quality or food safety date labels for products under its purview.
5. Today's date labelling regulation in Norway follows *EU regulation 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers*.
6. Interview Norwegian Food Safety Authority (Mattilsynet), Trondheim, July 2016.
7. Interview Norwegian Food Safety Authority (Mattilsynet), Frøya, October 2017.
8. Interview with quality manager of a large Norwegian supermarket and food production chain, Oslo, February 2018.
9. Interview with quality manager of a large Norwegian supermarket and food production chain, Oslo, February 2018 and own observation of the campaign.
10. Here it is important to note that in Norwegian, *ferskvare* – fresh produce – means not only that the product is fresh (not-old) but also delicate and perishable.
11. Interview with store manager of a supermarket in Trondheim, April 2018.

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9 "We Did Not Shrink from Eating Carrion"

Food Disgust and Early Soviet Famines

Rebecca Manley and Iryna Skubii

Disgust serves to police and sustain boundaries. As Olga Matich (2009, 284) writes, it is "a sentiment that regulates transgressive experience with the purpose of enforcing social and cultural taboos." Historically, the "expanding threshold of repugnance," in Norbert Elias' (2000, 51) apt phrase, has played a central role in the "civilizing process." Like other forms of disgust, food disgust serves to enforce social and cultural norms and to demarcate the boundaries of community. Bound up with categories of purity, food disgust has long played an important role in distinguishing human from animal, self from other (Miller 1997, 50). Studies of food disgust have helped elucidate the construction of national, religious, and class identities.

This chapter approaches food disgust from a different angle. In what follows, we address not the construction of identities, but rather what happened when the boundaries established by food disgust were broached. The transgression of established food norms is a perennial feature of famine. From the earliest written records, chroniclers have devoted special attention to the food of the famished. Lists of the substances consumed by an increasingly desperate population signalled not only the severity of famine but also the threat it posed to the fabric of social life. The recourse to surrogate foods compelled people to violate longstanding cultural norms. In the process, the "threshold of repugnance" shifted: some substances that were previously proscribed came to seem not only acceptable but tasty. Others were consumed furtively. In such cases, the ingestion of surrogate substances was a transgressive experience, a breaking of norms that for many was both shameful and dehumanizing. As the foods consumed changed, so too did people's conceptions of themselves. Famine food transgressions were often a source of life-long trauma, leaving traces in the memories of survivors many years after the fact. A history of food disgust during times of dearth thus illuminates both the extreme food practices that people were forced to adopt and the transgressive experience of famine.

The famines of the early Soviet era offer unique insights into this history. Characterized by a catastrophic decline in available foodstuffs resulting in large-scale starvation, they present ample evidence of food transgression. The famines of the immediate post-revolutionary period (1918–1923) afflicted first urban centres and then, on the heels of a devastating drought, vast swathes of the countryside in central Russia, the Urals, and southern Ukraine. The famines of the early Stalin era (1931–1933), precipitated by the Soviet state's catastrophic collectivization of agriculture and exacerbated by brutal food procurement policies, were most severe in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and parts of southern Russia. During both of these periods, the inhabitants of the starving territories were compelled to consume substances that until only recently were

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unthinkable for use as food. In what follows, we begin by addressing these substances, cognizant that food norms are culturally constructed. The objects of food disgust discussed in this section are neither universal nor comprehensive, but reflect the food taboos and sensibilities of the populations under study.

The early Soviet famines further lend themselves to our study because of the unique vantage point they offer on the dynamics and the psychological impact of famine-induced food transgression. The transgressive dimension of famine came sharply into focus in the immediate post-revolutionary period, as experts in the natural and human sciences, often starving themselves, set out to study starvation and its effects. In the second section, we address their reflections on the sensation of disgust. Initially conceived as a hindrance to rational nutrition, a barrier to be overcome, disgust came to be seen as a crucial component of the population's moral makeup, an inhibitory factor that kept instincts in check, distinguishing human from animal. The widely noted "disappearance of disgust" came to epitomize the way hunger deformed not only human behaviour, but the human mind. We conclude with an examination of how desperate food choices were remembered by survivors of the famine of the early 1930s in Soviet Ukraine, the Holodomor. Unlike the famines of the post-revolutionary period, the Holodomor was not subjected to systematic study by contemporaries; merely speaking of the famine, which Stalin and the Soviet state denied, was forbidden. Because of its central place in Ukrainian national memory, however, over the past few decades the narratives of those who survived have been methodically collected and transcribed. These texts shed light on the powerful memories associated with the sensation of disgust and the enduring discomfort displayed by those who were once, in a situation of dire need, compelled to cross the threshold of repugnance.[1]

Objects of Disgust

Famine compelled people to seek out substances that they did not habitually consume as food. Traditional famine foods were distinguished from the population's habitual fare by their smell, taste, texture, and appearance. Among the most common surrogates in Russia and Ukraine was goosefoot, a longstanding surrogate for rye. Breads baked with goosefoot were described as "bitter in taste, with a musty smell" (Vasilevskie and Vasilevskii 1922, 24). Eaten with "evident revulsion" by subjects in a nutritional experiment in Moscow during the famine of 1891, the consumption of bread and flat cakes baked with goosefoot continued to elicit disgust among the famished during the Soviet era, particularly among children (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 1:197). Goosefoot was nonetheless a habitual surrogate for a peasant population accustomed to periods of dearth and in the context of the Soviet famines, it was considered something of a luxury.

Rotten vegetables, the smell of which often evoked a revulsion reflex, were also common fare among the famished. Rotten foods have long elicited disgust, although as Alison Smith (2016) has noted, the boundary between fermented and rotten was porous. As early as 1918, rotten potatoes in particular became a staple of urban cuisine. Decomposing plant matter was equally important in the hungry countryside, where villagers during both periods of dearth baked rotting straw into bread and in the winter dug up frozen potatoes and beetroots from gardens and fields, extracting whatever was edible and seeking, through various recipes, to eliminate the terrible smell (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 2:214). As one survivor of the Holodomor later

recalled, "rotten potatoes were thawed, the stench from it was incredible. Potatoes were ground with heads of dried horse sorrel and clover and baked into bread. This bread was covered with a black crust on top, and in the middle was uncooked porridge, which was eaten with a spoon. The bread tasted so sour that it brought the jaws together" (Demchenko et al. 2008, 34).

Undoubtedly the substances that elicited the strongest sensations of disgust, however, were of animal origin (Miller 1997, 46–50). Primary among these was carrion. Longstanding cultural taboos proscribed the use of carrion as food. "One must keep in mind," a psychologist writing in 1922 reminded his readers, "the squeamishness with which the population relates to the corpses of animals that have died from some kind of illness, even those that have been strangled but not killed expressly for food" (Liubushin 1922, 121). Over the centuries, stories of the consumption of carrion served to signal the severity of famine. As early as the thirteenth century, chroniclers noted of a particularly devastating famine that people "ate dead meat." Carrion occupied a prominent place in the diets of the hungry in the early Soviet era, particularly in rural regions, where a sharp increase in animal mortality made carrion readily available. This was particularly marked during the early 1930s, when the collectivization of livestock and the full-scale requisition of grain caused the death of livestock *en masse*. During this famine, slaughterhouses and cattle cemeteries became spaces of consumption, compelling people to gather food amidst the stench of spoiled carcasses and dead animals. Investigators reported that there were villages in which "the use of carrion as food has become a mass occurrence" (Lozyc'kyi 2008, 38). Contemporary accounts of the consumption of carrion frequently noted the "fetid smell" and distinctive "stench" such food produced (ibid.). The disgust it elicited is readily apparent in reactions such as the one recalled by one interview respondent, whose mother, faced with the prospect of eating dead horse meat, proclaimed that she would "rather eat chaff" (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 2:118).

The consumption of cats and dogs elicited a particular measure of disgust. In the lands of the former Russian empire, dog meat had long been proscribed as unclean. Describing the traditional squeamishness of the population in relation to certain foods, a psychologist made particular note of "the meat of dogs (the latter, as is well known, is considered unclean)," and noted that "in the past even rabbits were not eaten, the only explanation for which was the fact that their form was reminiscent of a cat" (Liubushin 1922, 121). Like carrion, the consumption of cats and dogs was invariably noted in the chronicles, invoked as a sign of the severity of famine and as evidence of the depravity of the famished. In the extreme conditions of the early Soviet famines, dogs and cats became common fare. Hunted down in towns and villages, they were also bought and sold as food at markets. "I used to have my dog guard my house; now I guard my dog," the chairman of one village council remarked in late 1921 (Ivanitskii-Vasilenko 1923, 170). Visitors to the hungry countryside in 1921 and 1922 invariably commented on the complete disappearance of cats and dogs, and many years later, survivors of the Holodomor similarly recalled that "[t]here were no dogs or cats left in the village" (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 2:134).

The object of consumption that generated far and away the most extreme sensation of disgust, however, was human flesh. The injunction against eating human flesh is age old and almost universal. Cases of cannibalism were documented in the chronicles in days of old, but at the turn of the twentieth century, this seemed to be firmly in the past. The extreme deprivation of 1918–1923 and 1931–1933, however, and the

preponderance of unburied corpses, led people across the afflicted districts to turn to human flesh as food. Russian and Ukrainian distinguish between the consumption of human flesh (*trupoedstvo*) and homicide for the same purpose (*liudoedstvo*). Numerous cases of both forms of cannibalism were documented in the early 1920s and 1930s: publicized and subjected to scientific study in the first famine, such incidences were concealed and kept out of the press in the second (Khmelevskaia 2011; Bertelsen 2018). The consumption of human flesh was, to be sure, an exception rather than the norm, but it underscores the transgressive dimension of famine food choices. This dimension comes sharply into focus when we turn to the records and reflections generated by those who experienced famine.

"The Disappearance of Disgust": Food and the Psychology of Famine, 1918–1923

The post-revolutionary famines offered Soviet scientists an unprecedented opportunity to study hunger and its effects. As they charted the changing foodways of the population, they accumulated ample evidence of famine food transgressions. In the process, they became preoccupied with the question of disgust. In their reflections and reports, they strove to understand the impact of hunger on the sensation of disgust and the role of disgust in regulating human behaviour.

Initially, disgust was seen by Soviet scientists as an obstacle to be overcome, an impediment to rational nutrition. As Soviet nutritionists sought to find new sources of sustenance, they regularly bemoaned the influence of superstition and religious taboos on the popular diet. In the words of one newspaper article, "We must launch an energetic struggle against superstition and the irrational disgust that underlies the refusal to consume one or another food item" (Narskii 2001, 548). As food shortages became more acute, they put pen to paper in an effort to undermine these taboos and make proscribed food options more palatable to the population. In Petrograd, for instance, nutritionist Boris Slovtsov (1922, 4) drew on history and ethnography to promote the consumption of horse meat, noting that Parisians had eaten it during the siege. He even enjoined his readers "to reconsider the question of the use of dogs and cats for human food." Seeking to undermine long-standing taboos, Slovtsov highlighted the fact that dog meat was consumed in China and that puppies had been enjoyed as a delicacy in ancient Rome. Nutritionally, he averred, "dog meat is very close to regular meat and even more tender" (1922, 6). Slovtsov thus worked to normalize cats and dogs as food, seeking to reduce, if not entirely eliminate, the population's feelings of revulsion.

At the same time, many commentators had to concede that the food taboos they were struggling against were already in the process of disappearing. In the newspaper article cited above, the author followed the call for struggle against superstition with an immediate concession: "in fact, life itself, which becomes more severe with every day, is weaning the majority of the population of such superstitions" (Narskii 2001, 548). This was perhaps most obvious when it came to horse meat. Even as Slovtsov sought to overcome the population's aversion to the meat, he acknowledged that "in the last few years almost all horses killed at war or due to some unfortunate circumstance have been eaten" (1922, 4). The transformation wrought by hunger in people's attitudes towards horse meat is vividly evoked by sociologist Peterim Sorokin, who noted how even speech reflexes had changed as a result of famine. Writing of the

attitude towards horse meat among his compatriots in Petrograd, he noted that people used to say: "'Fu, how vile! I can't eat it, it will make me sick! It is a sin!' Now we rarely say such things and rarely hear them; we hear other things, such as: 'Horse meat! A wonderful dish'" (2003, 222).

While contemporary nutritionists celebrated the disappearance of "irrational disgust" and "religious taboos," they did not regard all aversions as unfounded. Horse meat was promoted as a nutritious and acceptable substitute, but horse dung was an entirely different matter. Feces have been described as a "universal disgust substance," and it should come as no surprise that the use of animal waste as food was universally decried by doctors and nutritionists in the early Soviet era (Miller 1997, 15). In their reactions to the consumption of horse dung, however, Soviet commentators sounded a new note and a new anxiety. The recourse to horse dung signalled not only the dire state of need; it signalled transgression.

Whereas the consumption of horse meat could be cast as a triumph of reason at the expense of superstition, the consumption of horse dung signalled a breakdown in norms. Explaining the recourse to horse dung in Bashkiria, between the Volga and the Urals, Dr. L.M. Vasilevskii (1922, 5) cited the population's "indifference," the "loss of customs inherited over centuries," and the "disappearance of disgust," which went "so far that people collect horse dung from the streets, smoke it on the fire, and eat it in the form of flat cakes." As his comments suggest, Vasilevskii attributed the turn to horse dung not only to the desperation born of famine, but to the "disappearance of . . . disgust." This phrase became a common trope among contemporary observers. In the Urals, psychologist A.A. Liubushin (1922, 121) was likewise struck by the "complete absence of a feeling of squeamishness, which in the end allows the starving, without a trace of disgust, to completely freely eat horse dung, to collect and eat oats from horse dung, etc."

The phenomenon that, more than any other, brought the "disappearance of disgust" into focus was cannibalism. Cannibalism was the ultimate form of transgression. Reports of people consuming the corpses of the dead emerged as early as December, 1921. Cases of killing people with the intent to consume them emerged only slightly later. Cannibalism quickly emerged as a central subject of study. Studies of cannibalism, penned by specialists who were almost invariably hungry themselves, sought to chart and make sense of this phenomenon. As doctor A.I. Gutkin (1923, 17) wrote of the subject, "who among doctors did not become interested in this 'new' question of the biology or psychopathology of man?"

In their studies of cannibalism, specialists devoted special attention to disgust. Time and again, they noted what Dr. Aikhenval'd referred to as the "complete disappearance of the feeling of squeamishness" (Nitochko et al. 2007, 190). The phenomenon was observed across the famine districts. Psychologist D.B. Frank, who studied the hungry in Ukraine in 1922, observed of his subjects that "squeamishness disappears, they consume nauseating substances as food without any experience of disgust" (1922, 231). In interview after interview, the psychologists questioned their subjects, seeking to understand their feelings as they contemplated and then consumed human flesh. In the most substantial study on the topic ever written, Frank asked each of his subjects a variation on one and the same question: "Did you not feel disgust consuming human meat?" (1926, 113). Time and again, they responded in the negative (130). "Why should I feel disgust?" one retorted. "We ate the intestines of dogs and carrion. My kids are better than that" (148). "When somebody eats what we have eaten," another responded, "human meat is not all that bad – it was not, after all, rotten" (165).

The centrality accorded the sensation of disgust reflected the growing conviction among Frank and his contemporaries that it was disgust that prevented people from consuming human flesh. "There are internal inhibitions," Frank wrote, "that a person with a normal psyche must overcome to eat human flesh, such as, for instance, respect for the deceased, disgust for human flesh, for the meat of rotten corpses, many have a superstitious fear before the dead, etc." (1926, 169). Cannibalism, from this perspective, was enabled by the disappearance of disgust. As psychiatrist E.A. Kozhevnikov concluded, "cannibalism can be ascribed to a decline in the feeling of disgust in exceptional circumstances" (1925, 84).

In their reflections on human behaviour in conditions of famine, contemporaries thus evinced newfound interest in the sensation of disgust, reflecting on its role in the regulation of human behaviour and the maintenance of social norms. Frank ascribed the diminution and disappearance of disgust to the triumph of "physical complexes" over "higher mental complexes, which in the course of normal life serve to inhibit the cravings of the physical 'I'" (1922, 232). Explaining one woman's recourse to cannibalism, he described the way "one after another mental impulses that were once necessary for the development of higher forms of life fell away, having become superfluous and even dangerous to the operation of instinct. Disgust for nauseating substances disappeared, the feeling of shame for relying on charity was extinguished, interest in others and sympathy for their suffering vanished, efforts and care for the needs of life ceased, a mother forgot about her children as those around her become alien to her, and sometimes it seemed to her that they were already dead" (Frank 1926, 99). Stripped of all of these accretions of civilization, all that was left was "instinct" (ibid.).

The notion that hunger left people to be governed by "animal instinct" (Val'dman 1921, 440) or "the immediate impulses of the cerebrum" (Grinev 1922, 36), was widespread. "Tsar hunger," wrote Dr. Aikhenval'd in a typical formulation, "awakens the dormant atavistic instincts of the animal" (Nitochko et al. 2007, 194). The dominance of instincts was regarded by Aikhenval'd and some of his contemporaries as a kind of reversion, a return to an earlier stage of human development. The Samara based psychiatrist Dr. Kozhevnikov argued that starvation set off a "struggle" pitting "instincts" and "atavistic feelings of a rudimentary type" against the "cultured habits, tendencies, and feelings of later centuries" (1925, 85). In his view, extreme hunger set in motion a process of "reverse evolution" whereby the more "delicate" mental facilities that had developed in tandem with civilization (including disgust) were "replaced with the primitive ones" (ibid.). In a similar vein, Frank also presented cannibalism as belonging to a distinct (and more primitive) stage in human development, a relic of a time when "aesthetic feelings of disgust at the consumption of human flesh did not exist" in the "weakly developed souls" of a "primitive" population (1926, 47).

To be sure, not all subscribed to the concept of reversion. As a number of commentators pointed out, there was ample evidence that cannibalism had always evoked "disgust" (Krasnushkin 1922, 207). Nor could cannibalism easily be ascribed to the animal world, the repeated references to the animalistic nature of the act notwithstanding. As some acknowledged, indifference towards one's own progeny was no more a characteristic of the animal world than it was of the world of humans (Violin 1922, 17). Whatever their views on reversion, however, all observers concurred that hunger effected profound changes in the human psyche.

While some attributed the disappearance of disgust to the triumph of instincts, others emphasized the way the experiences of famine served to undermine traditional

taboos. Psychiatrist A.A. Liubushin charted a slow progression whereby the hungry, having exhausted their supply of foodstuffs and slaughtered their livestock, were compelled first "to hunt domestic cats and dogs" and then, as their strength waned, "to turn to carrion." "The psychological significance of this moment for the starving," Liubushin argued, "is enormous" (1922, 121). These were, after all, significant forms of transgression. The passage to eating the flesh of dead and diseased animals marked a turning point: having broken taboos against foodstuffs considered 'unclean' (dogs and sick animals) the path to the consumption of human flesh was now open. Liubushin saw in the subjects of his study neither deviants nor atavistic animals: rather, the majority of subjects he interviewed were "the most normal people" whose prolonged experience of hunger had extinguished "the feeling of squeamishness" and "all emotion," leaving them in a state of "indifference to themselves and their surroundings" (1922, 122).

Hunger, in this account and others, thus effected profound changes in human emotions, including the sensation of disgust. Conceived by Soviet psychologists as a "higher feeling," disgust was understood as an inhibitory mechanism that protected the population against both physical contamination and moral transgression. Its dissolution led not only to a coarsening of human relations but to forms of transgression that were earlier inconceivable. Without disgust, there was no individual psychological mechanism that could be relied upon to keep baser instincts in check. The disappearance of disgust not only enabled transgression; it also signalled the disappearance of a fundamental human character. The disappearance of disgust was thus perhaps even more disturbing than the consumption of disgusting foods: while the latter signalled the degree of desperation, the former signalled a threat not only to human life, but to humanity.

"I Still Sense That Stinky Smell": Remembering Disgust

The long-term impact and traces of famine food transgressions were never studied by Soviet scientists, as famine itself became a taboo topic by the early 1930s. Nonetheless, the famines of the early Stalin era offer unparalleled insight into the reverberations of food disgust in memory. The "world wide upsurge in memory" (Nora 2002) over the past few decades has resulted in large-scale documentation of personal experiences during the famine of 1932–1933 in Soviet Ukraine. Since the late 1980s, when it became possible to speak of this, various projects have focused on preserving the memory of survivors, allowing them to reflect on their personal experiences during what has come to be known as the Holodomor (or death by hunger). "When I still cannot sleep at night, these rotten potatoes appear in front of my eyes, and I still sense that stinky smell" (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 2:132), one Holodomor survivor remembers. While for contemporaries, the disappearance of disgust was a troubling signal, for those who survived the famine disgust endured through time and space in their memories. Among various emotions encapsulated within the personal narratives of survival, one can find numerous references to the disgust elicited by the surrogates that people were forced to eat due to the lack of conventional food. As Peterim Sorokin observed of the post-revolutionary famine, starvation sharpens the recall of facts related to nutrition and objects of sustenance during a period of deprivation (1975, 75–76). Memories of the consumption of disgusting foods persisted, and respondents in interviews many years later could easily recall them in connection

to a specific place, providing details about their appearance, taste, and smell. Uncovering the ways of remembering food practices that elicited disgust is a way to understand how the emotional exposure is mediated in memory and language and how the respondents coped with, and *navigated*, unpleasant, painful, and traumatic emotions afterwards (Plamper 2015, 289; Widdis 2020, 201).

The questions raised above require critical analysis of Holodomor survivors' memories by placing them within the framework of trauma studies, where traumatic memory is defined by its ability to cause strong negative effects, particularly disgust, shame, or guilt (Smelser 2004, 36). Recent scholarship on the memory of Holodomor victims suggests that it contains some signals of trauma, such as self-awareness, fragmentation and silencing, alienation, numbness, and forgetting (Kis 2013; Kasianov 2018; Ohiienko 2013; BenEzer 2004). Given this, it is important to bear in mind that not all survivors opted to reveal stories about the disgusting foods that they had been forced to eat. Putting personal testimonies into the framework of trauma studies allows us to see this experience as converted into a narrative matrix, which helps to find a logic of plot in individual and collective biographies (Oushakin 2009, 9), although here one should bear in mind that the interviewees of the Holodomor were placed in the already created context within which a respondent had to navigate either by their invitation to a specific memory project or by prepared questionnaires. Considering trauma as a plot opens an opportunity to rethink the past in the context of a common system of narrative coordinates (ibid.).

To understand how the emotions of disgust are represented in the personal narratives of extreme survival, one should uncover emotions related to disgust within the language of a storyteller. According to Matich, in literature the narrative of disgust can be seen as a *distancing gesture*, which permits the expression of either "moral revulsion or aesthetic delight, or a combination of both" (2009, 290). She suggests that such narratives could be considered as a *zigzag*, "moving toward a representation and then away from it" (ibid.). Using the metaphor of zigzag behaviour in the analysis of the post-famine memories allows us to grasp the basic principles of constructing narratives about transgressive food practices and famine foodways. In the interviews on survival during the Holodomor, one can find stories following the distancing principle, i.e. mentioning disgust and then moving away from it, denying a personal connection to an act of transgression and then turning the listener's attention to extremely grim famine food experiences.

If the interviewees want to speak about unconventional famine foods, they often refer to the experience of a third person: "young boys," who would go to a collective farm searching for rotten meat from dead animals, which contained maggots (worms) (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 2:26); "one woman," who was so hungry that she slaughtered her son (ibid.); "people," who were eating a stinking beet pulp (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 6:269). Similarly, when recounting stories about eating carrion, some would prefer not to relate this practice to anyone or any place specifically, e.g. "we did not shrink from eating carrion" (Borodin et al. 2008, 1122). When recounting stories of eating cats and dogs, people avoided actively positioning themselves or their family members as the actors in such cases: "there were no dogs, no cats – all were eaten" (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 2:47); "there was nothing to eat, dogs were eaten, cats were eaten, hedgehogs were eaten" (Mace and Heretz 1990, 26). To recall consumption of household pets by someone else served to acknowledge that this food transgression happened and to create a distance between the narrator and an "uncomfortable" practice.

Hence, eating a deceased animal was discussed with the help of general phrases, such as "dead animals were eaten" (Harkusha et al. 2008, 533). When reflecting on the consumption of horses, the interviewees would mention that it was their neighbours who transgressed. One respondent recalled the story of how his neighbour ate the dead corpses of horses and cooked jellied meat (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 2:185), whilst in another case an owner requested a village council to secure the return of half of his dog, stolen earlier by his neighbour, meaning that the former did not mind eating it (Borodin et al. 2008, 1103).

The places that were associated with food-based transgression, disgust, and violence (Borodin et al. 2008, 1102), i. e. cattle cemeteries, dumpsters, lardheaters, were often evoked in the same distancing way, as the comments of one interviewee attest: "One of our female neighbours went to that place, where the dead horses were thrown away" (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 2:185). A similar practice was also adopted to tell the stories of necrophagy and homicide: "In the village, there were cases of cannibalism: the brother killed his brother and cooked the pieces, the mother killed and ate the child" (Hamretskyi et al. 2007, 602); "If the deceased was not buried in time and he was lying somewhere in the village, people cut the meat and ate it. Here and there in the village lay the clipped and gnawed corpses" (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 2:155).

A sense of disgust for particular famine foods helped contemporaries to draw the imaginary borders of their humanity. One respondent remembers that her mother strongly opposed eating and feeding children carrion by saying that she would "die but won't feed the children with that meat of a dead animal" (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 1:174). Deciding whether or not one could reject taboo foods, the starving made their critical everyday choices: being able to feel disgust, one could make a humanizing gesture. Generalization, creation of a common system of narrative coordinates and distancing from an object and environment of disgust as a method for sharing narratives enabled the traumatized interviewees to speak about their extreme survival experiences of eating rotten foods, carrion, taboo animals, as well as cannibalism.

In line with other emotional responses and storytelling practices regarding famine foods, survivors' memories reveal feelings of shame and guilt. Scholars studying the nature of human shame believe that it is connected with the self, helping to define who people are, whereas guilt concerns one's actions, explaining what people do (Leys 2007, 185–186). In famine, consumption of previously non-eaten substances evoked feelings of shame in some, while others experienced guilt. Memories of the way the hungry consumed famine foods, i. e. eating live animals or soil and grass from the ground, not to mention the experience of eating human flesh or homicide, made some reticent to recount their experiences as first-person stories. As one respondent remembers, a female neighbour, recounting the story of how she and her siblings ate worms from their mother's dead body, asked the respondent not to mention her name if these memories would be published (Mytsyk 2004–2008, 1:164). Indeed, this story is very telling: it speaks not only to the level of despair forcing just-become orphans to eat food causing a visceral sense of disgust, but also demonstrates how a victim distances herself from the imagined audience of readers through the involvement of an intermediary, clearly ashamed of her own transgression.

Personal experiences of disgust were often connected in memory with a specific or unbearable sense of smell. In oral testimony, comments ranged from general references to the smell eliciting disgust (e.g. spoiled horse meat, stinking anchovy, or rotten vegetables) to a very strong feeling that was difficult to cope with (Mytsyk 2004–2008,

2:149, 2:163, 2:214). Based on how spoiled the food was, the level of personal deprivation during the famine, and moral ethics, people remembered the food they ingested differently. In one case, a cooked gopher was perceived as "a tsarist dish," or a dish fit for kings. The same meal prompted others to throw up when they just started moving a spoon with gopher to their mouth, as one respondent remembers about his squeamish father (Borodin et al. 2008, 1128). Conflicting emotions were even apparent in the recollections of a single individual. Rotten potatoes were described by one woman with positive sensory emotions, associated with a neighbour's act of kindness, even as in retrospect she questioned her assessment of the taste, underscoring both the shift in senses that occurred in the midst of the famine and the reversion to pre-existing cultural norms in its aftermath. "I will never forget how a neighbour girl invited me to the house, . . . and treated me with those pancakes made of rotten potatoes. I have never eaten in my life such delicious flat cakes. Fifty-five years have passed since then, and I can feel their taste. And are they really delicious baked with *tavot* [lubrication oil]?" (Hamretskyi et al. 2007, 610).

Disgust and the Dehumanizing Effects of Famine

The encounter with foods eliciting disgust was an integral part of survival during the early Soviet famines, when the starving were compelled to breach boundaries and abandon cultural traditions and social norms. The famines transformed people's sensory experiences of food by compelling them to adjust to the smell and taste of rotten and spoiled substances. The consumption of taboo substances also threatened the humanity of the hungry. Foods are central to people's understanding of themselves, and as the foods they consumed changed, so did their perceptions of themselves. Reports of the consumption of cats, dogs, and carrion sought to elicit sympathy for the starving, but they also elicited disgust, which threatened to position the hungry as beyond the bounds of culture. In many cases, this was precisely the point: stories of people eating cats and dogs underscored hunger's dehumanizing effects. The provincial press in Samara, in a typical example from 1921, described the way "cats and dogs have all been devoured, literally 'devoured,' in the manner of beasts, as people have lost their human character due to the unbearable suffering of hunger" (Gorev 1922, 8). Stories of eating foods that were traditionally regarded with disgust (in a manner that also elicited disgust) served to highlight the terrible toll hunger exacted not only on human life, but also on human behaviour.

The dehumanizing effects of the early Soviet famines changed the way contemporaries perceived the hungry and how the latter perceived themselves decades later. Strong emotions about famine foods were transformed over the years into powerful and vivid memories, where feelings of disgust were interconnected with feelings of trauma, shame, and guilt. Recollections about the experiences of obtaining, cooking, and consuming unpalatable food substances became a constituent part of post-famine memories. Eventually, the stories about eating taboo foods and sensing stinky smells, once evoking disgust, coalesced into a common system of narratives about famine food practices. Expressions of disgust affirmed the humanity of the hungry, while the feelings of shame and guilt compelled the narrators to distance themselves from the disgust itself and food-obtaining practices. By giving voice to those who studied and experienced emotions of disgust during the early Soviet famines, this chapter invites

readers to think about the sensory and emotional experiences of prolonged starvation and their traces in survivors' memory.

Note

1. The analysis is based on the published personal testimonies of Holodomor survivors collected and transcribed from the late 1980s and until early 2000s. This corpus of sources does not permit an analysis of the verbal expressions of disgust, emphases, missing verbs, which are often eliminated in the process of preparing interviews for publication.

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10 Cannibals and Kin

Escaping the Disgusting in Newfoundland Fairy Tales

Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye

Foodways scholars argue that the most immediate response to cannibalism is disgust (e.g. Wisnewski 2014, 282) and that alimentary revulsion sets people and groups apart from one another (Philips 2013, 73). As othering practice, "Cannibalism incites innate disgust and is therefore a potent means to designate . . . the subhuman" (Brown 2013, 5). As vernacular culture, folktales offer exciting opportunities to explore this deep connection between cannibalism and disgust. Often invoking the carnivalesque in their play with the bizarre, grotesque, and absurd (see Bakhtin 1968), these stories demonstrate disgust's nuances and show its cultural imbrication with a wide range of shared concepts about eating and food, gender and kinship.

We draw on structural analysis in foodways and folklore theory to connect kinship and cannibalism with ideas of disgust. Crucial is anthropologist David Schneider's (1968) distinction between blood relatives, a genetic relationship like that between biological siblings, and social or legal relatives like husbands and wives. American kinship presumes that blood relations are inherently closer than legal relations; blood relations are inescapable under most circumstances, whereas legal relations can be severed, for example by divorce. Sexual relationships between blood kin are considered incestuous, where those between most legal kin are not. But even beyond intergenerational sex taboos, sexual relationships are generally frowned upon between a man and his stepchildren – the adult sons or daughters of his wife who are not his genetic kin but his social kin. Particularly censured are those in which the sons or daughters were minors during the parents' relationship. "It is culture, not nature, that draws the lines between defilement and purity, clean and filthy, those crucial boundaries disgust is called on to police. . . . Incest prohibitions . . . are generally maintained by disgust" (Miller 1997, 15).

We focus our exploration of this (incestuous) consumption play on folktales of cannibalism collected in Newfoundland. Situated on Canada's east coast, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador had an economy dependent on the cod fishery from the arrival of Europeans in the sixteenth century until the collapse of the northern cod stocks in the early 1990s. Settlement in small communities called outports was dispersed along the coastline, many places accessible only by water. Newfoundland (all our examples were recorded on the island not on mainland Labrador) offers a useful example of a relatively contained, historically circumscribed tradition in English. Though its isolation should not be overstated, it was a colony of Britain until 1949, with a settlement history, linguistic profile, and strong sense of culture distinct from the rest of Canada.

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Newfoundland's tale oeuvre, while international like other such traditions, also reflects its particular location and people, which allows for a cultural analysis based in contemporary ethnographic and ethnohistoric research. Individuals known as good storytellers were highly valued community members. Narrating at informal gatherings in kitchens and on-board fishing vessels, tellers entertained mainly adults but sometimes also children, eavesdropping after they had gone to bed. Unlike in Disneyfied Euro North American culture, in Newfoundland and other locations where oral tradition flourished, folktales including fairy tales were not considered mainly for children. Family- and community-centered storytelling has not abated completely but is much less extensive than it was until the 1960s. Much fairy-tale narration has moved into public performance and written forms (see Best, Lovelace, and Greenhill 2019, 289–291).[1]

In this chapter, we consider every example of cannibalism found in two major folktale collections, incorporating several tale types.[2] Collected from the 1960s to the 1990s (see Halpert and Widdowson 1996; Best, Lovelace, and Greenhill 2019), the narratives evoke an earlier time when sharing folktales and food among family and neighbors were popular pastimes. In these tales, giants and witches threaten protagonists and innocents with becoming their supper. Escaping cannibalism motivates the hero and drives the action, as in "Jack and the Giant," when storyteller Freeman Bennett[3] describes how the title character "went to . . . where the giants was to, well there was three or four of 'em. Oh well they was goina eat Jack right away"[4] (Halpert and Widdowson 1996, 858). Of course the giants don't succeed with their intention; Jack trades them for a King's daughter and ultimately prevails, but the desire to avoid being eaten lies at the tale's heart.

Not all Newfoundland fairy-tale cannibals are explicitly evil murderers, however. Some willingly help the hero/ine overcome a difficult problem. And perhaps more surprisingly, they can be kin to their (potential) human meals – what we call incestuous cannibalism. The women given the task of cooking human meals for cannibals may also be biological relatives of those they plan to cook, or they may partner with the heroes (that is, their employer's potential meal) through sex and/or marriage, becoming social kin. As we discuss below, anthropophagy – eating humans – and kinship have unexpected links, many of which have gendered connections to disgust.

Who Is the Cannibal?

All kinds of taboos mark what should and should not be appropriate food for human consumption. Familiar not-food interdictions include the Biblical abominations of Leviticus and certain creatures, in Euro North American society especially mammals like cats, designated pets, while others, often marked with special food-names like beef for cattle, are conventionally edible (Douglas 2002; Leach 1964). For those who subscribe to these cultural exclusions, it would be disgusting to make those distasteful beings into food. Etiquette and taste go together, and bad taste can mean unpalatable or unseemly. Both invoke dis/gust, which linguistically as well as culturally originates in and thus returns to taste, as well as to the revolting.

Fascination with cannibals, their meanings and motivations (often mixed with a salacious disgust), appears across academic (inter)disciplines, notably cultural studies. "Cannibalism creates ambiguity because it both reduces the body to mere meat and elevates it to a highly desirable, symbolic entity; it is both disgusting, and the

most rarefied of gastronomic tastes" (Brown 2013, 4). Anthropologists have made much of non-Western peoples' alleged, supposed, and actual cannibal practices (see e.g. Counihan 1999, 17; Lévi-Strauss 1966; Obeyesekere 2005). Folklorists rarely examine disgust as a concept (for an exception, see Jones 2000, 53) but just like the celebratory qualities of food they study more often, disgust can bring people together, including a shared feeling against the cannibal.

Indeed, the Newfoundlanders who narrated and listened to fairy tales didn't need to be told that murdering a guest – or indeed anyone – is reprehensible, and subsequently eating them is disgusting. It was part of the larger discourse of cannibalism that historian Alisa Marie Wankier argues provided late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans a means to understand foreign people and places:

> Discussion of food, eating, and cannibalism saturated early modern travel narratives, and this discourse of foodways offered as a language to simultaneously articulate and form English ideas, and unease, about otherness, status, sovereignty, and power. . . . Food overflowed with meaning. When it came to eating, an observer – whether the writer or reader – might deduce the wealth, civility, or temperament of the eater; the observer might also make presumptions about the entirety of a foreign peoples or place based on the reports of foodstuff.
>
> (2016, 141)

In their startling representation of the Other, narratives of cannibalism express a complex mix of superiority and anxiety. Using stories of foreigners eating human flesh, the English depicted themselves as more civilized than outsiders, at the same time as stories of English peoples' cannibalism in places like Jamestown and Newfoundland reflected anxiety about losing their global position (Wankier 2016, 141). Richard Hakluyt's travel writings, *The Principall Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, first published in 1589, included a narrative of English-on-English cannibalism in Newfoundland that reportedly took place in 1536.

Hakluyt recounts merchant and navigator Richard Hore's trans-Atlantic voyage from England to Newfoundland to catch cod in two ships, the Trinity and the William. While the William anchored off the south coast of Newfoundland and had a successful fishing trip, the Trinity did not fare as well. After two months at sea, it arrived on Newfoundland's north coast; when the crew ran out of food they had brought with them they were unable to find or catch enough to meet their needs. They turned on one another and at least one man allegedly resorted to cannibalism. Hakluyt's account, scant on details and based on the testimonies of two survivors decades later, is the only remaining narrative of Hore's trip. Whether or not the cannibalism actually occurred as Hakluyt described it, his narrative was widely read in England as evidenced by his revising and expanding his collection ten years later in 1599–1600 (see Hakluyt, Hakluyt, and Taylor 1935; discussed in Wankier 2016, 122–140).

Cannibalism in some folktales participates in this larger discourse. In many contexts, the cannibal clarifies the separation between what is us and what is not us. We eat what is not us, so when a character in a tale eats or threatens to eat a human – an us – they definitively declare themself not us (Crane 2018, 60). Some folktale characters show cannibalism and its threat as a demonstration of strength and brutality that calls their practitioners' very humanity into question (Philips 2013, 90) and serves to heighten the honor and other superior qualities of the heroes and their helpers.

Both anthropophagy (any creature eating humans) and cannibalism (humans eating humans) are (in) bad taste as well as disgusting to most people. And yet humans eat humans in more than ten traditional fairy-tale types (see Vaz da Silva 2016), and other creatures eat humans in more of them. Even apart from fairy tales' erroneous reputation as sweet moral stories for children, this topic seems unusually compelling to the form's recreators and renarrators. Indeed, fairy-tale scholar Maria Tatar comments that

> Stories about witches who plan to feast on the flesh of small children and about ogres who relish the thought of drinking an English boy's blood rank among the most popular fairy tales, in part because no one has ever been able to turn them into stories that preach and teach.
>
> (1992, 191)

The threat of cannibalism by a giant or witch certainly provides the horrific narrative tableau that adds dramatic effect and chills the blood of teller and listener. But in the Newfoundland tales cannibalism is treated with remarkable nonchalance. For example, one cannibal cook who did not originally plan to eat her own children nevertheless goes ahead with the repast (perhaps in the proverbial spirit of "waste not, want not"). In the tale "Peg Bearskin," the witch intends to murder and cook the title character and her sisters, but hero Peg tricks her into killing her own kids. Teller Pius Power Sr. narrates, in an apparently casual aside, that when Peg sees her again, "the old woman was cookin' her two daughters" (Best, Lovelace, and Greenhill 2019, 109; see also Tye and Greenhill 2020).[5] Most common, though, is the human woman, a giant's servant instructed to cook the traveler Jack for her boss's dinner, who becomes Jack's lover or wife.

Escaping cannibalism involves substitutions in the Newfoundland fairy-tale collections we examine. The witch's daughters take the place of Peg and her sisters, and a series of unappetizing objects – old rope, old boots, and leather breeches – can stand in for the human Jack. For example "The Maid in the Thick of the Well," another story of Power's,[6] concerns Jack, an unpromising hero figure who after being shipwrecked meets a giant, and asks for food. The giant sends the illiterate Jack to his housekeeper, a King's daughter who was "stolen by someone" with a note instructing her to not to make him supper, but instead to make him *into* supper. "'I have to cook you,' she said, 'for the giant's supper.'" Jack is displeased with receiving such "'poor treatment,'" but also says ominously, "'I don't know if you or the giant is able to cook me'" (Best, Lovelace, and Greenhill 2019, 124). In this matter-of-fact exchange, Jack expresses no dread or fear. Cannibalism is something to be avoided, for sure, or to be navigated around. But its threat mobilizes characters into action more than it terrifies them.

This laissez-faire attitude is also captured in the formulaic ending of many Newfoundland tales. Power often closed his stories with a casual reference to cannibalism. In "The Suit the Color of the Clouds":[7]

> Jack was the king.
> She was the queen.
> They were so far generations afterwards.
> They had children by the baskets.

They sold them by the dozens.
Sailors bought them and made sea pies of them.
And the last time I see them
They were sot down to a tin table eating.
And the tin table bended.
Oh, the tin table had to be stronger
My story'd be longer
The tin table bended
and my story's ended.
And if they didn't live happy
I hope we will!
Now.
That's the story.
(Best, Lovelace, and Greenhill 2019, 222)

As the teller nonchalantly describes cannibalism perpetuated on the next generation, he suggests his own complicity in his report of last seeing Jack and the Queen sitting down to eat together. The closing threatens to implicate even the listeners as it effectively takes them out of the fairy-tale world and back into the present in a parallelism of the communal cup of tea and lunch that would have been a part of most house visits where these tales were shared. The fantastical act of selling one's children for pie filling becomes intertwined with the mundane deed of having a cup of tea with the neighbors.

This equivocal take on being eaten surfaces, in particular, in tales that involve incestuous cannibalism, wherein a character is served in a meal, or wants to eat, a member of their social and/or biological family. Surely such cannibalism piles cultural and gustatory injury upon injury to reach the height of bad taste. Presumptions that both cannibalism and incest are disgusting (hence revolting), but also their gendered implications in the characters of eaters and eaten associate with another double entendre: to serve (as giving help; but also as giving food); and to revolt (as disgust, but also as dissent). Both cannibalism and incest invoke disgust, but in these fairy tales they also have consequences for the revolt/ing; who does revolting things (men), and who needs to be rescued from disgusting cannibalism (men and children), are differentiated from those who save others from it (women). The solution to defeating the cannibal as Other in these Newfoundland tales lies in his domestication – but also, commonly, the primary male character's parallel domestication into becoming a cook along with a woman. In these stories, hero Jack, with the help of a servant who is really a princess, overcome the cannibal. Together, sharing the food preparation which is commonly women's work, they conquer inhumanity and assert their rightful places in the social order.

Transformation – social and physical – takes place in the kitchen through cooking. This happens not only by making the raw cooked (Lévi-Strauss 1966) but also by making resourceful substitutions. The switches Jack makes in Power's Maid in the Thick of the Well's cooking pot mean that the giant is served his own belongings; Jack and the cook want to trick him into a kind of symbolic autocannibalism. The familiar tames the unfamiliar and the Other becomes the domestic. Perhaps less benignly, in John Roberts's "Jim Slowan" and Freeman Bennet's "The Black Chief of Slowan"[8] (Halpert and Widdowson 1996, 568–606), a human part takes the place of the whole

person. A finger or toe served in a stew allow the hero and cook to avoid killing a child, and a rag and turpentine tie up the wound ("done it up" 574) and presumably disguise the smell of human from the notoriously sensitive giant olfactory sense.

But only some Newfoundland tales represent the cannibal as Other. Sometimes, the cannibal is a mundane, human-like figure, even a family member – one among us. In doing so they draw on a tradition dating to early modern Europe when cannibalism was closer at hand than travel accounts of remote tribes and sea voyages gone wrong would suggest. "For well over 200 years in early modern Europe, the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate all participated in cannibalism on a more or less routine basis" (Sugg 2011, 1). The human body was a resource for physicians in drugs made from Egyptian mummies and the dried bodies of those killed in North African desert sandstorms, human blood swallowed sometimes fresh and hot from a donor's body, and human fat used in plasters and ointments. Human skulls were sold in London chemists' shops because parts were ingested as powder to treat nosebleeds and other hemorrhaging.

In fact, "there was almost nothing between the head and the feet which could not be used in some way: hair, brain, heart, skin, liver, urine, menstrual blood, placenta, earwax, saliva and faeces" (Sugg 2011, 1). This body mining was an extension of the resourceful approach to healing prevalent in the Newfoundland communities where these folktales were shared. The kitchen was an extension of the medicine cabinet. Turpentine might be the answer to defeating a cannibal giant but it was more often used to treat everyday chest ailments like coughs, colds, croup, and bronchitis (Crellin 1994, 119). Urine was a remedy for skin problems from chapped or chafed skin and chilblains to rashes and eczema (141). In the folktales, the hero or female helper recognizes the life-saving potential of everyday objects. Recognizing their value results in escape from danger – including the possibility of being eaten.

Food scarcity contributes to cannibalism's mundane quality, and messages instructing on the value of resourcefulness in locating unlikely foodstuffs or swapping out ingredients would be relevant to listeners in communities where nourishment was too often in short supply. A "perpetual fear of dearth" (Philips 2013, 73) echoes throughout folktales (evident in their many magical people and objects giving unlimited food) and would have resonated for Newfoundland communities under constant threat of not having enough to eat. As Tatar writes, "That famine plays a prominent role in fairy tales comes as no surprise when we consider the chronic food shortages and periods of scarcity that afflicted those who shaped these stories" (1992, 192). Think of Hansel and Gretel's (in ATU 327A) stepmother instructing their father to abandon them in the woods, so there would be fewer mouths to feed. But note that the stepmother persona doesn't offer the suggestion that the parents should eat the children; and conversely, despite living within a literal house of plenty, the witch seeks anthropophagy. There is a certain realism in cannibal fairy-tale foodways, wherein "the plausible and realistic traumas of everyday life . . . are sharply intensified and repeated in the antirealistic nightmare of victimization and retaliation" (Tatar 1992, 222).

Cannibal Intentions: Women and Men Cook Together

In "Jim Slowan" and "The Black Chief of Slowan," the hero uses human parts – a finger or toe – mixed into soup made with "a little pig" (Halpert and Widdowson 1996, 569), seeking to convince a giant he's eating the entire child (568–606). "Jim

Slowan"'s title character runs away from a "hard father" from whom he's stolen money. He encounters a girl "'bout fifteen years of age," crying:

> "I'm not cryin 'cause I sees you." She said "The giant brought a little boy three years old. . . . An' I'm to . . . kill him an' cook un for his supper. And I'm cryin because I got to kill that poor little child."
> "Well" he said "I wonder is there any way in foolin the . . . giant?"
> "Well" she said "he's nearsighted."
> "Well now" he said "you . . . got to make soup of un?"
> "Yes" she said "I got to make soup of un."
> "Well" he said "I'll get some turpentine now. You get a bit o' rag" he said "an' I'll cut off his right toe an' do un up" he said "an' perhaps he be to sleep when . . . the giant comes." So that's what he done.
> "Now" he said "whatever you does when he asks for his fresh plate o' soup take this toe in his soup and he won't know the difference." So he killed a little pig an' he cut off the boy's toe an' she made the soup an' just before night all but dark here comes the giant. So he sat down an' had his supper an' now he was crawling in the den. An' the little boy was asleep.
>
> (Halpert and Widdowson 1996, 568–569)

Crucially, the two protagonists cook together. Hero Jim provides the ingredients – the pig and the toe – but the woman (unnamed) prepares the soup. He comes up with the successful idea; she enacts it. The giant fortuitously drowns chasing the three, the woman carrying the child. The adults go their separate ways but meet up again. When Jim renarrates the story (Halpert and Widdowson 1996, 573–574), the child, now Knight O' Glen, who has "offered thousands o' dollars for your reward" (574) recognizes his savior. The result is that "a fortnight afterwards the girl an' the feller got married an' they lived happy together" (574). Their cooperation is cemented by their marriage.

The element of showing the giant the boy's toe to prove the soup's child contents isn't in the narration, perhaps an oversight (since the version below includes it). But that absence introduces the notion that one small part is enough to make a satisfactory cannibal soup. We presume the giant ate the boy's toe, and his quick death suggests the need to punish him, but the story doesn't identify if that is for his murderous suggestion to kill the child or for his disgusting taste in food. In this version and the next, the pathos of the crying woman being forced to kill and cook the child, more than the cannibalism per se, provides the story's emotional motor.

Freeman Bennett's two versions, narrated just over a year apart, include the crucial element of the soup being suspicious, so the cook must pull out the finger to demonstrate that the meal is genuine – which, arguably, it is. A single narration suffices. A thief tells three stories to a king to save the lives of his companions and finally to spare his own life "for two hours" (Halpert and Widdowson 1996, 595). His final account involves his walking to a cabin:

> there was a woman in there. He said "an' she had a small baby." He said "An' she was sot down" he said "cryin." An' I said to her . . . "What's the trouble?" "Well now" she said "there's a ol' giant" she said "took me" she said "an' he've had me" she said "here for two year" said "'long with un." She said "now" she said "he

> brought this baby here luh today. Now" she said "I got to kill this baby" she said "an' cook un" she said "time he comes back". . . .
>
> "Well" he said "I tell you what I'll do." He said "I'll cut off . . . one o' the youngster's fingers." He said "An' you cook that finger." He said "you got some meat there." She said "Yes" she got plenty o' meat there. "Well now" he said "you cook that finger" he said "along wi' the meat. Well now" he said "when he goes to . . . sits down to his supper well for sure he's goin' to say "This is not human." Well uh you can say "Well now you know 'tis human" well you can take up the finger an' give un well he'll eat that well he'll know that 'tis human." . . .
>
> [S]he got his supper on the table an' he started eatin of it an' "Well" he said "this is not human flesh." An' she said "Oh yes" she said "it is" she said took up the finger, she said "look at that" she said "eat that." An' he said "Yes" he said "you're right."
>
> (Halpert and Widdowson 1996, 595–596)

Once again, the king the hero narrates the story to, missing a finger, is the rescued child now grown. In Bennett's version, the woman and hero do not marry. But their cooking together suggests their connection, and she is the one who ultimately saves his life by pointing out to the king "'You look at one o' your fingers . . . an see isn't he cutted off'" (604).

In Power's "The Maid in the Thick of the Well," an unpromising hero figure, named Jack as are so many others, after being shipwrecked meets a giant, and asks for food. Though she's supposed to cook him, the giant's princess housekeeper has no such intention, saying "'we're goin' to fool the giant'" to which Jack says "'that's easy done.'" While the princess prepares the boiler, Jack gathers various objects belonging to the giant himself:

> The very first thing Jack got was a coil of old rope, slapped it into the boiler.
> The next thing Jack comes along with a pair of the giant's old boots
> old leather boots the giant had, slapped them into the boiler.
> The next thing he slapped in was the old giant's leather breeches. Jack said,
> that'll make the flavor!
>
> (Best, Lovelace, and Greenhill 2019, 124)

These objects stand for Jack, but they also stand for the giant. Like the old woman cooking her daughters in "Peg Bearskin," the princess prepares a meal to be consumed by those who comprise its elements. The giant, at first oblivious to the trick that he's eating his own possessions, presumes they belong to Jack:

> He got the fork, he walked it down into the fountain [cooking pot]
> and the first thing he hauled up was a pair of boots.
> Well, well, well, he said.
> She cooked him boots and all!
> That was alright.
> He made another smack of the fork, for to get a piece of Jack.
> When he did, he hauled up a pair of breeches.
> God, he said, that – that was queer.
> She cooked him clothes and all!

> But the next smack he made
> he hauled up the rope
> and when he hauled up the rope, ah, he said
> she fooled me
> but not for long.
>
> (126)

The giant doesn't mistake the boots and breeches for Jack himself, but he also fails to recognize his own possessions. Only upon discovering the rope does he realize the woman has deceived him – replacing objects for Jack. He apparently never eats the ersatz human meal. Conspiracy between two underlings – the servant and one who begged a meal – is ultimately the giant's downfall. There is no direct confrontation, unlike in those stories where Jack beheads his adversaries. Instead the princess drops hairs in the form of a cross "over the stern of the boat" in which the two escape and "the sea rose up and away goes the old giant" (Best, Lovelace, and Greenhill 2019, 127).

The woman who saves Jack's life, and prevents cannibalism, is his future wife – his non-blood kin. Though the two escape together, Jack, under an enchantment, forgets her and at his blood kin's orchestration marries another. Now known as "The Maid in the Thick of the Well," the cook proves even more clever. She tricks various potential rapist/suitors; provides magical objects; and ultimately disenchants Jack. He

> done away with . . . his wife
> and he got her [The Maid]
> and they lived happy for ever after.
>
> (132)

Given what's come before, and the fact that she enchanted him, "done away with" means Jack killed his first wife – who is also his brother Bill's wife's sister. Newfoundland folktales often treat women's transgressions more harshly than men's. Power, a respectful appreciator of actual women and their talents and qualities, showed enthusiasm for bold and capable female characters in his chosen tales. He did not support the wimpier heroines from better known stories:

> For example, when his granddaughter asked for "Cinderella" one night, he altered the ending. When the Prince comes with the famous shoe in hand, Ella doesn't much like the look of him in broad daylight and pretends that the shoe doesn't fit. She decides she would rather have young Jack from over the road, content to stay in her own world with her own people.
>
> (Best, Lovelace, and Greenhill 2019, 29)

And yet his stories include some gruesome punishments for female characters. In "Pretty Raven/The Copper Castle of the Lowlands,"[9] two women who spy on Jack through a hole in the wall have their eyes "poked . . . with the poker" (273) – though at the story's end Jack magically cures them. However, just as rope, boots, and britches substitute for Jack in the cooking pot – non-food, fakes, with no direct relation to the real thing – the hero's false first wife substitutes for the one he deserves and who deserves him, the princess, the Maid. In the context of kinship substitutions are dangerous and problematic, and reflect desperate measures, as they do when cannibalism is invoked.

Family Diversions

While the above story involves (future) non-blood kin or sexual partners saving the hero from cannibalism, in "Jack Shipped to the Devil in Blackhead,"[10] Jack's aunt (his mother's sister), the four winds' mother, hides him and feeds her sons bullock meat so they're not hungry for human. His aunt prevents incestuous cannibalism of Jack by his cousins. The first to arrive is East.

> And when he come in
> ho, ho, he said
> I smells fresh meat.
> And I smells human.
> (141)

When his mother claims what he smells is only fresh meat, East presses the issue, but as a dutiful son, eats the bullock she prepares. When he still smells "human blood" (142) – his blood kin, in fact – Jack's aunt relies on him:

> you have to promise me you won't touch him.
> Oh, no, mother, he said
> I won't touch him.
> (142)

Jack's aunt successfully uses the same substitution (non-human meat for human meat) with her other sons. She describes the winds as "'monstrous great men . . . and they're savage'" and they are preternaturally large. East "hooked down his finger and took Jack up" (142); Soud "took him on the palm of his hand" (143); West "admired this little cousin he never knew he had. He couldn't get over how small he was" (144); and, on their way to Blackhead where Jack must serve the devil, Nord carries his cousin "'in me coat pocket. He'll be alright'" (145). The wind cousins become helpers. Jack doesn't have to kill these blood relations and they don't try to eat him, saved respectively from inappropriate incestuous murder and cannibalism by a close female blood relation of all.

"The Suit the Color of the Clouds," in contrast, has Jack dispatch three eminently killable giants. When Jack asks for lodgings, the first (one-headed) giant responds:

> Hah, he said,
> the lodgings, he said
> you'll get lodgings. Do you know what I'm going to do with you? he said to Jack.
> And Jack said, what is that?
> I'm going to kill you now, he said
> and bring it up to the maid, he said
> to cook for me supper.
> (204)

Jack fights and beheads him, then heads to the castle where he finds "the King's daughter," who propositions him:

> Oh, come in Jack, she said
> and stay with me, she said.
> And, she said
> we can live happy.
> (205)

But Jack determines instead to keep his bargain with a captain to return "'in a day and a twelvemonth'" and says that she, the eldest of three sisters, will be his eldest brother Bill's wife. Tom's future wife, the first woman's next sister, works for a giant who is "a monstrous great man . . . with two heads." Having removed both heads in a fight, Jack goes on to face "the fellow with the three heads. Now he was a big fellow" (205). That giant's princess servant "fell right in love with Jack as soon as ever she see him" (206). When the brothers and sisters reunite, Bill and Tom are working for the King and try to pass off Jack's successful battles with the king's enemies as their own (another substitution). Ultimately Jack is discovered as the true hero and his brothers exposed as frauds. Jack and his princess become king and queen.

There is no cooperation between the princesses and Jack to prevent his being eaten. The hero simply slices off the three giants' six heads in a fight, effectively saving his own life. But the work of both blood and non-blood kinship is also multiplied. Jack finds princess wives for his ungrateful brothers. Power doesn't tell his listeners what happened to them, but given the apparent taboo against executing one's own blood kin, it's likely they survived.

Cannibal Incest

In Newfoundland folktales, younger characters, the story's hero/ines, successfully stand up to family authority. But, as the examples here show, gendered differences emerge in how they accomplish this feat. When left to his own devices, Jack battles the giants in a violent show of physical strength and prowess. He wins by beheading them. In other stories, however, Jack has a female helper who first recognizes the need to challenge familial authority. She, like Peg Bearskin in her own tale, subverts power indirectly, through the use of substitutions. The message is clear: blood kin, especially parents, may not be helpers or allies. Nor can they be counted on to prioritize their offspring's happiness. The family, especially in generations past, fit Lewis Coser's description of a "greedy institution" demanding exclusive, undivided loyalty through voluntary compliance (1974). This was especially true for women. At the tales' close, happiness comes from the family being reconfigured, usually by the female helper.

Consistent with Elspeth Probyn's claim that in shame and disgust, the body displays knowledges that may yet surprise us and point to new corporal connections (2000), cannibalism and family intersect in Newfoundland fairy tales and provide the catalyst for an imaginative reordering of family. Martin Lovelace writes about Jack tales told in Newfoundland as comprising a kind of occupational prescriptive oral literature. The tales instruct young men to guard their knowledge, be useful, mistrust others' words, and never admit a task is too difficult (2001).

Tales of cannibalism also offer advice on the family. Blood and non-blood kin meet in the kitchen. In the Newfoundland tales, thwarting a cannibal results from skillful use of female domestic knowledge – and cooperation between the sexes, particularly in cooking. That collaboration might require creating a disgusting meal of boots, britches, rope, and even children's toes or fingers. But crucially knowledge and cunning trump brute strength. In tales, a cannibal's knowledge is decentered and his power dismantled. Diverted from his taste for humans, with the exception of blood kin, he is quickly dispatched in the narrative.

So where is the disgusting in these stories? Certainly not in the narrators' commentary. As attitudes are generally presumed in traditional tellings, rather than made explicit, the audience understands that men should resist cannibalism. Don't become a

cannibal's meal and don't allow a cannibal to make a meal of someone else. Women, in contrast, can seek to avoid cooking someone else in a meal, but actually preparing them (or part of them) isn't a culpable act. Substitutions or human parts may be sufficient to divert suspicion, but success also requires cooperation with male kin (a nephew, a future husband, or at least a cooking partner). Indeed making that connection allows the avoidance not only of cannibalism but also cannibal incest. The only woman who cooks (and perhaps, but outside the story, eats) their own relative is Peg Bearskin's lone witch, who prepares the food solo. Revolting against the revolting is a task for a mixed sex couple – an aunt and nephew or a princess and her future husband.

We would never suggest that fairy tales alone can make the world a better place, but like other fictional forms they can both reinstate and contest ideologies that seek to render taste and disgust simple matters of biology, or indeed of right and wrong. While never advocating for cannibalism, these stories allow for a perhaps surprising cultural and personal complexity rather than confirming norms. As disgust triggers realignments and a reimagining of who constitutes family, characters and audience have opportunities to put the world back together in new ways.

Notes

1. For more on Newfoundland storytelling see Halpert and Widdowson (1996) and Best, Lovelace, and Greenhill (2019).
2. Fairy-tale scholars employ *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography* (Uther 2004), revised from the work of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson (1964), to identify traditional stories. A tale type groups narrative structures via a capsule plot and shared motifs, settings, characters, and actions. Uther's index comprises around 2,500 types, including fairy tales (called therein tales of magic; ATU numbers 300–749), animal tales, religious tales, realistic tales, anecdotes, and jokes.
3. Told at St. Pauls, Great Northern Peninsula, 31 August 1966 (ATU 1640, The Brave Tailor; ATU 1060, Squeezing the [Supposed] Stone; ATU 1063A, Throwing Contest; ATU 1052, Carrying a Tree; ATU 1131, Hot Porridge in the Giant's Throat; and ATU 328, The Boy Steals the Ogre's Treasure).
4. All tale texts are given as published, including non-standard grammar and orthographic dialect.
5. Told at Southeast Bight, Placentia Bay, 1 September 1987 (ATU 711, The Beautiful and the Ugly Twinsisters; ATU 328, The Boy [Girl] Steals the Ogre's Treasure; and ATU 327B, The Brothers [Sisters] and the Ogre).
6. Told at Southeast Bight, Placentia Bay, 1 September 1987 (ATU 313, The Magic Flight).
7. Told at Southeast Bight, Placentia Bay, 1 September 1987 (ATU 301, The Three Stolen Princesses and ATU 314, Goldener).
8. "Jim Slowan" told at Sally's Cove, Great Northern Peninsula, 26 August 1966; "The Black Chief of Slowan" told at St. Pauls, Great Northern Peninsula, 19 July 1970 and 14 September 1971 (versions of ATU 953, The Robber and His Sons and ATU 1137, The Blinded Ogre).
9. Told at Southeast Bight, Placentia Bay, 1 September 1987 (ATU 301, The Three Stolen Princesses and ATU 300, The Dragon-Slayer).
10. Told at Southeast Bight, Placentia Bay, 15 September 1979 (ATU 313, The Magic Flight).

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Section IV

Engaging with Disgust in Music and Visual Culture

11 "The Kind of Music That Makes My Skin Crawl"

Disgust Associated with Musical Experiences

Henna-Riikka Peltola

For many people, music is a source of pleasure and intense, positive emotions. Our Western conceptualizations of music have long emphasized its positive role in human experiences, considering it as a universal "language of emotions" (Cooke 1959) that connects people in a way words cannot: a "pacifying, healing medium" (Garratt 2019), which many believe can be actively used to support health (e.g., Ekholm, Bonde, and Juel 2015). Even if a piece of music is disliked or considered as 'bad', we might still be strangely intrigued by it. Washburne and Derno (2004, 2–3) state that there is a virtual love-hate relationship behind people's value judgements of music, implying that our concepts of "musical badness" would be mostly discursive, positioning gestures used for constructing our social identities and personal aesthetic tastes. Thus, musical experiences are often considered fundamentally positive to the extent that even our most negative experiences are actually pleasurable, that we "love to hate" (ibid.) the kind of music that is not to our liking – or as Frith (2004, 19) proposes, "'bad music' is a necessary concept for musical pleasure, for musical aesthetics." In this chapter, I will challenge this overly positive view of music, explore the dark sides of musical experiences, and introduce a variety of truly negative emotions associated with music listening, which previously have been largely ignored in studying music-induced emotions.

Since the 1990's, music's role in emotional experiences has gained increasing attention in both academic and non-academic contexts. In the interdisciplinary research field of music and emotions, also there is a strong consensus that one of the most important reasons to listen to music in the first place is to experience emotions, and that music evokes mainly positive emotions in listeners (Sloboda and Juslin 2010). Because of this positive bias, negative emotional experiences have not received as much interest among music scholars, or they have even been considered as irrelevant in a musical context; Zentner and Eerola (2010, 197) describe how, sometimes, in the studies investigating musical emotions, "traditional emotion categories have been modified by replacing musically inappropriate categories such as disgust and surprise with more fitting categories such as tenderness or peacefulness." Along this line, the emotion models regularly used in music psychology emphasize positively toned emotions, and even exclude most negative emotions altogether.

When negative aspects of music have been under investigation, the majority of studies have concentrated on so called "paradoxical enjoyment" of music-induced negative emotions, such as sadness or aggression (e.g., Eerola et al. 2018; Garrido and Schubert 2013; Thompson, Geeves, and Olsen 2019). Alternatively, concerns have been expressed regarding the side-effects of negatively toned music on individuals'

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well-being, such as encouraging antisocial or self-destructive behavior (see Thompson 2015, 235). The variety and meaning of aversive, subjective experiences associated with music are not yet well understood, a situation which is likely to maintain the idea that music or music-induced experiences could be only positive or harmless at most. However, music is known to have been purposely used for evoking unpleasant affective reactions or emotional manipulation, and even as a tool for torture (Cusick 2006; Garratt 2019; Krueger 2019). Thus, ignoring the fact that aversion might be a genuine response to musical material is a serious defect of the current academic and non-academic discussions on music and emotions.

However, even if we accept the idea that people might have unpleasant experiences while listening to the kind of music they do not like, is it possible they actually feel *disgusted* by it, or is disgust truly an inappropriate emotion when it comes to musical contexts, as it has been proposed? In order to answer these questions, I will explore the affective aspects of aversive experiences relating to music listening. Relying on ecological psychology and constructivist approach to emotions, I will first discuss the rather poorly understood nature of negative emotions in musical context, then, I will review some of the recent findings of empirical studies investigating disliked music and aversive musical experiences, and finally, I will consider the implications of current constructivist theories of emotions and affect for studying negative affective responses to art. I will conclude the chapter by considering whether disgust could really be an appropriate concept to employ when aiming to understand unpleasant musical experiences.

Aesthetic Emotions and Embodied Disgust

How is it possible that music evokes strong emotions in the first place? The fact that we react to mere sounds that seem to have no implications for our life goals has puzzled scholars since ancient Greece, as Juslin and Sloboda (2010) point out. Traditional psychological theories on emotions have struggled in explaining the existence of emotions experienced in aesthetic contexts, as well as recognizing negative emotional responses to art objects. In general, modern empirical research on aesthetics has heavily emphasized positive emotions and pleasantness of the experience, and identified aesthetic responses with liking and preference (Cooper and Silvia 2009; Silvia and Brown 2007). Similar assumptions about the nature of musical experiences have dominated empirical research on music and emotions, as is exemplified in the two major theoretical paradigms, *the basic-emotions hypotheses* and *appraisal theory of emotion* (see e.g., Warrenburg 2020).

The basic-emotions hypotheses propose that certain human emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, or surprise) are universal, innate states of the human mind that are related to specific brain functions and embodied processes and, therefore, occur in most or all cultures (Niedenthal 2007; Frijda 2008). Thus, it is also assumed that basic emotions have some universal, unified meanings and relate to fixed behavioral tendencies that are linked with innate, fundamental action goals, such as personal achievements and losses. In the context of art and fiction, the existence of basic emotions has been seen as rather paradoxical, since "fictional triggers" should not be able to evoke 'real' emotions (see e.g., Kivy 1989). Nevertheless, based on empirical evidence (e.g., Vuoskoski and Eerola 2012), we know that emotions experienced in relation to music listening have similarities with emotions experienced in

other contexts, as they involve similar physiological activation and cognitive changes. Because of this, suggesting that they would be somehow less real as experiences than emotions in non-musical contexts seems somewhat dismissive.

The appraisal theory of emotion aims to solve this problem by proposing that emotions induced by music would be music-specific, aesthetic, *musical emotions*, which are different from everyday emotions (Zentner, Grandjean, and Scherer 2008). This idea is especially evident in the discussions of negative emotions, which are traditionally considered as being rare in the context of music listening: according to previous empirical studies, people tend to recognize negatively toned expression in music (e.g., sadness or fear), but instead of experiencing negative emotions, the music produces *positive* effect in them (Kallinen and Rajava 2006; Gabrielsson 2002). In their 2008 questionnaire study, Zentner, Granjean, and Scherer classified emotions such as contempt, disgust, and anger as "nonmusical emotions," since the participants of their study evaluated them as rare or unusual experiences. The conclusion by Zentner, Grandjean, and Scherer (2008, 498, 501) was that the perception of negative emotions in music does not translate to actual negative emotional experiences, because music listening does not have any negative real-life consequences. This kind of conclusion suggests a rather functionalist, amodal "input-output" approach to emotions, which emphasizes cognitive appraisal processes needed in responding to particular environmental challenges and issues that need to be addressed for human survival. Furthermore, Zentner and colleagues' statement might sound naïve in the sense that provocative or challenging works of contemporary art, for example, are indeed known to evoke negative responses in the wider audience: according to Silvia and Brown (2007), anger, disgust, and contempt are, after all, common responses to aesthetic objects.

Negative responses like these are not unknown in the musical context either: historical accounts of the furious riots and even violence, which attended the premiere of Igor Stravinsky's ballet *Le sacre du printemps* in 1913 (see Walsh 2001) or the so-called Disco Demolition Night in 1979 violently attacking disco music (see Frank 2007) demonstrate how strongly people are able to react to music that challenges their taste or aesthetic and moral ideals, despite the fact that these do not pose an apparent, immediate, and concrete threat or danger to them. Moreover, some people do report experiencing strong aversive emotions while listening to music, which again challenges the idea that negative emotions would be irrelevant when it comes to musical experiences. I will discuss these accounts more in-depth later in this chapter.

Based on the kind of evidence presented above, it should be obvious that traditional emotion models cannot provide us adequate understanding of any art-related affective experience, especially when it comes to negative emotions in aesthetic context. First of all, by emphasizing the individual psychological processes of emotions, these theories tend to exclude the social and cultural aspects which shape the experiences, which is a defect when studying emotions in any contexts, since cultural differences in experiencing and expressing emotions are well known (e.g., Heine 2008; Jack, Caldara, and Schyns 2012; Miyamoto and Ma 2011). The role of socially and culturally learned emotion concepts and language (e.g., Barrett 2006, 2017) are rather excluded from the models. Secondly, although traditional emotion theories do not deny the role of human body in emotions, the embodied nature of affectivity and emotions is not really grasped within these paradigms. Thus, a more holistic approach on emotions and affectivity is needed in explaining negative aesthetic emotions.

Current constructivist views on emotion and cognition emphasize the embodiment of human existence. Theories of embodied cognition propose that perception, action, and information processing are all shaped by the brain, body, and its interactions with the outside physical world (e.g., Carr, Kever, and Winkielman 2018). The so-called "4E approach"[1] has roots in phenomenological philosophies, as well as Gestalt psychology and ecological psychology (Warrenburg 2020). From the 4E perspective, emotions are considered as "both evolutionarily prepared and culturally and developmentally shaped," as our affective experiences and expressive/gestural repertoire develop through our lifespan in interaction with the environment and other people in it (Colombetti 2018, 580). These processes of meaning-making rely on embodied information: even abstract concepts are generated with the help of body-based meaning. According to Johnson (2018), the whole rich variety of human meaning-making and communicative activity is not limited to linguistics and intentional verbalization; rather, all forms of art, spontaneous gestures, and ritual practices emerge from this body-based meaning generated in dynamic interaction with our environment, which affords us perceptually meaningful information; *affordances*. This concept was developed by Gibson (1966) in his foundational work on perceptual systems and direct visual perception. In the context of music, for instance, musical affordances would be multimodal perceptual information that provide us various interaction possibilities, such as synchronization and bodily alignment with music; they are needed in dancing or playing an instrument, but also music's mood induction qualities, and socio-communicative qualities for sense-making, emotional and aesthetic experiences, and judgements of value, as Reybrouck (2017) summarizes.

Embodied music cognition, which has become a popular paradigm within music perception and cognition research, views the body as the center of musical experience (Thompson and Vuoskoski 2020), but this approach has not yet become quite as dominant within the field of music and emotion research. Of course, scholars drawing from ecological psychology and the 4E approach have acknowledged human affectivity and emotions as embodied experiences. For instance, Clarke (2014, 355) has argued for the importance of paying attention to phenomenological qualities of listeners' embodied experiences when studying music-induced emotions, as he found the term 'emotion' "too narrow, and perhaps too blunt" to do justice to affective experiences taking place in a musical context. Furthermore, Schiavio et al. (2017a) reviewed the history of music and emotion studies, and proposed that since the existing theories provide too narrow views on musical affective experience, enactive/dynamic systems approach would better serve us in studying both musical emotions and music cognition (see also van der Schyff and Schiavio 2017). Nevertheless, Schiavio et al. (2017a) also recognized how limited attention this kind of approach has yet received in empirical music research. Warrenburg (2020), on the other hand, suggests that enactivist perspectives on emotion are gaining more popularity among music and emotion researchers, as these theoretical perspectives have been applied in recent articles published.

To summarize my argumentation thus far, emotions are embodied phenomenon, part of our social reality, and dependent on implicitly or explicitly learned shared concepts, values, and beliefs. In fact, although disgust, to stick to our theme, is often classified as one of the basic emotions, to feel disgusted actually requires some learned, conceptual knowledge. According to Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley (2008), substances that seem to be universally considered as disgusting, such as feces or decay, are not automatically rejected by young children. There is no innate rejection of such things

because the aversive reactions develop through interaction and active training provided by the caregivers. There are also cultural differences in conceptualizing elicitors of disgust – for instance, culture determines what is considered to be fermented and delicious rather than decayed in the case of specific food items. Furthermore, disgust is not induced only in response to 'natural', concrete substances. Interpersonal aspects and moral violations are capable of inducing similar feelings, physiological reactions, and brain activity in some people than bad tastes or odors. (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008). This kind of "moral disgust" is especially dependent on the implicit and explicit learning of the social and cultural values, but this does not mean that the experience would necessarily be any less physical than disgust induced by foul substances. Therefore, it is not necessary to assume it is merely a figure of speech or a linguistic error when people say they get "grossed out" or find abstract things "repulsive." Rather it is an actual conceptualization of their embodied experience.

If "disgust seems to require enculturation," as Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley (2008, 765) propose, explaining disgust by referring to the basic emotion hypotheses makes no sense. Instead, considering emotional episodes as dynamic meaning-making processes where the affective meaning of the experience emerges in the interaction between the experiencer's body – including its autobiographical history and sensorimotor capabilities – with its environment and its perceptual affordances loaded with socially and culturally constructed values, helps us understand how all kinds of emotions, including negative ones, can be experienced in aesthetic and 'fictional' contexts such as music.

Aversive Music and Disgusting Feelings

Disliked music and aversive musical experiences have not gained much academic interest until quite recently. Washburne and Derno (2004) write how scholarly literature systematically ignored the kind of music that was considered as "bad," "valueless," and "unworthy" by the gatekeepers of academic inquiry. By this, the authors are referring mostly to the popular music domain and musicological debates on value formation and discourses involved in these discussions. Their comprehensive edition of essays about "bad music" highlights how music that is deemed as being "disgusting" or "Kitch" by some authorities of music aesthetics – or sometimes even the mainstream audience – can provide other people indulging in guilty pleasures, means and tools for social identity processes, or artistic ways of challenging the musical status quo. Yet again, these perspectives highlight the assumption that, eventually, musical experiences have more positive outcomes compared to the negative ones.

Frith (2004) makes an exception here in considering to what extent responses to "bad music" be considered as discursive phenomenon as opposed to real, affective experiences. In his thorough analysis, Frith points out that aesthetic judgements are necessarily tangled up with ethical judgements, and that at the core of these experiences, there is the emotional response to the sound: "When we label something as 'bad music' it is because it is music that, if nothing else, upsets or offends us, that we don't want to listen to" (2004, 30). Frith identifies *anger* that is evoked by disliked music, and which is originated in violation of people's musical expectations and ideals, moral values, and social identity. Furthermore, he proposes that anger can also be elicited by somebody else's music that is invading our space, "that we can't listen to it as music," and that we end up experiencing it as noise instead of music, which

is supposed to be "a *pleasurable* organization of sound" (32, emphasis added). The fundamentally positive essence of music is again echoed in Frith's definitions, implying that disliked music is not actually music at all; if we are not in control of the sounds we hear, they become noise. Although I might not completely agree with Frith here, empirical findings that are in line with his conclusions have been made in recent studies focusing on the psychology of disliked music.

The preliminary work of Ackermann (2019) and Merrill (2019) provide us insights into listeners' psychological strategies relating to negative attitudes towards both disliked music and singing voices in popular music. Their findings suggest that, in addition to aspects relating to social identity, psychological, emotional, and physical responses also play a crucial role in aversive musical experiences. In my recent project (Peltola and Vuoskoski 2021), we investigated people's descriptions of unpleasant musical experiences, and found similar patterns in respondents' qualitative free descriptions: aversive musical experiences were characterized by unpleasant and involuntary bodily feelings, perceived loss of personal agency, and violation of social or moral attitudes and values. Furthermore, as in Frith's (2004) analysis, inexplicable anger was repeatedly described by our respondents as a typical reaction to unpleasant music, which could often lead to even hostile behavior towards the source of music or other people associated with the music. But what does anger have to do with disgust?

In the 1970's, Carroll Izard proposed that, together with contempt, anger and disgust form a so-called *hostility triad*, a group of emotions associated with aggression, opposition, and conflict (1977). Although there are differences in the qualia and action tendencies, these three concepts might have more in common than what is implied in the day-to-day conversations about emotions. Berkowitz (1993) proposes that humans have a "built-in" association between negative affect and an anger/aggression response. Aversive events generate negative affect and a rudimentary anger experience, which can further be interpreted in different ways depending on the individual, thus resulting in different negative emotions. He assumes that any kind of negative affect could activate at least parts of this anger/aggression system, although "certain types of feelings are particularly likely to set the network components into operation" (Berkowitz 1993, 11). Thus, if we consider emotions as embodied experiences emerging in dynamic interaction with the environment, the kind of "moral disgust" (cf., Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008) evoked by music could lead to aggression, contempt, or anxiety, depending on the listener's autobiographical history with their personal values and social biases, previous experiences of music, sensorimotor abilities, and current situation and mood. For one of our (Peltola and Vuoskoski 2021) participants, this anger/aggression system triggered by music makes her feel aggressive, whereas for another, the feeling is closer to overwhelming agony:

> I can't control the sensation: I can feel it even when I'm not thinking about it, but I can eventually grow numb like I can do with bad smells, physical pain, or irritation. Loud noise makes me more aggressive than some other aversive things.
>
> (woman, 62 years, half-professional musician)

> It's agonizing, especially if I can't decide whether I'm listening to it or not, so I can't control the situation. I can feel the music in my bones.
>
> (woman, 48 years, non-musician)

Furthermore, it is not only moral abuse that music can be associated with, but it can also produce physical violations felt strongly in the body and considered as, at least to some extent, disgusting. In our study (Peltola and Vuoskoski 2021, 5–8), the descriptions of involuntary physiological responses to aversive dominated the participants' accounts:

> [M]y breathing is shallow; I have this feeling like I have a lump in my throat. My neck and shoulders feel tense.
>
> (woman, 33 years, half-professional musician)

> I feel a little nauseated, have this bad feeling in my stomach, my body becomes tense and tries to find ways of escaping the situation.
>
> (non-binary, 33 years, non-musician)

These kinds of bodily feelings such as nausea or a "bad feeling in the stomach," unpleasant chills, and the feeling of a lump in the throat, are typical responses for disgust (see Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008). Not all respondents specified the cause of these reactions, but there were also explicit sound qualities that were reported as evoking disgusting feelings, such as strong beat, loud and heavy bass, and the bass drops used in EDM, which all seemed to us like an immediate, embodied responses to sound frequencies through actual bodily resonance:

> Dance and trance music, the kind with a thumping beat, makes me physically sick, although I don't know why.
>
> (woman, 37, non-musician)

> I can't stand bass drops; they give me unpleasant goosebumps.
>
> (woman, 29, non-musician)

One respondent even stated that she experiences similar unpleasant physical responses from both aversive music and ASMR videos. This is an interesting finding, since both of these mediums, music and ASMR videos, are often made for evoking sensory experiences that are highly pleasurable to the person having the experience.

ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) is a term that is been used by people who experience pleasurable bodily sensations and 'tingling' feelings, typically in the head and spine, in response to specific sounds and/or visual stimuli, such as whispering, lip smacking, tapping on different kinds of surfaces, and slow hand movements. Around this sensory phenomenon, a large online community has emerged with hundreds of thousands of members and the so-called "ASMRtists", who produce videos that aim to trigger these sensations in their audience (e.g., Gallagher 2016; Poerio et al. 2018; Tuuri and Peltola 2019). On the other hand, the sounds generating pleasurable ASMR response in some people can also elicit strong negative response called *misophonia* in others. Especially "man-made sounds," such as sounds of someone eating or breathing, or other sounds relating to throat, nose, or hands can be strong misophonic triggers (McGeoch and Rouw 2020). Based on preliminary evidence, there seems to be a neural basis and phenotype differences explaining why some people experience strong anxiety, anger, and "fight or flight" response when hearing certain trigger sounds, and that high interoceptive sensibility and bodily awareness might be linked with misophonia (Kumar et al. 2017). The scientific understanding of ASMR

and misophonia is still limited, but it is likely that there is a continuum between everyday sounds and music, as well as how the affective experiences evoked by these are constructed. For instance, certain qualities of aversive singing voices identified in the previous studies ("breathy" or "grainy" glottal sounds, singer lisping or singing in a "childish" way; see Merrill 2019; Peltola and Vuoskoski 2021) bear a strong resemblance with some of both ASMR and misophonic triggers. A similar description was given by another participant of our study:

> I hate if the singer is whispering, or if their voice is nasal or wheezy, if they're 'yodeling' or pronouncing words in a lazy way, or they're lisping.
>
> (woman, 39 years, half-professional musician)

This further suggests that our tendency to humanize music is at least partly based on the auditory and physical qualities of the musical sounds produced by another embodied human being (or sometimes other sound sources imitating these sounds). In addition to sound qualities, some participants in our study (Peltola and Vuoskoski 2021) also described the semantic content of music alone as being capable of evoking physical disgust in them, which illustrates how language and verbalized meaning-making are not disembodied processes but firmly based on our embodied cognition and affective system:

> If [the singer] is shaming female bodies, it makes me feel like somebody touched me without permission. This reaction feels very physical.
>
> (woman, 28 years, non-musician)

Thus, like ASMR videos, (aversive) musical sounds can also "blur the boundaries between language, sound and gesture," as Gallagher (2016) proposes, and act as "devices for supplying scaffolding to subjects' experiences" (Tuuri and Peltola 2019, 353), leading to unpleasant physical sensations and feelings of disgust. I will next explore how these physical, affective, and intersubjective sound qualities may have destructive dimensions, especially in the case of involuntary musical engagement.

Hacking the Affective Mind and Emotion-Regulatory System with Music

Music listening, as an act, is often considered to be a somewhat passive and disembodied event, as opposed to playing an instrument or moving to music, which have traditionally been seen as very much embodied and in the focus of experimental music cognition studies (see Thompson and Vuoskoski 2020). Nevertheless, listening is also very much participatory endeavor between the listener, musical material with its affordances, and the social context where the act of listening occurs. Schiavio and colleagues (2017a) state there is perceptual autonomy with regard to how people develop "affective-emotional interactions with music," which are dependent on their previous, embodied musical experiences. Moran (2017) proposes that the interactive processes of music listening happen through the participatory work between the experienced *agency* of the listener and the imagined entities – other musical agents, such as musicians performing the music, the composer who created the music, the voice (actual human voice or instrument-as-voice) heard in music, and the music as an act

of narration (see also Levinson 2006). Thus, because of this intersubjective quality of music as a phenomenon, listening to music of our own selection can provide us comfort and help us to reduce loneliness. However, in the case of involuntary listening, it can also pose the kind of 'imaginary,' social threat.

Frith's (2004) proposal is that "somebody else's music" invading our space turns into noise, and that is ultimately the reason why the experience feels aversive. I, however, propose that the musical agency, or musical *persona*, can be experienced as "the other" evoking interpersonal aversion and possibly moral disgust, by representing people, ideas, or values different from ours. These kinds of experiences were described in the accounts by those of our participants (Peltola and Vuoskoski 2021), who felt like aversive music put them into a vulnerable position where the threat of rejection or social isolation (concrete or imagined) felt possible. In these accounts, the role of music as a negative social mediator was evident. A recent monograph by Cheng (2020) provides the idea of music as "a de-humanizing force" that has the potential to contribute to violent and racist behavior towards others different from us. Similar to Cheng's discussion, we noticed people making judgements not only on the music violating their subjective ideas of what music is and how it should sound, but also on the people they imagined liking the awful-sounding or morally questionable music. Some of them confessed that music could make them hate the people who like that music or the people who control the selection of music playing, and thus, they might even start acting aggressively towards them (see Peltola and Vuoskoski 2021, 9–10). Thus, the dark side of our tendency of humanizing music is that, instead of experiencing empathetic connection with the musical agency, people can reject "the other" present in music based on their personal prejudices and dislike for the physical, social, and moral aspects the music is being associated with. Furthermore, the descriptions of *restricted agency* consisted of experiences where music felt so invasive that people needed to escape or protect themselves from it, and if that was not possible, the experience would be highly uncomfortable, even painful. These accounts reveal a wider scale of interactive meaning-making processes, which are dependent on the music's materiality.

Krueger (2019, 59) proposes that, since we physically resonate with sounds and music, the soundworlds surrounding us are capable of literally and affectively capturing us, thus "pulling out emotional responses out of us and regulat[ing] the character of their unfolding." We often take advantage of these processes by purposely making musically-structured environments, or "auditory bubbles," for manipulating physical and social spaces (for setting a mood for a party, for example), or reclaiming individual space by blocking out distractive sounds with the help of headphones, for instance. This "worldmaking dimension of music" provides an *environmental scaffolding* for our emotion-regulation system. This kind of scaffolding and offloading of cognitive processes to external objects takes place in multiple everyday contexts: we can, for example, offload things that need to be remembered to devices such as notebooks, laptops, or mobile phones, that will "do the remembering" for us. In the case of music listening, we can "let the music take over self-regulatory dynamics that would normally fall within the scope of our own internal capacities and, via this offloading, let it do some of the emotional work for us," as Krueger (2019, 60) has it. However, if the musical world created is not to our liking, or if it feels somehow inappropriate in the moment, avoiding it can be difficult because of the materiality of that soundworld.

Because of this bodily resonance and its affective dimensions, it is even possible to weaponize these processes, and use music as a technology for "affective mind invasion," where individuals are forced to adopt idiosyncratic 'affective styles' for communication, interaction, and emotional experience and expression, without their full awareness or consent (Krueger 2019, 64). As mentioned earlier, the most extreme form of this would be the use of music for torture (Cusick 2006; Krueger 2019; Garratt 2019), but also less severe cases of being exposed to aversive music could be seen as involuntary affective scaffolding, where our emotion-regulatory system is being 'hacked' by unwanted musical sounds. This 'hacking' could also explain, at least partly, why auditory overstimulation, such as urban environmental noise, can be a source of significant stress leading to severe health problems (see McGeoch and Rouw 2020). The restricted agency (e.g., impossibility of leaving the situation or ignoring the music and its virtual agents) combined with the embodied experience of listening to physically exhausting, ugly-sounding or offensive music is thus likely to evoke unpleasant emotions – even moral and physical disgust.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued for the importance of recognizing and acknowledging aversive emotions associated with music. Music has a great affective power over many people, and based on decades of academic research and empirical evidence, there is no doubt that often music has a very positive and even therapeutic role in people's lives. Furthermore, not everybody reacts to music as strongly, and I am certain that there are people who do not consider aversion or disgust as relevant emotions when it comes to their personal musical experiences. However, for those who do, involuntary engagement with unpleasant music might be a rather severe and truly undesirable experience. While not all unpleasant musical experiences can be classified as disgusting, I argue that music has at least the potential of evoking disgust, because of its material, semantic, and intersubjective character. Could it be that this kind of sensitivity to musical sounds has a similar neural and embodied basis to that of ASMR or misophonia? This might implicate that a physical disgust response to music is experienced only by certain individuals. Further research is still needed in answering this question.

Considering emotions not as universal affect programs (basic emotions) with more or less unified meanings and action tendencies, but as dynamic processes emerging in the embodied interaction with the environment provides us with a more fruitful framework for studying affective responses to music and other forms of art. The traditional, somewhat narrow views on emotions, which dominated empirical research on both music and aesthetics, have played a part in misleading us to believe that there is no room for negative emotions in aesthetic context, or that music and art exist only for pleasure. Historically, the preference for certain kind of music or other artistic expression has been even associated with virtue, civilization and high morality (see e.g., Cheng 2020, 12), and it might still be tempting to think that "good taste" can be used as the measure of a person – this is what we do when we feel deeply connected with people sharing our preferences in music. However, these same social dynamics relating to our musical preferences and our need to belong can leave us unaware of the fact that our dislike of unpleasant musical material is not limited to the sounds themselves. It is the intersubjective associations of those sounds, which are based on our embodied affectivity, personal values, and social biases, that can evoke inexplicable

aggression, and lead us to feel disgust and hatred not only towards the music but towards other people different from us. These kinds of antisocial dimensions of musical experiences are a perspective that has not yet gained enough attention within the field of music and emotion research.

Negative affective responses to music require more scientific attention, as they affect people's wellbeing on individual, interpersonal, sociological, and cultural levels. The same self-regulatory systems that often provide us with pleasure and happiness when we are interacting with music can also produce pain, disgust, and aversion, depending on both our own autobiographical body and the socio-cultural soundworld we currently inhabit. It is important that we, as researchers and human beings, are aware not only of the healing and uplifting qualities of music, but also know its potentially destructive powers.

Note

1. The four E's refer to the nature of human cognition as being Embedded, Embodied, Enacted, and Extended (see e.g., Schiavio et al. 2017b).

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12 Music to Vomit to

The Dubstep Drop, the Bass Face, and the Sound of the Social Web

Edward K. Spencer

This chapter investigates North American dubstep, a 'net-native' genre of Electronic Dance Music (EDM) in which synthesized bass timbres are described in terms of filth and foul stenches. At festival sets, the climactic musical moment known as 'the drop' induces a nauseated visage termed 'the bass face', while the so-called 'vomitstep' created by the producer Snails is voraciously consumed by his social media followers (the '#vomitsquad'). Although North American dubstep first entered public consciousness at the beginning of the 2010s with the sensational rise of Skrillex, since 2017 the genre has found a home at Lost Lands Music Festival in Thornville, Ohio. Curated by the Canadian producer Excision, this event has a sensationalized reputation for debauchery and excess. For instance, at the inaugural Lost Lands, there was a great deal of online-offline furore surrounding a so-called 'ass eating competition' in the campgrounds. This activity led to reactionary clickbait articles being published on EDM websites as well as the development of tracks that frame the dubstep drop as the sound of anilingus.

In order to examine aesthetic disgust in this context, I attend to the sound of the dubstep drop and the sound of the social web simultaneously. Specifically, I mix fieldwork at the first two iterations of Lost Lands (29 September – 1 October 2017 and 13–16 September 2018) with digital ethnography in festival Facebook groups (especially 'Lost Lands Fam').[1] The festival fieldwork was short-term and intensive (cf. Pink and Morgan 2013), involving interviews, focus group sessions, participant observation, and qualitative data elicitation in the form of 'Bass Music Diary' entries (henceforth BMD),[2] while the digital ethnography involved year-round listening and questioning (cf. Pink et al. 2015). In contrast to grounded theory approaches to EDM festival research (Little, Burger, and Croucher 2018), this investigation pursues post-positivist empiricism (Born 2010a). The aim is not to "rediscover the eternal or the universal" traits of aesthetic disgust, and the research "throws up material and findings that cannot be incorporated into existing frameworks" (Born 2010a, 198). By examining the online-offline mediation of 'the bass face' as well as the 'ass eating competition' at Lost Lands and its subsequent sonification, the chapter problematizes idealist accounts of the musically visceral.

Significantly, the idea of a return to a primordial, infantile, or uncivilized state via music and dancing has been particularly seductive in the electronic dance music literature (e.g. Gauthier 2004 Landau 2004 after Rietveld 1993; Vitos 2010). Often advanced by way of reference to continental philosophy and psychoanalytic theory, there are several devices that have been used to support this conception of dedifferentiation. My analysis in this chapter will consider how prominent motifs

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such as Kristeva's notion of abjection, a Nietzsche-derived emphasis on the 'Dionysian' traits of music festivals, and Freud's oceanic feeling might be used to affirm the ritualistic value of 'debased' bass music, but I argue that such idealism is naïve and incompatible with the case study at hand, especially due to dubstep's inextricable relationship with the social web. This relationship was forged as UK dubstep began to cross the Atlantic during the mid-late 2000s (D'Errico 2015), a time when the growth of 'Web 2.0' was also increasing the spread of intentionally disgusting content on sites such as 4chan. The 'filthy' dubstep drop became entangled with 'shitposting,' the practice of sharing low-quality, inane, humorous, or obscene material in online spaces for the sake of attention, and something often fuelled by (anti)social 'one-upmanship' rather than dedifferentiated 'oneness'.

Through my analysis of dubstep's convergence with the social web, I aim to elucidate the internet-driven recalibration of aesthetic disgust and the musically visceral. In particular, I aim to show how the dubstep drop, the bass face, and the so-called 'ass eating competition' are entangled with the online-offline attention economy (Bueno 2017); networked individualism (Rainie and Wellman 2012); and male-orientated fetishism, in both the Marxist and pornographic senses of the term (Phillips 2015).[3] In the age of self(ie)-consciousness and clickbait capitalism, aesthetic disgust possesses a tremendous capacity to capture and choreograph attention, and as a fetishized commodity it also produces some nauseating side-effects.

On the Dubstep Drop and the Bass Face

At the inaugural Lost Lands festival in 2017, the set by Snails (Frédérik Durand's artist name) was eagerly anticipated and discussed. The bass sounds in a Snails drop are renowned for their slimy and viscous audiotactile qualities. As Dominic (a festivalgoer from Chicago) explained during our discussion, the music produced by Durand is "like vomitstep – I've heard people say that, like Snails fans – it makes you want to vomit, it's so nasty – he's trying to make the nastiest sound you can make." Experiencing such sound is deemed to be disgusting-yet-desirable, with the consequence that vomitstep induces a ravenous hunger. The paradox caused by this affective ambivalence was captured pithily by Stacy (from New Jersey) in one of our interviews when she remarked "eww, that's disgusting – give me more!" Although North American dubstep fans often contend that Snails "invented the whole vomitstep thing," to put it in the words of Tiger (from Southern California), it is useful to consider a significant precursor to this musical idiom in order to pinpoint some of the perceptual invariants of the 'vomitstep' sound.

Significantly, in a B-side called *Blurgh!* by the UK producer Cookie Monsta (2010), bass figures are literally 'de-bassed' through automated frequency filtering and are cast as the act of projectile vomiting due to the track title. This distinctive timbral topic is known as 'tear-out bass' or 'wobble-bass' in the dubstep scene, and it is commonly the result of a low frequency oscillator (LFO) being used to modulate the cut-off threshold of a low pass filter or other components within the audio signal chain. When this filtering is rapidly automated, the bass sound seems to suddenly transgress or violate its own confines. It may even cease to sound like bass at all due to the immediate proliferation of higher frequencies. Due to its framing by the titular vocal sample in *Blurgh!*, Cookie Monsta's LFO automation specifies the revolting passage of vomit from an interior to an exterior space, while low-to-high pitch portamento

is used to enhance the sense of 'chucking up'. More broadly, the 'de-bassed' dubstep drop gives rise to debased affordances, and it is significant that in the subsequent track *Bubble Trouble* Cookie Monsta (2011) turned his attention to bowels and the process of digestion. Here, detuned wobble-bass sounds serve as a sonic simile for borborygmus (the bloated stomach rumbling caused by the movement of gas bubbles in the intestinal tract), and since the listener is invited to make a proprioceptive comparison between low pass filtering and the operation of duodenal sphincter muscles in this instance, the experience of the track becomes akin to auscultation – the medical practice of listening to the inner workings of the body (cf. Sewell 2013).

While this preliminary analysis considers *what it is like* to experience a filthy dubstep drop to a certain extent – the perception of which is predicated on a rich set of crossmodal correspondences between audition and other sensory channels[4] – it is important to question *what this means* for dubstep fans and how they respond to it in the festival setting. At dubstep sets, filthy drops often trigger a nauseated expression known as 'the bass face', which proved to be a much remarked upon phenomenon during my fieldwork and digital ethnography. It is also mentioned in several BMD entries, such this one by Frank (from Michigan) on Cookie Monsta's set at Lost Lands 2017:

> I made my way through the crowd and as the bass dropped I felt it vibrate my body and it felt like I went feral. The filth and grime of the bass just released all my pent-up aggression and I made what I can imagine to be a pretty gnarly bass face. I started to headbang and move through the crowd and as I moved closer and closer to the bass my entire body vibrated harder and harder till I reached the rail.

The "gnarly" appearance of the bass face mentioned here by Frank commonly takes the form of a frown, wrinkled nostrils, downturned corners of the mouth, and a protruding jawline. It was described in terms of physical tension and a kind of visceral purgation by Ned (also from Michigan) during our interview at Lost Lands 2017:

> It's very clenched, very tensed, like something's been held back for a while that you just need to just get out. You're not pissed off – but you *are*, in a way – like nothing is wrong in my life but at the same time – holy shit – I just wanna tense! You're clenching everything, squeezing, ugh!

The bass face is also known as the 'stank face' in the festival setting because the sensation triggered by the drop held to be similar to repulsive olfactory sensations. During my discussion with Tiger and Angelo (fraternity boys from Southern California) at Lost Lands 2017, the bass face became linked with the smell of rotten eggs and flatulence:

> [T]: I think there's like a *generic* bass face. I've seen some that have made me just laugh, cos that guy's face is just perfect to how it sounded. And I've seen some that are just very kind of like scrunched, like 'what the heck is this?!'. I want to know the psychology: what is it in the sound that triggers that kind of face? I can't think of any other experience where I've made a face similar, except maybe like the closest thing is a really bad smell. Have you ever smelled rotten eggs? That's

> bad, that's a really bad smell. It's probably the worst smell that ever happens is rotten eggs . . . you crack an egg open and then the yolk is just green . . . yeah that's a rough smell. There's nothing else like it – it's just sound that creates this. I think it's just the power of bass, like the power of bass has that. It's filthy, disgusting, gross . . . it's such an interesting way to describe music . . . Why is it the filthier it is, the better it is . . . the heavier it is, the more aggressive sounding it is? Why does that particular sound placed in that production in that drop make you wanna just like – make a face! [Tiger laughs].
>
> [A]: It's just a natural reaction. It's just – it's just not something you really think about.
>
> [T]: You know what I think of? You ever just like have someone just like rip a loud fart next to you? And I think girls do it better than guys cos guys just usually laugh, but girls make a face that's kind of like similar [to a bass face]. Like if you ever farted next to a girl, she'll look at you like 'What The Fuck?!'.

Angelo's insistence on the bass face being a natural and spontaneous response to the drop was a recurrent echo during my fieldwork. At Lost Lands 2018, several members of the 'Canada Crew' asserted that the bass face was akin to a reflex response, although there was also a suggestion that it was a partially learned expression:

> [CC1]: When I went to my first festival I didn't know people had bass faces or anything until someone pointed out that I had a bass face – it just came naturally. It's something that's already in people's heads.
>
> [CC2]: It's completely natural. You can't fake a bass face – you're either into it or you're not.
>
> [CC3]: But some people in the crowd, maybe the more inexperienced people, are looking around trying to get a feel for what other people are doing. I wouldn't say they're putting on a show, but they're trying to figure out how to do it themselves. Cos I guess when you first walk into a festival . . . it's something that you have to learn.

This issue regarding the natural and the learned dimensions of the bass face is revealing. In a first sense, the bass face is understood to automatically take possession of the festivalgoer at the onset of a particularly filthy drop, but on the other hand the expression might also be adopted as a more reactionary or knowing gesture that forges connections between festivalgoers. One way of finding a rapprochement between the idea of the bass face as a 'natural' psychological response to filthy drops and as a ritualized affectation might be to regard it as a phenomenon that embodies the experience of abjection. In the classic work on the abject by Kristeva (1982), abjection is presented as something that muddies distinctions between the innate and the learned, the semiotic and the symbolic, the self and the other. The abject is that which is excluded and repressed (filth, libidinal impulses, taboos)[5] but it always bears a trace of a primal existence and rekindles a state of being that is devoid of limitation:

> The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgements. It restores the ego to the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away . . . Abjection is a resurrection that passes through death (the death of the ego).
>
> (Kristeva 1982, 15)

Kristeva's principal metaphor for this abject return to an original state concerns the singularity between a mother and the unborn child in her womb. Their unity is total. As Menninghaus (2003, 370) notes in his work on disgust, Kristeva endows this mother-child fusion "with nearly all the qualities of the absolute in Idealist philosophy: it is preobjectival; it forms no circumscribed subject; it is undifferentiated; it is nameless . . . and it transcends the antithesis of conscious and unconscious."

Significantly, Kristeva appears to suggest that this abject, absolute consciousness is reconjured when people revel in the filthy, unsublimated corporality of 'Dionysian' festivals akin to those associated with Greek antiquity (Menninghaus 2003, 379; after Kristeva 1982, 79).[6] A similar sentiment was taken up and championed in early EDM scholarship that sought to affirm the vernacular value of rave culture and dance music. In a particularly influential paper, Jordan (1995, 125) portrayed raves as "vast celebrations where participants gradually lose subjective belief in their self and merge into a collective body," while Hemment (1997, 29) likewise argued that the raver's "disappearance into the singular field of the music is articulated within a general becoming unlimited . . . Indeed, the categorical distinction between Self and Other itself disappears." Moreover, reflecting on the motif of the womb, Rietveld (2004, 47) reflected that "there seems to be a need for a deeper, pre-modern meaning" at EDM events, the temporality of which re-establishes a "'pre-Oedipal' framework in which the dancer loses a sense of self." From this conceptual perspective, the bass face could be read as a phenomenon that "exemplifies the expression of 'passional' or 'orgiastic' behaviour . . . [that] re-discovers a Dionysian heritage in the present" (St John 2006, 6; after Maffesoli's 1996 reading of Nietzsche). It should be noted that both Kristeva's abject absolute and these motifs in the EDM literature are haunted by the notion of the oceanic feeling which Freud (2002) derived from his friendship with Romain Rolland. This oceanic feeling causes the blurring of the distinction between ego and world and thus a return to an uncivilized, infantile state. In an early article by Reynolds (1992), the facial expressions of ravers are read as symptoms of the oceanic feeling: "The urge to merge and the urge to surge fuse in a raging oceanic feeling. Dancers' faces are contorted with weird expressions midway between a snarl and a smile, or glare with a crazed, blazing impudence."

At Lost Lands, the abject resurrection of a primal prehistory is evoked by the festival's very name, its infrastructure (which featured the 'Prehistoric Paradox' stage and giant plastic dinosaurs), and its promotional discourse. Upon arrival at the inaugural Lost Lands, festivalgoers were given a pamphlet with an image of a salivating Tyrannosaurus Rex on its front cover. The first page featured a message from Excision, the festival's curator, headed "Dear Headbangers":

> Bass Music has always been a primal force that helps us to unleash our inner selves. Dinosaurs and ancient civilisations are symbolic of Dubstep in that they represent raw power and basic instincts amplified to the maximum. This dynamic range of emotion and rage that can be let loose on the dance floor is unique to our genre, and we're proud to present an environment where you'll feel at home being yourself.

It became clear that these words carried a great deal of significance for Stacy during our first interview when she remarked, "I love the fact that he used dinosaurs as the theme, that was very well thought out. You read the pamphlet, right? That shit made me cry when I read it." For Stacy, the drop enables an *excremental* catharsis, a gushy purgation that is far removed from the clarification connoted by the original

Aristotelian sense of catharsis (Pappas 2005). As she subsequently put it, "it's like a spiritual cleansing. I will literally rage until I throw up [as she did at the Cave of Souls stage on the Sunday of Lost Lands 2017]. It's kind of like all that bad energy that I have stored so deep in my soul will just – it executes itself, you know?"

Critically, this emic conception of excremental catharsis draws attention to the wider existential significance of 'vomitstep', though it is important to scrutinize the manner in which the bass face arises in more detail. From a first perspective, the drop triggers disgust via a quick-and-dirty mechanism and the bass face comes into being via pure affect, an alignment that would appear to suggest it is not so different from responses to rotten eggs. But on the other hand, the learned dimension of the bass face suggests that it is the result of a more-or-less conscious decision – an action taken in order to achieve a feeling of purgation, and one that is not completely severed from volition and the calculated pursuit of satiation. Rather than effecting excremental catharsis via an ideal kind of abjection, the bass face is predicated upon self-conscious choreography and a kind of sincere fakery.

Although this argument is at odds with the recent work of Witek (2019) and other EDM scholars who seek to silence the significance of higher-order consciousness (the capacity to be aware of and reflect on the narrative events that constitute one's autobiographical self), it is not without precedent. In his analysis of *dhikir*, a form of excitational trance, Rouget (1985, 321) stresses the importance of premeditation and asserts that although "the actual entry into trance may be feigned, this does not mean that the trance is insincere." Moreover, in her compelling critique of empirical research on disgust conforming to a 'basic emotions' paradigm, Leys (2014, 77–78) draws attention to the "performative and transactional nature of facial and other displays." Although disgusted faces are often cast as "a reflex revulsion" and "as simply and primordially a visceromotor reaction" in this work, Leys stresses that "facial responses to odours and tastes do not behave like simple reflexes, but are influenced by the social setting in which they occur, including the presence of others." Instead of somehow eroding distinctions between the self and the other, the bass face should be regarded as an entity that is involved in a deliberate process of exchange across borders. To put it necessarily bluntly, the bass face is not only pulled to intensify one's feeling of excremental catharsis, but also to forge social relations with other festival-goers. This forgery is the result of imitation and takes place with the 'goal' of inter-psychological connection in mind, which is to say that there exists an economy of disgusted faces in the festival setting. Significantly, the bass face is often accompanied by a vocal exclamation that serves to bestow the gift of excremental catharsis upon others, as Ned's vignette attests:

> When artists are playing a build-up that's really familiar to you, and then they *cut it*, and they drop it into something else, you're just so taken aback. Like verbally, I will be in the crowd and look at someone wide-eyed and just scream 'What The Fuck?!' at them.

Through its online mediation via festival Facebook groups, this discrete moment is reified and becomes all the more invested with social capital. For instance, both the bass face and the 'What The Fuck?!' moment appear in a SpongeBob SquarePants meme that was shared in the 'Lost Lands Fam' Facebook group on 8.10.17 after the inaugural festival. The meme was captioned "When that nasty drop came out of

no where [sic] and you're literally like 'WHAT. THE. FUCK'", and it also made an IRL appearance at Lost Lands itself, where it was mounted on a pole and used as a 'totem' (see Figure 12.1). In the comments thread below the Facebook post (accessed 30 October 2019), numerous members of Lost Lands Fam emphasized the relatability and accuracy of the meme – it was seen to capture something essential to the experience of the drop. Comments included "This face is spot on" and "AHAHAHHA FO REALLL ALL THE DROPS." Scrolling through threads such as this one suggests that the bass face is not only triggered by the precise onset of the drop (a discrete, fetishized musical moment) but is also fed by an ever-growing feed of representation and discourse in the online-offline festival setting. As such, it becomes apparent that the real-time genesis of the bass face is always already routed through its web-based depiction – it is in fact an index of its own internet-mediated grounding. Bass face memes and related emojis function as "perceptual ordering devices" that constrain responses to the drop, since they "set up expectations of what is (what must be) and what is not (what cannot be)" (DeNora 2013, 107).

In Lost Lands Fam, there also exist threads devoted to explicit imitations of the bass face in the form of musical selfies (cf. Gopinath and Stanyek 2019). These musical selfies may be short audiovisual clips of a group member's facial reaction to a particular drop or even just still images of their 'gnarliest' stank face. From a perspective informed by the work of French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, the musical selfies can be seen to constitute customary imitation (Burgess, Miller, and Moore 2018) since they succour the cult of feeling that revolves around the bass face, or even imitation by degree (Born 2010b) because there is a level of competition involved, with each group member seeking to outdo previous posts having pulled an even more stinky

Figure 12.1 SpongeBob SquarePants Bass Face Meme at Lost Lands

stank face. These musical selfie practices are characterized by a cultural logic of one-upmanship that Phillips (2015, 55) describes with reference to 4chan, and they demonstrate that the bass face is in fact a valuable commodity in the online-offline festival setting, with the result that the dubstep drop begins to seem like a fetish in both the Marxist and pornographic senses of the term. Since the internet-mediated bass face is involved in the acquisition of social capital, it produces a disequilibrium which is incompatible with the idealist conception of abjection: it does not bring about a collapse of the barrier between self and other but serves to reinforce it. Collectively, bass face memes, emojis, selfies, and 'IRL' versions thereof are all involved in the configuration of self(ie)-consciousness and what Rainie and Wellman (2012) term "networked individualism." In other words, the bass face is found on a face that knows it is being watched, that wants to be seen, and which choreographs attention and perception.

On the 'Ass Eating Competition' and Musical Shitposts

It is significant that North American dubstep entered public consciousness around the turn of 2010–2011, a period that coincides with what Phillips (2015) labels as the 'golden years' for online trolling generally and shitposting in particular. Much like the images shared by shitposters on 4chan, the dubstep drop would fare well in the West's online-offline attention economy because it was "both massively offensive and massively appealing" (Phillips 2015, 56). The bass face is haunted by a 4chan meme known as the 'Me Gusta' expression (see Figure 12.2), which was initially used to

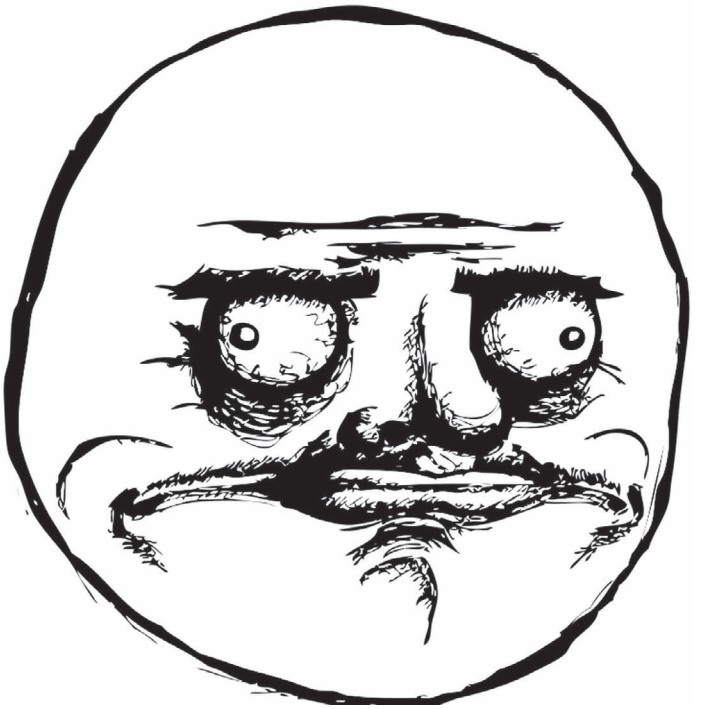

Figure 12.2 The 'Me Gusta' Meme

convey "an odd sense of pleasure in sexually perverse contexts" before becoming an indication of "a more general state of being disturbed and pleased at the same time" (PKZALGO201 2010, online). Just as the 'Me Gusta' meme would be regarded as an icon of the male gaze as it pertained to extreme shitposting, participation in North American dubstep became associated with a particular demographic of frat-based 'bros' that were prone to pig-headedness and cruel laughter. With the benefit of hindsight, this convergence can be seen to contribute to the controversial yet ubiquitous 'brostep' moniker that emerged online during this period. Both the contemporary attention economy and the male gaze (or ear canal) are crucial considerations when investigating the cultural significance of anilingus in the online-offline festival setting.

On the final afternoon of the inaugural Lost Lands festival, an 'ass eating competition' was held in a particular corner of the campgrounds. Having been planned by a group of friends in advance of the festival, this was to be the final event in a collective effort to raise money for a Hurricane Irma relief fund, yet the good intentions behind the competition (at which the organizers also handed out freshly prepared food) would soon evaporate once the first few 'ass eating competition' posts began to circulate in Lost Lands Fam and other Facebook groups. Through rumour and hyperbolic misinformation, the ass eating competition was transformed from a relatively innocent and well-intentioned fundraising initiative into something that involved promiscuous unprotected sex and unspeakable debauchery. The difficulty of gaining access to shower facilities during the festival was much remarked upon in relation to the imagined dirtiness of the young women who had volunteered to be 'eaten out'. Once my flight landed back in the UK, I noticed that several EDM news websites had started running short features on the Lost Lands ass eating competition for the sake of clicks (see, for instance, Your EDM Staff 2017). This served to deepen journalistic mythologization of Lost Lands and the wider North American dubstep scene as the site of pure filth, and the supposed anilingus became a highly prized asset in the festival industry's attention economy. In other words, the ass eating competition had been reified into a useful marketing tool by (male) industry professionals.

A musical example of this reification process can be heard in the track *Lost Souls* by Knife Party (2019), which was originally titled *Lost Lands* prior to its official release some two years after the inaugural festival. The track begins with male narration reminiscent of a nature documentary over foreboding orchestral textures. After the build-up that follows, a vocal sample declares "Ain't washed for three days, eat some ass at the rave" just before the first drop. Similarly, in *Skrawberries* by TVBOO (2019), the bass drop is framed as the sonification of anilingus through another one-liner that functions as a perceptual ordering device: "I met a girl and her booty taste like skrawberries [drop]." But how might we arrive at a holistic analysis of the 'ass eating competition' and its subsequent musical refraction? From a naïve perspective, the obsession with anilingus in the North American dubstep scene could be read as evidence of a general desire to reclaim a lost childlike state in which filthiness is something fun or novel and the constraining factors of consequence and social responsibility have not yet come into view. Such an assessment would perhaps use Freud's famous footnote in *Civilisation and its Discontents* regarding anal eroticism as scaffolding (Freud 2002, 42), and it might also point to the discussion of empirical work on disgust and toilet training in Rozin and Fallon (1987, 36). In any case, this interpretation would be congruent with an orthodox perspective on rave culture since its

commencement in the early 1990s, which tends to emphasize polymorphous amorous affect over explicit sexual engagement.

For instance, Hawkins (2003, 99–100) contends that dancers "become united through a utopian form of ritualistic display of erotic response that disregards the restrictions of everyday 'fixed' identity." Yet this affirmative argument must be resisted, since in the case of the North American dubstep scene, anal eroticism is inseparable from the androcentric practice of online shitposting and the fetishistic cultural logic identified by Phillips (2015). Since it simultaneously celebrates and condemns the 'ass eating competition' and a wider repertoire of bro behaviour at festivals in the manner of 'edgy' internet trolling, *Lost Souls* is a musical shitpost that attempts to lay claim to the attention of web users rather than something that asymptotically approaches a utopian kind of transgression. The pre-drop one-liner serves to reify the ass eating competition so that the drop becomes commodified as a magical fetish that rivets attention. Moreover, neither *Lost Souls* nor *Skrawberries* befoul patriarchal hegemony – instead they serve to valorize heterosexual males' acts of conquest. The "girl" in *Skrawberries* is reduced to the status of a fetishized part ripe for consumption, a process that is operating via the same cultural logic as pornographic clickbait in web fora.[7] The drop that immediately follows does not disrupt the gendered disparities of the digital age, but rather serves to reinforce them.

This final analysis may seem overly despairing, yet it is important to consider how "the internet changes what a music genre is in the twenty-first century" (Born and Haworth 2018, 602). One last example is needed in order to further elucidate the differences between dubstep's net-native, androcentric version of aesthetic disgust and alternative musical engagements with 'filth' before the advent of the World Wide Web. Consider the track *How Rude* by Flux Pavilion (2010), another UK record from the beginning of the decade that paved the way for transatlantic 'brostep'. *How Rude* begins with spaced-out sound effects (sfx) over dubstep's characteristic 'half-step' drum pattern. This ethereal musical environment contains an indecipherable vocal sample, which after nineteen seconds is revealed to be an utterance of "you just wanna be." At 0.23, everything grinds to a halt as we hear the full, undisguised vocal sample as a pre-drop one-liner while the rest of the mix is muted – "you just wanna be fucked in the ass."

As with the other examples covered in this section, the line is a musical version of clickbait, but what is remarkable in this instance is the identity of the voice in question. It belongs to the performance artist Karen Finley: Flux Pavilion plundered the sample from her classic record *Tales of Taboo* (Finley 1986). Just as the true purpose of the 'ass eating competition' was distorted through its online mediation and reification, the original meaning of Finley's utterance is muzzled in *How Rude*. Her militant feminist sardonicism (with lines such as "You don't own me bastard" and "I've got the master action/And boy you don't own me, not one bit") is silenced by Flux Pavilion. Finley is reduced to the status of a musical object. The power and purpose of her vocals are muted by the immediate musical reaction (the drop) and by the wider online environment in which *How Rude* circulates. In their original 1986 setting, slathered over 'electro wave' synths, Finley's outrageous pronouncements can be heard to do critical work at a particular moment in time (arriving, as it happens, a mere four years after the English-language version of Kristeva's foundational feminist text was published). But to the ears of Flux Pavilion and his following of male web users, all that matters in

Finley's lyrics are the "absurd, exploitable details" – this is "all they choose" to hear, and she becomes a "grotesque caricature" as a result (Phillips 2015, 29). The rise of social web platforms has ushered in a heightened propensity for "context collapse" (Gaunt 2015), and Flux Pavilion's sample lays claim to attention by dismantling the historicity and cultural politics of Finley's vocal persona.

Closing Remarks: A Call for a Critical Turn in Disgust Research

By considering the case of dubstep, this chapter has argued that affirmative and idealist perspectives on the musically visceral are problematic in the age of the (anti) social web. Notwithstanding the manner in which the dubstep drop is used for the sake of excremental catharsis – and notwithstanding its tremendous existential significance for festivalgoers – the bass face phenomenon and the musical refraction of anilingus are defined by ulterior motives of acquisition. From this perspective, the dubstep drop cannot be said to orchestrate a return to prelapsarian 'Lost Lands' that are free from desiderative sociality, since as a discrete fetish designed to be consumed it is actually involved in the intensification of human voracity. Revealingly, in order to obtain her visceral musical purgation at the Cave of Souls stage, Stacy had to fight off an overbearing male festivalgoer who was vying for her spot at the front of the crowd (on 'the rail'), and she subsequently offered a telling reflection:

> Humans are very greedy. I believe greed is also a part of filth. Even if you look at people dancing, the people that go quote-unquote 'hardest', they take up the most room, they're rude, but it's so raw and real. It's weird.

Other participants reflected on the ways in which their cathartic consumption of musical 'filth' is co-opted by artist promotors and festival infrastructures. Angelo and Tiger were acutely aware of the dubstep drop's value in the age of clickbait capitalism:

> [A]: I think the drop has something to do with our society's attention span. Our society has got a lot more technology, everything's on our phones, everything's really quick.
>
> [T]: Deeper down the rabbit hole, you have Facebook and social media advertising for artists, and what they'll do is post short, one-minute clips, and it'll be one drop, or two drops, and the recording of the crowd 'aaaarrrrghh!!' going crazy. That's how they advertise their music, how they brand themselves – it's how they always have since the drop became a thing.

Captured through video recording and uploaded to the social web, the festivalgoer's consumption of the drop is appropriated and recycled in order to sell experience itself. Whenever the festivalgoer becomes 'debased' at the onset of the drop, they are simultaneously becoming the brand. The 'sordid' is thus always already sanitized and 'shareable' due to social media branding and promotion. To put it another way, it is important to realise that "transgression today is entirely normative . . . far from being subversive or oppositional, transgression is the actual motor of capitalist expansion" (James 2015, 189, quoting Stephen Shapiro).

A critical turn in disgust research is therefore long overdue. As early as 1992, Georgina Born called in to question the facile and affirmative use of theoretical fetishes, noting that "the rhetoric of 'jouissance/the body/desire/excess' – especially given its disregard for cultural and aesthetic differences, and for the historical and cultural specificity of subjectivity – often amounts to a powerful instrument of closure" (Born 1992, 84). In order to sidestep universalizing tendencies and aim for the historical and cultural specificity to which Born refers, there is a need to examine how social web users and corporate infrastructures invest in and exploit aesthetic disgust. Future work might build upon exchange between anthropology and psychology (the more traditional dialogue within disgust research) by engaging with the growing body of critical work on the social web and its mediation of aesthetic experience.

Notes

1. Fieldwork was approved by the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) with the reference R50978/RE001. Informed consent was sought from all participants and all names have been changed. The research comprising digital ethnography on the social web was initially approved by the Oxford Internet Institute's Departmental Research Ethics Committee with the reference SSH OII C1A 17 019. An extension of this research was approved by CUREC with the reference R51339/RE001. All Facebook posts and comments have been anonymized.
2. Participants were asked to write about their experience of a festival set they had attended. These 'Bass Music Diary' (BMD) entries were completed online after the participants had returned home from the festival. The BMD interface comprised an initial text entry question ('What is your state/city, age, and gender?'), a drop-down menu instruction ('Pick a set you attended at Lost Lands'), and the main text entry prompt ('What was it like to be at this set? Use this space to describe your experience in as much detail as possible. Feel free to use any language you want').
3. The androcentric cultural logic identified by Phillips is haunted by the notion of commodity fetishism, the process by which materials "are 'made magic' by capitalism so that the social conditions and relations of power that create and sustain economic disparity are rendered invisible" (Phillips 2015, 29–30).
4. For a general review of empirical work on crossmodal correspondences, see Spence (2011). See also Eitan (2017) for a discussion of crossmodal correspondences as they pertain to music perception, and Wang, Keller, and Spence (2017) for a study of crossmodal correspondences between audition and taste specifically.
5. As Kahn-Harris (2007, 29) notes in his work on extreme metal music with reference to Kristeva (1982), "the abject is that which is formless, disgusting, terrifying and threatening" and it is often "associated with 'vile' bodily fluids, but may be displaced elsewhere."
6. Caution and nuance are necessary here, however. Menninghaus (2003, 388) is also at pains to stress that occasionally Kristeva seems to build up the conception of autonomous subjectivity which elsewhere she works to undermine. Moreover, he draws attention to the way in which the political and academic reception of Kristeva's work is often profoundly incompatible with her original theory of abjection due to the (over)emphasis on an empirical notion of the abject. Revealingly, writing on the verge of the new millennium (in the original German edition), Menninghaus reasoned that the turn to the abject sought to bolster "legitimation in the humanities", a trend which has continued intermittently to date (Menninghaus 2003, 394).
7. Relatedly, dubstep's affinity with hardcore pornography is made explicit in *Nympho* by Borgore (2010) through a pre-drop one-liner that references a scat fetish film. For debates concerning the presence or absence of misogyny in the music of Borgore, see D'Errico (2014) versus Clayton (2014) after Shepherd (2012). See also Reynolds (2013, 573) quoting the female producer Ikonika.

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13 Generative Disgust, Aesthetic Engagement, and Community

Erin Bradfield

Introduction

How do individuals and communities respond to negative aesthetic experience? Historically, philosophical aesthetics has devoted much thought to positive aesthetic experience, including the beautiful, agreeable, charming, and tasteful. But this is only a partial picture. Some aesthetic experience displeases: the ugly, disgusting, and horrific are but a few examples with which aestheticians have grappled in recent decades. The aversive and visceral nature of disgust has generated particular interest. But as Carolyn Korsmeyer points out in *Savoring Disgust: The Foul & the Fair in Aesthetics* (2011), there is also a paradoxical attraction to that which arouses disgust. Following Kant and Korsmeyer from the Western philosophical tradition, I claim that the aversive-attractive response is integral to disgust's power to motivate aesthetic engagement. On the one hand, people might feel its force and refuse to engage with that which disgusts. On the other hand, unshakeable interest may spur active responses including the exchange of judgments of taste; protests of a given artist, work, or exhibition; or even violent actions intended to damage or destroy a particular work. While the negative dimension of disgust response is often regarded as a liability from an aesthetic standpoint, disgust also has a corresponding productive dimension that has important implications for communities.

In this chapter, I coin the term "generative disgust" in order to explain the productive capacity of disgust to inspire communal, often subcultural, activity.[1] On my view, generative disgust has two orientations – destructive and constructive. Both forms activate the community in question based upon the valence of the group's comportment towards a particular work of art. As such, destructive generative disgust galvanizes the community and spurs increased activity based upon *negative* response to art, whereas constructive generative disgust galvanizes the community and spurs increased activity based upon *positive* response to art. I explore two examples that reveal the dual character of generative disgust in communities: Andres Serrano's *Immersion (Piss Christ)* (1987) (destructive deployment) and Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal* (2013–2015) (constructive deployment). In the case of *Piss Christ*, the intensity of generative disgust spurred some Christians to police moral-religious boundaries and restrict aesthetic expression in order to protect a community. Their activity culminated in vandalism and destruction of Serrano's photograph. In the case of *Hannibal*, the intensity of generative disgust, combined with hedonic ambivalence inspired the "Fannibals" (the *Hannibal* fandom) to forge community, make art, and to try to find the show a new home when it was not renewed by NBC. Both instances manifest how

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generative disgust can incite aesthetic engagement and increase organized activity on the part of subcultural groups.

In this chapter, I approach concepts developed and refined in the history of philosophical aesthetics and contemporary psychology and use them to make sense of the reception of *Piss Christ* and *Hannibal*. I begin by outlining some historical and contemporary accounts of disgust, with particular emphasis on Kant's and Korsmeyer's views, in order to establish disgust's visceral nature and its relationship to unshakeable interest. I then extend this theoretical analysis to the reception of *Piss Christ* and *Hannibal*, to reveal complex aesthetic experiences marked by hedonic ambivalence that provoke increased engagement. I explore the dual character of generative disgust in order to better understand its capacity to spur social cohesion and inspire communities to engage in organized activity that can be deployed destructively or constructively.

Disgust Then and Now

In *The Critique of Judgment,* Kant writes,

> Fine art shows its superiority precisely in this, that it describes things beautifully that in nature we would dislike or find ugly. The Furies, diseases, devastations of war, and so on are all harmful; and yet they can be described, or even presented in a painting, very beautifully. There is only one kind of ugliness that cannot be presented in conformity with nature without obliterating all aesthetic liking and hence artistic beauty: that ugliness which arouses *disgust*. For in that strange sensation, which rests on nothing but imagination, the object is presented as if it insisted, as it were, on our enjoying it even though that is just what we are forcefully resisting; and hence the artistic presentation of the object is no longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of the object itself, so that it cannot possibly be considered beautiful.
>
> (Kant 1987, §48, emphasis in the original)

While Kant says precious little about ugliness, this passage provides a hint of his overall view. Here, he distinguishes responses to nature and art with respect to beauty, ugliness, and disgust. Since ugliness can be described or presented beautifully in it, Kant argues that fine art "surpasses nature" in this respect. After all, one would not approve of or be pleased by ugliness in nature; one would experience it as harmful or even devastating. Kant's examples are telling. Only in art can subjects like war, diseases, and the Furies be presented in a beautiful way. Thus, one can be pleased by the *presentation*, but not by ugliness as such.[2] Consider Picasso's 1937 painting, *Guernica*, from Kant's perspective. This work presents the devastations of the Spanish Civil War, but does so in a beautiful way.

According to Kant, that which arouses disgust is a kind of ugliness that is beyond the pale. It "obliterates all aesthetic liking and . . . artistic beauty" (Kant 1987, §48). One cannot be disinterested in that which disgusts because "the artistic presentation of the object is no longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of the object itself" (§48). Kant argues that in this state of intense engagement, "the object is presented as if it insisted, as it were, on our enjoying it even though that is just

what we are forcefully resisting" (§48). The work of art presents itself for positive consideration, but also elicits displeasure, pain, or even revulsion. This combination of conflicting demands and responses complicates the experience. The individual is repulsed, but also drawn to that which disgusts (Korsmeyer 2011, 5).

The push-pull disgust response occurs outside the realm of aesthetic experience, too. Korsmeyer points to an illuminating example regarding the strange allure of corpses: "Plato used the attraction of disgust in one of his most powerful pictures of the warring factions of the soul when he described Leontius, who admonished his own eyes for desiring to look upon the corpses of executed criminals" (Korsmeyer 2011, 5). Even though Leontius is repulsed by the sight of the dead bodies, he still feels compelled to gaze at them. He experiences a lurid fascination and is enticed to look. This example reveals how one can experience the alternation of repulsion from and attraction to the same stimulus. Disgust accounts for this push-pull feeling. This toggling reappears in psychological and aesthetic literature as the "aversive-attractive" response. Contemporary sources highlight the primal, visceral nature of disgust; its potential to contaminate; and its aversive effect, among other characteristics. Authors also emphasize disgust's intrusiveness (Miller 1997, 8). Feelings of disgust are difficult to dispel, which likely explains one's conscious recognition of having them.

Reflecting the intrusiveness of this feeling back into Kant's argument, the simultaneous insistence on enjoyment and the experience of the opposite spurs cognitive tension. There is a push-pull between pleasure and the forceful resistance of it due to revulsion; there is a conflict between what the object demands and what the subject experiences. Due to its visceral nature, one cannot be unbiased about that which disgusts. Concern about the object's existence and its potential to harm prevents the establishment of aesthetic distance; this undermines disinterested aesthetic judgment. For Kant, interest in that which disgusts prevents one from making pure judgments of the beautiful. Contra Kant, I argue that disgust can nonetheless function as a potentially *productive* quality for communities based precisely on this interest and the aesthetic engagement it spurs. So too, I hold open the possibility that positive aesthetic judgments may be compatible with disgust, even though Kant rejects this idea. I return to this issue in my discussion of hedonic ambivalence and *Hannibal*.

Following Kant, Korsmeyer describes disgust in several ways, including "paradoxical attraction" (Korsmeyer 2011, 3), "paradoxical magnetism" (3), "perverse magnetism" (37), "grisly relish" (11), "the eroticism of disgust" (6) and the "vortex of summons and repulsion" (6; Kristeva 1982), among others. She claims:

> The survey of emotion theory . . . situates disgust as an aversion so intense that it occasions uncontrollable visceral recoil from its objects. At the same time, the peculiar attraction of the disgusting has not gone unnoticed. Kolnai even argues that the very structure of the emotion is prone to induce one to dwell upon loathsome sensory qualities. Certain artworks afford especially compelling examples of the allure he identifies, the most obvious cases – though neither the only nor the most interesting – coming from the genre of horror. Nonetheless, of all the emotions, disgust seems to present the greatest barriers to actual enjoyment, and thus it also raises some of the most recalcitrant problems for understanding an emotion in its aesthetic contexts.
>
> (Korsmeyer 2011, 39)

Rather than minimizing the significance of this emotion, Korsmeyer makes it central to her inquiry. She outlines three common criticisms of aesthetic disgust. First, disgust may be treated as if "aesthetically discountable," because its objects are considered "foul, polluting, lowly, and base" (Korsmeyer 2011, 39). Second, due to its visceral nature, disgust cannot be aesthetically manipulated through imitation or representation (39–40). Third, artists' renderings of that which disgusts often lead to other aesthetic qualities such as the tragic, grotesque, or comic that arouse emotions such as pity, compassion, or amusement (40). Some claim that such transferals cause works to "lose their capacity to disgust" (40). In response to these claims, Korsmeyer constructs an argument designed to recuperate aesthetic disgust. She not only highlights the insight and visceral power of this feeling, but also makes a compelling case showing how aesthetic disgust can be an advantage (See Korsmeyer 2011, Chapter 2). Aligning with and building upon Korsmeyer's position, in the next section I argue that generative disgust has the capacity to motivate increased engagement and organized activity on the part of communities. Its power is two-fold; it may be deployed destructively, as in the case of *Piss Christ*, or constructively, as in the case of *Hannibal*.

Unlocking the Generative Power of Disgust

Piss Christ

Andres Serrano's *Immersion (Piss Christ)* is a well-worn example of controversial art from the Western tradition. Why provide one more investigation of this work and its associated scandal? My aim is to shed light on the interrelationship of moral-religious disgust and community, especially because *Piss Christ* shows how generative disgust response can be deployed destructively in the service of cultures or subcultures. I begin with a description of the work, with special attention to its medium in order to ascertain the types of disgust involved in its reception and to facilitate understanding how a photograph inspired so much organized and destructive activity.

Immersion (Piss Christ) is a 1987 photograph depicting a crucifix submerged in Andres Serrano's urine. Examined formally, and apart from its title, some have described the work as "darkly beautiful" (Freeland 2001, 19) and claimed that *Piss Christ* shows Serrano's careful preparation and enormous skill working in the glossy Cibachrome medium (Freeland 2001, 18–19). According to critic Lucy Lippard, "*Piss Christ* – the object of censorial furor – is a darkly beautiful photographic image . . . The small wood-and-plastic crucifix becomes virtually monumental as it floats, photographically enlarged, in a deep golden, rosy glow that is both ominous and glorious. The bubbles wafting across the surface suggest a nebula" (quoted in Freeland 2001, 19). Given the way Lippard describes the work, *Piss Christ* has the ability to transport the viewer into another world – one inflected by beauty and possibly even sublimity. Commenting on color, shape, and composition, it is clear that Lippard finds much to admire in the image.

Despite this positive formal and material analysis,[3] response to *Piss Christ* varied. For example, some refused to view the photograph based upon its title alone. Others were curious or even excited to view the work; they evaluated the photograph based upon their experiences of it. Still others were offended by the title, but nonetheless chose to view *Piss Christ*. Among that group, some admired the photograph, while others were disgusted by it. A subset of the latter group may have experienced the

force of this feeling as a spur to increased engagement both with the work and with other people, resulting in social cohesion and organized activity.[4] I call this phenomenon "generative disgust." When the activity is inspired by negative response, I refer to it as "destructive generative disgust."

In order to understand the nature of *Piss Christ*'s reception on a deeper level, a moral examination is necessary. While Lippard describes the photograph as "darkly beautiful," (quoted in Freeland 2001, 19) she also notes that the title could transform one's experience of the work. The awareness that Serrano photographed a crucifix immersed in urine could alter one's perception, transforming the once beautiful glowing galaxies into disgusting urine bubbles. Thus, the titular indication of bodily fluids may be enough to spur core or contamination disgust,[5] while their combination with a crucifix may elicit moral disgust.[6]

It may be difficult to achieve Kantian disinterest in response to *Piss Christ*, due to moral considerations. On his view, one could only achieve proper aesthetic distance if one were not disgusted by the photograph. For example, if a religious individual considered Serrano's work to be blasphemous, they might find it difficult to establish the distance necessary to make an unbiased judgment of taste. Moreover, Kant would likely argue that individuals who were offended exercised moral rather than aesthetic judgment. Put differently, some who turned away from *Piss Christ* may have been "too interested" from a moral or religious standpoint to engage with the work aesthetically. In fact, the phrase "turned away" may be too weak to capture the force of this experience. As indicated above, some may be *repulsed* by *Piss Christ* based upon its title alone.

In the 1980s, Serrano's work caused an uproar among American conservatives and the Religious Right as part of the Culture Wars.[7] In 1987, *Piss Christ* debuted in New York and gained notoriety two years later when it was shown as part of a tour sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) (Lacayo 2009; Andrews 2017). Senators Jesse Helms and Alfonse D'Amato spoke out against Serrano's work during a session of the Senate, even going so far as to dramatically tear apart the catalog for the show in which *Piss Christ* appeared (Lacayo 2009; Chrisafis 2011). The NEA found itself under increased pressure in the wake of the scandal due to its federal funding. Institutions that showed Serrano's work, notably the Corcoran Gallery and the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, experienced increased scrutiny due to the ongoing debate about federal arts funding in the United States (Lacayo 2009). Some protested these controversial exhibitions; others sought to shut them down entirely.

The furor over Serrano's images was not merely a product of the American sociopolitical climate of the 1980s. Serrano's work has continued to garner similarly extreme responses from different communities over time. In 1997, a print of *Piss Christ* was destroyed while it was on display at the National Gallery of Art in Melbourne, Australia (Vogel 2007). In 2007, Serrano photographs included in "The History of Sex" exhibition in Sweden were also destroyed (Chrisafis 2011; Vogel 2007).

Now on to the incident that is the focal point of my analysis: In 2011, religious protests culminated in an attack on *Piss Christ* at the Exhibition at the Collection Lambert in Avignon, France. The work was quietly on display for four months as part of the "I Believe in Miracles" exhibition. But about a month before the show was set to close, a protest campaign took hold. Civitas, a group interested in re-Christianizing France, sought to rally fundamentalist groups in the country (Chrisafis 2011). As a result, the gallery received tens of thousands of emails and spam messages protesting

the exhibition (ibid.). Ultimately, 1,000 Christian protestors marched to manifest their opposition. In response, the gallery increased its security, put plexiglass in front of *Piss Christ*, and appointed guards to stand beside the work (ibid.). The situation came to a head when four people stormed the exhibition in order to destroy *Piss Christ*. They broke through the protective screen and slashed the photograph with a sharp implement. An image of a meditating nun was also damaged during the incident (ibid.). The gallery was forced to close, but the director, Eric Mézil, was insistent about restoring access as soon as possible. In fact, he decided to show the works in their altered state in order to make a point about what, in his words, "barbarians can do" (ibid.).

The destruction of *Piss Christ* manifests the power of what I call "generative disgust." This example shows how interest can spur extreme engagement with that which disgusts, including violence against or destruction of a work of art. Not only did *Piss Christ* spur social cohesion, but it also inspired communal activity, as seen with protests of the photograph in France. Intense aversion combined with perverse magnetism provoked organized communal action with the intent of destroying *Piss Christ*. From the perspective of the protestors, Serrano had desecrated a religious artifact. Based on the moral disgust they may have felt, protestors sought not only to limit access to *Piss Christ*, but to eliminate it entirely, perhaps to ensure that no one else would be able to experience the work.[8] Generative disgust served as the impetus for this communal, destructive activity. From one perspective, the protest and destruction of *Piss Christ* is a defensive move, intended to protect the Christian worldview and its iconography. From another, it is an antagonistic move, intended to attack a differing point of view. Here, I confess my own perspective: I am committed to upholding the right to freedom of expression, even of expression that cuts against or fails to confirm my worldview.

As a final note on its reception, it is important to consider *Piss Christ*'s position with respect to culture more broadly. As aforementioned, *Piss Christ* was a flashpoint during the Culture Wars in the United States in the 1980s. The very fact that American politicians felt the need to weigh in on the status of this work – and whether it ought to be considered art at all – reveals a struggle for meaning and signification. It was a battle for the ability to determine what was included in or excluded from culture, and in particular, to demarcate what was illegitimate and beyond the pale. In short, some American conservatives and traditionalists sought to position *Piss Christ* as a marginal response to mainstream culture. Dick Hebdige's sociological examination of the dynamics of youth subcultures with respect to authority, expression, and meaning is relevant here. Applying Hebdige's analysis of subcultural refusal to Serrano's art, we can see the artist as engaged in a struggle for signification and "possession of the sign" (Hebdige 1979, 17). In this case, the sign being reflected upon, critiqued, and possibly subverted is the crucifix and its meaning within Western culture. On this reading, Serrano's exploration of taboo and disgust in conjunction with religious iconography signaled a subcultural refusal of the dominant cultural order in the United States. In *Piss Christ*, Serrano sought to recuperate embodiment by highlighting the significance of bodily fluids in Christianity as well as to critique the commodification of religious icons (Freeland 2001, 19–21). Interpreted this way, the work manifests the struggle between mainstream culture's use of the crucifix and Serrano's aesthetic use of it. Decades on, *Piss Christ*'s position with respect to culture seems to have shifted. The artworld continued its support and mainstream culture has also embraced the work.

As such, I claim that *Piss Christ* moved from a marginal to a central position with respect to culture. If this is the case, recent violent responses to *Piss Christ* inspired by generative disgust may have emerged from subcultural positions.

Hannibal

Now let's turn to the generative power of disgust in its constructive rather than its destructive deployment. Recall that generative disgust occurs when the force of this feeling spurs increased engagement both with a work of art as well as with other people, resulting in social cohesion and organized activity. When the activity is inspired by positive response, I refer to it as "constructive generative disgust."

Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal* is based upon Thomas Harris' novels and stars Mads Mikkelsen in the titular role and Hugh Dancy as his FBI Special Investigator counterpart, Will Graham.[9] Fuller diversified and updated Harris' narrative by altering the race, gender, and sexual orientation of some of the characters. During its three-season run on NBC (2013–2015), the show became a cult hit. Part police procedural, part gothic-horror[10] romance, the show is styled with the look and feel of arthouse cinema.[11] What's more, the grisly case-of-the-week murders and Hannibal's culinary creations, often made of human flesh, provide ample opportunities for aversive-attractive disgust response. It's surprising that NBC carved out space for such an adventurously gruesome show that not only depicts horrific murders, but also thematizes cannibalism. Across several episodes, the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit investigates a "mushroom garden" composed of people who have been placed in diabetic comas and partially buried (Season 1, episode 2); a motel room containing "blood angels" whose flayed back skin has been arranged to form elaborate wings (Season 1, episode 5); a musician fitted with the neck of a cello so that his vocal cords serve as replacement strings (Season 1, episode 8); and a corpse folded origami-style into the shape of a heart and put on display in the Norman Chapel in Palermo, Italy (Season 3, episodes 1 and 2).[12]

It is obvious that *Hannibal* provides much to disgust the audience – note the blood and body envelope violations for starters![13] The writers and directors of *Hannibal* entice viewers to gaze upon these murder-of-the-week corpses with lurid fascination. Viewers are invited to adopt Will Graham's point of view as he performs crime scene reconstructions. Using imagination and empathy, Will enters the mind of each killer in order to understand their motives and methods. Depicted from Will's perspective, these crimes are neither shoddy nor ill-conceived; Fuller, et al. have crafted some horrifically artful images. In fact, Will ends each reconstruction by intoning, "this is my design," in place of the killer. Viewers are duly invited to *enjoy* the imagery represented by Will, as horrific or disgusting as it may be.

Hannibal's brutally stunning aesthetic intertwines the beautiful and the horrific (Hyman 2015; García 2019).[14] Recall Kant's analysis of disgust here: "the object is presented as if it insisted . . . on our enjoying it even though that is just what we are forcefully resisting" (Kant 1987, §48). Kant's statement tracks what *Hannibal* is up to elegantly: the show holds aversive-attractive images up for aesthetic delectation within a horror frame of reference. "Darkly beautiful" might aptly apply to *Hannibal*, too.[15] Therefore, contra Kant's conclusion that disgust negates the possibility of aesthetic liking, Fannibals are able to positively appraise *Hannibal*'s gruesome images.[16] In fact, the community makes fan art and memes reflecting the beautiful, horrific, and comedic aspects of the show. Put another way, Fannibal art mirrors the complexity

of the aesthetic experience of *Hannibal*. A cursory review of Tumblr and social media reveals art that is often blood-drenched and grotesque, but also creative and beautiful (Baker-Whitelaw 2013; McLaren 2017; Wild 2021). While making art is a common practice among fandoms, what distinguishes Fannibals' work is its intermixture of horror, beauty, and disgust.

At least two interpretations of the aesthetic experience of *Hannibal* fans emerge. One option would be to argue that viewers experience the aversive-attractive disgust response, toggling back and forth between repulsion and fascination. As articulated above, the murders and corresponding crime scenes are meticulously constructed in order to create darkly disturbing, but brutally captivating phantasmagorias. The show's high production values and disquietingly alluring images call for positive aesthetic evaluation. Under this interpretation, viewers are not enjoying *Hannibal* "in spite of" its gruesome and disgusting depictions, but precisely *because* of them. The audience is both repulsed by and attracted to the show's grisly imagery. Matthew Strohl's notion of hedonic ambivalence is illuminating here. Strohl argues that fans can enjoy and positively appraise works that engender fear and disgust (Carroll 1990; Strohl 2012). He distinguishes two types of hedonic ambivalence in order to explain experiences of pleasure that involve some painful elements (weak ambivalence) and experiences of pleasure that are derived, in part, *due to* their painful elements (strong ambivalence) (Strohl 2012, 203).[17] Strohl's notion of strong ambivalence helps elucidate Fannibal response. Given the way in which disgust is woven into the narrative, it would be implausible to claim that fans enjoy the show "in spite of" its disgusting and disturbing imagery. Instead, per strong ambivalence, they enjoy *Hannibal* because of it.

A second interpretation of the aesthetic experience of *Hannibal* fans would be to argue that viewers toggle between experiences of beauty and disgust. Here, the poles of aesthetic experience are more divergent than presented in interpretation one. On interpretation two, the toggling moves between beauty and disgust, rather than merely between the captivation and repulsion internal to disgust. Throughout the series, an impeccably dressed, cannibalistic serial killer prepares haute cuisine. When inspiration strikes, Hannibal flips through his recipe cards, articulated in a neatly calligraphic hand, in order to select the perfect recipe before assembling and preparing the ingredients. Viewers witness Hannibal create several meals from start to finish – chopping, searing, flambéing, and performing whatever special techniques are required for the plat du jour. Critics have referred to the exquisite culinary creations of Janice Poon, food stylist, and chef-consultant, José Andrés, as "food porn" (e.g. Jung 2014). Given the prevalence and popularity of cooking programming on television and streaming services, the pleasures of watching people cook may be obvious. What is remarkable in the case of *Hannibal* is the narrative context for such enjoyment: these preparations involve cannibalism.

Throughout Fuller's series, Hannibal manifests taste in all things.[18] From his immaculate three-piece suits, complete with Balthus-knotted ties and coordinating pocket squares, to his technical drawing abilities, his talent playing and composing music on the harpsichord and theremin, his extraordinary culinary skills, and his medical expertise as a psychiatrist, Hannibal is presented as a cultured man of arts and letters. As portrayed by Mads Mikkelsen, Fuller's Hannibal is easy on the eyes, too. Such beautiful appearances contrast Hannibal's darker proclivities as a cannibalistic serial killer. Who would suspect that such a refined individual could commit such grisly murders?

Returning to interpretation two with these positive aesthetic evaluations in mind, *Hannibal* fans may toggle between exceedingly divergent aesthetic experiences. An individual might enjoy the sight of Hannibal's delectable dishes, only to recoil in moral disgust at the recognition that this gorgeous cuisine is composed of human flesh. One may find the images alluring, but their moral implications repugnant. Rather than simply having an aversive-attractive disgust response, the individual alternates between poles of aesthetic experience that are even further apart.[19] Given that beauty may be involved in the assessment, there is greater potential for positive aesthetic evaluation under interpretation two.[20]

In "*Hannibal* and the Paradox of Disgust," Alberto N. García makes an argument that supports my second interpretation. He claims that while *Hannibal* traffics in dark, disturbing depictions, its scenes are carefully framed and shot in order to attract and engage viewers. García analyzes the human cello example from "Fromage" (Season 1, episode 8) to illustrate how viewers are invited, even seduced, into appreciating the show's imagery. In this episode, the crucial sequence takes place in the aesthetically pleasing location of a concert hall captured in long shot, starting at a high angle and tilting to the stage, which is highlighted by a "zenithal beam" encircling the crime scene and macabre corpse display. The light intensifies as Will uses empathy and imagination to reenact the murder (García 2019, 557). Based on this analysis, it is clear that *Hannibal* doesn't use disgust or gore as blunt instruments with which to assault viewers, but instead, builds enticing presentations that reveal the intermingling of the beautiful, horrific, and disgusting (ibid.). Drawing on Strohl, García argues that *Hannibal*'s layering forges a complex aesthetic experience designed to lure viewers into *Hannibal*'s world. On my view, such enticement can also spur communication and community.

In accord with García, my dual interpretations of hedonic ambivalence highlight the complexity of aesthetic experience in *Hannibal*. The show invites viewers to contemplate their aesthetic delectation and to recognize that it may be laced with disgust. In season three, the call for moral reflection is made explicit. Dr. Abel Gideon, portrayed by Eddie Izzard, addresses the camera directly to ponder how viewers will feel when *they* are ensnared by the titular cannibal and eaten alive. Considering the fact that Hannibal's exquisite meals are composed of human flesh, and that he tricks his guests into unknowingly ingesting said flesh, one must reevaluate their enjoyment *even of the images*. Upon reflection, one may feel morally compromised savoring art that depicts such morally disgusting actions. Fuller presses viewers to (re)consider the images they have been relishing in order to examine whether this enjoyment makes them morally complicit in Hannibal's actions. Food for thought, indeed.

Building on García's claims about the seductive quality of *Hannibal*'s complex aesthetic, I argue that hedonic ambivalence, coupled with constructive generative disgust draws Fannibals into the show's world and inspires community engagement with *Hannibal* and with each other. As articulated above, Fannibals enjoy *Hannibal* due to its intermixture of beauty, horror, and disgust. The works created by Fannibals mirror this complicated aesthetic. Furthermore, the *Hannibal* fandom is marked by Fannibals' direct and positive interactions not only with each other, but also with the showrunner, stars, producers, and crew (McLaren 2017; Wild 2021). Fan art and fan fiction are shared and discussed among these parties online, in interviews, and at conventions in a welcoming and respectful way. Mads Mikkelsen has reflected on Fannibals in interviews, warmly noting their creativity and expressing appreciation for how the

fans forged a supportive, cohesive community (Wild 2021, 57–58). When *Hannibal* was not renewed at the beginning of season three, Fannibals banded together. Within hours, a #SaveHannibal social media campaign was launched, garnering thousands of tweets, shares, and likes (Fitz-Gerald 2015). These various Fannibal responses reveal how generative disgust can be deployed constructively to facilitate aesthetic engagement and organized activity.

Finally, I want to address a potential objection regarding the relationship of aesthetic appreciation and disgust with respect to Fannibals. My analysis is founded upon the notion that watching *Hannibal* is a complex rather than an atomistic aesthetic experience (Strohl 2012, 209). The show elicits a variety of feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, some of which may be embedded within each other (ibid.). Leveraging the notion of hedonic ambivalence, individuals can have multifaceted experiences and evaluations of *Hannibal* including disgust, beauty, fascination, and horror; as I have argued above, they may even toggle among them. Disgust is integral to the aesthetic experience of *Hannibal*. Based on my notion of generative disgust and its capacity to inspire increased engagement, disgust shapes the show's reception, including Fannibal response. Given the way in which disgust is woven into the narrative, it would be implausible to claim that fans enjoy *Hannibal* "in spite of" its disgusting and disturbing imagery. So while some of the aforementioned activities may be common to fandoms more generally, I claim that generative disgust plays a uniquely productive role in Fannibal response.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the aversive-attractive disgust response in order to better understand its generative capacity in communities. My goal here is to grasp not only the desire to turn away, refuse to engage, or remain silent when confronted with aesthetic experience that disgusts, but also to clarify the kinds of increased aesthetic engagement that this feeling can provoke, especially for communities. On the one hand, response to Serrano's *Piss Christ* shows how generative disgust can spur actions aimed at destroying a work or eliminating a threat (destructive deployment). On the other hand, response to *Hannibal* shows how generative disgust can spur interaction, communication, and creativity that mirrors the aesthetic complexity of the show (constructive deployment). These cases manifest the dual character of generative disgust response.

As my analysis has shown, generative disgust is complex. It operates viscerally to spur increased aesthetic engagement. It can be deployed destructively or constructively and harnessed in order to facilitate organized social and communal activity. Generative disgust can be used to protect a worldview, while simultaneously attacking, marginalizing, or destroying a competing worldview. Alternatively, generative disgust can spur communication about art and inspire creative activity and expression regarding the same. In both cases, generative disgust response incites aesthetic engagement with a work of art as well as with other people. When properly understood, generative disgust has important implications for community identity and expression.

Notes

1. "Subculture" often has a pejorative connotation. Here, I use the term neutrally to indicate a group with interests, values, and expressions distinct from and often critical of mainstream culture, while noting the power differential among these groups. Culture is often

not open to or accepting of subcultural styles, expressions, or critiques (See Hebdige 1979). My sense of the term is also influenced by Nancy Fraser's concept, "subaltern counterpublic" (See Fraser 1990).

2. Scholars debate whether Kant's system can accommodate pure judgments of taste regarding ugliness (See Shier 1998; Wenzel 1999; McConnell 2008; Bradfield 2019).
3. *Piss Christ* raises several questions that extend beyond such analysis. One regards whether an individual can achieve the aesthetic distance necessary to evaluate the work impartially.
4. This is merely a sketch of reception options; it is not exhaustive.
5. Animals, body products, and food can elicit core disgust, which serves as a form of protection against the threat of contamination or harm (Haidt et al. 1997, 115). The contamination threat would likely not be very strong in the case of *Piss Christ*, since this work does not co-locate audience members in the same room with body products. Andy Warhol's oxidation paintings could serve as a contrast case. Warhol used copper metallic pigment and urine as materials in his "piss paintings" (Christie's Auction House 2008). Dried bodily fluids may not be a powerful disgust elicitor, either.
6. Moral disgust is spurred by the violation of social or moral norms.
7. The American usage of the term, "Culture Wars," dates back to the 1920s. It refers to the social and political conflict over "traditionalist" and "progressive" values. My usage of "Culture Wars" refers specifically to the battle over morality, art, and culture in the 1980s and 1990s in the United States. During that era, debates about American culture played out in terms of proposed restrictions on paintings, photographs, pop music, television shows, and radio programming that were alleged to be lewd, sexually explicit, sacrilegious, or otherwise immoral. Andres Serrano's and Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs were Culture War targets (See Lacayo 2009).
8. Ironically, censoring art in this manner can backfire; the target of silencing often receives more attention in the wake of destructive protests. Such actions may raise questions not only about the incident, but also about the work itself. When publicized by the media, destructive protests can actually stoke curiosity and increase gallery visits. So rather than limiting or eliminating access to the work, such activity may inadvertently increase it.
9. Fuller is often referred to as *Hannibal*'s "showrunner"; he served as creator, developer, writer, and executive producer of the show.
10. Alberto N. García argues that *Hannibal* is permeated by gothic horror and the grotesque. He writes, "The grotesque is not only present in the actual aesthetics of the weekly murders, . . . but also infuses the way the narrative is structured, the dramatic engagement with the characters, the underlying motifs, as well as the acute symbolism *Hannibal* exhibits" (García 2020, 84). I added romance to this description as a nod to Hannibal and Will's relationship. Fans often refer to the pair as "Hannigram" and the "Murder Husbands." As Jacquelin Elliott notes, Fuller combines some characters from Harris' novels, specifically Will Graham and Clarice Starling (Elliott 2018, 250). This compositing has important implications for the intimacy of Hannibal and Will's relationship.
11. Fuller explicitly instructed the show's directors to think of *Hannibal* as a "pretentious art film from the 80s" (See Thurm 2015).
12. This heart serves as a "valentine" from Hannibal to Will.
13. Body products (e.g., blood, urine, feces) often evoke core or contamination disgust, especially if they are not one's own, since these feelings can serve as an evolutionary form of self-protection. Body envelope violation regards the rupture of bodily integrity by some form of breach, puncture, mutilation, or maiming (See Haidt et al. 1997).
14. Fuller has even commented that there is "whimsy and light" in everything (See Hyman 2015).
15. Recall Lippard's description of *Piss Christ* (Freeland 2001).
16. I depart from Kant's view here, but pause to note that he distinguishes between judgments of taste of the beautiful that are subjectively universal and judgments of taste of the agreeable that are merely personal. The latter type expresses the claim that something is "beautiful *for me*." For more on this distinction, see Kant (1987). On my view, both forms of positive aesthetic evaluation can be compatible with disgust.
17. Strohl focuses on hedonic ambivalence with respect to pleasure and pain; I apply this concept to aversive-attractive disgust response.

18. This is how Alana Bloom tracks Hannibal in Europe. His taste for bottles of Bâtard-Montrachet and tartuffi bianchi give him away (Season 3, episode 5). Articles have been devoted to Hannibal's delectable cuisine as well as to his flawless wardrobe (See Jung 2014; Franich 2015).
19. This interpretation raises additional questions: Can an image be both beautiful and disgusting at the same time? Or is toggling a necessary feature of this aesthetic experience? Due to space constraints, I cannot address these admittedly interesting issues here.
20. In this instance, positive aesthetic evaluations could regard beauty, style, taste, culture, charm, etc.

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Section V

Disgust, Laughter, and Pleasure

14 Producing Disgust

Profanation, the Carnivalesque, and Queering as Keys for Understanding the Unsettling Pop Cultural Performance of Die Antwoord

Susanne C. Ylönen

Introduction

What concepts do we have for describing turns towards the ugly, the odd, the irreverent, the disrespectful, and the disgusting? The English language provides terms such as profanation, the carnivalesque, and queering. But what do these terms reveal about the social, political, and psychological significance of pop cultural or artistic performances that make us feel uneasy, annoyed, dirty, even sometimes amused or intellectually stimulated by taking recourse to the disgusting? Performance artists such as South African rap rave trio Die Antwoord, famous for their highly aestheticized, at times politically incorrect music videos, stir up controversy, because they play with race and racist imagery in a parodic manner that some find outright disgusting. But what is the role of disgust in drawing audiences towards such performances?

In this chapter, I focus on the terminology that we use to talk about cultural processes or performances that feed disgust or that portray something that might otherwise be sacred, nice, or conventional in a grotesque or disgusting light. My approach is based on aesthetics and art education and motivated by the question: what attracts audiences in sociomoral violations that draw on the unsavory and the politically incorrect? The terms that we use to describe such acts disclose much about our own positions and values. As language produces reality, the terms that we use to describe our disgust in response to a performance become part of it, by highlighting some aspects while staying silent about others. A look at the terminology of disgust production may thus shed light on the nuances of disgust, the interconnectedness of different emotions, and the normative systems that define the disgusting.

In what follows, I look at three terms that may be used to describe deliberate disgust production: profanation, the carnivalesque, and queering. Profanation is an action or act that desecrates or violates that which is sacred, is obviously related to disgust, since it may also be defined as a sort of defilement (OED 2021c). Swearing, for example, becomes especially profanatory (as in blasphemous or degrading) in a religious or otherwise "high" profile context. The carnivalesque is related to disgust in that it has been described as a folk cultural style of expression, frank and free, "liberating from norms of etiquette and decency" (Bakhtin 1984, 10). In Mikhail Bakhtin's account, the carnivalesque includes parodies, travesties, humiliations and profanations, and revels in reversals of hierarchy – top to bottom and front to rear (1984, 11). Queering is related to disgust via its deviant and mischievous connotations. In its broadest sense, queering may be understood as the disruption or deconstruction of categories,

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binaries, and norms (Lanser 2018, 924). Some theorists speak of "perverse" readings in order to stress the non-normative, deviant nature of their queer approach (Rossi and Sudenkaarne 2021).

To explore the field of the disgusting in these terms involves various assumptions. I depart from the assumption that disgust is induced by norm violations. That is, something deemed morally wrong or otherwise unfitting may be described as disgusting. This is not to say that norm violations are always experienced as disgusting by all. In some, they may evoke laughter or amusement, depending on the situation. Yet many researchers in this field start by defining disgust as a sociomoral reaction that seeks to preserve social order. Rozin and colleagues (2008, 759) argue that disgust is an emotional expression of or reaction to distaste, danger, and inappropriateness or a sense of offensiveness. In a moral sense it encompasses issues such as betrayal, hypocrisy, and racism (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008, 762). Jones and Fitness (2008) attest that reading about criminals such as con men and fraudsters produces signs of disgust in individuals. Russell and Giner-Sorolla (2011) add to this the claim that disgust responds to bodily norm violations and abnormality, which distinguishes it from anger as a response to harm and intentionality. Whereas anger is a reaction to violations of autonomy such as unfair, harmful behavior, sociomoral disgust may be directed at something that is merely unfitting or "does not fit in with society" (Russell and Giner-Sorolla 2011, 4).

A further assumption that underlines my inquiry is that disgust is not only an involuntary reaction, but also something that may be deliberately produced and sought out. As an aesthetic choice it brushes shoulders with the irreverent, the laughable, the grotesque, and the weird. To disgust is thus to challenge, to entertain, to seek out a strong reaction. There is no shortage of words to describe the antithesis of beauty and sublimity. Yet our vocabulary for the processes and entanglements of disgust-related production and consumption seems incomplete, as some of the more recent attempts at coining new terms such as "stuplimity" (Ngai 2005) or the "sublate" (Korsmeyer 2011) attest. To make something seem inappropriate or offensive is to defile or to corrupt, to make disgusting. Yet offensiveness is always a matter of perspective, interpretation, and context. While defilement and incorrectness may be experienced as funny, they may also be experienced as hurtful. Parodic performances are interpreted differently depending on recipients' positioning as targets or as audiences (Kleinhans 1994, 198–199).

In the sections that follow, I describe how profanation, carnivalesque parodying, and queering have been used in theoretical fields ranging from philosophy to literature, performance and gender studies, or queer theory. After this, I apply these three terms to a case: the disgust-inviting performances of the South African rap rave group Die Antwoord. My aim is to understand the push and pull reactions that the band exerts on its audiences in terms of disgust. I seek to complement readings of the band in music studies, critical race studies, and performance studies by focusing on the terminology used to describe the band's output. To me, it seems obvious that the band uses profanation, the carnivalesque, and a sort of queering in their output to evoke strong responses in their audiences. But how are these descriptive concepts and approaches related to them used by academics studying the band?

Profanation, the Carnivalesque, Queering

Profanation is a concept related to ideas of sacredness and degradation. It may refer to the degradation of anything considered worthy of reverence or respect; a cheapening or vulgarization of something (OED 2021b). It is a good starting point for explorations

of the processes of inducing disgust, because it describes acts in which sacred or quasi-sacred objects or ideas are presented in a seemingly inappropriate context, or manipulated inappropriately by an inappropriate or unqualified person, to yield an unusual interpretation instead of a prescribed one (Bouissac 1997, 196). Paul Bouissac, who examines the concept of profanation in the context of circus clown performances, claims that profanation is essentially the exposure or explication of some fundamental social rules.[1] From a performance studies perspective, Bouissac argues that:

> Profanation is not so much the breaking of a rule made explicit in a legal code as the exposure of the rule of the rules, the principle of principles that are so fundamental for the holding together of the regulative system that they cannot be formulated.
>
> (1997, 197)

The sacred, in this secular context, consists of the culturally tacit axioms and silent dogmas that form the basis of cultural conventions. According to Bouissac, these cultural axioms are "undemonstrable, unjustifiable and ultimately impotent," but nevertheless powerful. What distinguishes profanation from simple rule breaking, is thus the nature of the rule that is broken. Profanation is the breaking of an unformulated, rather vague but still powerful rule or cultural axiom. To apply the term profanation in everyday, secular contexts, one would thus have to assign at least a quasi-sacredness to some ideas, things, or practices. Bouissac assigns such a status to conventions related to birth, marriage, and death as he analyzes how circus clowns perform ritualistic profanations of these key life events – usually through selective transgressions and profanatory subversions that perform the unspeakable and unthinkable (1997, 194–207).

In secular contexts, profanation may be used as a term to expose the range of prohibitions concerning anything inappropriate. Moreover, the term may reveal how sacred, untouchable things can be used in a playful way. Giorgio Agamben shows this in his essay "In praise of profanation" where he discusses profanation in relation to play, religion, and capitalism (with brief examples from defecation and porn). First, Agamben defines profanation as the opposite of consecration, which is the "removal of things from the sphere of human law" (Agamben 2007, 73). He thus defines profanation as returning things that once were sacred to the free use of men. In religious contexts, profanation may occur through contact (touch), or "a special form of negligence" that ignores the separation of the sacred and the profane. As such, it may be characterized as a free and distracted approach to things and their use. Yet profanation is not simply secularization. Like play, it has a ritualistic function that is central to human behavior. Children make playthings out of anything, thereby (carelessly) profaning things that may belong to "serious" spheres of economics, war, or law. (Agamben 2007, 73–77.) Capitalism does not provide room for profanation, because its central item, the commodity, transforms use-value and exchange-value into "an ungraspable fetish" that cannot be appropriated (Agamben 2007, 81).

The Carnivalesque

Despite its playful aspects, profanation may seem somewhat stern. This is what distinguishes it from the carnivalesque, a characteristic or style of the carnival season, a time of "revelry and riotous amusement" (OED 2021a). The carnivalesque may be described as a dynamic, playful, and gay approach to things (Bakhtin 1984, 11), a

joyous upside-down turning of existing social hierarchies. Mikhail Bakhtin relates it to marketplace style expressions and the festive, ambivalent laughter of the carnival season, and describes it as universal, deriding, triumphant, and vulgar (11–12). His account of grotesque realism is related to disgust in that its laughter-evoking grotesqueries may be considered norm violations, departing from the neat and the tidy into areas of hyperbolism and excessiveness (303).

Bakhtin's account of carnivalesque folk humor focuses on highlighting the positive, renewing, and reviving aspects of grotesque realism. Critics of this "self-consciously utopian" (Stallybrass and White 1986, 9) account have focused on the temporary character of the carnival, arguing that it is merely a means to maintain the status quo by offering short-term respite to the downtrodden and controlled strands of society: the urban poor, the marginalized, and the subcultural. This criticism highlights the fact that the carnivalesque is ambivalently dependent on authorized culture and dichotomies such as official – popular, or classical – grotesque (16). Some things that are normally considered inappropriate, disgusting, and indecent (bowels, genitalia, mouth, anus, eating, drinking, defecation – see Bakhtin 1984, 317) are celebrated, but only for a limited time, forming an exception that confirms the rule to uphold existing customs and power hierarchies. A further critique notes that carnivalesque laughter may also abuse and attack weaker social groups such as women, ethnic and religious minorities. As such it is uncritically populist, complicit in upholding the status quo. As Stallybrass and White put it:

> The grotesque physical body is invoked both defensively and offensively because it is not simply a powerful image but fundamentally constitutive of the categorical sets through which we live and make sense of the world.
>
> (1986, 23)

Yet the carnival spirit has been acknowledged as a vehicle for social protest, a "mobile set of symbolic practices . . . employed throughout social revolts" (Stallybrass and White 1986, 15) and in the decades following Bakhtin's investigation of popular humor and folk culture in Rabelais' work, it has become "an indispensable instrument for the analysis not only of literary and filmic texts but also of cultural politics" (11, quoting Stamm 1982, 47). One merit of the carnivalesque is the demystifying potential of its laughter-evoking grotesqueries and hierarchy reversals. Even in its temporality, the carnival exposes the fictive foundations of social formation. Its focus on materiality may be invoked to degrade all that is spiritual and abstract. Understood in this way, "the cheerful vulgarity of the powerless" may be seen as a weapon to be used "against the pretense and hypocrisy of the powerful" (Stallybrass and White 1986, 18; quoting Stamm 1982, 47). In the carnivalesque, ecstatic collectivity thus meets the demystification of class hierarchy, political manipulation, sexual repression, dogmatism, and paranoia, resulting in a sort of creative disrespect.

Queering

The connection between queering and disgust may seem less obvious than in the case of profanation and the carnivalesque. In the field of queer theory and gender studies the term has mostly been used to describe disruptive readings related to sex, gender, and sexuality. It can, however, also describe the troubling or deconstruction of

categories, binaries and norms in general (Lanser 2018, 924). Since norms are often guarded by disgust and anger (Heerdink et al. 2019), queering may induce such reactions. It may even seek them out. After all, what disgusts us has the capacity to draw us in and enhance our concentration, turning aversion into fascination (Korsmeyer 2011, 113–119).

The historical meanings of "queer" relate it to the strange, odd, peculiar and eccentric as well as the confounding or puzzling (OED 2021c). In its early uses, "queer" denoted "an array of meanings associated with the deviation from normalcy" including "of obscure origin" and "the state of feeling ill or bad . . . obscure, perverse, eccentric." As a verb form, "to queer" also incorporated meanings such as to quiz, to puzzle, to ridicule and to cheat. (Butler 2011, 130). The originally pejorative term was positively reclaimed in the late twentieth century when queer theorists and activists started to apply it to describe the disruptive, intersectional readings, performances and sensibilities of their field (Walters 1996, 833, 381). As V. Spike Peterson (2014, 604) puts it:

> A key insight of queer analytics is that codes and practices of 'normalcy' simultaneously constitute 'deviancy,' exclusion, and 'otherings' as sites of social violence. To reveal how power operates in normative codes and normalizing practices, queer theory aims to 'make strange' – disrupt, destabilize, deconstruct, effectively *to queer* – what is considered normal, commonplace, taken-for-granted, or the 'natural order of things.'

Queering as the troubling of normative structures and the highlighting of power relations is thus often politically motivated. In Judith Butler's words: "As a term for betraying what ought to remain concealed, 'queering' works as the exposure within language – an exposure that disrupts the repressive surface of language – of both sexuality and race" (1993, 130).

Sara Ahmed's account of the performativity of disgust exemplifies the power of queer readings quite well. By tracing how expressions of disgust shape their objects, Ahmed troubles normative notions of disgust as an emotional response to something that may be contagious. Her analysis highlights the political motives and networks of power behind acts of disgust-making. According to Ahmed, disgust implies something that offends taste. What is bad or disgusting is also often seen as strange and other (Ahmed 2014, 82–83). Performativity, in this context, implies that disgust is not just felt, but also discursively produced by labeling something as offensive. Although disgust is always directed at an object, it does not merely arise from that object, but may be projected upon it. Hence, a speech act that designates something as disgusting by exclaiming that it is so, works as a form of vomiting. It expels an idea formed in the mind of the perceiver and then cast on the object as if it was an essential feature of that object (Ahmed 2014, 92–95). This performative stickiness may be used to explain how even experiences like grief may be turned into exclamations of disgust. Following the events of 11 September 2001, shock was transferred onto the bodies of the attackers by means of wordings that cast the terrorists as twisted, depraved, subhuman vermin. Through sticky associations, this transference molded a view that conflated the "disgusting" terrorists with the Middle East and Muslims in general (Ahmed 2014, 96–100).

In the next section, I apply these concepts of profanation, the carnivalesque, and queering to a case that seems to invite "troubled" approaches: the irritating,

exuberant, and norm-violating performances of the South African rap rave trio Die Antwoord. The band, which rocketed to fame in 2010 when their music video *Enter the Ninja* went viral, has produced many carefully crafted music videos. With the rest of their musical output and their live performances, these provide a dense patchwork of intricate, intriguing texts that defy easy readings. Moving forward, I describe parts of Die Antwoord's output and the scholarly writing that has followed it in light of the three terms.

Die Antwoord's Performances as Profanation, Carnivalization, and Queering

Die Antwoord make what they've described as "car crash music," music that makes people stop and look (Scott 2012, 757). They rely on a combination of rap and rave, the cute and the cool, the seductive and the weird or frightening, and the performative and the parodic, all of which results in a performance that exerts a curious push and pull reaction on their audiences. As a Reddit.com user (2017) put it:

> Die Antwoord is like the smell of gasoline. Objectively I don't think it's good, and it probably isn't too healthy for me, but it's got a strangely euphoric quality that just can't be ignored.

Like the smell of gasoline, Die Antwoord may be conceived as rather nasty. This is not only due to their music, which is shrill in a rave style, condescending and dissing in the beefing tradition of rap, and irritatingly childish in its recourse to "nyah-nyah" tunes. Much of the controversy revolves around the parodic performances of race and class within their visual output. Challenging political correctness, the band takes up their own South African whiteness and their proclaimed low-class status in a manner that can easily be interpreted as humorous or exaggerated (Krueger 2012). This has divided audiences, with some viewing their act as more or less insightful conceptual art or (meta)parody (Bekker and Levon 2020; du Preez 2011; Van der Watt 2012; Milton and Marx 2014, 24–25) and others claiming that it is nothing more than "deodorized dog shit" or impoverished "ersatz entertainment" (Haupt 2013; Kitchiner 2013, 79; O'Toole 2012, 398). Besides charges of cultural appropriation, homophobia, misogyny, and blackface (Kitchiner 2013; Haupt 2012, 2013; Obbard and Cork 2016, 423–426; Schmidt 2014), the band has gained success and intensely committed fans (Noakes 2014; Murray 2014, 2016; Parry 2015; Ryder 2015). Aesthetics wise, they claim to have taken the white trash aesthetic called "zef," which denotes bad or undeveloped kitsch-like taste, "like wearing high heels with a tracksuit" (Krueger 2012, 402; du Preez 2011, 106; Van der Watt 2012, 411; Marx and Milton 2011, 735), to the next level as a sort of cool, weird whiteness (O'Toole 2012, 397).

Previous research has focused on Die Antwoord's act as either a racial project or as an artistic performance that raises issues of authenticity. Questions like "are they blackface/racist?" (Haupt 2012, 2013; Schmidt 2014) mingle with questions like "are they real?" (Van der Watt 2012; Parry 2015; Smit 2015) as scholars seek to understand the act in the contexts of both post-apartheid South Africa and contemporary art and performance studies. Some researchers have concentrated on the racialized gender performance of Ninja (Watkin Tudor Jones), the band's front man (Falkof 2012; Rossouw 2015). The trio's other rapper Yolandi Vi$$er (Anri du Toit) and the

third member, DJ Hi-Tek (Justin De Nobrega), also known as the producer GOD, have been discussed somewhat less intensively in academic treatises.

Dirtiness, trashiness, non-normative corporealities, violent imagery, and inappropriate sexuality are only one part of the band's controversial aesthetic. The most forceful disgust reactions to their output are related to their humorous style and performances of race (blackface, exaggerated whiteness). My perspective on their violations of good taste is white, privileged, and Nordic. I am intrigued by disgust as an artistic means and hence generally tolerant in what comes to performances of this kind. Yet I find that my fascination with Die Antwoord's output is accompanied by some shame. I feel that my interest in them taints me a bit like admitting the use of porn publicly might. Hence my aim here is not to propose a simply appreciative reading. Rather, I want to demonstrate how using the terms profanation, the carnivalesque and queering may tease out different interpretations of the band's unsettling performances.

Profaning, Carnivalizing, and Queering Race in the South African Context

Reading Die Antwoord's performances as profanation, carnivalization, and queering provides various lenses through which to make sense of their irritating ambivalence. Take the much-quoted lines that Ninja delivers in the beginning of the band's first hit *Enter the Ninja* (2010) "I represent South African culture. In this place you get a lot of different things, Blacks, Whites, Coloureds, English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, watookal. I'm like all these different things, all these different people, fucked into one person."[2] The imagery that accompanies these lines shows Ninja in a basement-like space, its dirty walls bathed in dark shadows. The camera zooms in on his naked upper body and the prison tattoos that adorn his white, dirty skin; the soundscape is eerie, menacing. During the speech, the face of South African DJ Leon Botha, marked by progeria, emerges from the shadowy backgrounds and fades away again. The beginning is dark, menacing, and mysterious, evoking themes such as cultural plurality and marginalization in the South African context. After this dark and mysterious beginning, the electronic dance beat that starts blaring, accompanied by high-pitched singing of an almost albino-like super blonde Yolandi, is surprising in its kitschy exuberance and Ninja's performance at once turns zany, that is, amusingly unconventional and comic, marked by "a desperate quality" (Ngai 2012, 185). The wannabe character that Ninja adopts in the rest of the song even comes across as cute. As Sianne Ngai puts it:

> Far from being 'divinely untroubled,' zaniness projects the 'personality pattern' of the subject wanting too much and trying too hard: the unhappily striving wannabe, poser, or arriviste. The utter antithesis of ironic cool, the perspiring, overheated zany is a social loser.
>
> (2012, 189)

The theme of social lowness/loserdom is especially visible in the white trash aesthetic that the band members adopt. Despite their middle-class, educated background and by now well-off status as world-renowned musicians, Ninja and Yolandi sport a poor white, trashy identity at the core of their zef style. According to Roberto Filipello (2021), "white trash" is a working-class aesthetic, whiteness in its racialized,

non-appreciated form, that has been used in fashion photography since the 1990s to mock and trouble beauty ideals enforced by the fashion industry. In Filipello's account, the profanatory aspects of white trash performances expose the desire within the social imperative to reject or debase the "low." This exposing takes place through the rejection of middle-class good taste – especially moral norms related to sexuality (2021, 2). At the core of the profanity of the white trash aesthetic sweat, tan, and porn references meld in a monstrous whiteness (10). This excessive whiteness and the monstrosity that accompanies it is highlighted by Die Antwoord's self-titled enfreakment, exemplified by their bleached-white, tacky appearances in the music video *Baby's On Fire* (2012), or their freak parade in the music video *I Fink you Freeky* (2012). This is in line with the band's proclaimed appreciation of the art of the marginalized. Front man Ninja has stated that he is "only interested in the art that children make, that retarded people make and that criminals make" (du Preez 2011, 114).

In terms of profanation, the question about Die Antwoord's act becomes: what are the sacred or quasi-sacred cultural axioms, rules, or conventions they are seen as breaking? Charges of cultural appropriation and racism are a good starting point for answering this question. Lanisa Kitchiner (2013) argues that Die Antwoord engages in "strategic acts of erasure" that reduce gangsta rap and African American culture to negative stereotypes. In her view, Die Antwoord's performative "thug minstrelsy" in the music video *Fok Julle Naaiers* (2012) erases and essentializes Black identity by appropriating the most unsavory and nihilistic elements of hip hop culture in the name of material gain. Adam Haupt (2012, 2013), who analyzes the music video *Fatty Boom Boom* (2012), further claims that Die Antwoord's parody of Lady Gaga is misogynistic and that Yolandi's blackface performance (complete with a pickaninny attire) is racist in nature. According to Haupt, the band uses their privileged access to media and technology to propagate conservative race and gender politics.

In profanatory terms, the cultural axiom that Die Antwoord are breaking in these accounts could be the rule that "you cannot make free use of race." By trying to pass as non-white or as racialized hyper-whites in their visual performances and music, the band highlights their own racial position. The inappropriateness of their performance stems from the context (South Africa, with its notorious history of racial segregation) and their own position as white, thus privileged, South Africans. Critiques such as Kitchiner's and Haupt's are not simply directed at the band's aspiration to transgress race as a fixed and essentializing category. Rather, the critique highlights the position of privilege from which they produce their humorous, exaggerated performances of race. For any socio-culturally sensitive twenty-first-century liberal, a fundamental social rule is that race is a troubling notion that must be handled with care and sensitivity because of all the inequality, misery, and violence caused by racial segregation. Die Antwoord's rude parodic style may be seen as exhibiting blatant disregard for this rule. Following Agamben's ideas on profanation, it can be regarded as a "special form of negligence" (2007, 75) that seems to ignore any need for seriousness. Scholars studying Die Antwoord speak of "tactical ignorance" (Parry 2015, 114), and the "almost too casual dismissal of a long history of repression and segregation" (Van der Watt 2012, 415). The most forcefully profanatory aspects of Die Antwoord's performance are thus directed at white, "woke" audiences, who may find their "whatever" attitude towards race both insulting and appealing because of the shame and guilt that they feel for being part of an unjust, racially segregating system. The band's performances may, of course, also be enjoyed and critiqued from a racist or racialized

perspective, but for these viewers, the profanatory edge might lie elsewhere or remain irrelevant/non-existent.

In what comes to the carnivalesque, the most carnivalesque aspect of Die Antwoord's performances is probably the celebratory party spirit. As blaring techno beats and tribal drums meet frenzied dancing, what objectively speaking might be considered bad may become intoxicating and euphoric. The carnivalesque affects that the band has on its audiences have even been identified as their "post-hegemonic potential" (du Preez 2011, 114). Amanda du Preez, for example, notes that "hardly any boundaries remain intact and unproblematized by Die Antwoord's zef performativity." Their exaggeration and hyperbole; the grotesqueries they revel in; the non-normative corporealities; the figure of the monster, freak and, alien; the obsessive occupation with orifices, excretions, and bodily processes all create a sort of carnival revival (du Preez 2011, 107).

Vulgarity, hyperbole, and irreverence do indeed abound in Die Antwoord's output. Their whole zef style rests on an ambivalent celebration of the degraded and the material, a sort of violent and vulgar agency assigned to the lower strands of society that they claim to be part of. Many of their videos also recall the duality of birth and death via references to childhood and violence. Their short video *Umshini Wam* (2011, directed by Harmony Korine), for example, shows Ninja and Yolandi as onesie-wearing, jobless "fuckups" rolling around in wheelchairs on the streets of a deserted South African suburb, shooting shopkeepers to "pimp their rides." In this video, the endless summer days of innocent bourgeois childhoods are contrasted with lullabies corrupted by violent lyrics such as "I'm old enough to bleed/I'm old enough to breed/I'm old enough to break a brick in your teeth while you sleep." In this weird video, even the murders that the pair commit become part of a childlike, playful existence. But can this be read as a social protest? Does it expose the "fictive foundations" of social formation? Does it degrade the spiritual and abstract? Demystify class hierarchy? Or is it a mere "time out," that ends up upholding existing customs and power hierarchies via temporal role reversals? Furthermore, what roles or hierarchies are reversed here?

Die Antwoord's carnivalesque features have led many critics to regard their act as mere superficial spectacle or a "comedy of degradation" (Krueger 2012) that parodies and thus perpetuates class and race stereotypes (Milton and Marx 2014, 35). In this vein, the band has been accused of "calculated and empty commercialism" (O'Toole 2012; Van der Watt 2012, 414) and "flamboyant display without any fixed enemy or goal" (Krueger 2012, 407). Amanda du Preez's reading, too, ends up viewing Die Antwoord's carnivalesque affects as privatized hedonism that lacks the societal resistance of medieval carnivals (du Preez 2011, 111–112). Yet, later analyses also discuss Die Antwoord's performances as Baudrillardian simulation, capable of destabilizing myths of authenticity (Smit 2015). Some academic readings even stress the consumer's own culpability in producing/interpreting their acts (Schmidt 2014). Commenting on Adam Haupt's criticism of Die Antwoord's performances as blackface minstrelsy, Bryan Schmidt (2014, 146), for example, retorts that rules such as "blackface is never OK" ignore the "texture of what blackface produces in terms of race, gender, class, and sexuality" thereby offering an easy, non-reflexive assessment of such cultural performances.

Readings such as Schmidt's stem from performance studies, and they lead us to questions of queering. Concepts such as meta-parody (Bekker and Levon 2020) or

"fictional realness" (Parry 2015) are used in some of the later readings to trouble interpretations that see Die Antwoord's act as simply parodic or deceitful. Ian Bekker and Erez Levon (2020, 122), for example, show that Die Antwoord's performances may be read as "[t]he act of deauthenticating one's own parodic practice," since one cannot always be sure what they are mocking. Are they parodying rap scene coolness, or the idea that white trash cannot be cool? Are they laughing at the non-normative subjects and tacky style that they evoke, or their own attempt at trying to pass as cool, weird, white rappers? According to Owen Parry (2015, 113) Ninja and Yolandi are not only imitating the zef style but actively inhabiting its forms and textures, which elicits a series of ethical questions about their integrity or realness. The fact that they do not answer these questions, or their tactical ignorance on them, only fuels the radical potential of their performance as a sort of trauma work (Parry 2015; Truscott 2016). In Parry's words:

> By staging multiple references, from South Africa's grim political struggles and intermeshing them with references of thugs, football hooligans, blackface, whiteface, and Gaga, they draw on the energies of violent histories and practices, putting them to work differently, incorporating them but "subverting them from within" to produce strange, celebratory fictions.
>
> (2015, 114)

This liminal positioning between imitation and inhabitation, and the involvement of audiences, may be interpreted as a sort of queering. Ninja and Yolandi are trying to "pass" as disadvantaged, racialized whites, but they do it so flamboyantly as to highlight the staged nature of their act. In terms of gender, this attempt at passing extends to Ninja's aspirations of hip hop coolness, troubled or made ambivalent via his at times deliberately awkward or failed hypermasculinity (Falkof 2012; Rossouw 2015). Researchers have spent less time on Yolandi's childlike yet highly sexualized and horror-tinged appearance – possibly because violence-imbued renditions of cuteness are already quite mainstream due to the global influence of the Japanese kawaii aesthetic (Yano 2013, 1–41, 49–53). Yet, in terms of a Western notion of cuteness as a sort of childlike innocence, Yolandi's cuteness may still be considered a tool for subversion in scenes like the one where she throws a brick in Ninja's face (*Baby's On Fire* 2012), or in the multiple cases in which her feminine appearance is made frightening, grotesque, or perverse with all-black contact lenses (e.g. *I Fink U Freeky* 2012), face paint (*Fatty Boom Boom* 2012), or references to pedophilia (*Cookie Thumper* 2013). Instead of occupying only the role of objectified cheerleader (*Enter the Ninja* 2010), Yolandi also adopts the roles of a freaky enfant terrible (*Cookie Thumper* 2013) and pickaninny (*Fatty Boom Boom* 2012) highlighting the fact that cuteness has traditionally been a white, bourgeois aesthetic associated with childlike innocence (Bernstein 2011). As such, she turns the assumed powerlessness and passivity of cuteness and femininity into a rebellious, loud existence that both seduces and attacks.

Read as a sort of queering, Die Antwoord's act hence becomes a project of questioning the intersections of race, class, and gender. In some instances their approach is even presented as perverse. In his psychoanalytically oriented paper "Post-apartheid rhythm: Beyond apartheid beatings" Ross Truscott (2016) reads Die Antwoord's performance of obscene South Africanness as a masochistic – thus perverse – beating fantasy, relating it to an unconscious desire to be punished. To Truscott, overidentification

with racial and gendered stereotypes and repetitions of apartheid-derived violence dramatize, in a musical, rhythmic form, a contradiction "at the heart of the post-apartheid social contract." This contradiction, stated in the preamble of the South African constitution, is to both recognize and disavow past injustices, simultaneously carrying them and not conceding too much complicity.

Conclusions

To return to the questions posed at the very beginning of this chapter, one could claim that all the three terms discussed here may be used to describe processes in which a society's norms and power relations are attacked, highlighted, and/or questioned. Yet they emphasize different aspects of this process as the case of Die Antwoord attests. Using the term profanation may reveal something about what a critic holds sacred in terms of cultural rules and norms. Read as profanation Die Antwoord's transgressions shift attention to the social rule that race is a troubling notion heavy with the weight of past and present injustices. From a liberal, socioculturally alert perspective, the band may be seen as inappropriately manipulating their own racial position, falsely denying their privilege (see disgust reactions to fraudsters) and violating the anti-racist cultural convention. Exposing any discontent of white South Africans may be regarded as an almost taboo act as past injustices of the white supremacist apartheid regime still haunt the social structure of South Africa. Hence, Die Antwoord may be seen as using imagery and claims related to race inappropriately, profaning ideals that the community around them holds dear or sacred.

Reading Die Antwoord as carnivalesque parody, in turn, discloses a gravitation towards attributions of empty, commercialist spectacle, even if the social, celebratory character of their performances is noted. Since the carnivalesque is ambivalent, simultaneously overturning and upholding existing societal hierarchies, studies that center the carnivalesque are almost sure to stress the conservative underpinnings and fleeting nature of the transgressions. This makes carnivalesque transgression seem politically toothless. "Queer" readings that emphasize the performative, the meta-parodic, and ultimately political character of the act (Parry 2015; Smit 2015; Schmidt 2014; Truscott 2016) challenge such accusations of mere frivolity. They highlight the staged aspects of the band's performances and draw parallels to ballroom cultures (Schmidt 2014; Parry 2015). They also direct attention to the intersectional nature of the band's transgressions. In these readings, zany aspirations to hip hop coolness become signs of troubled white, poor hypermasculinity and grotesque cuteness questions associations that link childlike femininity with innocence, passivity, and whiteness. Notions of perversity, or masochism, further link the act to psychologically meaningful processes of atonement.

These three concepts thus differ in how they shift attention from the religious to the social and the political. Profanation, the carnivalesque, and queering all interweave in their attention to the inappropriate or disgusting, but they provide a different framing. Profanation evokes breaches of sacred or taboo issues; the carnivalesque highlights the communal and celebratory; and queering likely shifts attention to intersections of gender, race, and class.

All these terms may be understood as positive, when used as tools of inquiry. Yet the force of all profanatory, carnivalesque and queer performances rests on the fact that they may be understood as disrespectful, violating, and even disgusting. In light

of claims made about moral disgust in psychological research, disruptive acts such as Die Antwoord's may be met with aversion, contempt, and anger, because they contort the social roles, norms, and codes of ethics (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008, 763, Rozin et al. 1999) that structure our cultural landscape. Die Antwoord specifically has been criticized for being fraudulent, misogynistic, homophobic, and racist.[3] The analysis presented here shows that these accusations and the feelings that they mirror are a prerequisite for any attempt to understand the ambivalent aversion and attraction of the performance. The disgust reactions and puzzlement that the band has been met with are hence an essential part of their act. Whether the act is interpreted as upholding or subverting reprehensible practices ultimately rests on the perspective adopted by the viewer. The terminology used to describe and make sense of the grotesqueries that the band produces is part of constructing that perspective.[4]

Notes

1. This resonates with Mary Douglas' ideas on dirt as matter out of place. In Douglas' account, ideas of dirt are always connected to systems of thought as dirt "is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification" (Douglas 2002, 36–41, quote on p. 36).
2. Watookal is Afrikaans for "whatever".
3. See Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley's (2008, 762) account of betrayal, hypocrisy, and racism as elicitors of moral disgust.
4. I would like to thank the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the University of Jyväskylä and the Witwatersrand University as well as all the colleagues who offered comments on the manuscript for their support.

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15 Mortal Bodies, Disgust, and Affective Incongruity in Stand-Up Comedy

Outi Hakola

In her Netflix comedy special, 78-year-old Joan Rivers (2012) first invited the audience to laugh at her aging body, and then she urged them to work out and to look good. Heavily ironic, her encouragement addresses cultural practices whereby fit, young, and beautiful bodies signify "healthism," meaning that health represents success, happiness, morality, and good citizenship (Crawford 1980; Tolvhed and Hakola 2018). In public discussion, on the other hand, aging, dying, and death are associated with failure and bad taste, visible in phrases such as "losing the battle" with terminal illness. Hence, their public representation may cause unease, even disgust. My aim in this paper is to discuss the functions of disgust in stand-up comedy on the subject of aging and death.

Disgust is defined in scholarly discussion as a violent affect that is experienced, felt, and embodied by the person who is disgusted. It is also an evaluative act, whereby old and decaying bodies become associated with filth and failure, for example (Ahmed 2014, 82–85; Miller 2009, viii). Disgust, as Korsmeyer (2011, 179) writes, "recognizes – intimately and personally – that it is our mortal nature to die and to rot." When mortality is associated with disgust it becomes worthy of rejection, a process on which Kristeva's concept of the abject may shed light. The abject connotes something (e.g., vomit) that has been part of a human being, but that after separation from the subject creates a threat to the identity and a source of chaos, contamination, and fragility, and it needs to be cut loose. Whereas the abject is the source of affective experience, abjection is the process of rejection (Kristeva 1982). Abjection has acquired historical, social, and political functions in addition to its psychological function, frequently being associated with stigmatization and even dehumanization such as when the exclusion of some groups of people is (morally) justified by representing them as disgusting. During these processes, disgust often becomes tangled with various emotions and affects, such as fear, hatred, or shame (Tyler 2013, 19–24). In the case of aging and dying, there is a complex intertwining of psychological and sociocultural aspects as people are loath to accept something they are unable to avoid in themselves. Here, the fear of mortality prompts disgust, which in turn may cause shame, and this combination – disgust, fear, and shame – is visible in stand-up comedy about aging and death.

In the context of aging and death, both disgust and abjection stem from unwelcome reminders of mortality that appear to threaten the order of society (Douglas 1996). As such, disgust as an evaluative act can have a moralizing effect, used to maintain social order by producing social stigma and condemnation (Miller 2009, 238–251). Moralizing hierarchies build on the "stickiness" of affects, whereby certain objects, issues,

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or groups of people become vulnerable to being labeled disgusting through long histories of being treated as such (Ahmed 2014, 90). Although aging and dying are unavoidable parts of humanity, in Western cultural and philosophical history bodily transformations towards death have been framed as disgusting (Menninghaus 2003, 58–60). Thus, regardless of the normalcy of these processes, aging bodies are stuck with at least a partially socially constructed sense of disgust.

Sociocultural aspects of disgust can be explored in the context of stand-up comedy, as comedians often build their performances on observant insights, flirt with inappropriate themes, and push the limits of the normal and the abnormal. Jokes related to aging and death are accepted as "dark comedy," which finds humor in the grotesque, the macabre and the tragic, and plays with affects such as disgust and pain (Hye-Knudsen 2018; Shouse and Oppliger 2020). Disgust and laughter have long been combined. Referring to medieval parodies, Bakhtin (1984, 25–27) argues that bodies that are close to birth or to dying are grotesque, and as such evoke laughter and ridicule. Bodily comedy purports to control and ease tension related to the threat of mortality by making fun of, shaming, and ridiculing the vulnerability of the human body (Billig 2005, 235; Korsmeyer 2011, 97; Shakespeare 1999). Thus, both laughter and disgust participate in body politics in maintaining a social order that portrays old bodies as disgusting, and young and healthy bodies (that are repeatedly celebrated in athletic and beauty contests, for example) as the baseline ideal of the human body.

A distinction should nevertheless be made between laughing *at* someone because of their physical limitations and laughing *with* them (Collings 2018; Shakespeare 1999; Sundén and Paasonen 2019). Whereas laughing at someone may reproduce disgust in the context of mortality, I argue that laughing with someone at the assumed disgustingness of mortality could ease the social stigma related to aging and death. Stand-up comedy is a performative communication mode, and according to Korsmeyer (2011) performative modes have the potential to force people into paying attention to the structures of disgust, and consequently to change social norms. Thus, when comedians joke about aging or death, they offer a space in which to make fun of social norms of disgust related to mortality.

My particular interest lies in what happens to disgust in the self-reflective performances of stand-up comedians. I have analyzed seven recorded Anglo-American stand-up comedy specials, performances featuring one headline comedian. Four of these specials include jokes about self-disgust and aging: Joan Rivers continues her trademark joking about her aging body in what was her last comedy special *Don't Start with Me* (2012); Wanda Sykes ends her *Not Normal* (2019) on a personal note about the physical impacts of aging; Ross Bennett discusses aging in his comedy show *Comedy! . . . for the Rest of Us* (2019); and Ricky Gervais's *Humanity* (2018) concerns life-cycle events, including his aging body, death, and funerals. The other three chosen specials continue with death-related jokes: Norm MacDonald discusses the fear of death and cancer in *Me Doing Stand-Up* (2011); Dan Soder includes "dead-dad jokes" in his first special, *Son of a Gary* (2019); and Patton Oswalt talks about his wife's death in *Annihilation* (2017). In all these specials, aging and/or death fuel stories of personal and affective experiences that function, in one way or another, in the context of disgust. I approach the relationship between disgust and comedy in these shows through affective incongruity, the aim of which is to reveal contradictions or absurdities in the social construction of affects.

Affective Incongruity and the Out-of-Placeness of Dark Humor

Ross Bennett starts one of his death jokes with reference to the discomfort and disgust that joking about death can evoke in the audience. He leads into the topic by explaining that odd twists give new life to old-fashioned jokes:

> Now, a set-up is a piece of information that travels along in a linear fashion until there is a twist on the end, an incongruity. We call that the punchline. I will give you a good example. I have been married twice. I was widowed by my first wife, okay? I was divorced by my second wife. As I sometimes say, my first wife died, and my second wife would not.
>
> (Bennett 2019)

The joke follows the traditional set-up of incongruity humor, pinpointing the perceived contradiction or absurdity between the ideals of the world and its realities (Billig 2005, 83; Brodie 2019, 6; Hye-Knudsen 2018, 14). Incongruity theory, which along with superiority and relief theory constitute the three traditional theoretical approaches to humor, focuses on the rhetorical and cognitive aspects of humor, comedy, and jokes (Billig 2005; Shouse 2007). As shown in the above example, Bennett gives the audience rhetorical permission to laugh by framing the joke as an example of incongruity, and at the end he assures the audience that they do not need to be disgusted by the joke, as it is "just comedy": "It's a comedy show, breathe! The set-up, and then the punchline comes along, bang! Smacks you in the face" (Bennett 2019).

Incongruity humor has been criticized for its use of detachment by providing evaluative distance from the chosen topic to enable laughter to emerge through the "absence of feeling" (Bergson 1956, 63), and for being technical and impersonal (Billig 2005, 68). As such, it is assumed to bypass affective aspects of humor, even when laughter as an embodied reaction ties comedy to affective experiences (Shouse 2007). However, the detachment process is not that different from abjection, whereby offending issues are managed through affective reactions. Abjection is, indeed, strategically used in comedy to reject or distance undesired elements and difficult topics such as aging and death (Limon 2000; Scepanski 2020). Thus, I argue that paying attention to affect and abjection brings to light the role that emotions and embodiments play in creating incongruity, the recognition of out-of-placeness.

Incongruities come into play at the affective level, particularly in dark jokes in which comedians discuss topics that violate social norms. In the above joke, for example, although ill-wishing is socially disapproved of, in the context of divorce it may be understandable, perhaps even identifiable and liberating. The potential for disgust on account of "bad taste" is compensated with amusement, two affects that often function simultaneously (Hemenover and Schimmack 2007). When the perceived contradiction or absurdity takes place at embodied and emotional levels, it creates affective incongruity. Affectivity, along with cognitive evaluation, give complexity to stand-up performances and the audience's comedic experience, particularly in the context of dark comedy and topics such as aging and death.

"Affective incongruity" here refers to three aspects of stand-up comedy. First, it can be constructed at the level of the joke, being related to the violation of affective expectations. Bennett starts the dead-wife joke on a note of sadness and grief. He finishes it with a desire for retaliation, and as such he violates cultural norms about what

emotional registers can be publicly admitted about death and dying. This unexpected turn also requires the audience to register the ambivalence of socially desired and undesired reactions, and amusement arises from this recognition that requires both cognitive and affective understanding of cultural expectations.

Second, affective incongruity is tied to the embodied comedic performance. The set-up of the stand-up stage where the sparse decorations focus attention on the performer already spotlights the comedian as the performance (Brodie 2019). The comedian's bodily, mental, and sociocultural public images become embodied self-representation on the stage, and this "process of individuation" resonates both allegorically and personally with audiences (Lindfors 2019). Bennett, for example, with his grey hair and marvelously wrinkled face, plays with his embodied aging. His loud groans when getting up add spice to his comedic story of an old man's noises. He then assumes a relieved expression, and sighs loudly, "aah," as if he had managed to do something challenging yet rewarding. "Everyone got it? I make noises doing almost nothing" (Bennett 2019). In this joke he is mocking himself for getting old, and as such he plays with the sticky association of disgust with aging. However, his mockery exudes warmth and amusement, which unravel the stickiness of disgust. The joke shows how self-deprecating humor can become a subversive act in which self-recognition may be used to embrace assumed disgusting features and diminish the related shame and embarrassment (Shakespeare 1999). The simultaneous reaffirmation and absurdity of disgust provide affective incongruity for self-reflective performance.

Third, affective incongruity could take place at the level of the audience's embodied reaction. Disgusting jokes or jokes about disgusting topics sometimes cause embodied tension, which laughter, a bodily reaction, may discharge or heighten (Menninghaus 2003, 113). Incongruity tends to come with ambivalence, such that the humorous and the non-humorous in combination push against the boundaries of good taste. The set-up of dark comedy may cause disgust, but because it typically disregards boundaries between the acceptable and the unacceptable, it may also create a sense of excitement among the audience, which appreciates the comedian's rebelliousness or frankness (Collings 2018, 68; Oppliger and Zillman 1997). Thus, the audience's laughter may be a source of ambivalent affective experience.

Affective incongruity has social consequences. Stand-up is an interactive performance in which the audience participates at a certain time and in a certain place (Brodie 2008; Lindfors 2019). This experience-oriented participation is socially shared and has social functions. Other people influence how performed affective incongruities are experienced, and experienced affects, in turn, influence feelings, thinking, and actions (e.g., Clough 2007). If a member of an audience finds the dark stand-up performance funny, and notices that others are allowing themselves to laugh at these jokes as well, the shared affective moments shape the comedic performance and interpretations of it. Consequently, performances may take on personal and socio-cultural functions beyond the comedy stage, and comedy acquires the potential to raise issues that may well be considered disgusting and socially inappropriate. Bennett reclaims this role for comedy when he argues that his bodily topics can help raise awareness. He sees his colonoscopy jokes as a public service: "I figure if I can get everybody laughing about it appropriately when they're in their 20s and 30s and 40s, then maybe when the doctor tells them it's time for the examination, they won't put it off" (Bennett 2019). Hence, humor's affective release can (momentarily) make heaviness lighter or even turn affects into action (Sundén and Paasonen 2019). It therefore follows that humor

can be used to resist disgust or to cope with disgusting topics, not only to mock that which is considered disgusting.

I argue that paying attention to the incongruities that arise through affective expectations, embodiments, and personal as well as socially shared experiences could shed light on the complex functions that disgust plays in stand-up comedy. The contradictory facility of comedy to draw joy from anxiety and disgust, and consequently the transformative and collective potential of dark comedy to ease anxious feelings and troubling issues, are widely recognized (Berlant and Ngai 2017, 233–234; Double 2017; Kapica 2020; Sundén and Paasonen 2019). Comedians often emphasize this aspect. In their comedy specials, for example, Ricky Gervais (2018) and Dan Soder (2019) claim that laughing at life's hardships can help people to deal with such issues. These remarks pinpoint humor as a personal coping mechanism, yet sharing these comedic notions with others could also help to build a social understanding, not only about a particular event, but also about topics such as aging and death in general. In all this, the evaluation of humorous content is not merely a cognitive process, it is a deeply felt and embodied experience – for both the performer and the audience.

Aging Bodies and Strategies of Self-Disgust

Modern stand-up comedy performances gravitate towards self-reflective intimacy, and they embrace dark comedy traditions with emotionally and socially challenging topics such as aging (Double 2017; Shouse and Oppliger 2020, 11–14). Similarly, Wanda Sykes (2019) starts her story on the menopause from a first-person perspective. However, she responds to an intervening audience member who shouts, "Sorry!" by agreeing that the menopause is "the worst." The quick move from personal to interpersonal inclusion exemplifies how stand-up as a form of "intimate talk" reaches beyond the separation between performer and audience (Brodie 2019, 5), and self-deprecating humor together with honest and frank personal experiences, in particular, appear to diminish this distance (Lockyer 2011, 116). Sykes's self-reflection makes her approachable, which in turn allows her to address the sensitive topic of aging. In the above interchange, not only does she create space for sharing, but she also appears to reinforce social assumptions about the undesirability of aging, and the audience's laughter confirms that they have recognized, perhaps even agreed with, this sociocultural norm.

From here on, Sykes jokes about her aging body, which she describes as failing, grotesque, and excessive. She follows the established tradition of using self-deprecating humor, which is common among women comedians and in how they relate to their (aging) bodies (Lockyer 2011; Mizejewski 2014; Mock 2012; Russell 2002). This gendered, aging-related self-disgust reflects Western traditions in which old women and their sexuality, or in Bakhtin's words "old hags," are devalued and ridiculed through disgust (Bakhtin 1984; Lockyer 2011; Menninghaus 2003, 84). Because women's bodies are valued for their reproductive function, through connotations of waste, older bodies are associated with disgust and presumed female shame (Menninghaus 2003, 75–78; Russo 1994, 13, 74). Many women comedians, such as Sykes, take this stickiness of affects connected to their menopausal and aging bodies as a starting point for their comedic performances.

In line with her strategy of self-disgust, Sykes uses both embodiment and abjection to explore her experience of aging. When she talks about her slowing metabolism,

she starts to rub her stomach, thereby forcing the audience to pay attention to her appearance, which is marked by the consequences of aging. Through her appearance, and her gestures, she embodies the topic and turns herself and her body into a performance. Highlighting her undesirability, she refers to her growing belly as Esther, thereby giving it its own agency: she argues that although she tries to make healthy choices, Esther embraces junk food and rebels against moderation and self-restraint. Esther appears empowered and liberated from sociocultural expectations to constrain an aging body, but at the same time, Sykes represents her as a disgust-worthy personal failure. Because Sykes is unable to practice mind over matter, she has become afraid that her stomach fat must also be revolting for her wife, who is 10 years younger than she is, to deal with. The "disgusting belly" joke appears to have a few functions. On the one hand, Esther personifies the abjection of body fat and as such creates a psychological distance that can help the audience to confront challenging topics and to see humor in them (Warren and McGraw 2015). On the other hand, Sykes's affective connection with Esther and the intimacy of the joke may allow the audience to feel empowered by the experience, which in turn may decrease psychological distance (Hye-Knudsen 2018, 28). In other words, Esther simultaneously represents both abjection and endearing acceptance of aging. This contradiction results in affective incongruity whereby disgust and shame compete with affection and self-acceptance.

Furthermore, Sykes's naming of her special *Not Normal* highlights the possibility of contradictory interpretations. Half of her jokes are about absurdities in American political and media culture, and half of them are dedicated to her personal experiences related to race and age. As a black, queer, feminist comedian, she has carved a space for intersectional identities in the heteronormative, white, male traditions of American mainstream stand-up comedy (Wood 2016). Thus, even if she provides the potential to interpret her own aging body as disgusting, at the same time she makes space for these bodies to be accessible to the public. Indeed, laughter has the potential to (re) define the boundaries between "normal" and "not properly" human (Collings 2018, 64–65). The name of Sykes's special *Not Normal* is a double entendre in this context: her black aging lesbian body could be seen as undesired, but the ways in which these bodies are stigmatized as disgusting should not be normal. Thus, although Sykes starts her aging jokes from a position of self-disgust, her performance becomes more complicated when disgust is also framed through other affects: it turns out be a relatable pathway to the subversive visibility of an aging woman.

Comedian Joan Rivers built a significant part of her career on the image of an unashamedly aging woman (Lockyer 2011, 118; Mock 2012; Russell 2002). She often tackled the connection between the invisibility of older women and their inability to reproduce. For example, in her reiterated tampon joke she recalls "accidentally" dropping a tampon from her purse whenever she felt invisible in social situations: suddenly, she becomes interesting again. In this joke, assumed social embarrassment related to menstruation is less than shame of an aging body. Thus, reflecting Sykes's strategy, the assumed disgustingness of the aging body serves as a starting point.

Rivers's (2012) joke about falling vaginas, and how her vagina suddenly became a "bunny slipper," continues this line of thought, and further emphasizes how abject experience is used as part of disgust. Again, the aging organ is set outside the person. Mock (2012, 13, 24) argues that Rivers is exploiting abjection to reaffirm her aging body in a public confession while drawing uncomfortable implications about monstrous nonproductive bodies. A significant part of this reaffirmation process is

her nonapologetic tone. Thus, although disgust is assumed to serve as a keeper of social norms through shame, Rivers' refusal to be ashamed shifts the social use of self-disgust. She even embodies this affective contradiction because her well-groomed appearance makes it obvious that she is performing disgust in a controlled way (e.g., Russell 2002). While aiming for a relatable experience of aging and then refusing to accept a position of shame, she invites the audience to laugh at themselves and at their experiences of aging, but also to laugh at the social uses of disgust that provoke feelings of shame.

The ambivalent invitation to laugh at the aging body is visible in exclamations such as, "I shouldn't laugh," which reflect how audiences often recognize the faltering line between seriousness and non-seriousness, and between the appropriateness and inappropriateness of comic moments (Reilly 2015). Joan Rivers, among other comedians, reminds her audience of this awareness when she intersperses her performances with responses such as "Oh, grow up" or "Too much?" She validates the audience's potential feelings of discomfort, and in turn gives them permission to enjoy the ambivalence of the performance. In this way, she shows her awareness that, due to social norms that render aging female bodies shame-worthy and disgusting, her performance could bar these bodies from and admit them to the public realm at the same time.

Common to both Sykes and Rivers is the use of self-disgust as a strategy to verify, and then deconstruct, social stigma related to aging women. Their bodies become visible on the stand-up-comedy stage, and their experiences are meaningful as feminist performances of the female grotesque that criticize gendered sociocultural practices of restraining and controlling female bodies and endorse liberating excess (such as by empowering bodies that are considered too old, ugly, fat, tall, hairy, or muscular). Embracing the unruliness of the female grotesque could normalize the assumed corporal excess, moving away from the sticky affect of disgust and substituting other affective relationships with aging bodies (Rowe 1995; Russo 1994). This strategy has been particularly effective for subversive groups such as women, whose bodies are eagerly controlled, but men also occasionally adopt a similar self-deprecating approach.

British comedian Ricky Gervais (2018), for example, talks about getting old in a similar way as the afore-mentioned women comedians, in other words by discussing male reproductive organs. He jokes that what he found shocking about aging was his descending testicles. He goes on to explain how he found this out while in the bath, and he noticed them floating. From here on, he constantly describes his testicles as "them," as if they had their own agency. This is highlighted further on in the story, when he describes how his "buoyant" testicles kept surfacing regardless of what he did. Unlike Bennet, however, not once does he reference feeling old. Parts of his body have decided to act on their own and to get old, and as such are contaminated with unwanted aging, separate from his identity and experience. Thus, the story also creates a distance to the aging process and compartmentalizes Gervais's body such that old testicles can be rejected. As long as he is dealing with anxiety related to mortality, his male shame remains on a personal level, whereas both Sykes and Rivers acknowledge how social expectations guide their understanding of disgustingness in female bodies.

In all these cases, self-disgust is enacted through embodied and rejected experiences, which turn attention to aging and may resonate with the bodily experiences of audience members. At the same time, they address the sociocultural norms and expectations of how these bodily experiences should be discussed when shame and

embarrassment related to disgust are replaced with openness and honesty. Although they seemingly celebrate young bodies, the dominance of embodied self-disgust related to older bodies may even make audiences aware of their relationship with their own bodily limitations, and provide an opportunity to engage with human fragility (see also Collings 2018, 72; Lockyer 2011, 119–121). These jokes and comedic performances play both with the audience's cognitive recognition of social norms related to aging and with affective intimacy: disgust, rejection, shame, honesty, and acceptance are brought together in a complex way that could redeem aging bodies, but also carve a public space in which they are welcomed and appreciated. As such, self-deprecative comedy has the potential to challenge audience expectations and to shift sociocultural hierarchies (Mizejewski 2014, 15–18; Russell 2002). After all, it is not a matter of accepting one comedian's aging body, it is a question of socially accepting the aging process and, with that, mortality.

Disgust and the Evaluation of Appropriateness in Death Jokes

Along with aging, death and dying are sensitive topics, and sometimes humor is used as a communicative mode in difficult discussions. Death-related humor is used in morbid jokes to relieve tension or to entertain others, and self-deprecating humor is rather rare compared to jokes about aging (South, Elton, and Lietzenmayer 2020). The challenge is that although the existential idea of death and embodied realities of dying could be framed as disgusting and worthy of rejection, it is difficult to ridicule a certain person's death or loss. Thus, whereas aging stories build on the intimacy of personal performance, affective incongruity manifests in death stories in the construction of jokes and the audience's evaluation of whether it is (in)appropriate to laugh at death. In other words, it is not death or the deceased that are disgusting, it is the cultural norms, expectations, and social situations in which death is discussed.

Ricky Gervais's (2018) dead-baby joke highlights the complex relationship between disgust and death in stand-up comedy. Gervais confesses to the audience that he never wanted to have children because of having to take responsibility for a human life. He enacts a scene in which he is lulling a baby to sleep when he suddenly notices that it is dead. Instead of reacting with horror or devastation, which might be the expected emotional reaction to such a situation, he adopts a pondering expression and questions why the baby is dead. He shows the audience his hand as if he were holding up the baby, showing it around like a doll, and declares it to be an embarrassment, a "waste of time." Disgust plays several roles simultaneously in this joke.

On the level of the joke, he expresses abjection when he represents the dead baby as a product that broke down too soon. He also frames a situation that is usually associated with grief using emotional registers that are typical of disgust: embarrassment and shame. The death of a baby is presented as disgusting, yet the audience could also interpret joking about a baby's death as disgusting. Gervais is no stranger to evoking disgust, anger, and other negatively interpreted emotions in his comedy (e.g., Kauffman 2012). After all, his most famous role as office manager in the British television sitcom *The Office* (2001–2003) was built on flaws, mundanity, embarrassment, and inappropriateness (Tyler and Cohen 2008; Hye-Knudsen 2018, 20). In the dead-baby joke, for example, he walks the fine line between humor and being disgusting. The affective incongruity whereby the dead baby is represented as a disgusting and useless object instead of a tragic loss works because the baby is imaginary, not a real human

being. Thus, after all, the joke is about his fear about what could happen, not about any real event. As such, inappropriate laughter could facilitate "affective release that energizes bodies by increasing their capacities to act" (Sundén and Paasonen 2019, 8). Thus, the affective release that takes place in the audience's bodies in situations in which fear, outrage, and laughter mix could also provide the desired physical release, thus highlighting the potential therapeutic role of humor.

Death jokes highlight how audiences evaluate the appropriateness of jokes, but sometimes performers turn their gaze to the audience. An example of this is when Norm Macdonald (2011) talks about his father's death from a heart attack. As part of his joke, he mentions that others tried to console him by saying his father was now in a better place, which he did not understand: his father was lying on the floor, surely the bed would be better. In the televised version of the show at this point the camera cuts to the laughing audience, focusing particularly on a man in the foreground who is laughing so hard that he has tears in his eyes. Even if the audiences at home were laughing at the same story, this image might inspire self-evaluation of why people laugh at someone's experience of loss.

In stand-up comedy, a live audience has a key role in creating the atmosphere, and in televised comedy specials their reactions also provide affective and interpretative cues to remote audiences: captured laughter, clapping, and other reactions promote social laughter, marking its successes and potential failures (Brock 2015; Brodie 2008). When it comes to dark jokes, a double audience adds another level of evaluation: the remote audience also evaluates the appropriateness of the live audience's reactions, as in the case of Macdonald's joke. Although the remote audience cannot know whether the laughing man's reaction to the joke is authentic or created through editing, the image encourages it to question whether one is allowed to laugh, or whether amusement at the loss of a human being should be dismissed as disgusting. As Shakespeare (1999, 48) notes, there is always some tension between open amusement at (dark) bodily comedy and the desire for a civilized reaction that would banish such voyeurism.

Consequently, joking about death risks causing "unlaughter," which according to Billig (2005) is an absence of laughter where it is expected, such as in a comedy show. The notion of unlaughter and the affective incongruities in the construction of jokes are visible in Dan Soder's dead-dad jokes. Instead of embracing his own embodied reactions to death, Soder (2019) observes the sociocultural norms related to it. For example, he recalls how he used to be jealous of other people's attentive dads, and after his father's death, this jealousy shifted to "better dead dads." He justifies his claim by arguing that his friends' dads who died in rescue work on 9/11 were heroes, and as such "premium" dead dads, whereas his "bottom-shelf dad" drank himself to death. In this joke, he combines critical observation of social hierarchies with his personal life history. This allows the audience to maintain some distance to the experience, and thus they are not laughing at the personal loss as much as at the affective incongruity of the joke.

Soder also discusses unlaughter, claiming that people who have lost fathers laugh at the dead-dad jokes, whereas those whose fathers are still alive ("greedy assholes") dislike them. In this joke he acknowledges that the audience might be disgusted by jokes about parental death, yet at the same time he upends the affective expectations. He portrays the disgust as a disgusting act, because by frowning on these jokes, the unlaughing people deny the therapeutic potential of laughter. He also claims that

personal experience with loss gives one permission to deal with these issues, and to invite others to deal with them as well. Thus, the joke criticizes the tendency to avoid talking about death, whereby Soder questions whether it is people's complicated relationship with death that is disgusting, not death itself.

Patton Oswalt's special *Annihilation* (2017) serves as another example of this. Oswalt revisits his grief over his wife's death, reflecting on his own and others' reactions to death. He portrays his own experiences as deeply dark and emotional up to the point at which he started to imagine that he might be dead himself, because he could not imagine anything that would be more like hell than his grief. These dark journeys of grief focus on seriousness, and they are framed through despair, which does not invite laughter and the audience stays silent, unlaughing. Instead, any amusement comes from the absurdity with which other people react to his grief. For example, he told a joke about a "Polish woman of doom," and how he tried to occupy his daughter's mind on the first Mother's Day after his wife's passing. He takes his daughter to a getaway, but on the way back a woman recognizes them and says how awful it is to lose a mother. Oswalt is very expressive in making his point that the doom attitude was unwelcome and disgusting. The audience laughs at these expressive descriptions, even as Oswalt asks them to think about how they greet grieving people. For him, disgust related to death derives from the insensitivity of others.

Thus, disgust plays a very complex role in death jokes. It appears that ridiculing or mocking the deceased tends to be considered bad taste, but that discussing death is fair game. Death jokes, indeed, evoke an interesting mix of reactions: making a topic personal and intimate, forcing the audience to engage with an emotionally challenging topic in public, and providing some observational and critical distance that enables audiences to challenge their affective assumptions.

Conclusions

The comedy specials analyzed in this paper paint a picture of how mortality is discussed in stand-up comedy. Because mortality threatens the continuity of society, disgust has been used to push it into the margins by marking it as individual failure, something to be ashamed of. Examples of this kind of social control include mockery and ridicule of disgusting aging and dying bodies. However, humor and comedy may also be personally and socially empowering because laughter can release affective tensions related to disgusting mortal bodies. If nothing else, stand-up comedy provides space for play and seriousness in which disgust with mortal bodies could be deconstructed and made visible.

The comedians I chose struck a balance between intimacy and distancing. The rejection of mortality places the threatening elements outside the person and the body, and the shared ritual of laughter promises affective release, as audiences are allowed to transform their disgust into laughter. At the same time, the self-reflective and personal style of modern (dark) stand-up comedy invites intimate engagement with the performance and its topic. Whereas comedians paint a complex image of mortality that inspires contradictory affective reactions, audiences are invited to participate in and evaluate experiences of aging and death. This ambivalence is experienced corporally within the audience members, as physical laughter is mixed with confusion, anxiety, or disgust at the inappropriateness of laughing at difficulties in someone else's life.

In the case of aging, affective incongruity tends to build on the comedian's embodied and personal performance of growing old. Comedians generally portray the physical aspects of the aging body as shocking, unwanted, and disgusting, and as such, worthy of abjection. Nevertheless, they offer a public space in which these bodies can be discussed and celebrated. In the case of death, affective incongruity is generally at play during the construction of the jokes and the audience's evaluation of the inappropriateness of comedic performance. In both cases, the comedians direct attention towards the valuation of social norms and affective cultural practices related to aging and death. In asking the audience to allow themselves to laugh at these topics, comedians give them permission to share various affects related to them. Something that is often considered a private issue might become a collective experience, which in turn might reduce (but also, in some cases increase) the social stigma related to aging and death. Given this transformative potential, the rebellious potential that can be found in humor dealing with issues represented as disgusting might be positive after all.

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16 A Cultural Approach to Sex-Related Disgust

Rethinking Shunga and Other "Perversions" in the 21st Century

Hiroshi Yoshioka

1

Tracing the subject of disgust from an aesthetic point of view, I cannot help thinking first and foremost about an element in our appearance that currently, in 2021, dominates the world, and which was totally unimaginable only two years ago.[1] I am not talking about the pandemic Covid-19 per se, but the fact that people all over the world are supposed to wear face masks in public spaces. I am not discussing the necessity or effectiveness of masks for the purpose of preventing infection, but rather examine from an aesthetic point of view the social landscape of so many people covering their noses and mouths as an everyday practice, as if these parts of the body should not be shown in public. This is really something that I had never expected to witness in my lifetime.

I have lived in Japan more than 60 years. I can say that, at least in this particular country, people have always felt relatively comfortable with wearing masks, or seeing other people doing so. There have always been people walking around with masks on, when they have a slight cold or hay fever, for example. Even if they don't have such problems, some young people who tend to be withdrawn would wear masks all the time, especially when they have to meet other people. This has been thought as a defensive psychology to hide themselves from society, and it has been widely known as a recent social phenomenon. Before Covid-19, my Western friends who visited Japan would sometimes ask me why so many people wore masks. I didn't know how to answer because I'd never thought about it seriously before.

In the past two years, the situation has completely changed. Now, people all over the world are wearing masks. In a sense, it gives me a strange feeling of familiarity as if the whole world has become like Japan. Let me put the rational reasons for wearing masks in parentheses for now, and think about this situation from an aesthetic point of view. A mask is something that hides our nose and mouth, which in turn hides the natural expression of our feeling normally shown by these parts of the face. The mask makes the face look expressionless and defensive, making it difficult to read what other people are feeling.

I dare to go further and say that the mask turns our nose and mouth into bodily organs that should be hidden from public view, organs which, if exposed in public, would embarrass people, or make people angry. I have heard some people making jokes that masks now have become like undershorts or panties. Well, if the masks were underpants, then the nose and mouth would be external genitalia, so to speak. Just as exposing one's external genitals was once associated not only with obscenity

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but also with the fear of serious infectious diseases such as syphilis, in today's world, exposure of the nose and mouth is feared as a possible infection of Covid-19.

Furthermore, the widespread use of masks means that communication itself has come to be regarded as a behavior that should be banned in public. When you take a train or bus, or visit an art exhibition, you will hear an announcement that says "Please refrain from talking." It is as if communication through speech (and facial expressions) itself has become something that should not be done in public, just as it is forbidden to publicly show defecation or sex. I do hope that I am here making just a joke. However, it is also true that our perception of the body has changed more drastically than we expected when we look back on our history.

In his essay *Ineireisan* (*In Praise of Shadows*, 1977, 1982), Japanese author Junichiro Tanizaki[2] discussed the traditional Japanese custom of *ohaguro* (teeth blackening). *Ohaguro* is the custom of adult men and women in pre-modern Japan to dye their teeth black. It was originally a custom of the aristocratic society in ancient and medieval times. In some areas, it remained for a long time as a custom for women to show they were married. A brownish solution of iron dissolved in acetic acid is applied to the teeth, and then tannin extracted from a plant (white gum tree) is applied on top of the solution, causing the ferric acetate and tannin to combine and turn black. A possible rational reason for such a procedure would be the effect of preventing tooth decay and gum disease, but from our modern perspective, it would seem simply bizarre how the mouth would look all black because of it.

Many Westerners who visited Japan around the end of the Edo and the beginning of the Meiji period found this custom to be plainly disgusting. This feeling of disgust spread to the 'enlightened' Japanese of the time, who were striving to identify themselves with Western culture as the norm. By the latter half of the Meiji period, the practice of Ohaguro had fallen into disuse. If I were to somewhat jokingly imitate Tanizaki's expression in *Ineireisan*, I might say that modernization has taken shade away from the mouths of the Japanese as well. To be honest, as a person living in the 21st century, I too find black teeth disgusting. At the same time, I believe that there was a time when it was accepted as something beautiful, or at least natural, and that there was a different aesthetic about the body than there is now. However, it is not easy to understand such an aesthetic.

In another essay titled *Raida no hanashi* (*A Tale of Laziness*, not translated in English) written around the same time as *In Praise of Shadows* (1930s), Tanizaki commented how strange he felt seeing Hollywood movie stars smiling in foreign magazines, all showing off their well aligned white teeth. In the traditional Japanese sense of beauty, he writes, the sight of a mouth full of white teeth was not regarded as attractive at all, but it rather gave the impression of being "somehow cruel, wicked and brutal." In older times, sophisticated urban men and women were considered to be rather charming with poorly aligned teeth. In particular, one component of feminine beauty in the city of Kyoto, where Tanizaki once lived and I now live, was the poor quality of their teeth! Such old aesthetics of the oral cavity remained to some extent until recently; around the 1970s, the imperfection of teeth of young singers and actresses was regarded as a charm point to show their friendliness. It is only relatively recently that people have become so concerned about the perfectly aligned teeth that they are eager to have their children wear braces.

Will the habit of wearing masks, which is now spreading all over the world, permanently change our way of seeing our own bodies? If this situation continues, will

appearing in public without a mask eventually come to be perceived as a shameful and disgusting behavior, just like exposing one's genitals without wearing underwear? Fortunately, such concerns are not yet beyond the realm of fantasy for now.

However, comparing the nose with the mouth and the genitals in terms of parts of the body being hidden or exposed leads us to another point. It is the question of whether, in pre-modern aesthetic standards, overt visual representations of external genitalia, especially emphasized visual images of male and female genitalia in the midst of sexual activity, were seen by our ancestors as something quite different from the way we see them today. We can consider this question referring to the art of "Shunga"[3] as a clue.

First of all, however, it should be noted that I am not at all an expert on Shunga, and this essay is not an attempt to present any new views in the study of Shunga itself. For the purposes of this essay, Shunga is merely a topic to suggest the existence of a dimension of imagination that we moderns have lost related to the representation of sexuality, a dimension that has been much more common in human history.

2

Over the past few decades, Japanese pop culture has become widely known throughout the world. With this, the differences in traditional cultural standards inherent in contemporary expressions can also become apparent. Although Japanese manga and animation are very popular among the general public, certain excesses in their representation can be baffling to Western audiences. One of these is the overt sexuality of the stories in spite of the fact that many of them are aimed at children and young adults. This seems to violate the ethical standard that children must be protected from the negative effects of pornography.

Keiko Takemiya, a popular manga artist who once served as president of Kyoto Seika University, rose to fame with her work *Kaze to Ki no Uta (The Poem of Wind and Trees)*, which was serialized in weekly comics for girls starting in 1976. The story was set in a fictional French boarding school and dealt with controversial themes such as drugs, pedophilia and sexual abuse. Despite these disturbing subjects, the overall atmosphere of the story is not realistic but rather romantic and aesthetic. At the time of its publication, it was highly praised not only by comics fans but also by liberal intellectuals, which is not particularly surprising. It is noteworthy that even though the work was generally perceived as sensational, many readers – mostly teenage girls – were not offended but totally fascinated by the stories. The work was thought to be a controversial one, but not banned as obscene or violating children's rights.

It often happens that comics or animations that are not so seriously condemned in Japan – although some people frown on them – are called into question as serious ethical or human rights violations in the West. For instance, in 2016 The BBC reported that "A recent UN report weighed into a debate that provokes intense controversy in Japan, by including manga in a list of content with violent pornography," and called Keiko Takemiya "The godmother of manga sex" (BBC 2016).

The question that needs to be considered here is: is sexually explicit Japanese expression (as interpreted by Western standards) really "pornography"? Pornography itself is a modern Western concept, and the problem is that what we understand by applying the term is by no means self-evident. In modern Japan, of course, there is pornography in the same sense as in the West. The term "pornography" here refers mainly

to works intended to cause sexual arousal in adult males. In most cases, women feel uncomfortable with it, and children are considered to be in need of protection from it. However, the sexual expressions in "shojo manga" (girls' comics) such as *Kaze to Ki no Uta* and many other children's manga are clearly not pornographic in that sense. If so, what are they? What is the meaning of sexual expression in such works, and why are women and children able to allow them, whether they admire it or not, rather than find them disgusting? In order to think about these questions, I propose remembering how our ancestors viewed and treated Shunga may give us some hints.

By its appearances, Shunga gives the impression of being far removed from modern manga and comics. However, as far as the interpretation of sexual expression is concerned, it has much in common with contemporary "problematic" Japanese pop culture. Shunga is not pornography. While there is no denying the fact that Shunga looks like pornography to us today, there is some evidence that people in the past saw elements in it other than sexual interest. The images depicted do provoke sexual interest. We can also imagine that it was quite different from today's pornography in terms of who it was painted for and by whom it was viewed. The audience for shunga was not limited to adult men. Women were equally receptive to shunga. Women also played an equally (and often more) active role as characters in shunga. In shunga, women are not the objects of sexual exploitation; rather, their subjective desires are also depicted in a straightforward manner.

Another clear indication that shunga is not pornography is that it is not strictly hidden from the eyes of children. In his autobiographical work, *Vita sexualis* (1909, 1–32), Japanese novelist Mori Ogai recounts a striking experience from his childhood: His aunt was looking at a book with a young girl, blushing. He asked her, "What book is that?" The aunt points to a part of the picture in the book and asked him, "What do you think it is?" When he replied that he guessed it was a leg of a person in the picture, both women laughed out loud, which made him feel uncomfortable.

What the young Ogai was shown was a man's erect phallus in a shunga book, which was unrealistically large and emphasized. That was why the child thought that it was a leg of the man in the picture. He felt uncomfortable, not because the image he was shown was disturbing or disgusting, but because the two elder women shared a secret, and he was laughed at for not knowing it. They laughed, but not necessarily to make fun of the child. Shunga is sometimes referred to as "warai-ê," laughing pictures. While the women knew that sexually explicit stuff should be hidden from the eyes of children, they were not very strict about it. They just couldn't resist the effect of shunga to provoke laughter.

Thinking about the relationship of shunga and children, what is more interesting (and perhaps shocking to some) is that small children often play an important role as characters in shunga. Not as sex partners (fortunately), but as innocent observers looking at adults making love, or as a bored child trying to sidetrack his mother and father from having their fun. They are scenes that were maybe intended to be seen as cute and funny. This is definitely far from what we usually associate with the word pornography.

It is also important to note that the heterosexual norm is very weak in the fantasy of sex in shunga. There appears to be no taboo about homosexuality, and even about cross-species sexuality between human and animals. Some readers may have seen the famous image of a woman having sex with a giant octopus painted by Kitagawa Utamaro (approximately 1753–1806), one of the most renowned ukiyo-e artists in the

Edo period. The theme of octopus-human sex will elicit different reactions depending on the cultural significance of the octopus and the extent to which bestiality is considered taboo. However, the mood of this scene is neither immoral nor violent, but rather humorous. But sex between humans and animals is only a part of the variations of deviant sex depicted in shunga. There are even depictions of sexual interaction with ghosts or human bones, as if sex could transcend the boundary not only between different species but even between life and death. I have always been fascinated by this aspect of shunga, as it gives the impression of playfully experimenting with possible combinations of the various creatures of this world. Another noteworthy aspect of shunga is that it seems to extend the sexual image of the human body to the non-human world. A huge phallus depicted in shunga is sometimes more reminiscent of a large, knotty tree branch depicted in a landscape painting, than of a normal part of the human body. In some works, female genitalia are superimposed on normative landscapes in literature as well as paintings called "Omi Hakkei."[4] This phenomenon of sexual meanings being superimposed on non-living landscapes and things reminds me of the imaginative play of superimposing sexual couplings on everything in contemporary Japanese subcultures, especially in the cultural phenomenon known as "fujoshi," female fandom of fictional gay stories ("boys love, BL") often published in novels and manga.[5]

It is possible to understand the sexuality of non-human objects as a kind of anthropomorphism. Even when depicted in the form of animals or skeletons, we can interpret that they are actually caricatures of human males and females. Or, when genitalia are related to the landscape, it is possible to think of the landscape as a metaphor for a part of the human body. However, I would like to emphasize here that the opposite interpretation of anthropomorphism is also possible. In other words, these Shunga paintings do not compare the inhuman to the human, but on the contrary, they extend the sexuality that happens to be seen in humanity to the world of non-human or non-organic things such as animals, ghosts, objects, and landscapes. Shunga could be said to embody its own sensibility, which does not fit external classifications or taxonomies.

When Shunga is made the subject of academic research or introduced to the public, the excuse is often used that it is not obscene, but a wonderful cultural document that shows the open and generous attitude of the pre-modern Japanese toward sex. This is not wrong, but it seems to me to be an understanding that is too much in line with our modernized thinking. In my view, it is not that our ancestors were more liberal about sex than we are today, but that for them, human sex was not a phenomenon limited to humans, but originated from a principle deeply rooted in nature itself. I respect our ancestors not because they thought in a liberal way, but they understood the phenomenon of sex as something originated from an energy of life in general, as the power permeating the human world from within nature.

Shunga is often said to have had a meaning as a kind of talisman. They were given to daughters about to be married, or were placed in the helmets and armor of soldiers on their way to war. Since sex is a life-giving act, carrying a picture of it may have had the magical meaning of avoiding death. In the background of shunga, there seems to continue an ancient tradition of thought that finds the immortality and the sacredness in the images of genitals and sexual intercourse.

Even today, there are many examples of natural stones and rocks in the shape of phallic and female genitalia preserved as sacred objects in various regions. Although they are familiar to travelers in Japan, there are few serious attempts to understand what such natural objects symbolizing genitals and sexual intercourse meant to the mind of

the ancients and what worldview they reflect. One way to approach these topics is look back at ourselves and examine if the vestiges of ancient thinking are still at work in modern culture in an unconscious way. I think that such an old-world view on sex was not completely lost in the distant past, but has been carried on in the tradition of shunga for example, and even continues to exist in the contemporary culture in a different form.

In October 2020, I had the opportunity to be invited to speak at an interesting and unusual symposium. It was a symposium titled "Kinbaku New Wave." It was organized by Professor Yasuo Deguchi of Kyoto University's Graduate School of Letters.[6] "Kinbaku (Bondage)" is the name for the specialized technique of tying up (mostly naked or half-naked female) bodies with rope. The word also means images of tied-up figures in such a way, in pictures, films and also live performances on the stage. Kinbaku is played out mostly for erotic purposes, but sometimes as an art performance. In both cases, as you can easily imagine, it is considered to be a controversial practice in terms of today's gender consciousness.

The lecture I gave on that occasion did not focused on the act of bondage nor the body in bondage, but on the rope that binds it. This is because I thought that the rope binds itself before it binds the human body. The rope is made of two or more fibers twisted together, and it was traditionally thought to have a kind of supernatural power of its own. What is the origin of the magical power of the rope? According to archaeologist Naoyuki Oshima (2016), the rope patterns on Jomon pottery, which has been produced for more than 10,000 years until the 5th century B.C., represent the mating of snakes. This may seem like a strange association to us today, but we can well imagine that the ancient Japanese witnessed mating snakes much more frequently than we do, and that they recognized in their form the meaning of regeneration of life and immortality, and used the rope as a symbol of this (Oshima 2014, 54). To the ancients, snakes were sacred creatures and also symbolized "immortality" (Yoshino 1979). For one thing, the shedding of a snake is interpreted as an event in which the snake sheds its old self and acquires a new life, and the mating of such a mysterious being to produce offspring is also thought to symbolize the continuity of life through death and rebirth.

The female figure that most of us tend to focus on in Kinbaku may appear as the modern representation of eroticism, but the rope that ties her up seems to suggest a continuity to the ancient imagination of reproduction. In this sense, I thought that Kinbaku is also as important as Shunga, in the sense they are both linked to the ancient view over sex, reproduction, and immortality. However, it goes without saying that this issue needs to be examined in more detail, so at this point I would like to limit myself to suggestions.

3

Finally, knowing the risk of sounding a leap of argument, I would like to extend the subject of sexual imagination beyond the context of folklore and cultural anthropology to that of biology. One of the characteristics of my philosophical thinking has been that I did not consider any cultural phenomenon to be limited to the interior of human culture, but I tried to examine what it means in nature from the perspective of evolutionary biology. What is sex when we look at it from the perspective of the natural and biological world?

Claims that heterosexuality is biologically "normal" are often the subject of general controversy beyond academic research today. Some conservative politicians argue that

homosexuality is unproductive and abnormal because it is not linked to reproduction and speak negatively about LGBT+ rights. In contrast, liberal intellectuals often argue on the basis of human rights, to defend the diversity of sexual activities and expressions. In other words, the freedom of individuals to choose their sexuality should be respected even if it does not conform to the "natural" order of reproduction.

I think in a way that is different from both of these positions and argue that reproduction is not the natural purpose of sex in the first place. Just as there is no purpose to Darwinian evolution, there is no "purpose" to the behavior of living things as we understand it, and "purpose" is merely a concept that humans need to interpret natural phenomena. In the natural world, sex is not only for procreation, but homosexuality and other variations of sexuality are built into the natural phenomenon of sex from the beginning. In other words, sex has a multiple function far beyond that of reproduction, far in advance of its diversification in human culture, already in the natural world.

The bonobos (pygmy chimpanzees), the primates that live in the Republic of Congo and are the closest species to us Homo sapiens, are famous for interesting observations on the social function of their sexual behavior. Bonobo society is known to be more peaceful than that of other primates (including us homo sapiens'), and it is thought that sexually charged communication plays a unique role in their social interaction. When tensions rise between individuals, bonobos avoid aggression by engaging in homosexual behaviors such as rubbing their genitals against each other. Various forms of pseudo-sex behaviors have also been observed between members of the same sex and between children.

Of course, idealizing bonobo societies as a pacifist utopia based on these characteristics alone is a stretch. They can be aggressive and prey on other species of monkeys. However, what I would like to focus on here is the fact that the use of sexual gestures to avoid interspecies conflict has already evolved as an animal behavior long before human civilization. We humans tend to think that the diversity and deviance of sex, which does not directly serve the purpose of reproduction, is unique to humanity and sometimes blame it on the overdevelopment of civilization, but this is clearly wrong.

I would like to suggest that interesting cultural traditions of sexual representations can also be considered in this natural context. I think that assuming a simple conflict between nature and culture is a fatal obstacle when considering such a fundamental topic as sexuality. I believe that the layers of meaning that run through the undercurrent of our culture cannot be fully understood without taking into account biological and evolutionary perspectives. And I have always felt that there is a stronger continuity between our own minds and our modern culture and the minds of our ancestors and their culture than we think. "Disgusting" traits in ancient images might be a bridge that helps us to understand these continuities.

Notes

1. This essay is based on the talk "Manga and Shunga: understanding sex and eroticism in Japanese pop culture" in the 21st International Congress of Aesthetics, held at University of Belgrade, July 23, 2019.
2. Tanizaki Junichiro (1886–1965) was one of the most important novelists in modern Japanese literature. In his early years, his style was influenced by Western modernism, but from the 1920s, he gradually shifted to a more traditional Japanese aesthetic. *In Praise of Shadows* is an essay written in such a direction, seemingly with general readers including non-Japanese ones in mind.

3. The word "Shunga" is made of two characters: "春(*shun*, spring)" and "画(*ga*, picture)". The character "shun" mean sexual activity in some words, which can be understood by its association with reproduction. For those who like to read about Shunga from various different perspective, see Clark et al. (2014).
4. The eight traditional scenic views of Ohmi (present Shiga prefecture), which was inspired by the eight views of Xiaoxiang in China, became one of the standard motifs in art and literature in the 14th–15th centuries.
5. BL (Boys' Love) novels and comics have been making remarkable strides in the women's section of bookstores over the past decade or so. BL is a story of "love" between "males" played out in a variety of situations. I put the word "males" in quotation because the men in the stories are not depictions of real men, but rather very special characters that appeal to the fantasies of female readers. Therefore, "love" between men is not a depiction of real homosexuality at all. It is important to know that BL is about "pure love." In other words, it is a story about meeting a single person with whom one can feel that "I was born in this world to be with this person." At the same time, however, there are explicit descriptions of sex. There are various games and self-discoveries about which of the two people will end up as the "seme" ("aggressor," i.e. the one who inserts the male organ into the other's anus) and which is the "uke" ("receiver"). The unexpectedness of the combination makes a story exciting. Unlike the platonic love stories of the past, in BL, pure love is not antithetical to sexual intercourse, but rather the two factors are integral to each other. But the sexual act in BL does not feel realistic, so it is not the same thing as pornography. Sex in BL is not a physical union, but rather something like a combination of symbols.

   The fact that there are so many of these books on sale means that there is a large readership. Female readers who indulge in BL are called "fujoshi (literally 'rotten girls')." There are some women who call themselves "fujoshi" and say self-mockingly, "I'm getting pretty 'fujoshi' these days. On the other hand, there are also girls who don't like the name, don't want their preferences to be known, and feel that they should be left alone and not be the subject of media or research. And, of course, there are women who have no interest in BL at all, and express that it is disgusting. However, it is clear from the amount of books sold that reading stories of "pure love" (and sexuality) between men is not just a maniacal preference of a limited group. While there are certainly some who are disgusted by these fantasies, most women seem to be more or less sympathetic to them, or at least not opposed to them. Even if they don't go so far as to call themselves "fujoshi," I think most women feel that they can understand why such things are read.
6. The video of the whole symposium with English subtitles (including a performance by Kinbaku specialist Kinoko Hajime) is available on YouTube (https://youtu.be/oqgwa_FjrNs). My lecture begins around 1:55.

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