

Article

Abjection Interrogated

Uncovering The Relation Between Abjection and Disgust

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Abstract

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, as propounded in *Powers of Horror*, emphasises the centrality of the repulsion caused by bodily experience in human life, and explains behaviours in and attitudes to our environment. The phenomenology of abjection bears similarities to the phenomenology of disgust. Both involve physical feelings of repulsion caused by a source, and the concomitant need to reject the source in various ways. Abjection is conceptualized within a psychoanalytic framework where it refers to the repudiation of the maternal prior to the production of an autonomous subject, and the subsequent rejection of disgusting substances in later life. But apart from its role in such a psychoanalytic account, are there any other significant differences that exist between abjection and disgust, or are we looking at a distinction without a difference?

Keywords: disgust, abjection, Julia Kristeva, repulsion, horror

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection was propounded in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection*, originally published in 1980. The translation, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, which appeared two years later, profoundly shaped the Anglophone reception of her work. Since then, a number of studies about the significance of abjection in cultural life emerged, from within the visual arts (Ben-Levi *et al.* 1993; Foster *et al.* 1994; 1996a, 1996b; Ross 2003), which include art criticism, exhibitions, and film (Chanter 2008; Thomas 2008) and from within sociology (Butler 1993; Tyler 2009, 2013), which conveys its wide application to different cultural fields. However, Kristeva's theory has been criticized on a number of different grounds, especially with regards to the repudiation of the maternal, her claims to universalism and the reification of abjection. This article concerns itself with another aspect of her theory, which has not been probed, namely the relationship between the characteristics of abjection and that of disgust. One of main lines of enquiry here is whether abjection is fundamentally the same phenomenon as disgust or whether there are differences in their phenomenology. Their conceptual frameworks, histories and contexts differ; Kristeva's theory of abjection is located within a psychoanalytic framework, whereas disgust is evaluated by its aversive effects, firstly in relation to food, and then in broader remits.

Kristeva's Theory of Abjection

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva gives an account of the psychic origins of revulsion where abjection is a process that negotiates the limits in the formation of the subject through the rejection of unwanted things. Abjection prefigures the mirror-stage in the psychic development of an infant and occurs in the pre-Oedipal relationship between the infant and the (figure of the) mother, where the former experiences the latter's body as object.



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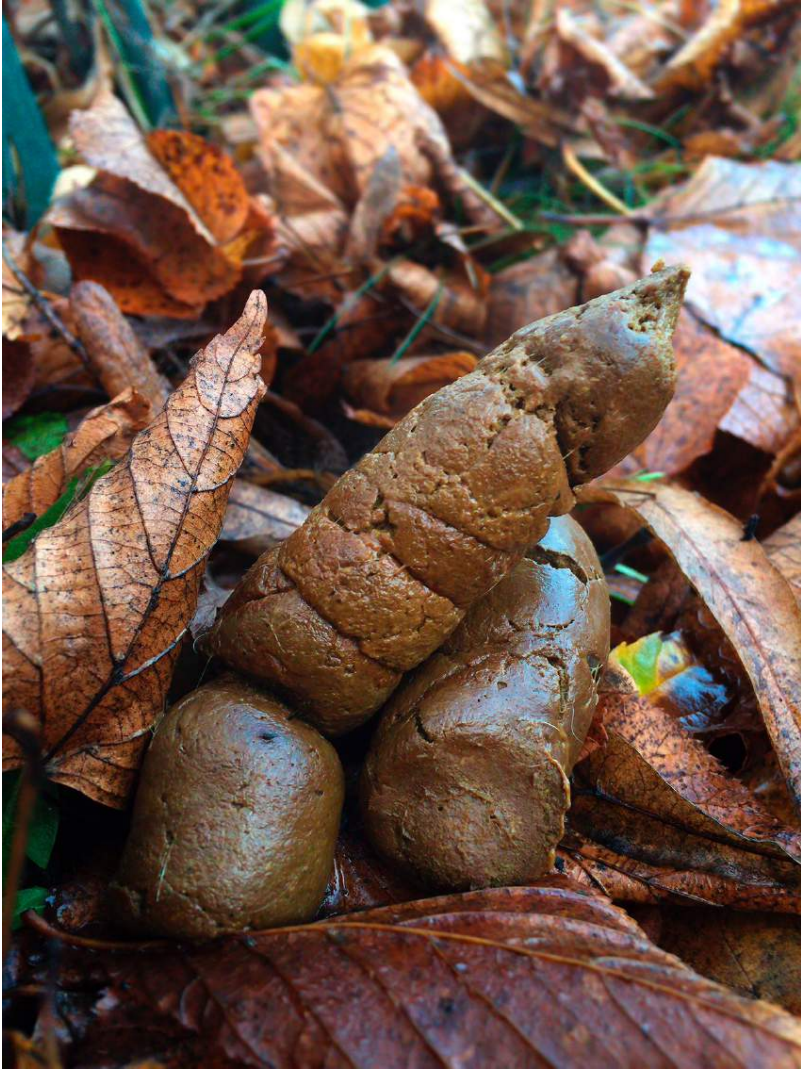


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Kristeva reworks Lacan and positions the maternal in the process of the development of subjectivity. Abjection comprises the period when the child begins to separate from the figure of the Mother. Prior to the child's misrecognition of itself in the mirror, it must first become estranged from this Mother. Kristeva writes: 'Even before being *like*, "I" am

not but do *separate, reject, ab-ject*' (Kristeva 1982, 13). Abjection therefore occurs before the subject's positioning in language, anterior to the emergence of the 'I': '[t]he abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine ... The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*. (Kristeva 1982, 1). Winfried Menninghaus asks '[w]hat sort of strange non-object and non-subject is this – one that precedes the distinction between conscious and unconscious, and always already must be "cast out" in order that some 'speaking subject' can speak of itself as "I"?' (Menninghaus 2003, 369).

Abjection is a provisional, transitory sense of differentiation from the maternal: a fragile, unbecoming and unknowing sense of self. The process of feeding is simultaneously a process of moving towards the breast and suckling, and rejecting and withdrawing when satiated. This movement of identification and separation symbolizes a switch between being one with the mother and then asserting difference, and marks the process by which the borders between the infant and mother are established. The feelings of revulsion and horror, and the action of expelling the mother, shatter the narcissism and result in feelings of insurmountable horror. The 'child must abject the maternal body so that the child itself does not become abject by identifying with the maternal body' and its pollutants (Oliver 2003, 47). The process enables the child to create an autonomous identity through the various rituals involving cleanliness such as toilet training and this enables the production of a clean and proper body (*the corps propre*).

The experience of abjection both endangers and protects the individual: endangers in that it threatens the boundaries of the self and also reminds us of our animal origins, and protects us because we are able to expel the abject through various means.

While abjection originates as a psychic process it affects all aspects of social and cultural life; it 'is not a stage "passed through" but a perpetual process that plays a central role within the project of subjectivity' (Tyler 2009, 80). Since the abject is 'what disturbs identity, system, order' (Kristeva 1982, 4) of the *corps propre*, because it 'does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva 1982, 4), taboos are in place to safeguard societies and communities. '[A]bjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger' (Kristeva 1982, 9). Experiences of abjection can be traced back to this elemental scene of maternal abjection – this founding moment of being – where '[t]he abject is the violence of mourning for an "object" that has always already been lost' and is thus the object of primal repression (Kristeva 1982, 15).

Elizabeth Grosz (1994, 193) describes three broad categories of abjection in *Powers of Horror*, which bring about revulsion. Firstly, we have abjection towards food; secondly, towards bodily waste; and, finally, towards sexual difference. In their proximity to the orifice, objects in these categories draw attention to the body's inherent vulnerability of being turned inside out. The physical symptoms of nausea when confronted with an



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abject thing is dramatized in Kristeva's gut-wrenching encounter with filmy milk, which is one of the opening examples used in *Powers of Horror*:

When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since the food is not an 'other' for 'me,' who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*; I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself* (Kristeva 1982, 2-3).

The disgust experienced because of this film, which is neither solid nor liquid, inner nor outer, consists in not only physical sensations but also psychological turbulence. Realising that it is not sufficient to ward off the substance because she has already been contaminated, she has to work through purification rituals of spitting before she is able to recover a sense of self. There are numerous other examples of phenomena that bring about abjection in Kristeva's account but they all follow this pattern of threatening the boundaries of the self, which have to be remade. The experience of abjection both

endangers and protects the individual: endangers in that it threatens the boundaries of the self and also reminds us of our animal origins, and protects us because we are able to expel the abject through various means. It is manifested in its two modalities: the action of expulsion (*to abject*) and the condition of being abject.

Theorising Disgust

In the above account of abjection, it is clear that disgust is an integral feature of Kristeva's theory, where it refers to the sense of aversion experienced when confronted with the abject. Disgust is a powerful instinctual emotion that is central to human life and is associated with aversive feelings leading to recoil and rejection. In 1927, Aurel Kolnai wrote the first full-length treatment of the phenomenology of disgust in 'Disgust' (*Der Ekel*). Another noteworthy study was Andras Angyal's article on 'Disgust and Related Aversion', which was published in 1941. More recently, Paul Rozin's studies on disgust, some of which are carried out collaboratively, are leading in the field and identify how the 'elicitors of disgust come from [different] domains', which in the case of North Americans are as follows: 'food, body products, animals, sexual behaviours, contact with death or corpses, violations of the exterior envelope of the body (including gore and deformity), poor hygiene, interpersonal contamination (contact with unsavoury human beings), and certain moral offenses' (see Rozin et al. 2008, 757).

Earlier expressions of disgust focus on the rejection response to certain foods. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) Darwin discusses disgust (which is defined in opposition to pleasure) primarily as a gustatory response of revulsion that we have to certain foods, which is what has come to be regarded as 'core disgust' (Rozin et al. 2008, 757). Disgust, which Darwin takes to be a universal expression (and affect), has evolved for regulatory purposes to ensure well-being; the disgust we have for unpalatable food acts as a protective mechanism which ensures 'the safety of the organism by inhibiting contact with what is foul, toxic, and thereby dangerous' (Korsmeyer and Smith 2004, 1). Sometimes the food itself is not 'bad' in the sense of harmful but it may be perceived to be so by virtue of its proximity to a carrier of contamination. Consider the following example by Darwin, which Miller takes from *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*:

In Tierra del Fuego a native touched with his finger some cold preserved meat which I was eating at our bivouac, and plainly showed utter disgust at its softness; whilst I felt utter disgust at my food being touched by a naked savage, though his hands did not appear dirty (Miller 1997, 1).

Sara Ahmed uses this example to show 'that being disgusted is not simply about "gut feelings"' in the sense of a visceral reaction to food that has gone off, for instance, but is instead 'mediated by ideas that are already implicated in the very impressions we make of others and the way those impressions surface as bodies' (Ahmed 2004, 83). The admission that the native's hands did not appear dirty reveals that the fear of contamination is not about actual dirt but about the perception of being contaminated by someone who is associated with dirt, something that is in this case cast in imperialist terms. This contamination by association is identified as the contamination response or as psychological contamination (Rozin et al. 2008, 760; Rozin et al. 2009, 266). This also



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conveys that disgust does not necessitate the actual ingestion of the disgusting substance as contact alone is enough to cause disgust. Miller takes this further to say that '[t]he mere sensation of it also involves an admission that we did not escape contamination' (Miller 1997, 204).

...sliminess is repugnant because it distorts the relationship between the observer and the object.

Since Darwin's studies, disgust is regarded as a universal expression and there are common elicitors that cause disgust, especially those connected to the body. But beyond this we cannot generalize cross-culturally or trans-temporally about objects of disgust, although these often centre on the bodily. In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution* (1966) Mary Douglas discusses the cultural reasons for judging certain objects or people to be dirty (which she discusses in terms of pollution; she does not use the term 'disgust'); her findings have been instrumental in research on disgust. She emphasizes the view held by many, including Kristeva, which is that disgust is not caused by a 'lack of cleanliness' (Kristeva 1982, 4). Douglas discusses the instrumental role that categories play, including hierarchies, in society which work to enforce boundaries between entities. Boundary crossings bring about pollution, which Douglas discusses at length in relation to specific cases such as the Jewish food laws in *Leviticus*. Here the in-between anomalous nature of animals that are not 'proper to [their] class' (Douglas 2002, 69, xiv) renders them abominable and unfit for consumption. Douglas draws on Jean-Paul Sartre's

ontological account of slime in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), and its threat to being. He finds sliminess (or the cognate phenomenon of stickiness) repugnant because it distorts the relationship between the observer and the object. 'An infant, plunging its hands into a jar of honey, is instantly involved in contemplating the formal properties of solids and liquids and the essential relation between the subjective experiencing self and the experienced world' (Sartre, quoted in Douglas 2002, 47). In its viscosity slime confuses because it does not behave either like a liquid or a solid but is halfway between these states. The ontological state of being in-between categories, which creates the anomaly, as Douglas puts it, gives rise to a sense of disgust, as it problematizes the boundary. Many examples of disgusting objects fall in between such category states, whether solid/liquid, living/dead, male/female.

In spite of Douglas's influence on cultural and anthropological attitudes to dirt, however, there are various criticisms of her structuralist analysis that need to be taken into consideration, including William I. Miller's concern about the problem of fit (see Miller 1997, 45). One way of refining the definition of dirt as matter-out-of-place argument, which incidentally predates Douglas with Kolnai's study of 1927, is to consider the significance of the organic when thinking about the issue of matter being out of place. The smear of soup on a man's beard, to use an example by Darwin, is more disgusting than if the smear was on his collar or tie. And, to give another example, marks made on the door of a public lavatory in ink are far less disturbing than stains of excrement. In these cases, it is the presence of the organic and its location, as identified by Aurel Kolnai, that contributes to the disgust. It needs to be emphasized that Kolnai is concerned here with core disgust, and not moral disgust, which involves a different set of factors, such as agency.

We experience revulsion at bodily fluids because they are reminders of the borders of the body thereby invoking the insides of bodies, and at the loss of control that the body can be subject to.

The presence of the organic in matter-out-of-place increases the contamination potential. In asking 'What exactly is dirt?', Kolnai regards the definition of 'dirt' as something that is located in an improper place as inaccurate and unpersuasive. 'For should I find precious stones scattered in a peat bog, I would not say that the peat [was] "filthy with diamonds", but much rather that I had found diamonds in a heap of dirt' (Kolnai 2004, 55). Equally, it is too simplistic to adduce that dirt signals danger or is disease-laden because '[we] would not, after all, shrink away from a hand that has been dipped into, say, cholera germs as from one which were merely dirty' (55). Kolnai proposes that dirt has an integral relationship with the organic; '[d]irt is, to an extent, simply the presence, the nonobliteration, of traces of life'. It is present in the '[h]ands [that] become dirty through manual activity, underclothes through being worn. And there is often sweat that plays an agglutinating role in the formation of dirt.' Elsewhere he states that '[t]here exists here a substantial connection with feces . . . and also with grease and sweat' (Kolnai 2004, 55–56). Dirt reveals 'an unmistakable intentional relation to life, and to life's ebbs and flows' (Kolnai 2004, 56). This revision and qualification of what constitutes dirt is important when thinking about what we find abject or disgusting. The presence of the organic increases the disgust quotient.

What studies about disgust and abjection show is the inherent ambivalence we feel about our animal nature; we tend to find things disgusting that are a reminder of our animal origins. Freud dealt with disgust indirectly through his studies of sexuality, where it is configured within reaction formations (see Freud 1905). The process of ‘civilization’ in certain parts of the world involves the regulation of bodily order and raised awareness of disgust, which becomes integral to moral, social and political order. We experience revulsion at bodily fluids because they are reminders of the borders of the body thereby invoking the insides of bodies, and at the loss of control that the body can be subject to. This revulsion can also be overcome in erotic desire. The animal at the core of humanity is a core idea in the work of several commentators on disgust including Georges Bataille, Andras Angyal (1941), Becker (1973) and one of the central theses of Rozin’s work (see Rozin and Fallon, 1987). The animal roots of disgust are also responsible for the ambivalent feelings that we have towards objects of disgust. We feel a simultaneous sense of attraction and repulsion but the overriding response is to turn away; something which Freud, Becker and others would explain in terms of the denial of death.

The Role of Fear

The phenomenology of abjection bears similarities to the phenomenology of disgust in that both involve aversion to and rejection of a source that gives rise to feelings of repulsion. Throughout *Powers of Horror* Kristeva theorizes abjection in phenomenological terms associating it with bodily experience (fluids, processes, and affects). Her archetypal example of abjection of the rejection of skin on milk can be used to show how the stages of behaviour mirror those experienced in disgust. A reminder of the passage in question conveys the extent of sensory turmoil:

When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream ... (Kristeva 1982, 2-3).

The above passage can be charted in stages that we will later see are key to the phenomenology of disgust, whether core or moral. The first stage involves the confrontation with the object of disgust, which monopolizes our senses. Usually something causing disgust comes into contact with us; rarer is the occasion of moving towards the source itself. The threat may come from within (like bodily fluids) or from without. In some cases, the disgust remains on an abstract level – it is the mere thought, which could be a recollection, of the object that evokes disgust. All cases of disgust involve discontent; we are ill at ease with being in the presence of something disgusting, and may shudder in anticipation. The second stage is the physical symptoms that convey the disgust response – this could be the gape face, the ‘disgust face’ (Rozin *et al.* 2008, 759), and which more precisely involves the lowering of the jaw, the nose wrinkle and (less often) the upper lip rise. The facial expression may be accompanied by nausea,

prompting the gag reflex (through retching) and other behavioural changes including the urge to move away from the source of disgust (recoil). The third stage involves undergoing purification rituals, which may involve spitting the milk out if it has been ingested, and if not, ensuring that all physical traces are removed thereby restoring physiological equilibrium and avoiding defilement.

In their introductory essay to Kolnai's 'Disgust', Carolyn Korsmeyer and Barry Smith make a brief but critical comparison between Kristeva's notion of abjection and Kolnai's notion of disgust. They argue that the two are 'different' and that what distinguishes them is that while abjection entails disgust, it also involves fear, but the reverse is not true (Korsmeyer and Smith 2004, 18). Although in 'actual experience' disgust and fear are often 'blended together', Kolnai emphasises the point in his work on disgust that they are structurally different, a fact that is derived from phenomenological analysis; disgust is oriented towards the particular features or characteristics of an object (the *Sosein*) while fear is deeper and is a reaction to the being (the *Dasein*) of the object (Korsmeyer and Smith 2004, 18–19). The fear and threat posed to one's self-integrity is at stake in abjection, which causes one to flee (following recoil). Kolnai's differentiation between the *Sosein* and the *Dasein* of an object is interesting. '*Sosein*' refers to the characteristics of an object, while the prototypical Heideggerian term '*Dasein*' refers to the sense of being-in-the-world. *Dasein* is a being whose *being* is an issue for itself; it is an entity that is conscious of the meaning of its own existence. Kolnai claims that while disgust is caused by the sensory aspects of the object, in its appearance, smell etc., abjection is more minacious because of the inextricable relationship that it has with subjectivity. As it encroaches on the boundaries of the self, it operates as a threat, calling being into question. As Hal Foster puts it, 'the object is what I must get rid of *in order to be an I* ... It is a fantasmatic substance not only alien to the subject but intimate with it – too much so in fact, and this overproximity produces panic in the subject. In this way the object touches on the fragility of our boundaries...' (Foster 1996a, 153).

Miller also makes a distinction between disgust and fear: he aligns disgust with removal of the offending item and fear with flight. 'It is usually supposed that fear leads to flight and disgust more to a desire to have the offending item removed' (Miller 1997, 25). If we are disgusted by something then we wish to have it removed from our presence, and its proximity is a contributing factor. We may even flee the room to escape the object but this is a different type of flight from what would occur if we were fleeing to escape something that we actually feared. There is usually a greater sense of urgency present in fear-impelled flight; we cannot bear to be in the same room as the offending item and need to leave as quickly as possible. Unlike Kolnai who does not think that disgust involves fear, Miller recognises that there are more extreme cases of disgust, cases which he describes as 'intense disgust' which involve fear 'for contamination is a frightful thing' (Miller 1997, 26).

Excretions, for example, travel from inside to outside the body, thereby troubling any sense of it having secure borders. ... The threat to the boundary or orifice remains an indispensable part of the modality of being.

I agree with Miller that not all disgust is the same in intensity but believe that if we are going to take the view that contamination is integral to disgust then disgust is necessarily accompanied by fear, however low level. In the face of disgust, we turn away in repugnance and try to avoid its touch. And the closer the disgusting object moves towards us, the greater the fear. Winfried Menninghaus suggests that disgust does in fact bring about fear because it involves the loss of self, which is something that invariably involves fear. He states that ‘Everything seems at risk in the experience of disgust. It is a state of alarm and emergency, an acute crisis of self-preservation in the face of an unassimilable otherness, a convulsive struggle, in which what is in question is, quite literally, whether “to be or not to be”’(Menninghaus 2003, 1). Abjection involves greater levels of disgust, and therefore fear, and fear encroaches on the boundaries of the self. The following two examples illustrate the differences in response between disgust and abjection, where neither precludes our fear of contamination. If we were to find a mouldy peach in a cellar we may feel disgusted and would feel inclined to remove it from our presence or to avoid it in other ways. If we were to find instead a rotting corpse instead of a mouldy peach, our reactions would be very different. That would promote flight of a different kind and urgency. The reason for our different stances is that the peach, vile as it may be, does not encroach on the boundaries of the self. Both the peach and the corpse evoke strong feelings of visceral disgust that affect us emotionally but the corpse represents a threat and harm of a different kind. It is, to use Foster’s phrase, ‘not only alien to the subject but intimate with it’ (Foster 1996a, 153) and this means that we cannot separate ourselves from it. The corpse, Kristeva argues, ‘seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object’ (Kristeva 1982, 4). The same rationale can be applied to bodily fluids and their processes. Once separated from their natural location and on the other side of the boundary, these once benign substances – of blood, mucus, saliva etc. – become foreign and dangerous to us, being reminders of death. They are capable of defilement and must be gotten rid of discreetly. They are what Gordon Allport calls ‘not-me’ – the ego-alien – and cause revulsion (Allport 1955, 43). They are of the body and cannot be completely eradicated. Excretions, for example, travel from inside to outside the body, thereby troubling any sense of it having secure borders. The acquaintance such materials provide us with regarding the lack of assurance of our physical borders is supplemented by recognition of the precariousness of our psychic borders, our sense of self. The threat to the boundary or orifice remains an indispensable part of the modality of being.

...even in the case of objects that we know would not contaminate us, we still feel both disgust and fear. ... people reject acceptable foods e.g. chocolate fudge that had been fashioned in the form of dog faeces ... because of their fear of contamination.

Disgust thus exists on a spectrum of fear, where mild cases, such as the mouldy peach do not generate much fear but nevertheless influence our behaviour to move away from the

object. Our instinctual desire for self-protection and avoidance of contamination means that we tend to avoid disgusting objects. Paul Rozin's studies about non-disgusting objects becoming associated through resemblance with disgusting objects reveal the fear of contamination. Rozin and his collaborators drew on the law of similarity (from Frazer and Mauss' laws of sympathetic magic) to show how even in the case of objects that we know would not contaminate us, we still feel *both* disgust and fear. They showed how people reject acceptable foods e.g. chocolate fudge that had been fashioned in the form of dog faces or a bowl of favourite soup that has been stirred by a brand-new comb because of their fear of contamination (Rozin, Millman *et al.* 1986, 705-6).

Abjection: An Aesthetics of Horror

In his study of disgust Miller discusses how the combination of disgust and a high degree of fear – so 'fear-imbued disgust' – results in horror (Miller 1997, 26). What is interesting is that Miller suggests that whereas fear generates the desire to flee, horror that has been generated from disgust results in an inability to move, a passivity, that means that the only option is to face it. We are unable to flee because we are frozen in our tracks. We are not able to fight it because 'the threatening thing is disgusting, one does not want to strike it, touch it, or grapple with it' (Miller 1997, 26). It becomes like Sartrean slime, and we don't want to be in contact with it lest we get caught up in it. This fits with Kristeva's aspirations for her narrative of abjection, which is a story about horror.

In the latter section of *Powers of Horror* Kristeva talks about the compulsion that certain avant-garde writers like Dostoevsky, Proust, Joyce, Artaud and Louis-Ferdinand Céline have had to examine the horror of life. As Kristeva says, '[t]he writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence perverts language – style and content' (Kristeva 1982, 16). Kristeva focuses on the role of the abject in the writing of Céline 'whose writing "speaks" horror and whose political vision, includes a violent anti-semitism, is to be understood as a symptom, which both enacts and exposes the horror and fascination of psychic violence' (Marcus 1995, 258). While human 'civilization' has been a process of taming and controlling the nature of the human body, this is countered by a continued fascination with the baser side of humanity, with the abject. This shift in motivation is relevant. Everyday life involves a need to maintain the boundaries of the self, which necessitates the disavowing or regulating aspects of instinctual life in order for the subject to enter into the symbolic order. Through abjection Kristeva reverses this. Within the realm of culture artists and writers beckon the abject in order to express the fragile limit of meaning, to experience how 'objects at the boundaries of palatability and thinkability enter symbolic representation' (Cazeaux 2011, 718). One of the effects of abject art is to provoke horror 'and thus regenerate an affective relation to art' (Lechte 2003, 11) which Kristeva argues can be 'cathartic' (Morgan and Morris 1995, 23). This fascination with horror conveys the ambivalence of the abject. Kristeva comments on how we are constantly beguiled by the abject in 'a vortex of summons and repulsion' (1982, 1); 'the jettisoned object, [that] is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses' (1982, 2).

A development of the connection between disgust, fear and horror is articulated in Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990) where he looks at the phenomenology of horror; with the nature of the experience of horror, what it feels like to be horrified. Using examples of films to convey the horror of the monster and the monstrous, he makes a distinction between art-horror as opposed to real-life horror to show the continued fascination that we have with the genre.

Conclusion

Since the 1990s, reflecting the 'affective turn' in the humanities and social sciences, there has been a number of book-length treatments on disgust most of which do not mention abjection. Winfried Menninghaus' study *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation* (2003) is an exception to the literature as it is one of the only studies that consider abjection. Devoting an entire chapter to abjection, Menninghaus describes it as 'the newest mutation in the theory of disgust' (Menninghaus 2003, 365) and asks whether it should be added 'to the Freudian catalogue of defense mechanisms (repression, repudiation, denial, transference' (367). The omission of abjection in studies about disgust can be explained by the different guiding concerns and methods used, in particular the psychoanalytical framework of abjection vis-à-vis Kristeva is not of interest to evolutionary psychologists or analytic philosophers.

Abjection features as a region on the spectrum of disgust where it is associated with a high degree of fear. ... it is something that we do our utmost to reject, but which also captivates our interest. Abjection is the darkness that reigns at the heart of the human condition.

Abjection and disgust share certain phenomenological traits but the degree of fear (and therefore horror) varies. Abjection features as a region on the spectrum of disgust where it is associated with a high degree of fear. And so to draw on two objects used earlier, while the mouldy peach is an example of disgust it does not cause abjection, whereas the corpse does. The degree of fear means that not all cases of disgust are abject. The terms express different applications, where Kristeva's is folded into a theory about the processes of subjectivity. Kristeva's theory of abjection highlights the ambivalent nature of disgust, which for the main part is something that we do our utmost to reject, but which also captivates our interest. Her theory then is not only about the unconscious process of signification but a theory about a cultural need to seek out horror. Abjection is the darkness that reigns at the heart of the human condition.

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