1 From Visceral to the Aesthetic

Tracing Disgust in Contemporary Culture

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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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