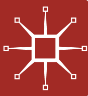

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN
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Art, Excess, and Education

Historical and Discursive Contexts

Edited by
Kevin Tavin · Mira Kallio-Tavin · Max Ryynänen

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Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures

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The series Educational Futures would be a call on all aspects of education, not only specific subject specialist, but policy makers, religious education leaders, curriculum theorists, and those involved in shaping the educational imagination through its foundations and both psychoanalytical and psychological investments with youth to address this extraordinary precarity and anxiety that is continually rising as things do not get better but worsen. A global de-territorialization is taking place, and new voices and visions need to be seen and heard. The series would address the following questions and concerns. The three key signifiers of the book series title address this state of risk and emergency:

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Editors

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Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures
ISBN 978-3-030-21827-0 ISBN 978-3-030-21828-7 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7

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Cover illustration: © Ron Wigglesworth

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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CHAPTER 1

An Introduction to Excess in Art and Education: Discursive Explorations

Kevin Tavin, Mira Kallio-Tavin, and Max Ryynänen

There has been a continual relationship, for a significant period of time, between art, excess, and education. This entanglement has been dependent upon the specific context, the social and political order, and available discourse at that time. Of course, each of these concepts, 'art, excess, and education,' are contested terrains in themselves, and include multiple, complex, and contradictory perspectives that cannot be reduced to a homogeneous body. However, while art and education have their own histories, trajectories, and discourses (and indeed are sutured together as one field—'art education'), the concept of *excess* requires an initial, discursive exploration. For example, one of the most conventional ways excess has been defined, comprehended, and deployed is through a particular magnitude or over-abundance of 'something' on a predetermined scale. This discursive formation seems to imply that excess is not only the opposite of a lesser amount, or lack of 'something,' but also what is considered beyond a particular understanding of moderation or balance.

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_1

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Excess has also been used to characterize transgressions of particular orders: the social order, cultural order, political order, personal order, and so on. Within them are systems of economics, religion, medicine, science, art, education, philosophy, and so on. This also includes the discourse of the body in general, especially the human body as an orderly body and its relation to the prevailing body politic. The human body is often central for excess when the focus is on substances that the body produces, or surfaces that signify something, along with other matters outside, yet in close proximity to, the body.

Excess is a matter of sense. As mentioned earlier, it is often about transgressing what would be taken as common sense or commonsense standards (political and otherwise). It also has to do with questions around embodied sensations and primary reactions as sense (as in the *Sensation* exhibition, 1997). The discourse of excess can be about extremity. When sense, common sense, and extremity are discursive constituents applied to the body, excess is tied to ugliness and disgust. The latter might include real or metaphorical 'disgusting' body fluids, solids, skin, pigmentation, marking, impurities, defects, disfigurements, and so on that are uncontainable and uncontrollable—'just too much.' Excess is also the discourse of the undesirable, abnormal, forbidden, taboo, and wasteful. In this sense, excess is often tied to notions of the abject and monstrosity, especially in art and popular visual culture. Excess needs to be hidden in the dark, for if it comes into the light (so to speak) that which is beyond comprehension might become too dangerous or exciting—too excessive in itself as 'an experience.' Excess in Western art, especially filtered through the notion of the disgusting, has been represented (or forbidden from representation) from at least the time of the ancient Greeks, through the so-called Middle Ages, and Modern period. It has been explicitly taken up as a topic in contemporary art, through performance, endurance, shock, and the sensational, for example.

Excess in Art

Classical artworks dealt in part with both beauty and disgust, order and excess. In art from earlier millennia, formal qualities and content dealt with heroes, monsters, creatures, and all sorts of abominable beings, represented within the context of glory and beauty, and other times as its antithesis. Death, in all manners, continued to find its way into the art, through romanticized deterioration of flesh and bone, and severed heads and limbs. Religious art is full with examples of glorified excess, including paintings of Satan and

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Hell with details of blood, gore, and disfigurement. Of course, there are also endless examples of historical images of Jesus and his crucifixion, and deaths of other Christian martyrs, that show details of lacerations and revolting wounds. As Paco Barragan argues in his chapter in this book, "excess has traditionally been the exclusive monopoly of history painting within the visual arts." In this sense, one might argue the level of excess was not only within the formal qualities of the images themselves at the time—which were seen as grand, extravagant, beautiful, or sublime—but through the allegories and their corporeal, emotional, and political effects on audiences.

War and politics as a category of art and excess traverse different moments in time. Excessive imagery, such as bloody wounds, mangled body parts, and the suffering and suffocated adorn many of the well-known art examples for centuries as an indicator of conquer and the conquered. These artworks attempt to tell stories of greatness, history, and truth. This work, that was once (and still is to a certain extent) celebrated, has more recently been interpreted in a more critical light as excessive in terms of the extreme harm, brutality, genocide, and violence toward the other. In other words, it was once an attempt to represent the real through these violent works that has turned more recently into a non-representation of the Real.[1]

For the most part, it is not until the modern era that artworks from the West specifically addressed war not only through the glorious and grand but also through the stark and gruesome. Yet, it could be argued that, in many cases, when artworks were discussed by critics, excess was bracketed out in terms of materiality, while the focus was on an aesthetically valuable work representing excess and horror. For example, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), which is discussed throughout this book, represents a bloody massacre by German and Italians during the Spanish Civil War. The stark truth, so to speak, of the horrors of war is there for all to see, but at the same time framed in terms of abstraction, monochrome, and composition. In other words, while the artwork is about excess—human excess in war and its brutality (in terms of the affect)—the painting is not the same excess as discussed in recent discourses of contemporary art. For example, excess in contemporary art might be seen as an over-abundance of 'something' material, or some other 'matter,' or 'medium,' that in turn may cause an excessive embodied reaction. In this way, many contemporary and late modern or postmodern artists challenge the aesthetics of modernism and formalism, and expand their discursive and material relationship to excess outside the work itself.

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Modernist Aesthetics and Excess in Art

Strictly understood, modernist theories of formalism in art established that only 'the work itself' was of aesthetic interest. In this view, nonformal elements of the artwork, including the social and the political, were artistically and aesthetically superfluous—excessive. Through the configuration of formal qualities, one could attend to the intrinsic value of the work, and mostly through disinterested interest. In other words, everything but the art itself was a certain form of excess (to be discarded). According to this theory, a work of art is 'autonomous' and 'self-sufficient.' Some of these ideas are often contributed to the critical writings from Emanuel Kant (2007) and more recently Roger Fry (1956), Clive Bell (1961), and Clement Greenberg (1965). Undeniably, there are many other critics who contributed to the appeal of this idea, in both art and art education. Moreover, it is clear that the discourse of excess does not follow the exact path of art's relationship to modernism's formalist aesthetics. This is made manifest in the numerous perspectives from the contributors to this book. This brief section is intended, however, to highlight the general principles upon which the aforementioned critics agree and contextualize them within the broader notions of aesthetics, excess, and art in (high) modernism, as opposed to more contemporary artworks.

The writings of Emanuel Kant, however misinterpreted, provided a useful theoretical framework of modern aesthetic formalism that in part have defined a communal habit for viewing art and determining what is moderate, pleasurable, and beautiful, and what is disgusting and excessive. This work, knowingly or not, continues to have profound ramifications in the discursive relationships between art, excess, and especially education. In Kant's view, good and beautiful art must avoid excess to preserve qualities of artistic integrity and the sublime, and appeal to the disinterested. In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant (2007) insisted that any response to 'the beautiful' precluded the application of determinant concepts. He states, "taste in the beautiful is alone a disinterested and free satisfaction" (p. 32). For Kant, 'pure disinterested judgment' was based upon formal properties, not the subject matter. Kant's notion, that pleasure (as opposed to disgust) was to be found in form, provided a model for modernist versions of formalism that framed the notion of excess in terms of the opposite of the beautiful or perfect, which in most cases is removed from all the excessive 'muck' of life. This is exemplified later through the writings of Clive Bell (1961): "to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing

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from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions … nothing but a sense of form and color and a knowledge of three-dimensional space" (pp. 36–37).

Bell maintained that the essential qualities of art are permanent and stable, transcending historical, and cultural contexts. This is exemplified when Bell (1961) asks rhetorically, "to those who have and hold a sense of significant form, what does it matter whether the forms that move them were created in Paris the day before yesterday or in Babylon fifty years ago?" (p. 37). A similar view can be found in the writings of Roger Fry (1956), who claimed that art work must be "adapted to that disinterested intensity of contemplation, which we have found to be the result of cutting off the responsive action" (p. 29). Fry saw nature as essentially excessive and chaotic as opposed to 'art,' which embodied unity through formal properties. Parallel to Bell's position, Fry believed that the principles of art remained the same throughout time.

Kant's perception of beauty versus disgust, Fry's criterion for unity versus chaos, and Bell's notion of significant form can be found throughout the discourse of Clement Greenberg. Greenberg (1965) claimed that "visual art should confine itself to what is given in visual experience and make no reference to any other orders of experience" (p. 199). Greenberg's theories were synthesized into a model of 'pure form' and were clearly articulated against the excess of popular culture and kitsch. Greenberg argued that if one has to go beyond the artwork itself and confront extra-formal facts, to search for quality, the work is artistically excessive (defective). Greenberg's approach reached the status of a critical paradigm in the mid-twentieth-century high modernism, and was assimilated by a generation of younger critics including Michael Fried.

Fried's (1965) early writings affirmed the theories of Greenberg by promoting the "alienation of the artist from the general preoccupations of the culture in which he is embedded and the prying loose of art itself from the concerns, aims, and ideals of that culture" (p. 7). Initially, Fried accepted Greenberg's fundamental notion that 'quality' art should explore what belongs solely to its particular medium, and everything else was 'excessive.' Fried claimed that when an object depended upon the beholder, it degenerated into the condition of theater. In other words, when the pictorial essence of an artwork is compromised through its relation to particular situations, it no longer functions as 'pure form' but something else—excess of the pure.

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In short, the formalist aesthetic imperative of (high) modernism advocated the notion of 'pure form' as removed from all sociopolitical content and context: "To study content … would be like studying the Devil rather than God," to ignore content "was a sign of virtue" (McEvilley 1995, p. 69). The modernist imperative also saw art as perfect in form, unified in beauty, and perceived from a disinterested perspective. These positions reified a gap between art and life as excess, and promoted, however unintended, an ahistorical and apolitical perspective. Fry (1996) argued that 'actual life' requires moral responsibility, yet "in art we have no such moral responsibility-it presents a life freed from the binding necessities of our actual existence" (p. 79).

In our contemporary era, it is no revelation to claim that artworks should not be evaluated, interpreted, or analyzed in isolation from social, political, and other forms of content and context. As Noël Carroll and Filippo Contesi point out in this book, modernist aesthetics and its focus on formalism's reduction of aesthetic knowledge to standards of beauty, for example, do not play well if we consider excessive contemporary art. Yet, as we will argue later in this chapter, modernist aesthetics continues to be paradigmatically translated into much of contemporary art education theory and practice, especially in schooling. In art education, this often sets-up a false dichotomy between objects worthy of study (the beautiful, pleasurable, perfect) and those deemed pedagogically vapid (excessive, disgusting, popular).

Excess in Contemporary Art

In opposition to the exclusion of social context and content, the division between the beautiful and the disgusting, and of aesthetic experience and everyday life, what is the role of excess in recent contemporary art? There seems to be an abundance of contemporary artworks that deal with the concept of excess that, in one way or another, attempt to mark and trouble the boundaries between art and societal norms, and order and chaos. These artworks also try to engage various senses of self and world, often by raising ethical problematics. Sometimes these contemporary artworks have drawn attention and have affected people's ideas about art itself. And, in many of these cases, the intention of the artist was overshadowed by the reaction of various audiences, authorities, and critics. In turn, mass media has been eager to focus on them, not just on what would be considered moderate works of art that form the quantitative core

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of contemporary art. But what are some of the key ethical questions or social issues raised by these more recent artworks, even if not intended by the producer of the work?

Consider the following short set of examples: From 1962 through 1998, the Vienna Actionists performed over 100 Dionysian blood and gore orgies. In 1972, Stuart Brisley spent ten days (two hours a day) in a bathtub filled with putrefied matter (1972). In 1980, John Duncan had sex with a female corpse. From 1983 to 1984, Tehching Hsieh was tied together to another artist with an eight-foot-long rope for the entire year. In 1995, Teemu Mäki killed a cat with an axe and then ejaculating on its body. In 1990, Damien Hirst made artwork with fly larva, a decapitated cow head, and a bug zapper. In 2000, Zhu Yu performed an act of cannibalism by eating a dead fetus. In 2004, Tom Friedman placed a butterfly on a large pile of feces in an art gallery. In 2007, Andres Serrano made a series of 66 photographic close-ups of human, dog, jaguar, and bull feces. And, in a related nod to excrement as excess, and excess as excrement, in 2016, Mike Bouchet created an artwork out of 80,000 kg of human sludge, gathered during one day in Zürich.

The last example tries to make visible how much feces and other waste a city with a population of 400,000 people produces in one average day, and what does 80 tons of human sludge look like. The sludge was pressed tightly in forms of cubics and they were organized neatly next to each other to fill in an entire large exhibition hall. While the massive installation may have been visually interesting (for its formal qualities qua modernist aesthetics), the main affect when encountering the work occurred through olfaction disgust. The excessively strong smell filled the air, making it thick, almost something one was able to taste, causing of a sense nausea or actual vomiting. The embodied experience raises questions on art, materiality and the body, especially on material most people don't often want to think about, but which is part of them. As Susan B. Livingston states in her chapter in this book, "shit occupies an interstitial space of abjection … it once resided within our bodies. It is full of us, quite literally …. When it left our bodies, it carried with it an impression of our insides, a cast of our intestines, and a map to part of ourselves we will never see." Somehow it is difficult to know if what one is seeing and feeling is excessive because it *is* us, or *in* us, or it is both, and/or unnamable. For contemporary artworks that deal with excess, this type of experience might cause affects related to suspended or troubled subjectivity, disturbing the "very boundary separating the 'outside' from the 'inside'" (Žižek 1999, p. 19).

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The same problematic might be raised by the other works mentioned earlier. For example, the killing of the so-called innocent animals, or the defiling and displaying of their carcasses, has occupied a significant site of excess within the social imagination through prohibited, interrelated, and reinforced acts of violence. The same applies for human cannibalism as a transgression of codes and taboos that, in part, help construct rational and disciplined human subjects. As artworks, these acts inscribe the monstrous, evil, and violent transgressions on and through bodies (human and animals), and, in turn, inscribe the transgressions of the body politic (law, rules, and other so-called peaceful ways of existence). Similar to the effects of 80,000 kg of human sludge, seeing cuts into bodies, eating bodies, and modified bodies (human or non-human animal) might strip away predefined understanding of self, world, and norms, and take us, even momentarily, to a place of interference and irruption. However, as discussed throughout the book, excess in art is not just about physical or psychical sensations, or working with extreme artistic materials. It also has to do with thinking and theorizing about the artworks, and their relationship to dualisms, the irrational, the abject, subjectivity, aesthetic response beyond modernism, and so on. This thinking is informed, in part, by philosophical, psychoanalytic, and pedagogical discourse.

For example, we might think of the orgies of Vienna Actionists through Friedrich Nietzsche's discourse on the Apollonian and the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy* (2008). The Apollonian side of life stresses rational thinking, prudence, purity, and order. The Dionysian, following the name of the god of wine and dance (Dionysios), stresses irrationality and chaos, and it appeals to the less controllable sides of humanity, emotions, and instincts. Nietzsche also offered an alternative to the more contemplative, control-driven aesthetic theories of the founders of modern aesthetics (qua Kant). We also might interpret Zhu Yu's act of cannibalism as an objective and subjective violent artwork that brings us face to face with the possibility of our own death, dissection, and digestion. Considered through the work of Jacques Lacan:

> The image of the disembodied flesh, for example, may have entered into our unconscious where, at the level of the Real, our body remained fragmented and in pieces. Perhaps this moment of jouissance instigated by the cut, the collapsing of distance between subject and object, helped to create enough distance from our loss of intimacy to, paradoxically, bring us closer to thinking about the Other. (Tavin and Kallio-Tavin 2014, p. 429)

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The discussion above demonstrates that while the twentieth century reified modernist aesthetics and formalist approaches to artworks, it also brought forth significant theoretical discourse around the theme of excess that informs interpretations of contemporary artwork. For example, Georges Bataille (1985), Jacques Lacan (1994), Julia Kristeva (1982), and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1983), whose work is cited throughout this book, are just a few theorists who write about affect and disgust, and the unknown, unfixed, anxious, uncertain, and absent subject. Kristeva's theories of abjection, for example, offer excess as a site to contemplate topics such as violence, uncanniness, immorality, and so on. Furthermore, as Raphael Vella points out in his chapter in this book, contemporary artists such as Thomas Hirschhorn have been inspired by Bataille's (1985) understanding of the world of excess, transgression, human waste, and expenditure. Beyond theorizing about the concept of excess in relation to contemporary art, this book also addresses how excess constitutes questions of ethics for education. While education is always a question of exclusion and relationships between subjects, it is also a question of language and society, norms and values, and the Other and self.

For example, educational perspectives on excess offer an important area to discuss and challenge expectations and conventions about normalcy. Art and popular culture offer channels for these discussions. Tod Browning's film, *Freaks* (1932), discussed by Carroll and Filippo in Chap. 2 of this book, is a disturbing and fascinating example how non-normative body has been encountered in the past, and still today speaks to human curiosity toward non-normal body. The film is troublesome in a way that might stimulate important critical educational contemplation. Many disability studies scholars, for example, invite discussion around the non-normative body, and are likely to challenge what is considered as beautiful and what is not. As Vella points out in his chapter in this book, the non-normative body has been a site of public spectacle throughout history. Understanding the politics of inclusion and exclusion of disabled and differently abled bodies requires educational intervention. Policies and practices can only be inclusive insofar as disability cultures and disability aesthetics are fully represented. "Therefore, disability in the art classroom is not only about inclusion, defined as appropriately accommodating students with disabilities, but also about the exploration of disability culture and the sociopolitical issues of ableism in arts curriculum" (Eisenhauer 2007, p. 10).

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Art Education and Excess

The dominant discourse of education is understood as the production of knowledge, beliefs, and values that takes place within and outside of schools. In a more critical light, education is rooted in the need for individuals and groups to analyze the social, political, economic, and historical realities that have helped shape and represent experiences of the world. For a critical art education, this requires interpreting and responding artistically or otherwise to the inextricable nexus of these experiences, including their representations and affects. Henry Giroux (1988) sees this project as "a terrain of struggle … revealing the dialectical nature of its interests and possibilities" (p. 89). In this sense, art education is a performative and discursive activity that helps create and contest what it describes, and can help enable critical insight into ways that subjectivities are constructed through complex artistic processes. Charles Garoian (2001) argues that this type of performativity "re-positions viewers as critical participants and enables their creative and political agency" (p. 235). How then might artworks that address themes of excess, in one way or another, have import to this critical art education and educational futures?

In terms of typical art classrooms, especially in the U.S., excessive artworks, specifically contemporary artworks such as many of the ones discussed in this book, are considered so far outside of the conventional frames of education that they are often disparaged as useless. While there are myriad reasons for this (including increased standardization, testing, local and national politics, etc.), two dominant and ingrained positions seem to be the main culprits: (1) A continued undergirding of modernist aesthetics and (2) a rejection of artwork deemed too violent or controversial to offer any pedagogical value.

First, there is a shared common experience in many art courses, especially in the U.S., where the taxonomy for pedagogy emphasizes a modernist preoccupation with developing skills based on traditional media, and an aesthetic fixation on limited concepts of form. While oversimplified here, this modernist aesthetic perspective, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, often deemphasizes content, context, and theory in relation to contemporary art, and especially contemporary works that deal with excess. Because this idea is so embedded in contemporary U.S. art education discourse and practice as taken for granted and necessary, it is easy for educators to forget all pedagogy, and their attendant ideas about art reflect socially, historically, politically, and economically grounded understandings

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of art, conceptions of beauty and pleasure, and the roles of education for artists in schools and in society (Tavin et al. 2007).

Second, dominant art education discourse is framed through both a liberal humanist approach to learning, and psycho-biological conceptions of educational development for the learning subject. In other words, the discourse in art education supports the intellectual and moral capacity of a learner as cumulative and progressive, as in a 'life-long learner' (Tavin et al. 2018). This, in turn, presupposes a rational subject for whom education presupposes moral and social regulation. This education is then adapted and mobilized in the learner, in a Piagetian sense. Taken together, this suggests that art education's moral obligation is to develop students toward a utopian ideal of universal humanity, through the inherent goodness of art. Contemporary artworks that are seen as 'excessive' are inimical to this education. Anna Kindler (2009) provides an example behind this thinking:

> There is no doubt that late 20th century and early 21st century art has provided us with an abundance of unusual, weird, revolting, disgusting, repulsive, profane, and shocking artifacts. How much depth, however, has it contributed to our understanding; how much has it moved us toward resolutions of problems; how much has it enlightened us to create a better world; how much has it enriched our lives on societal or personal levels? I have to confess that for all the "novelty" driving the depths of much contemporary art (even with the help of theory), I have found myself touching the bottom of astounding triviality. (p. 153)

Unfortunately, this position seems all too common. Based on deeply held notions of aesthetics and taste, set within a frame of predetermined artistic criteria, and tied tightly to liberal humanist and developmental theories, there is no place for excessive art in art education or educational futures.

Against this position, we offer throughout this book a different type of art education that might be more reflexive about its own enjoyment and anxieties with contemporary art and visual culture. In other words, rather than only focusing on artworks and images that pedagogically guarantee to make the world a better place (in a narrowly defined, humanistic sense), or artworks that bring comfort to the totality of self through form, color, and composition, the artworks and images discussed in this book might offer a pedagogy of provocation, around the concepts of the unknown, unfixed, anxious, uncertain, or absent subject, through embodied experiences and non-representational practices (Tavin and Kallio-Tavin 2014).

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This is not to suggest, however, that art educators simply dismiss beauty, formal qualities, or aesthetics all together. Indeed, all properties of visual images do function psychologically, phenomenologically, physiologically, philosophically, cognitively, sensorially, and ideologically to affect pleasure and desire. Shapes, forms, and different representations in an image might accentuate domination, submission, and/or desire through the interaction of the gaze. Pleasure or pain can be felt through the process of constant play with meaning with form. A pedagogy of provocation goes further, however, and asks what can we do when confronted with an affective moment mediated through a contemporary artwork that deals with excess, when the grounding of our human subjectivity and limits of our knowledge are troubled. Perhaps, as an embodied experience, this may lead to a kind of overflow of our secure sense of being. These works may provoke questions of ethics through a failure of containment. As jagodzinski suggests, "This transgression is in itself a precarious act that has no grounding—no bottom so to speak—and as such immediately raises the question of ethics" (jagodzinski 2005, p. 270).

The artworks and images in this book offer a different educational choice for the future than perhaps the kind of works advocated by Kindler (2009) and others. The choice is not only about how to make the world more beautiful, harmonized, and pleasurable but also about how to deal with those things that are in us, and that are more than us—our excess of alterity. From a Lacanian perspective, this is when

> ethics comes into play, in the question forced upon us by an encounter with the Real: will I act in conformity to what threw me "out of joint", will I be ready to reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence? (Zupancic 2000, p. 235)

This opens up educational questions for the future. How might we engage excessive artworks and images that cause us to exceed ourselves and our understanding of the world (its norms, values, codes, etc.) in sensational ways? What might we learn from artists whose works are caught up in the nexus of intention and reception, where their original intent changed dramatically through reactionary discourse and tactics? And, how might a different look at the history and discourse of art and excess expand the conversations beyond the field-specific discourse of art history, art criticism, philosophy, and aesthetics? It is our hope that this book offers examples of something different, something new, and something that exceeds the current conversation about art and education, for a future that is indeed uncontainable.

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About This Book

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, 'Taxonomies, Histories, and Excessive Aesthetics,' consists of three essays. The first is an attempt to provide a classificatory scheme of art and excess, via the discourse of disgust as an epistemic emotion of curiosity. Noël Carroll and Filippo Contesi point to the different deployments of the discourse of disgust in art and popular culture using three categories and two variables. They raise numerous and important examples of excessive works, from early Greek mythology to contemporary art, and from early film to recent touch-screen devices, to make distinctions between images where the subjects are disgusting and images where the vehicles are disgusting. They bring together artworks and artifacts in part through themes of religion, pain, death, cannibals, zombies, sex, urine, feces, semen, dead and live animals, prostitution, fascism, moral degradation, and symbolic and objective violence. In doing so, they posit some of the major discourse of excess covered throughout this book. In addition, Carroll and Contesi's essay helps us to understand how the enduring association between art and the beautiful has most often bracketed out the sensation of disgust, and thus relegated the import of art and excess to education (as discussed earlier in this chapter). While the notion of disgust should not be conflated with the concept of excess, their taxonomic essay makes the case for a pedagogy that takes artworks and images seriously that are excessive and disgusting, via their communicative ends.

The next essay in this section focuses on the concept of excess as extravagant use of violence and ideology in the history of Western 'history painting.' Paco Barragan traces the relationship of history painting with representations of reality and its excesses, especially political excesses. The essay, in particular, looks at the grandiosity—grand formats, heroes, and events—of history painting and connects it to political manifestations including absolutism, imperialism, and colonialism, from the seventeenth century to the present populist regimes in Europe, and the conservative Trump government. Barragan also raises questions about the loss of painting's predominance as newer media competed for means of representation. Similar to the previous essay by Carroll and Contesi, Barragan explicates excessive imagery of religious conflicts, genocide, murder, and especially modern warfare through reactions of ambition, horror, and grief. Like other chapters in the book, Barragan discusses Picasso's *Guernica* as an example par excellence of excess and brutality. In terms of the pedagogical potential of history painting, the essay unveils the complex relationship between art and politics, and how education binds both to what he calls the 'whole artistic eco-system.'

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The last essay in 'Part I' takes us from the earlier essays on painting and representation to performance and non-representation. In line with the latter, jan jagodzinski offers the life and work of Tehching Hsieh as a form of excessive aesthetics and non-representation. The essay first explores examples of endurance and durational performance art, and reveals their excessive iterations and tensions, including spectacle, authenticity, provocation, and repetition. Once again, we find in this early part of the essay themes that cut across the entirety of the book, such as death, brutality, mutation, masochism, and sadism. However, jagodzinski focuses the majority of his writing on Tehching Hsieh, as apart from, and indeed as the very antithesis of, other performance artists. Through the philosophical framework of Deleuze and Guattari, the essay interprets Hsieh's six performances, over the time span of 30 years as 'becomings.' This essay provides readers with insight as to what Deleuze and Guattari call *A Life*. Like other chapters in this book, jagodzinski problematizes and deconstructs the very notion of representational art that is institutionally defined.

The second part of the book, 'Human and Non-human Art/Educational Excess,' comprises four chapters. The first essay, by Mira Kallio-Tavin, focuses on four contemporary artworks that include nonhuman animals, killing, and animal material in/as art: Guillermo Vargas's (aka Habacuc's) *Exposición N° 1*, Teemu Mäki's, *My Way, a Work in Progress*, Pekka Jylhä's *The Table That Wanted to Go Back to Being a Pond*, and Huang Yong Ping's, *Theater of the World*. The political implications of the four artworks are discussed, as well as some of the strong reactions to their perceived violence and excess. Juxtaposed with the previous essays where Carroll and Filippo describe artwork where animals are slaughtered and their carcasses strutted around, and jagodzinski's essay on the notion of 'A life,' Kallio-Tavin's text raises ethical questions about the normative value of a nonhuman animal, in part, through the philosophy of Emanuel Levinas. The essay points out that while topics such as animal rights are a small part of the larger discourse of oppression, their inclusion in education is more deeply neglected, and artworks such as the ones offered as examples are essentially deemed too excess to be considered.

The second essay in 'Part II' attempts to discursively invert the notion of excess by suggesting it be understood through a lack of completeness, loss, or defect, not only as an accumulation or over-abundance of something. Raphael Vella's chapter analyzes examples of art that engage the public with the loss of a body part, such as loss of limb through wars (a theme taken up in previous chapters by Carroll and Filippo, and Barragan)

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and the conflictual or exclusionary discourse that ensues. Continuing on the theme of the nonhuman animal, Vella concentrates his analysis on the artwork of Austin Camilleri, who produced with a life-size horse cast in bronze, standing on three legs. For some, the horse appeared to be a monster, comparable perhaps to the monstrous artists discussed by Kallio-Tavin, and for others, it signified a political lack. In the end, Vella describes the educational value of Camilleri's artwork, similar to a pedagogy of provocation, that leaves a wound which cannot be ignored.

The third essay supplements questions in other chapters regarding why many of us are drawn toward revolting objects, disgusting topics, and bodies and body parts that refuse normal categorizations. Susan B. Livingston draws upon different categories and taxonomies of disgust and frames them squarely within an art education context. Specifically, the essay explores the excess of excrement and secretions, and shares experiences of school children's fascination with those subjects. The essay then moves from the object of disgust to the abject—in particular, abject art. By investigating the interstitial space of abjection, Livingston points to the rupturing of boundaries, and its possible ensuing pleasures, between inside and outside (of bodies in particular). The essay connects quite well with previously mentioned norms of beauty and the aesthetic that defined the parameters of disgust, including previous discussions on feces that is at once part of us and rejected, and dead animals as art, which invite the viewers to contemplate their own life and ethical choices. Livingston provides a strong case for why the field of art education avoids *excessive* art, usually meaning contemporary art, and a stronger case for why it should not.

The last essay in this section looks closely at the work of John Duncan, who engaged in acts that were considered by many to be excessively horrifying, repulsive, immoral, and sexually violent. Juuso Tervo carefully and meticulously unravels Duncan's work from an educational standpoint, and explicates the deeply religious roots of Calvinist Christianity in Duncan's upbringing. In this way, the essay explores the discursive and experiential limits of the excessive artwork, "between affirmation and negation, learning and unlearning." Tervo uses the concept of darkness—both in a concrete and metaphorical sense—as a way to argue that Duncan's art does not represent an event, but is a *real* event of rupture, that embodies the indeterminacy between individual fate and universal history. In this sense, the essay continues the conversation about the limits of representation, a pedagogy of provocation, and the challenge for art education to grasp the immanence of artistic events of disruption without constituting a universal truth.

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The final section, 'Part III: Dead, Shocking, and Monstrous Art and Popular culture,' continues the discursive currents in other sections of the book but focuses more on specific media representations and representations in the media—especially through popular culture and on-line—and how they have, or may be, received by audiences. The first essay looks closely at one of a filmic example of science fiction horror, *Alien: Resurrection* (1997). Continuing to address why the disgusting and grotesque possibly satisfies viewers, Henriikka Huunan-Seppälä writes of slimy monsters, human–animal hybrids, body fluids, and sadistic masochistic terror and enjoyment. The essay, complementing both Livingston's and Vella's texts, discusses how the grotesque suggests both excess and lack. Huunan-Seppälä goes into great detail in analyzing the film, in relation to the maternal-feminine, threatening sexuality, transcategorical beings, the animate and inanimate, and human and machine. This essay also draws upon Lacanian theory, in part, to frame excess through fantasies, taboos and ideals, repressions, and desires. Building upon the larger question for education, Huunan-Seppälä suggests media education as an urgent need to study excess and unveil how grotesque representations draw upon fears and fantasies.

The next essay by Annamari Vänskä looks closely at an event regarding excessive reactions to sexually explicit and sexually offensive images from various websites. Ulla Karttunen's work, *Virgin-Whore Church* (2008), used these images in an installation in an attempt to tear open established taboos or moral codes and expose the 'pornographication of the mainstream.' The artwork caused a national sensation in Finland and was shut down. The essay explores specific legal, moral, and institutional details of this event as a singular moment and places it more broadly in the context of excessive contemporary art, feminist art history, 'shock art,' and other art shown in Finland. In terms of education, Vänskä, like Barragan and Huunan-Seppä, looks at media through critical perspective and asks what is the responsibility of an artist in an era of social media, in terms of possibilities and limitations.

The last essay in the collection continues with a discussion on how film and other media provoke excessive stimulation and sensations. Max Ryynänen lays out the concept of *a somatic film*, where the "immediate stimulation of the body is essential." The essay explores different discourses around the concept of the somatic and the history of film. Building on the concepts of the somatic and excess, Ryynänen addresses somatic education as a learning process that involves the bodily and various notions

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of the self. Extending the conversation, the essay suggests how excess in film might be a form of care and understanding that would extend to a pedagogical project about the self. This project might take watching film (on any device) as a serious endeavor, as much as sports education, music education, or art education in, and beyond, schooling.

Note

1. In a Lacanian sense, the *Real* is a site that can never be contained and, as such, is a core of anxiety (see Tavin and Kallio-Tavin 2014).

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PART I

Taxonomies, Histories, and Excessive Aesthetics

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CHAPTER 2

A Taxonomy of Disgust in Art

Noël Carroll and Filippo Contesi

Introduction

The association of art and disgust has been perennial. Populated by the likes of Polyphemus, Medusa and the Minotaur, classical legend is full of disgusting beings, while the "Dark Ages" served up Grendel, and into the contemporary period, we have creatures like Stephen King's (1986) Pennywise and Clive Barker's (1984–1985) Rawhead Rex to round out our western, literary bestiary of abominable creatures.[1]

From the fine art of the West, we are entranced by portrayals of the last judgment, such as Michelangelo's, by visions of Hell, like those of Bosch, and by installations exemplifying death and deterioration of the sort produced by Damien Hirst for the exhibition *Sensation* (1997), or the huge pile-shaped fecal sculptures of the Viennese art collective Gelatin (as presented at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam).[2] And, from the East, we find similar preoccupations with images of disgust—both literary and pictorial—as in the skeletal images of Durga/Kali bent upon murderous rampages, her necklace decorated with a string of bleeding, decapitated heads.

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_2

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Popular culture has whole genres whose predominant objects are disgusting, such as splatter-punk (e.g., *Family Tradition* 2002, a novel by Edward Lee and John Pelan) and torture porn (i.e., movie series like *Saw* 2003–2017 and *The Human Centipede* 2009–2015). Similar are the currently ubiquitous, zombie apocalypses represented by televisual programs like *The Walking Dead* (based on the comic book series by Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore), which rule the airways.

This taste, so to speak, for disgust, has been evident outside the precincts of art and representation for at least four centuries as people have flocked to the fairgrounds to experience the thrill of witnessing so-called freaks[3]—sometimes literally natural anomalies, like conjoined twins, two-headed births, including human fetuses—and sometimes counterfeits, such as P.T. Barnum's "mermaids." Similarly, Ripley (Believe It or Not) Entertainment Inc. operates 90 attractions (aka "museums") around the world and has drawn over 100 million customers since 1933, hoping to see the collections of "weird" phenomena often of the kind found in circus side-shows. This suggests that the fascination with the disgusting in art rests upon and evolved from an appetite deep in the human psyche. That is, Tod Browning's film *Freaks* (1932), for instance, satisfies the same generic curiosity and craving for biological anomalies (and the accompanying experiences of disgust) afforded by "freak shows."

And yet, despite the vast evidence for the existence of disgust as a significant theme of art, there is a possible traditional argument that denies that disgust is a legitimate subject of genuine art. This argument rests upon an enduring association between art and the beautiful. In the eighteenth century, art was often identified with the imitation of the beautiful in nature (see Batteux 1746/2015). Beauty, in turn, was associated with pleasure, notably disinterested pleasure. Putting these two ideas together, it is suggestive to arrive at the view that artworks have as their function the affordance of disinterested pleasure. Call this an early version of the aesthetic theory of art. However, at the same time, the sensation of disgust was regarded as inimical to pleasure. Genuine fine art portrayed what we might ordinarily find disgusting—say dead bodies—beautifully. But if the disgusting object were portrayed as such, it was believed, it would preclude pleasure and thus arguably art status. Or, at least, that is how the argument might go.

Perhaps the most authoritative source for the major premise—that disgust precludes pleasure—for an argument like this is Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790/1987). In section 48, referring explicitly to disgust, Kant writes:

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> 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 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 1790/1987, p. 180)[4]

Consequently, if one holds something like the aforesaid early version of the aesthetic theory of art, whatever putative artistic stimulus elicits disgust is not genuine art, properly so-called.

The problem with this argument is the narrowness of its conception of the aim of art. Art does not only aim at the beautiful, especially as that is conceived of in terms of the affordance of disinterested pleasure. Art has a diversity of functions, many of which are at odds with the contemplation of the beautiful, such as arousing hatred toward a despised enemy. Among those alternative ends are the elicitation of curiosity with the promise of rewarding it with fascination.

The objects of disgust are often abnormal in one sense or another—often impure or incomplete or unclean, excessive, categorically contradictory relative to a dominant cultural scheme, forbidden, freakish, particularly biologically. They are things to be hidden, shunned, or avoided. They are not, or should not be, out in the open. For these reasons, they are the natural objects of the epistemic emotion of curiosity. But with such curiosity comes the risk of disgust.

Disgust is nature's defense (often re-purposed by culture) against our exposure to insalubrity. We gag or recoil in the presence of its objects. Thus, when we approach the freak-show tent, we pay for our curiosity with pain. Yet, that does not cancel the possibility of pleasure altogether. For, we may be rewarded with the experience of novelty, of something beyond ordinary and/or approved experience, something beyond our ken or even forbidden where the thrill of discovery outweighs the pang of revulsion. Perhaps because this pleasure is mixed with the satisfaction of what is, in part, a cognitive *interest* (and, hence, not disinterested), this experience will be dismissed as aesthetically illegitimate. But surely cashiering our cognitive concerns from the domain of the artistic interests is as historically blinkered as discounting feelings of disgust as *a* source of art's provenance. Try imagining the history of Christian art without any gruesome crucifixions.

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Regardless of its powers of fascination, moreover, disgust can be an effective tool of education and even propaganda. Bosch's and Dante's visions of Hell are two of the many instances of the ways in which art has educated generations of devout Christians to shun sinful behavior and embrace orthodox doctrine. Understanding the mechanisms by which art utilizes disgust and the effects it achieves in so doing is therefore a crucial part of understanding both art and its educational value.

This chapter is intended as a step in the direction of such an understanding. By using the notion of disgust as it figures in ordinary language and experience, we will propose a taxonomy of disgust in art in terms of three categories, based, in turn, on two variables. These variables are the *subject* (or content) of the artwork (what it is about) and its *vehicle* (how that subject is embodied or articulated). Each of these variables, in turn, can be either disgusting or not. For example, an artwork may be about something that is not disgusting in itself—say, a rival religion—but which is represented in a disgusting way—its priests portrayed as slavering cannibals, drooling blood and pieces of human flesh from their serrated maws. Given this grid, we develop three categories: artworks whose subjects are disgusting and whose vehicles are disgusting; artworks whose subjects are not disgusting but whose vehicles are; and artworks whose subjects are disgusting but whose vehicles are not. We ignore the category of artworks where neither the subject nor the vehicle are disgusting for the obvious reason that these artworks are not disgusting in any way. We admit that taxonomies other than ours may be useful.[5] Nevertheless, we feel that this classificatory scheme, by focusing on the distinction between subject and vehicle, is especially useful in highlighting how disgust can be modulated by art to its communicative and educational ends.

Disgusting Subjects and Disgusting Vehicles

The first category contains artworks that aim to provide a treatment of a disgusting subject matter by means of a disgusting vehicle (see also Carroll 1990). One large class of cases that provide good candidate members for this category is constituted by works of literature, film, and so on in the horror genre. Many horror fictions aim to represent a gory and violent subject matter in realistic ways, by disgusting means. Consider, for instance, Ridley Scott's *Hannibal* (2001), one of the films that follow the adventures of the fictional serial killer Hannibal "The Cannibal" Lecter (played by Anthony Hopkins), and the FBI's attempts to bring him to justice. In one

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central scene, Lecter has the US Justice Department official Paul Krendler (Ray Liotta) captive in his own (Krendler's) house. Lecter, a world-class psychiatrist, has sedated Krendler and removed the cap of his skull, which is now open with the upper part of his brain in plain sight of the audience. In almost ceremonial fashion, Lecter proceeds to feed Krendler tidbits from his own brain, after Lecter has freshly plucked and then stir-fried them. All the props and special effects employed to make this scene are designed to make it disgusting to watch, and to represent realistically a common disgust elicitor, viz. a living human brain in an open skull. A similar case from the same film involves the elaborate make-up created for the actor Gary Oldman, most unrecognizable as Mason Verger, Hannibal Lecter's wealthy and vindictive former patient. As a young man, Verger disfigured his own face under Lecter's psychological influence. Multiple Oscar-winning make-up artist Greg Cannom created Oldman's make-up with the help of medical doctors to ensure a high degree of realism.

What the previous cases do with the aid (among other things) of disgusting make-up and special effects, literature does with words. Consider, for instance, the first description of Dr. Frankenstein's newly created monster, from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1831/2014):

> His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (Shelley 1831/2014, Chapter 5)

Once again, here the subject matter's disgustingness is conveyed realistically by means of a disgusting vehicle.

However, these are cases in which the disgustingness of the vehicle is achieved by using materials that, arguably, are only *fictionally* disgusting and/or *represent* disgustingness. Verger's face is disgusting in the film because physical deformities of that kind are commonly disgusting. By contrast, the make-up Gary Oldman used so that his face would appear deformed is itself not necessarily disgusting for it is not real skin or part of an actual, deformed face. Or, to take the *Frankenstein* case, Shelley's words are not themselves made of a disgusting substance; they only represent disgusting substances. All this is important to note insofar as, at least according to some, disgust is best understood ideationally, rather than

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sensorily (Contesi 2015). In other words, mere sensory properties or resemblance in appearance are not necessarily disgusting if they are not cognitively interpreted as belonging to something disgusting.

Some artworks, however, use nonfictional props as disgusting vehicles to represent disgusting subjects. A treasure trove of such works is contemporary artist Andres Serrano's *Shit* (2007). This is a series of 66 photographic close-ups of (actual) human, dog, jaguar, and bull feces. However, whether a work is fictional cannot always be easily determined. Such is sometimes the case in painting. It is not obvious whether, for instance, Rembrandt's *Carcass of Beef* (1657) depicts a real or a nonfictional carcass of beef. Another case is *The Wounded Man* (1919), one of the most powerful of Gert Wollheim's works, and certainly his best known. Wollheim's painting dates from the immediate aftermath of World War I and quite explicitly deals with the horrors of that war. Saliently, it portrays a man whose arms and legs are stretched in a pose of intense suffering. The man has a large and bloody wound on his stomach (Wollheim himself was shot in the stomach during the War, with near-fatal consequences) and blood on the palms of his hands. One cannot clearly determine whether the depicted wounded man is a fictional figure or an actual man, and perhaps it is Wollheim himself. Nonetheless, Wollheim's masterpiece is a memorable symbolic representation of the suffering that the Great War caused to tens of millions of women and men in Europe and elsewhere. It represents a disgusting subject, both bodily and morally, and does so by means of the disgusting depiction of blood flowing from a man's large stomach wound.

But fictionality is not the only layer of distance that art can interpose between its materials and subjects and its audience. Orthogonal to the fiction/nonfiction dichotomy, Derek Matravers has recently made the case for the usefulness of a dichotomy between *confrontations* and *representations* (Matravers 2014).[6] On this latter dichotomy, cases of representation are cases in which it is impossible to act on the represented object or event. But the represented subject can be both fictional and nonfictional. For example, both a nonfictional recounting of the battle of Waterloo and Steven Spielberg's *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) are representation cases. In such cases, it is impossible for a viewer to act on the events represented: because they completely occurred in the past in the former case, and, in the latter, because they do not occur in the present nor did they ever do in the past. Such cases are contrasted by Matravers to cases in which one is confronted with, or in other words can act on, an object or

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an event. Such is the case of a scuffle on the street one witnesses or, perhaps, of some news account and documentaries about the state of the current Syrian civil war.

All the vehicles of the works discussed in this first category so far are on the representation side of Matravers's dichotomy. Whether fictional (*Hannibal* and *Frankenstein*), nonfictional (Serrano), or less straightforward cases (*Carcass of Beef* and *The Wounded Man*), confrontation is impossible in all of them. By contrast, works of performance art such as those produced in Hermann Nitsch's *Orgien Mysterien Theater* (of which nearly 100 were performed between the 1960s and 1990s) confront their audiences (or, perhaps better, participants) with nonfictional disgusting materials (Vogt et al. 2010). In Nitsch's *Orgien* (1960s onward), actual animals are regularly slaughtered and their carcasses paraded around, and touched and smelled, without any representational mediation.

However, there are some works that should be considered as candidate members of this first category that do not straightforwardly fall on either side of the confrontation/representation dichotomy. Some of these are cases in which something disgusting is presented to an audience that is also, in a sense, hidden to them. This is arguably the case of a work of performance art such as Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1971). In this work, visitors to the Sonnabend Gallery in New York were presented with the voice coming out of loudspeakers of (what reportedly was) the artist, hidden under the gallery floor masturbating while he described his sexual fantasies out loud. While this work may perhaps be titillating or amusing to some, sexual organs and acts are often disgusting when disgust is not suspended or overcome by sexual desire (see Miller 1998). Indeed, sex is often titillating and amusing partly in virtue of its being disgusting. In the Acconci case, moreover, it can be argued that audiences cannot act on the situation being presented to them. They are thus not confronted (in Matravers's sense) with the artist masturbating. Instead, they are better described as being in the *presence* of the artist masturbating.[7,8]

Another kind of case that provides good candidate members for this first category of works is Andy Warhol's series of "oxidation paintings." Executed mainly between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, these paintings exhibit a characteristic visual style. This style is the consequence of various execution techniques, somewhat different one from the other, but all having in common urine staining and a subsequent process of oxidation or other similar chemical alteration. Basically, the paintings would go through a stage of being urinated on, often by one of

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Warhol's friends or acquaintances. A widely known item in this series is *Basquiat* (1982). A similar, earlier example is Marcel Duchamp's *Paysage Fautif* (1946), featuring a colored splash, on black satin, of what is reportedly the artist's own semen. In this case, one could argue that the subject is not completely intended as disgusting. Given the general nature of Duchamp's oeuvre, *Paysage Fautif* certainly, at least partly, meant to shock its audience. However, the work was also reportedly a statement of sorts of Duchamp's sexual lust for Maria Martins, a fellow artist of his (Sohail n.d.). So Duchamp presumably saw the subject matter of the work to be also sexual attraction.

While in Warhol's and Duchamp's cases the disgusting is present to the audience, a similar kind of case that involves representations is offered by Gilbert & George's series of microscopic photographs of bodily substances: such as *Piss on Piss* (1996a), *Piss on Blood* (1996b), and *Spunk on Sweat* (1997). These are images of bodily fluids as they really look under the microscope (although subsequently hand-dyed by the artists). It is worth emphasizing, however, that the vehicle in the Gilbert & George's examples is disgusting only insofar as the microscopic pictures are (known to be) representations of commonly disgusting substances. It is also worth noting that, although the intended subject of these works is, at least partly, the disgusting substances their titles make explicit reference to, something decidedly nondisgusting may also be part of that subject. Speaking about these works, the artists say things like: "[o]ut of these drops of blood come stained-glass windows from fourteenth-century cathedrals, or Islamic writing"; and, "[t]o see daggers and medieval swords in sweat: that's our aim. In piss you find pistols, flowers, crucifixes. Spunk amazes us … it really does look like a crown of thorns" (Tate Modern n.d.). If the artists' own words are to be taken as a guide (even though one should always keep in mind Gilbert & George's typical penchant for self-marketing; see Greer 2007), the works in question are also meant to manifest unexpected majesty and beauty—in addition (and contrast) to the less typically majestic and beautiful substances their titles refer to.

Neutral Subjects and Disgusting Vehicles

Perhaps the best-known examples of the category of disgust involving the marriage of a disgusting vehicle with nondisgusting content is the genre of the vanitas still-life in which assorted objects are juxtaposed with such symbols of death as a human skull, sometimes yellowed—not the sort of thing

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one is tempted to touch, fondle, or lick. For example, consider Pieter Claesz's 1630 *Vanitas*. A jawless skull, flanked by a bone from some limb, is propped up on a set of moldering books. Adjacent, there is an empty candle holder and a watch. Together, these items—but especially the human remains—are meant to conjure the notion of time and, hence, mortality, reminding viewers that the pursuits of life, such as the knowledge represented by the books, are vain, given our inevitable destiny. These pictures were intended to remind us of death (memento mori) and to dissuade over-investment in our temporal existence. Mortality is the content of these artworks; that is what they are about. But although mortality, as an abstract concept, is not disgusting, its conjunction with or figuration by means of repulsive imagery is disgusting (in the Claesz case, for instance, the yellowed, jawless skull with a broken nose and several missing teeth).

The Prince of This World, a fourteenth-century sculpture in St Sebald's Church in Nuremberg, shows a comely figure in a cloak frontally. But as you move around the statue, his garment opens to reveal a swath of corruption. His back is pocked, flayed, and scarred, with worms festering, symbolizing inexorable decay. The memento mori is still a contemporary theme. Damien Hirst's *A Thousand Years* (1990) is an installation piece that involves a slab of meat enclosed in a plastic housing populated by swarming flies that collide with an insect-zapper, dropping to and littering the floor. It is an image capable of eliciting a gag-response. But, again, its higher purpose is to remind us of where the cycle of life and its omniphagus pursuits end, namely in a pile of rotting tissue.

Mortality is not the only general or abstract subject that art figures by means of disgust. The incarnation of Jesus is frequently signaled through the revolting treatment of his body as in Matthias Grünewald's portrayal of his crucifixion in his Isenheim Altarpiece (1512–16) or as in the lacerating flogging to which he is subjected in Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). By emphasizing the repelling violence done to Christ's body, his carnality as well as the magnitude of his sacrifice is symbolized physically. Of course, the representation of things that are not disgusting by disgusting images is not always done for the sake of symbolism. Medical photos and biology movies may represent physical processes via imagery that the uninitiated may find disgusting to look at, such as birth—an event that is rumored to have caused many fathers to faint. Moreover, such imagery can be incorporated into artworks, such as Stan Brakhage's 1959 experimental film *Window Water Baby Moving*, a celebration of the birth of his first child, Myrrena.[9]

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Although the conjunction of a viscerally disgusting vehicle in artworks with nonviscerally disgusting content need not be engaged for symbolic purposes, it is striking how often the rhetoric of disgust is mobilized to figuratively characterize the content of the artwork, often for moral or political purposes. George Grosz's caricatures portray the plutocrats of Weimar Germany and the prostitutes who service them as loathsome grotesques, overweight, slobbering, and gluttonous. In *Sunny Land* (1920), Grosz makes his view of the upper class as porcine literal by giving the wealthy burgher sitting at the dinner table the head of a pig. But even in images such as his *Beauty, Thee Will I Praise* (1919a), the nauseating brutishness of the bourgeoisie is unmistakable.

As is well known, although disgust originates as a physical response to unwholesome foods, like sour milk, and sources of infection, such as leprosy, it can be mobilized by culture to stigmatize by association things that are not physically pathogenic, from foods, like cheese or lobster, to behaviors like cheating or stealing. Disgust, that is, can be transferred from the realm of biology to that of mores. Just as we can find rotten meat disgusting, so it is said we can find individuals and even groups of people morally disgusting.[10] What Grosz is doing in many of his caricatures is trying to convey the thought that the plutocrats that he portrays as physically disgusting are, in fact, morally disgusting. That is, a physically disgusting vehicle is used to get across the idea that the subject—the wealth-holding, propertied classes—are morally disgusting. A more recent instance of this mechanism is Stuart Brisley's mixed-media canvas *Royal Ordure* (1996). Brisley's work is essentially feces smeared over a canvas and is a critical commentary on the British monarchy. Disgust, in other words, can provide a vocabulary—visual and/or linguistic—of ethical contempt. An essentially, nonphysically disgusting person or category—such as a politician or a political movement—can be characterized figuratively by way of being represented via a viscerally disgusting vehicle.

Obviously, this is not only a modern phenomenon. For centuries, Satan and his minions were portrayed as composite beings—part goat, part human. When Bosch wanted to castigate priests as morally disreputable, he gave them the visage of rats. In cases like these, categorical contradictions resulting in impure hybrids made moral evil manifest. Just as the beautiful images of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and various saints are meant to symbolize their moral goodness, disgust, the putative antithesis of beauty, can function as an outward side of moral loathsomeness (see Carroll 2000). Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) might be thought of as a fictional articulation of and comment upon this structural premise.

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In modern art, disgust is often recruited to express moral indignation. In his film *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), Pasolini, in part, depicted the moral degradation of the fascists' behavior by having them force children to eat feces, compelling viewers like me, at least, to actually choke at the sight—thereby, making moral disgust, so to speak, palpable. Earlier, in his film *The Damned* (1969), Visconti attempted to telegraph the moral depravity of the Nazis by portraying the Brown Shirts in general, and Martin von Essenbeck, in particular, as prone to promiscuous, homosexual, and cross-dressing behaviors. Some of these behaviors are often, and especially in the historical context of the making of the film, thought to be perverted and disgusting. Indeed, even a viewer who is not disgusted by any such behaviors would recognize the rhetorical mechanism that Visconti relies upon: that is, to communicate moral disgust artistically, embody the subject of the intended reaction in a putatively disgusting vehicle.

As has already been seen, this conjunction of content that is not literally, physically disgusting with a vehicle that is literally, physically disgusting provides a very serviceable strategy for socially critical art. Paul McCarthy's multimedia-installation extravaganza *WS* (2013) is, in large measure, a demented, debauched, obscene, and disordered Disneyland—or better, "Disneyworld"—which, juxtaposed to images of McCarthy's childhood home in Utah, is meant to stand for America. The title is the initials of Snow White inverted just as the scenography of *WS* is an inversion of Disneyworld. Snow White, the Seven Dwarves, and Walt Disney engage in every sort of sexual perversion, addiction, and orgiastic revel, including bouts of sadistic mayhem, buggery, even unto murder. Characters defecate, masturbate, copulate, vomit, draw blood, and so on frequently and fulsomely. Whereas Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom is spotless, McCarthy's is a miasma of slop. Where Disney's world is nice, McCarthy's is nasty—a veritable Black Mass of the values enshrined in the Disney universe. Moreover, insofar as Disneyworld is an avatar for American culture writ large, the visceral disgust *WS* is stylistically predicated upon eliciting expresses the moral disgust McCarthy feels toward the US, unmasking its "Disney-fied" facade figuratively in order to reveal and denounce its underlying and repressed violence, lust, mean-spiritedness, and perversion.

The structure of this artwork, like that of many of the previous examples in this section, involves deploying the vehicle or form of embodiment of the piece as, in effect, a figurative comment upon the content of the work—that is what the work is about. The content of the work—say Disney-America—is not viscerally disgusting on its own terms. Rather, it

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is characterized as morally disgusting by being represented by means of viscerally disgusting imagery. A suggestive analogy of the way in which it operates is to imagine the content as providing the subject as if it were a noun that the vehicle or form of embodiment like an adjective then goes on to modify as disgusting, and often, specifically, morally disgusting.

In the Introduction to this chapter, it was claimed that drawing our taxonomy of disgust in terms of content and vehicle would bring to light certain interesting uses of disgust in art. Elucidating this structure for the articulation of moral disgust is the sort of thing that we had in mind.

Disgusting Subjects and Neutral Vehicles

We now come to our third and final category: works that use a neutral vehicle to treat a disgusting subject. One kind of candidate members for this category is constituted by nonrealistic representations of what is ordinarily disgusting. Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), for instance, portrays the bloody massacre (that same year) of the population of the Basque town of Guernica, bombed by German and Italian war planes during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). The painting represents beheadings and dismemberments of men and animals. The subject represented is no doubt disgusting, both bodily as well as morally (the painting aims to denounce the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War). But the representations themselves are not, in large part because they lack sufficient realism. A similar treatment, by nondisgusting means, of the subject of war and its bodily and morally disgusting aspects is provided by Grosz's black-and-white lithograph *Quitting Time* (1919b). Like *Guernica*, *Quitting Time* also denounces the horrors of war but is not disgusting. The disfigured face of the soldier lying on the floor should be a pretty disgusting sight if there is one, but it is not in Grosz's depiction. Here again, lack of realism, both in the coloring and in the *disegno* of the piece, is a crucial factor.

Music offers instances of art that aims to treat disgusting subjects by means of nondisgusting vehicles. Often, this is the case where the subject at hand is morally disgusting. One such instance is Gustav Mahler's so-called cry of disgust passage from the third movement of his *Symphony No 2* (1895). The passage is a piece of pure instrumental music and, arguably, no part of it is disgusting. However, a connection is often made between the response appropriate to the passage and moral disgust. Consider for instance Mahler's own words about the passage, where he

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talks about its being about "looking at 'the bustle of existence,' the shallowness and herdlike selfishness of society," until "[l]ife strikes you as meaningless, a frightful ghost, from which you perhaps start away with a cry of disgust" (Nussbaum 2004, p. 104, quoting from Mahler's "Letter to Max Marschalk," as reported in Cooke 1980).

Finally, two ambiguous, complex cases are provided, in turn, by conceptual and installation art. The first of these cases is Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* (1961), a series of 90 tin cans labeled in four languages and numbered. The content of the cans is, according to the labels affixed on the cans by the artist: "Artist's Shit/30 gr net/freshly preserved/produced and tinned/ in May 1961." Manzoni's work is arguably meant to call its audience's attention to the quasi-holy status of the artist in the post-Duchamp art-world. A sort of King Midas or a Jesus-as-Healer, whatever the artist gets in touch with, becomes art. His own feces are no exception. Indeed, Manzoni sold some of the cans by weight (30 grams each) at the then going market price of gold. Since then, the cans' worth has actually far surpassed the equivalent price of gold for their named weight.

While the subject matter of Manzoni's work is, at least in part, his feces, a less straightforward issue is whether or not the work's vehicle is also disgusting. Many have expressed skepticism concerning the actual content of the cans. For instance, Agostino Bonalumi, a collaborator of Manzoni's, famously stated in 2007 that Manzoni's cans contained just plaster. A French artist, Bernard Bazile, staked his claim to notoriety by opening up one of Manzoni's cans and turning it into a work of art of its own: *Boîte ouverte de Piero Manzoni* (1989). Bazile, however, did not solve the mystery as he only revealed an unidentified wrapped object inside the can (see Miller 2007). Even if the mystery of the actual content of Manzoni's cans was one-day resolved, the issue of the disgustingness of the vehicle of *Merda d'artista* may still remain ambiguous. If the cans turn out to contain actual feces, then the issue may be considered settled. If, however, the actual content of Manzoni's cans is found out to be non-disgusting (if it is, say, plaster), one may still argue that the verbal reference to feces (in the title and on the labels) is already sufficient to make the work's vehicle disgusting.

The second ambiguous case is Thomas Hirschhorn's more recent installation *Touching Reality* (2012). In this installation, audiences are in a cinema-type space where a video is shown of gruesome (ostensibly non-fictional) photographs of what the artist calls "destroyed human bodies."

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In the video (what appears to be), a feminine, well-manicured hand flicks through these pictures like one does on a touch screen: pinching to zoom in or out and moving around to show different bits of the pictures, sometimes in excruciating detail. On the one hand, the subject of the work is once more the bodily and moral disgustingness of violence and war. Its vehicle, on the other hand, is disgusting if one identifies it as consisting of the content of the gruesome pictures shown. Hirschhorn's work, however, differs from the typical video in that it has an additional layer, which is provided by the reference to touch in the title of the work and by the role of the hand flicking through the images. On this layer, the vehicle of the work is not constituted by the destroyed bodies represented, but by something (at least on one construal) nondisgusting: a touch screen.

Conclusion

We have shown that, in their work, artists can modulate disgusting material in various ways to make it play significantly different roles and communicative functions. Of particular interest to our discussion has been the use of disgusting material in the characterization of otherwise nondisgusting subjects, as well as its reverse, viz. the use of nondisgusting material in the characterization of otherwise disgusting subjects. Such uses have a long history in art. Indeed, their efficacy in achieving various educational and communicative ends has often been substantial. Categorizing some of the ways in which disgust can be manipulated to different communicative and educational ends, as we have done in this chapter, is a crucial step toward navigating and understanding such manipulations. The aim of such an endeavor is to bring more transparency in the viscerally powerful operations of disgust in art.[11]

Notes

1. While the first three are well-known figures of Ancient Greek mythology, Grendel is a character in the Old English epic story *Beowulf* (ca 700–1000 CE).
2. See https://www.boijmans.nl/en/exhibitions/gelatin/
3. The term, now considered offensive by many, has a troubled history and used to refer to those who are perceived to be physically deformed in significant ways, or to have certain types of "non-normative bodies"; cf. Stephens (2005).

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4. Here Kant is reiterating the view that he had put forward in his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), where he stated that "Nothing is so opposed to the beautiful as the disgusting…"; see Kant (2007), p. 44. Kant was not alone in holding the view that disgust is strongly antithetical to aesthetic pleasure, nor was he the first to express it. Moses Mendelssohn, in his "82nd Letter Concerning Literature" (1760), said that "The sensations of disgust thus are always nature, never imitation," and that in disgust "the soul does not recognize any obvious admixture of pleasure"; see Menninghaus (2003). Lessing (1766/1962) quoted Mendelssohn approvingly on this topic. Even (almost) a century later, Schopenhauer (1859/1969) rehashed the same view when he said that the disgusting had "always been recognised as absolutely inadmissible in art, where even the ugly can be tolerated in its proper place so long as it is not disgusting," p. 208.
5. For alternative categorizations see Contesi (2014), and Carroll (2015), pp. 153–4.
6. Note however that the orthogonality in question is not complete, since no fiction arguably falls under the confrontation side of Matravers's dichotomy. For a critical take on Matravers's argument, see Carroll (2016).
7. See Contesi (2016), pp. 349–50n for some reasons to prefer a presence/representation distinction to Matravers's confrontation/representation dichotomy.
8. A similar case in this respect is Damien Hirst's *A Thousand Years* (1990), which we discuss later as a member of our second category.
9. Here, it might be surmised that birthing is disgusting (at least in part) in virtue of a process of cultural construction influenced by patriarchal ideologies. That may be the case, although bodily fluids and orifices generally (and so also those not involved in birthing and outside of the birthing context) are very common disgust elicitors. Nonetheless, acknowledging that the common response of many viewers of the images and films in question is one of disgust is compatible with accepting a cultural-construction view.
10. Such transference is of course driven by culture to a significant extent and is, accordingly, significantly variable cross-culturally. See Chapman et al. (2009) for an outline, from the perspective of cognitive science, of the ways in which disgust can be mobilized to moral ends.
11. We are grateful to the following for comments on earlier versions of this chapter: the editors of this volume, Raciel Cuevas, Peter Lamarque, and audiences at the Universities of Milan and York. Contesi acknowledges the generous support of the US–Italy Fulbright Research Scholar Program, the Temple University Department of Philosophy and the LOGOS Research Group (University of Barcelona).

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CHAPTER 3

Painting History, Manufacturing Excess: How the Artistic Configures the Political

Paco Barragán

In the Prado Museum in Madrid there is an impressive, large painting—3.07 × 367 m (121″ × 144″)—by Diego Velázquez de Silva titled *The Surrender of Breda* (1634). It represents a famous episode in Spanish history: the surrender of the keys of the city of Breda by Dutch governor Justinus van Nassau to Ambrosio Spínola, the general commanding the Spanish troops of Flanders. Velázquez shows his masterly skills by concentrating the attention of the spectator on the triumphant general in the foreground, who symbolizes a powerful but generous Catholic empire. With a sumptuous pictorial style, Velázquez juxtaposes the magnanimity of the victors with the despondency of the defeated. The grandiosity of the general's gesture after the disputed battle captures magnificently the idea of the state and the representation of history that Philip IV pursued for the decoration of the Hall of Realms. Even if the war against the rebellious Northern Provinces was not won, what mattered was the manufacturing or *hand-making* of a new and glorious reality.

History painting portrayed the story of humankind and its excesses on a grand scale, focusing on great heroes and spectacular events. In the twentieth century this style suddenly disappeared. Did art learn anything

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_3

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from the death of history painting? Or did art history simply leave painting behind and choose other media in order to maintain its privileged status of chronicler of excess? The total suppression of history painting in the contemporary arts debate, in art history books and especially in arts education is, in my opinion, strange. My question now is why history painting is still important to the art historical discourse, and how is it related to our society and our own artistic experience. A challenging answer to these queries is the so-called Schutz affair that took place at the Whitney Biennial in 2017. Dana Schutz's small painting *Open Casket* (2016) triggered a heated controversy that ignited an unstoppable wave of censorship across international art institutions, especially in the United States; this is discussed in more detail later. In this era of Big Brother, called social media, the consequences of extravagant and outrageous censorship will not only close down exhibitions, but might also lead to difficult shows or artworks not being exhibited in the first place.

With this in view, I want to tackle three topics: (1) how excess has traditionally been the exclusive monopoly of history painting within the visual arts; (2) how history painting lost its artistic preeminence, but its function was taken up by other media such as photography, film, video, installation and even television, among others; and (3) how the artistic configured the political through its experimental and educational function. But before I continue, I should point out two elements in order to delimit the scope of the chapter. First, in this narrative I use the concept of 'excess' in an expanded manner, describing an excessive, extravagant and even immoderate use of violence, force, power or ideology. Very often it equates with violence, as violence is the embodiment of verbal, physical and psychological excess. Our sophisticated societies, in which technological, communicational, scientific and social media advances have merged, generate a society of excess and noise (Han 2014, p. 18). Secondly, I will briefly touch upon the history of history painting to frame it historically and indicate its ideological relationship with society.

History Painting and the Entitlement to Excess

Conscious of the troublesome conjunction in the section title, I will raise the following question: In what way are history painting and excess interconnected? Unlike landscape, still life and portrait, history painting used to be *the* genre until the end of the nineteenth century. It was privileged by the Academy and its academics. History painting became the visual history

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of mankind and its excesses: think of absolutism, imperialism and colonialism. Welfare and democracy in the West have always been based on the exploitation of other continents, such as Africa, Asia and Latin America (Losurdo 2015, p. 27). History painting was also the visual history of the West manufactured by those in power, who demanded the representation of their exclusive and monolithic "truth."

History painting was traditionally considered to be the supreme form of Western painting. According to Leon Battista Alberti, "Painting contains a divine force which not only makes absent men present, as friendship is said to do, but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive. Even after many centuries they are recognized with great pleasure and with great admiration for the painter (Alberti 1956, p. 17)." From these words, written back in 1435–36 when his *De Pictura* was first published, we can deduce the intimate relationship between painting and the representation of history. The earlier example by Velázquez represents perfectly the scope of the genre. As a matter of fact, the Latin term *historia pingendi*—painting of history/histories—covered religious, mythological, fictional, allegorical and secular narratives, both classical and contemporary. All the forms demanded some kind of "veracity," and represented moments of great violence, immense suffering or heroic grandeur. Paintings of religious conflicts, war, battles, injustices, genocides and crucifixions commemorate the origins and legacy of our Western culture, a culture of "sadomasochistic imaginary" (Van Alphen 2008, p. 89) in which excess in all its possible manifestations is celebrated.

The philosophical content of the Baroque (De Azúa 2012, p. 11), the foundation of the French Academy in 1648 and arts writer André Félibien's declaration in 1667 that history painting was the most important pictorial genre (Félibien 1668), established the intellectual primacy of painting. Painting became a propaganda tool in the hands of the Church, absolutist monarchs and aristocrats. The composition, not necessarily connected with the circumstances as they had really happened, was the result of the imagination of the painter. And this *imagined* history responded to the ideological desires of the commissioner.

Painting was no longer about a static and conventional *memoria* or commemoration. The Baroque demanded an epic, theatrical, exuberant and highly sophisticated style. We find one of the finest examples in Room 20 of the National Gallery of Ancient Art in Rome: a rather violent but stunning scene of a beautiful widow beheading the Assyrian general Holofernes, the greatest threat to the people of Israel. Painted by Caravaggio, *Judith*

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Beheading Holofernes (1598–99) uses violence and sensuality to convey a highly propagandistic message (Hagen and Hagen 2001, p. 212) against Protestantism. History painting exerts a monopoly of the representation of reality during the almost three centuries of the *Ancien Régime* or the old order of the absolutist monarchies. The advent of the French Revolution in 1789 not only defeated the monarchy but also the power of the Academy and its famous salons. What happened to history painting in the nineteenth century? Was there an alternative medium that would take its privileged place in the representation of reality?

At the close of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth there was a revival of the genre along with the history novel, as bourgeois revolutions occurred and the nation-state reached its apogee. But the bourgeois victors demanded a new kind of painting, and the artist had to cater to these new tastes and compete in the market. It also meant that heroes from 1800 onwards became anonymous or ordinary people, representing the new social order that emerged after the French Revolution as opposed to the heroes of the *Ancien Régime* (Mai 1988, p. 139). Gustave Courbet's *The Painter's Studio* (1855) is the best allegory of this new frame of mind. On the left we see the ordinary people and on the right Courbet portrays some members of the new bourgeois elites, among whom are his patron Alfred Bruyas, philosopher and anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Charles Baudelaire (Graw 2009). Courbet's figure standing in the middle is a representation of the artist as the privileged interpreter of reality. The slow demise of history painting as the major artistic genre started with the steady decline of the Academy. The Impressionists, and later avant-garde movements, were more interested in formalistic problems and the autonomy of the artist.

How Reality Abandoned Painting After Picasso's *Guernica*

In 1851, a miraculous event took place in Hyde Park: The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, or London's Great Exhibition. This world fair seemed to herald a new beginning for humanity. In a continuous time of war and struggle for colonial supremacy, this was the first time in history that nations had come together in peaceful circumstances under the same roof in order to stimulate trade, industry and peace. At many of these fairs and other smaller ones, new technological inventions such as the telegraph, radio, cinema, photography and television would be presented to large audiences

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(Mattie 1998). And yet these wonderful reunions of trade, knowledge and cosmopolitanism would not change the fate of the extremely violent twentieth century. Many artists from both camps participated with an excessive enthusiasm in World War One. While many know of the Futurists and Marinetti's glorification of war (Marinetti 2011, p. 4), what of the participation of artists incited by romantic ideas or pure patriotism, such as Marinetti, Carra, Boccioni, De Chirico, Apollinaire, Braque, Derain, Léger, Beckmann, Kokoschka, Dix, Macke, Marc, Kirchner and Schmidt-Rottluff, among many others? They became privileged front-line witnesses of the catastrophe.

This was a war of airplanes and bombs, toxic gas and camouflaged cannons, all of which eschewed decisive, heroic moments. To make matters worse, a fierce competitor had appeared on the battlefield: photography. Smaller and easier to manipulate cameras were showing up in the trenches among the soldiers themselves. In a letter to his mother in 1916, André Derain describes how wonderfully the camera works: "L'appareil que tu m'as envoyé marche extrêmement bien. J'ai des résultats merveilleux" (Derain 1993, p. 243). The interwar period saw the clash of left and right totalitarianisms and the art of the dictators: Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini. The war of fascism against communism did not embody an artistic opposition between classicism and avant-garde, as both sides imposed, as José Jiménez argues, a "return to figuration, grandiloquence and monumentalism" (Jiménez 1996, p. 57). But all in all, for these regimes painting lost its place. Its function was taken over by film, photography, radio, documentaries and even architecture. Painting became kitsch and bucolic and either neo-classicist or social realist, and suffered from an excessive iconographic presence of the dictator.

The 1937 International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life held in Paris became the perfect setting for the ideological struggle that was taken place in Europe between dictators and benevolent democracies under the umbrella of the League of Nations. Pablo Picasso had been commissioned to paint a propagandistic mural against Franco's coup for the Spanish Republican Pavilion. The artist had never before compromised his art and simply did not know what to paint. But the bombing of the Basque city of Guernica on April 26 by German and Italian airplanes served as a catalyst for a frantic progression of sketches that would crystallize in a big mural. Starting on May 1, in hardly five weeks the composition was finished in his new studio at 7, rue des Grands Agustins (Larrea 1947). The Spanish Pavilion was inaugurated on July 12 and *Guernica* became one of the polemic highlights of the International Exposition.

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Spanish historian Jordi Ibáñez Fanés considers *Guernica* the last history painting "outside the tradition of the grand painting" (Ibáñez Fanés 2012, p. 34). First, the painting is ambiguous in its portrayal of the massacre, lacking a clear propagandistic message. Secondly, the monochrome and scale of grays make it resemble a photograph more than a traditional colorful history painting. Thirdly, the dismembering of the bodies distances it from traditional realist representations (Arnheim 2006). And, finally, the abstract character of the painting's reality imbues it with a timeless force that former history paintings lack. In perspective, it was precisely these elements that explain the ongoing influence in the twenty-first century of *Guernica*.

And yet the fate of history painting was sealed. First of all, history painting received competence from other media. Dictators such as Lenin and Hitler preferred popular mass media that were capable of producing images more extensively and more effectively: photography, advertising and film. "Every act of terror," writes Boris Groys (2008), "every act of war is immediately registered, represented, described, depicted, narrated and interpreted by the media" (p. 121). Think now of Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). In the revolt of the sailors against the officials of the Tsar the camera hardly moves, as if it were a painting (Ortiz and Piqueras 2003). The revolution was not destined to be confined to the elitist realms of art: mass distribution was fundamental to educate the masses. As such, television would become from the 1940s the history chronicler par excellence. The watershed moment in the history of television was the coverage of President John F. Kennedy's assassination in Dallas. This set a "new standard of how breaking news was going to be delivered in television" that, according to Tierney Sneed, "would go unmatched until the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001" (Sneed 2013). Coming closer to today, we can see how terrorists of the Islamic State (IS) use video in order to stage realities that are taboo breaking because of its excessive horror and sadism. The beheadings of Jihadi John, the notorious IS executioner, have gone mainstream in the twenty-first century. His "gore propaganda" videos have been imitated online by other kinds of (non-Islamic) extremists (Koch 2018). Obviously social media has acted as a boomerang. And following this train of thought, I would argue that the official history of the killing of Osama bin Laden will be forever associated with Kathryn's Bigelow's thriller *Zero Dark Thirty*.

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Secondly, history painting would also be defeated in the field of visual arts. The totalitarian use of history painting and its jingoistic narratives under Nazism, fascism and communism meant the genre lost its credibility. Furthermore, from the 1960s artists began to abandon painting as they considered it too "commodified." Performance, conceptual art, video, photography, installation and, more recently, virtual reality showed themselves more agile and experimental when documenting history *à la minute*. Yoko Ono's and John Lennon's two week-long performance, *Bed-Ins For Peace*, at the Hilton Hotel in Amsterdam in 1969 signaled a new way of non-violent protest again the brutal Vietnam War. Jeff Wall's cinematic photograph *Dead Troops Talk (A Vision After an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol Near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)* from 1992, which is the result of theatrical staging and digital manipulation of zombie soldiers, clearly competes in size, concept and ambition with traditional history paintings (Heartney 2008, p. 102). Equally sophisticated is Shirin Neshat's film, *The Last Word* (2003), in which a woman is interrogated by an all-male jury in a Kafkaesque trial that reveals the paradoxes of Iran's society (Tammarazio 2009). And the 23 × 33 m (905″ × 1299″) digital multimedia installation at the 57th Venice Biennale *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, 2015–17, by New Zealander Lisa Reihana, offered an impressive and thought-provoking rereading of European Enlightenment ideals and imperialism. Finally, filmmaker Alejandro G. Iñárritu's virtual reality installation *CARNE y ARENA* (Flesh and Sand), 2017, is a radical physical immersive experience that addresses the drama of immigration to the United States of Mexican and Central American refugees. This list of examples references how artists since the 1960s and until today have engaged with history, society and its representation through the use of a large variety of media.

History painting's monopoly of the manufacturing of reality suffered tough competition both from inside and outside the field. The question we can ask ourselves is what happened to the grand genre. Has it disappeared forever? While the function of history painting shifted towards other media, I would argue that today we see the advent of a kind of "anti-history" painting. It is still interested in functioning as a mediator between reality and history, but some of its traditional characteristics have changed: the use of small formats, the perspective of silenced citizens and the depiction of ambiguous or confrontational scenes, and so on. History painting becomes as such a hybrid genre (Green and Seddon 2000).

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Fig. 3.1 Nicola Verlato, *American Trilogy (2)*, 2016, oil on canvas, 244 × 183 cm Courtesy the artist

Two examples will illustrate this idea. Italian Nicola Verlato conceives in his trilogy *American Trilogy (2)*, 2016 (see Fig. 3.1), an alternative and critical vision to the American mythos of a land of promise and justice while portraying the massacre of Native Americans, African Americans and Latinos by the Protestant settlers. Ronald Ophuis' reflection on the incessant wars in Africa fueled by European and American geopolitical interests confronts the spectator's morality with uneasy and unclear scenes of sex and violence in works such as *Girl with Gun, Sierra Leone 2001* (2010) (See Fig. 3.2).

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Fig. 3.2 Roland Ophuis, *Girl with Gun, Sierra Leone 2001*, 2011, oil on linen, 180 × 340 cm Courtesy Collection Municipality Hengelo, The Netherlands

How the Artistic Configures the Political

The complex relationship between the artistic and political spheres leads to the educational element that binds both. Education is not understood here merely as that which is taught in schools and universities, but refers to the whole artistic ecosystem: how artistic experimentation can inform or affect political action and how the fields are interconnected. The defeat of the *Ancien Régime* brought with it the decline of state and Church patronage. Artists were compelled to look for new clients but found it difficult to adapt themselves to new conditions when the foundations of the society to which they had been so closely tied collapsed (Haskell 1980). The revolutions at the end of the nineteenth century simply demanded a new bourgeois type of work, as we saw with Courbet. The creation of an art market would not really take off until the development of modernism and the avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century (Fitzgerald 1996). But the idea of an artistic avant-garde was paradoxical from the very beginning. It applied to a cultural independent and autonomous formation, but at the same time was critical and oppositional to bourgeois

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values. Part of the avant-garde proclaimed aesthetic depoliticized freedom while other sections assumed a political stand against Nazism and Stalin's Soviet Union (Cottington 2013).

Picasso is a perfect example of this contradiction. Until *Guernica* he had always privileged the *l'art pour l'art*, or the principle of art for art's sake. With the war years we see the radicalization of the artist who became a member of the French Communist Party on October 4, 1944. In this epoch he conceived highly politicized works such as MoMA's *The Charnel House* (1945): a pile of corpses in dark black and white shades that suggests the Holocaust (Utley 1998). This tension between autonomy and engagement is what has fed and framed the very existence of the avant-garde until today. Turning to its educational role, art is extremely capable of making visible ideas, conflicts and utopias that were and are not. How does art now display its influence on the political process?

What is commonly accepted is that politics influences art, but the way from art to politics is poorly acknowledged. Both politicians and audiences receive images that stem from painting, films, theater, novels and so on. Seeing, as Murray Edelman (1995) argues, is a constructed process, and although some people may not experience these works of art directly, they do so indirectly via television, Internet and social media. Many of the virtues and vices displayed in the political arena such as ambition, power, generosity, authority, philanthropy, and leadership derive directly and indirectly from art. They are based on social, political and psychological myths and values from the artistic field (Edelman 1995). In other words, art manufactures the images that define our world. As a catalyst, it provides images and creates situations that are strange, provocative, utopian, engaging or radical, and by doing so it ends up configuring the political regime. According to Edelman (1995), "art simply serves as a floating signifier into which political groups read whatever serves their interests and ideologies" (p. 9). Art is, as Ernst van Alphen (2005) rightly states, not only a "historical product" but also a "historical agent" with a "performative" function in whose realm "ideas and functions, the building stones of culture, are actively created, constituted, and mobilized" (p. xiii).

We adapt what we see to our mental images, expectations and ideology. These images are the result of centuries of works of art that, since antiquity, have depicted sentiments such as ambition, horror, altruism, grief and envy. Art has very often engaged with problems that touch upon wider social, political, economic and psychological issues. This also means that art's transgressive potential can have a troubled reception among larger audiences. Four examples will bring this point home.

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In 2012, Spanish *enfant terrible* Santiago Sierra started his *NO GLOBAL TOUR*: a sculpture with the word NO mounted on a trailer. It went on tour first in Europe, Canada and the United States, travelling through industrial derelict areas in the former German Democratic Republic, Berlin, Detroit, New York and others; the trailer also stopped in front of iconic institutions such as NATO headquarters, European Parliament, Wall Street and the Rockefeller Center. Since then many protests, from the Spanish *Indignado*s, the Spanish *#MeToo* movement to retirees complaining about their low incomes, have all displayed Santiago Sierra's *NO* on their T-shirts, posters, pins, stickers and placards. Sierra's *NO* has become an iconic symbol against the state, repression and neoliberalism in general. On February 6, 2019 the Venezuelan military blocked the Tienditas border bridge with Colombia, preventing the access of any humanitarian help with three tankers. Immediately the performance carried out by Santiago Sierra in 1998 in Mexico City came to my mind: *Obstruction of a Freeway with a Truck Trailer*. This consisted of the blocking of one of the busiest roads in Mexico City for five minutes, causing an enormous jam. And the political copies the artistic once again in the case of Venezuelan Alexander Apostol's video *National Posture: The Nation* (2010), in which a group of actors performing the role of national heroes surround a Miss Venezuela (see Fig. 3.3). The celebration

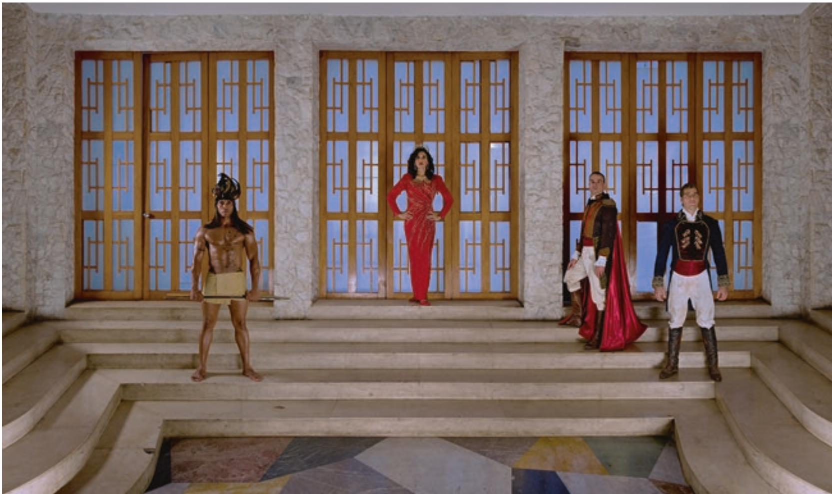

Fig. 3.3 Alexander Apostol, *National Posture: The Nation*, 2010, 16 mm transferred HD video, 18′ Courtesy the artist

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of the Fifth of July, Independence Day, in 2018 recreated a quasi-identical theatrical scene: Miss Venezuela's place was occupied by President Maduro himself!

But not all that the art world produces has an equally educational or aesthetical feedback. Sometimes the artifacts, images and processes generated by the artistic realm cause great havoc and alarm in society. The Dana Schutz affair is a perfect example of how artistic freedom can offend certain groups. Schutz's *Open Casket* (2016) was part of the Whitney Biennial in 2017. This painting is a portrait of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old boy who was lynched by two white men in Mississippi in 1955. In this case, the attack came from inside the art world: a British artist named Hannah Black sent an open letter of complaint to the Whitney. In the letter she asked for "the painting to be removed" from the Biennial "and destroyed," arguing that it was "not acceptable for a white person to transmute black suffering into profit and fun" (quoted in Fusco 2017). Finally, the painting was temporarily removed because of a water leak. Whether this was true or not, the damage was done: it looked as if the painting had been removed because of the polemics. With many populist governments in Europe, and especially since the conservative Trump government, a wave of censorship and self-censorship has descended on the art world. Many museums now think carefully about the kind of work they put on display and whether it is offensive to the audience. The fear of losing both public and private funding is mind-bending. The public will never know which artworks have been denied public exhibition.

While this has happened throughout history, the fascinating element of the Whitney censorship is that art and its institutions reflect like no other one of the major changes in society; that is, cultural diversity. This now challenges the very heart of the monolithic, compact and glorious values that history painting transmitted about race, people and nation. Why have art history and arts education avoided explaining the manipulation of those mental images of a unified past that history painting so effectively transmitted and that conform to the principles of many of today's populist leaders? And how do the art world in general and arts education in particular reflect a globalized and multicultural society? How have art history and the museum opened up the Western canon to other cultural identities? The answer is, according to Susanne Keuchel (2015), that art is able to "build bridges between different language groups," but that we have to be aware that it is not "a conflict-free platform" (p. 109).

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Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to trace the special relationship of history painting in particular and visual arts in general with the representation of reality and its excesses. With the advent of the twentieth century, painting lost its predominance and other media inside and outside the discipline competed for its agency. Art has constituted itself in a privileged public arena of experimentation and education, where artistic actions challenge social and political values. At times, art becomes controversial because its impulses are too rebellious or utopian, and, in some senses, simply too ahead of its time. Society and its institutions react with protests and, ultimately, censorship. But dialogue and not censorship has to be the response to a perceived injustice. The art field is after all a productive sphere that can empower people through education and provide them with greater freedom of choice.

This chapter ends with a quote by the talented Leon Golub (2011), who launched an interesting question about painting and its role in society: "How relevant is painting today to record these things, can painting do this? Or have photography and film usurped its role?" (p. 177). If we look at how *Guernica* more than eighty years after its creation is still claimed as *the* symbol against human excess and brutality, it is difficult not to conclude that painting has an iconic force that other media seem to lack.

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CHAPTER 4

The Excessive Aesthetics of Tehching Hsieh: Art as *A Life*

jan jagodzinski

While there are many well-known excessive performance artists like Mariana Abramović and the pioneering work of Stelarc, Tehching Hsieh, a Taiwan-American citizen, is an exceptional case in articulating the worth of what has become the 'fringe' in the *legitimated world of art*. This chapter addresses durational performance art as to what exactly can be made of 'excessive aesthetics,' especially the question of 'presence' that is said to be the defining characteristic of such performance. It is my contention that the durational performances of Tehching Hsieh can be best understood through the philosophical lens of Deleuze and Guattari, by providing us with their conceptual framework of schizoanalysis. My thesis is that Tehching Hsieh's performances give us a rare insight as to what they meant by *A Life*. Tehching Hsieh's 'lifework' exemplifies *A Life*, deconstructing all forms of representational art that is institutionally defined, including most performative art that continues to be caught by spectacularity.

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_4

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Some Preliminaries

Endurance art or durational performance art (Allain and Jen 2014) is a very strange phenomenon, not only to those who roll their eyes in disbelief, but also to the large majority of the 'art world' who judge this spectacle to be a sideshow, an artistic fringe who seems to mystify as much as promote antics that are often death-defying, or reach beyond the pain threshold of sensibility, or, for that matter, simply demonstrate extreme powers of concentration. What possibly motivates them? Why do they 'do it?' One wonders where the line is to be drawn between endurance artists and 'escape artists,' such as The Great Santini, named as the world's most extreme escape artist? Or, perhaps much more brutally and painfully, someone like Jonathan Goodwin who has 'hung' himself and escaped. He has had full bat swings cracked on his back without flinching or suffering from broken bones, and has escaped from a tank of ice water chained to a solid block of ice and so on. What to make of Mariana Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* (1975), where she cut a star (of David) on her stomach area with a razor, whipped herself, and then laid on an ice cross? Or Tino Sehgal's *The Kiss*, where he endlessly rolled around on an art gallery floor, girl in arm in a perpetual embrace, a 'dance' that billed itself as 'heartfelt' and 'graceful,' a restaging of Rodin's famous *Kiss* sculpture? Is the difference only a question of degree, or is there a difference in kind between these performances, a continuum rather than a break? It is a bit like asking where is the dividing line between art and craft to be drawn. After all, entertainment and the spectacle of these 'stunts' pervade both genres. This following statement about Abramović could as easily be said of any escape artist: "Forcing herself to endure beatings, starvation, and psychological violence [Abramović] has defined the role of the performance [escape] artist as that of the daredevil performer, the one who risks death and emerges intact for the benefit of her viewers" (Goldstein and Russet 2010, n.p.).

The Yugoslavian born, Marina Abramović, is possibly the best-known contemporary endurance artist in the globalized 'art world,' perhaps now superseding the surgical performances of the French artist Orlan in the 1990s. It is instructive to start this chapter by citing a critical review of Abramović's 2010 retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), appropriately entitled: *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*. I draw heavily from Amelia Jones' succinct review (2011), a professor and Grierson Chair in Visual Art Culture at McGill University, Montréal. Jones' long career charts feminism and performing art over several decades

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and provides the right provocations and contradictions that surround endurance art in general: claims to 'authenticity' of live art and the transformative emotional impact of durational performance. Abramović's 'presence,' for instance, depends on the 'presence' of documentation and the multi-media technologies that preserve the various 'events.' The further paradox is that the 'live act' oddly 'destroys presence.'

Jones was a participant in Abramović's *The Artist is Present* where a spectator (galley goer) is invited to sit across from Abramović, separated by a table, and gaze into her eyes for any duration that the participant desires. Jones' own experience was to see this as a spectacle, far from any transformative experience: a parody of the structure of 'authentic expression' and reception of 'true' emotional resonance that is touted to be the discourse of such 'live art' by the institutionalized art world, of which MoMA is the leading representative. Simply put, there is no 'original event,' and as event, it was never fully 'present.' A re-enactment of performance is really a counteractualization of a past event to change or modify its coordinates. It is a repetition that may introduce difference but not necessarily *make* a difference. Performance (endurance) art exposes the contradiction between durationality (time) and the materiality of art, as well as its discourse that is required to give it value and claim its 'unique' status.

The performative work of Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard, for instance, work the tensions between repetition in music, performance and visual art. The reiteration or re-enactment by live art is also economically driven, much like well-known pop and country bands that go on tour to sell seats and their records and CD's, or the escape artist who performs, over and over again, particular spectacular escapes, and then posts them on YouTube as documentation. The global market through documentation and media cuts across all three art forms (music, performance and visual art) even though endurance performative art sells itself as being ephemeral, escaping from market commodification.

Performative re-enactments must be seen as counteractualizations in Deleuzian (1990) terms to make a difference. Rod Dickinson (2002) redoes famous social psychology experiments as 'art.' Watching a segment of his re-enactment of the famous Milgram experiment where authority and power collapse by torturing respondents (university students), one readily sees the affective impact of its restaging. The sounds of screaming, the refusals and so on bring home and highlight its dangers. Milgram becomes politicized through such a counteractualization. The danger is to flatten out or aestheticize the 'original' act (event) in such a way that not

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much 'happens,' no new insights emerge. The odd thing about re-enactment or reiteration is that it is required to ensure a documentation of the work: the origin-copy complex that Deleuze (1990) shows by inverting Plato—the need to recognize the simulacrum as a necessary repetition, like the necessity of revisiting any trauma to ensure its existence. Only when revisiting a trauma, is it then 'perceived,' that is, made cognizant. A good example is *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim, New York, in 2005, where each of the six performances Abramović re-enacted referred to a well-known life performance in the history of performance art; she added a new one of her own, making it seven. The point is that each is a repetition with a difference. The performances were carefully researched and Abramović's reiterations were then carefully documented (photographed and a video by filmmaker Babette Mangolte).

Historically, Chris Burden's performances in the 1970s present a consistent address to the question of technology (the 'machine'), especially through his 'hanging' installations (either himself or his sculptures). Being 'suspended' was his ultimate metaphor when it came to exploring human relationship with inhuman technologies—the dangers and risks as well as the benefits; Burden, in this sense, "hangs in the cosmic void of his uncertainty, waiting to be rescued by the indifferent technology that hurled him into it" (Kuspit 1996, p. 83). Orlan's post-identification antics in the 1980s raise issues between what is art, non-art and not art; what is normal and what is pathological behaviour as these boundaries blur (normative artist or 'committed' lunatic). Her surgical 'operations' as durational performances also address technologies that 'distort nature,' as implied by the advances discovered by scientific research—from microsurgery to organ transplants, and the risks that prevail for those who are involved with genetic engineering: the full implications of which are yet to be disclosed.

The life-death question, which Orlan 'plays' with, as she intentionally places herself in danger during her operations, might be compared with the science-fiction television series *Altered Carbon* (Netflix). The elimination of death, promising the long-awaited immortality (the 'fountain of youth') through the wizardry of advanced technologies (the year is 2384) has led to a moral and ethical crisis as to what is 'life,' and where meaning is to be found if there is only endless entertainment (mainly sex and drugs), and ownership of 'impossible' things by the very rich (art treasures) and of course, power—for those who are off-ground and live in the 'sky,' literally floating cities. The extreme violence that sets *Altered Carbon* apart from say sci-fi's like *Blade Runner* presents masochism and sadism (virtual

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bodily torture and death by sex) as the apotheosis of the entertainment industry, part and parcel of a dystopian world. The military and the police are controlled by rich elites, who have become the new gods. The boundary between the virtual and the actual has collapsed: any virtual potential can be actualized so that anything is possible. Once dead, if you have enough credits and your 'cortical stack' is not damaged, you can 'transfer' it into a new 'sleeve' (a cloned body) and continue to 'live.' It becomes a video-game world where no one dies. 'Life' for the very rich (deities) becomes a 'forever' process of enjoyment *(jouissance*), although, as is always the case, the horror of the Real is simply around the corner (the Real referring to a realm that cannot be imagined nor described): the dreaded disease, a plague that no one is immune to, not even the rich, can spread: only jumps from one 'sleeve' to another sleeve can possibly escape it.

'Life' as it relates to time and the body is always in question with performative durational art, which perhaps appears as the antithesis of Conceptual art as 'idea.' We might say these extremes (mind-body) seem to justify a Cartesian duality; but I think this is not the case if we shift our thinking to Deleuze-Guattarian frame of mind where "what can the body do" raises the Spinozian ethical and political position as it raises how bodies affect and are affected through each other. Spinoza developed the so-called doubled-aspect theory, which presents no divide between mind-body, only their entanglement: two aspects of one underlying entity as processes of the unconscious and the conscious, namely body consciousness and mind consciousness through the "screen of the brain" in Deleuzian (1998) terms. With this in mind I would like to explore the performance endurance art of Tehching Hsieh, which is quite apart from other Conceptual and Body Art practices performed in the period that dates his work of his first 5 one-year works (Sept. 1978–July 1986). He does not foreground the body as a mutable and penetrable object; there are no visible heroics played to spectators, or masculine psychological cathexes of masochism or narcissism, not even transcendent aspirations—rather there is a sustained passivity and inertia, action as inaction as sustained processes of lived subjection, what I take to be a "passive vitalism" following Deleuze (see Colebrook 2010) as I shall now argue. More dramatically, Tehching Hsieh's performances seem to be the very antithesis of the spectacularization of Abramović and (of course) of escape artists.

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TH: *A Life*

Techching Hsieh's (TH) 'life work' lends itself to a Deleuze-Guattarian schizoanalysis as their process philosophy seems to directly address endurance process-based performative art, where the stress is on becoming and metamorphosis, very much opposed to theatre and any forms of easy commodification. Performance does indeed stress 'presence'; it does highlight 'reality' in the here and now, but, as Jones (2011) points out, it cannot escape documentation, which is why TH's documentation is especially interesting. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call such 'presence': haecceity, which is the 'thereness' and 'nowness' of performance art. Haecceity can only be grasped as a certain uniqueness and non-repeatability, but at the pre-subjective level—the level of affect. Haecceity, like performance, is always in the middle, moving, like 'life' itself, as there is neither a beginning nor end, no origin or set destination. "It is not made of points, only of lines. It is a rhizome" (1987, p. 263). The framing put around endurance art is always arbitrary; the frame makes a cut in the continuous temporality of time, thereby moving from 'pure' time of Aion, as Deleuze (1990) names it, to chronological time. In this respect, Jones (2011), as argued above, is right to point out at any form of a performance's iteration becomes another representation in another form (mainly documentation), which effectively 'ends' the 'life' of the performance.

With such an orientation, the understanding of the body in performance changes. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, chapter 6, pp. 149–166) develop what they call a Body without Organs (BwO). The mind-body duality of Spinoza undergoes a modification. An idea can be a full independent art object as the body-mind entanglement is understood as the complex interaction between a virtual body (BwO), whose potential is to express ideas that are limited to an actualized physical body. Our body's potential is activated by the coexistence, co-operation and contact with other bodies. This is the notion of 'becoming.' There is a BwO that has yet to 'become.' It is without a representational image. Its organs have yet to be connected and hence such a body is non-productive. The point Deleuze and Guattari make is not that representation does not structure the body, obviously it does. However, the body can be deterritorialized and changed: what a body can 'do' remains open, as does the ecology that it functions within.

TH performances are such becomings. They raise difficult questions about the nature of time, especially its anthropomorphized concretizations. In a capitalist sense, time is always money, always

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'productive.' Wasteful time is frowned upon as efficiency is always an issue. TH gives a rather bleak reply to such a situation:

> My view of life is: whatever you do, living is nothing but consuming time until you die. If the first two pieces 'working hard to waste time,' the last two pieces are simply 'wasting time.' By choosing this approach, art is again going back to life itself. (Heathfield 2009, p. 335)

We have in this statement an extraordinary testament to the indistinguishability between 'art and life' or 'life and art.' The 'and' is no longer simply a conjunction but an intertwinement between art-life. How?

To come to terms with this question, it will be necessary to look at the performances TH is referring to in his statement, and in which way they relate to the art-life paradox. TH has performed six pieces for the time span of 21 years: exactly from 30th September of 1978 until 31st December 1999. Each performance has a formal unity framed in a particular way via a contract foremost with himself. Each performance is officially announced and signed before it begins and then this contract is officially 'verified' by an institutional official (lawyer, art bureaucrat). TH always shaved his head at the beginning of each piece to mark the start, and illustrate the flow of time. I will cursorily describe each piece.

One-Year Performance #1: The Cage Piece (1978–1979)
TH spent an entire year locked inside a cage that he constructed in his loft. He did not talk to anyone. And had no media contact (no television, radio or books), only himself counting days and lost in thought. The ordeal was documented by making a mark on a soft-plastered wall. An assistant (his friend Cheong Wei Kuong) brought him food and disposed of all his body waste. TH had the assistance photograph him daily: only 19 visits were allowed by the audience.

One-Year Performance #2: Punch Time Clock Piece (1980, April 11–1981, April 11)
TH punched a time clock every hour in the 24-hour day for an entire year. For every clock punch, a camera recorded a single shot frame. Time was then fast-forwarded into a movie. This resulted in a day being compressed into one second of movie 'time' (24 frames per second); the whole year took six minutes and four seconds to view: 8760 possible punch-ins, only 133 were not performed (perhaps from sleep deprivation?): 14 visits were allowed by the audience.

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One-Year Performance #3: Outdoor Piece (1981, Sept. 26 at 2 pm–1982, Sept. 26 at 2 pm)
TH spent a year out of doors, never stepping into shelter (buildings, or roofed structures). The year was spent exploring and roaming around lower Manhattan, New York. To stay in touch with friends, TH would use pay phones and rely on chance meetings. His wanderings for each day were meticulously recorded on a map. The place where he ate, slept, defecated was noted, as was how much money he spent.

One-Year Performance #4: Art/Life (Rope Piece) (1983–1984)
TH was tied to Linda Montano, a collaborative artist whom he never met or knew before, by an eight-foot rope for a year (however, five and a half feet separated their bodies when the rope was taut). They were sealed with metal clasps and then engraved with witness signatures. Both avoided touching each other, and each tried to maintain personal freedom. Records of each day were kept of their time together by taking a photo and making audiotape recordings, which were never to be released.

One-Year Performance #5: BLANK **IIIII** *(Will) July 1st, 1985–1986*
TH negated art by just living life, seemingly deterritorializing all four previous performances. He did not make, talk, read, view or participate in anything to do with what is conventionally called art.

Performance #6: 13-Year Plan: Earth (1986–1999)
The 13-year performance, beginning from TH's 37 birthday and ending on his 50th—31st Dec. 1999, presents TH marking a new millennium: "I kept myself alive." No documentation exists of what 'art' he did.

This brief review of his performances enables me to go back to his initial interview statement where art=life. The symbolic order: that is, the structuring of society at large, only recognizes someone through coordinates that tie down well-known signifiers to identify which bodies are worthy of recognition. The coalescence of social position, class, ethnicity, profession, gender, sexual orientation, ability and so on provides for one's social identification; the combination of signifiers brackets the coordinates as to where one's position is to be pinned down in the ecologies that are navigated. Performance #1 is an experiment what happens when all these coordinates are taken away, or fall away. The Cage is not a jail. If it were so, TH would have found himself in another hierarchical ecology

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to negotiate. Here he finds only himself to negotiate, as if being on a desolate island, like the figure of Chuck Noland in the film *Cast Away* (2000), who was only able to communicate with his projected ego: Wilson, a volleyball retrieved from one of the packages from the ship wreckage. Likewise, TH avoids making his assistant Cheng Wei Kuong (who brought him food each day) into a 'Friday,' a subordinate slave in the well-known *Robinson Crusoe* book written by Daniel Defoe. Rather, TH has to negotiate only with his own being. There are no bodies that he affects except his own. To cope, he creates in this space his own inside/outside: "I treated the corner with my bed as 'home' and the other three corners were 'outside.' I would then walk 'outside' and then come 'home'" (in Heathfield 2009, p. 327).

In Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) terms, TH developed a *ritournelle* that made him survive, like a child whistling a familiar tune in the dark, a *repetitive* tune of familiarity and protection. Spatiality is territorialized through his repetitive 'walk,' his daily photograph, the regularity of his bowel movements, and the regularity of the mark being made on the wall. In brief, while TH is a 'no body,' he is 'all' body. What defines him is simply the patterning that territorializes the space he occupies. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, subjectivity becomes cartography. "You are longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects. You have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, *a life* …" (TP, p. 262, original emphasis). This passage of time might be seen as durational in Henri Bergson's (1998 [1911]) terms.

The Cage performance #1 is an 'inverted' escape performance, in relation to my opening paragraph as to what makes endurance art 'different' or simply a kind of 'escapist' trick. The cage, as mentioned, was checked to ensure there was no escape, placing the existential question of freedom into another frame, although, like one sees in cinema, TH scratch-marked the days on a soft-plastered wall chronologically charting his 'incarceration.' This gesture, and being photographed daily, marks also a passage that is representational. The indexicality of each documented image, when shown through a serialization that spans the year, reveals the time of difference, the time that cannot be captured, the time that escapes spatialization, the elusive time of 'presence' itself, time as Aion in Deleuzian terms.

The Cage performance #1 illustrates Deleuze's (1994) claim that 'thinking' itself is 'objective.' What happens to the circuit between action and thought can change behaviour to disrupt everyday life. But here, we have a disruption that is 'imploded.' The interior landscape of the mind

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does not manifest in some sort of self-expression (the usual artistic claim); rather, this is action through inaction where communication does occur, but what is this communication that appears as its opposite: non-communication? I can only think of the bizarre idea of a form of 'autistic delirium.' Visitors to the performance (on 19 separate occasions) had 'nothing' to 'see.' How visitors were themselves affected remains unknown. Who they did 'see' was TH's shadow friend, Cheng Wei Kuong. He was tethered to the performance as a prosthetic to TH's body, the low-level service of being caterer, laundryman and toilet attendance. This also was his gift, a gift of friendship and support.

Unlike Houdini (Phillips 2001; Heathfield 2009), whose multiple performances were symbolic re-enactments of a subject who wrestled with the forces of subjectification; being trapped, the heroic escape sets one 'free.' Rather as Heathfield (2009) puts it:

> As an immigrant, Hsieh also wrestles, from a situation of alienation and privation, with self-subjection and with the notions of freedom and escape. Trapped in his cage for a long duration, Hsieh conjures no visible triumph from adversity, no reiteration of the self as inherently free, but instead lives out a quite different understanding of the notion of freedom *from within* his constraint. (p. 25, original emphasis)

Freedom, as it is linked to free will, is generally liked to the right to choose, to speak, to decide and what to do—actions that are related to spatial movement. Here, TH deconstructs this view, as it is related to just the opposite: negating physical action and linguistic dialogue. Freedom is oddly found in the very limits of experience, in the constraints themselves. One asks if this is not easily seen in pathological terms, as in anorexia or bulimia, also performances of resistance to the symbolic order as well (Malson 1998). What makes TH's performance different in kind, rather than degree?

It seems one answer can only be that these pathologies do not mitigate the 'self,' they are rather conditioned by the gaze of the symbolic; whereas TH seems to strip himself of all trappings of a sovereign self (objects, property, things, ability to speak and act). He is left only to the contingencies of thought, which he can neither say nor communicate. To follow Deleuze and Guattari on this, such freedom is immanent and not transcendent. It is like an embodied 'mindfulness' that is not 'religious' but points to a *passive vitalism*, what Deleuze (2001) called *A Life*, closer to 'silence' (no talking) and inaction (movement as non-movement) what Deleuze and

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Guattari (1987) called a nomadology. The 'no mad' 'moves' but not spatially in the way geometric measurable space is thought of, but through the movement of 'spacing,' the way TH 'spaced' his cage, made it 'bigger' as an Outside, or 'pure' space, infinite space, immeasurable spacing out of singularities in the world and *as* world. Thinking is *A Life* in its nomadic form. This sense of 'freedom' is precisely what Nelson Mandela achieved in his 25 years of incarceration, like TH. It is the discovery of existence—*A Life*, a 'truly' creative act of thinking made possible by freedom, a gift that is paradoxically itself 'free'—an expenditure that cannot be measured or bought: unrepresentable. It is what I have called elsewhere "self-refleXion," a distancing from thought itself to arrive at thinking, a move (following Duchamp) from the eye-world to the brain-eye (jagodzinski 2010). What is at stake is the very 'life' of such a nomad as exemplified by the *figural* performances of TH, but not the 'figure' of Tehching Hsieh himself.

Adrian Heathfield captures TH's nomadology as explicitly manifested in his Outdoor performance #3. He writes:

> Hsieh's durational concept is manifested not just as a coincidence of art and life, but a binding together of activity and negation, production and redundancy, his immersion in the public sphere is one and at the same time an isolation, his step into the exterior an act of interiority, *his movement a kind of stasis*. In this delicate balancing act the question of belonging is negotiated, as a matter of the subject's relation to the open, *and to that bare life that paces inside the pathways of every singular life*. (p. 45, emphasis added)

Heathfield fingers passive vitalism as 'bare life' or *A Life*, and recognizes its pre-subjective affective force which TH is able to harness in his year-long 'walk' in urban 'spacings' that are overlooked by coded representations. Such 'driftwork' is quite different from the psychogeographical projects of urban geography, the *derivé* and *détournement* practiced by Guy Debord (1994 [1967]) and the Situationist International where reconnoitring of the city was intended to transform places and their political realities through re-dreaming its spatio-temporal compositions.

Passive Vitality of *A Life*

The second performance presents somewhat of an antithesis of the first, deterritorializing spatiality and territorializing, codifying time in its Western capitalist terms. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the *ritournelle* (refrain) is what structures and conditions patterns, while rhythm (as the

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uncoded) is what deterritorializes the spacing of *A Life*. One might understand Punch Clockwork (#2) as one continuous *ritournelle* without pause, bringing with it mesmerizing effects in its repetitions, like meditation on a continuous everlasting sound. Here leisure as 'wasted time' paradoxically turns into work. What is startling perhaps, is this uncoded 'rhythm' reveals itself in the 6.04 sec. 16 mm film of the one-year performance that escapes categorization of 'animation,' documentary or portraiture. It is "the only existing stop-action document of a year in a human life shot at hourly intervals" (Langenbach, in Heathfield 2009, p. 32). Heathfield catches this 'other worldliness' when he writes:

> Throughout the duration [of the film] we see Hsieh looking directly toward us. His eyes are startlingly engaged with our eyes, but in the meantime his body is coursing with a vial energy; he is rapidly trembling and mutating in the grip of a relentless, machinic condensation of time. This is a work of portraiture in which the portrait (and subject) is gripped by a process of temporal disfigurement. (p. 32)

It is this 'disfigurement' that is the passive vitality of *A Life*, the invisible forces on the body that penetrate TH for the year. It is a 'stuttering' that emerges between the photograph (the single still) and the cinematic 'movement' image, the missing and elusive gaps that exist between frames as manifest by TH's 16 mm film—the delirium of altered states of *A Life* that remain invisible, now 'caught' by the machinic eye. Heathfield (2009) once more captures this 'stuttering' of the forces of passive vitality:

> This is a body, wracked by time, locked in a faltering flux: an agitated spasm of differentiation. This is a body lacking temporal continuity and physical integrity, a body whose borders oscillate and twitch; yet, a body whose still point, whose *gaze* in the ruins of visibility, holds its observer remorselessly in its grip, as if to say 'it is *you* I am implicating here.' (p. 36, original emphasis)

Punching a clock every hour on the hour for a year seems like an impossibility as the biological rhythms of the body are completely disrupted and undergo a military-like disciplinarity. TH wore what was a hybrid uniform with the semiotic tracings of an institutionalized prisoner-janitor-soldier garb. Work becomes a form of 'Taylorism' (The time and motion studies of banal repletion divide time between one's own flights of escape, and the task that the body must repeat. Work here, however, has become totally deterritorialized through its repetitive territorialization. TH's labour does not produce anything. It may be a strenuous 'job' (punching a clock each

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hour), but it is ultimately empty and wasteful, a non-job in capitalist terms. Most of the time he does 'nothing,' but waits around for the 'punch' and the photograph. There is no function of utility to punching this clock. What his act of submission shows, is that he is punching a clock so as to 'waste' time. It is a record of a year spent 'wasting time.' In the same way, the surveillance of time through time and motion studies of Frederick Taylor to increase capitalist output is also deterritorialized. What after all is the 'film' that is produced, if not the surveillance and confirmation of time 'wasted?'

This structure of space by chronological time is the antithesis of a meditative body in Cage (#1): East versus West. The work-leisure dichotomy is reversed: leisure as work (#1) becomes work as leisure (#2). The implosion of work-leisure happens in both performances as a duty to a task and a task that demands duty. Rest and no rest as dichotomies 'drop' out. Time is currency: it is not passed by (as in #1) but spent (as in #2). In #2, speed becomes metronomic and repetitious to hold the task by a duty to it. *Just do it* as the Nike commercial demands. While TH is not subject to acceleration, the automation leads to a 'waste' of time that squeezes out any forms of creativity. There is no repetition with a difference, no Nietzschean eternal return, but the perfect repletion of a programmed machine. This is not the durational time of performance #1, the body's mechanics must be controlled by the mind to form a body memory, not unlike the perfect skate routine of an ice skater. What then is the line between aesthetics and machinic repetition? Is it one of degree or kind? That question constantly haunts art as judgement has no fixed formula. In performance #2, the Other drops out exposing the so-called purity of subjective time in #1, and the 'purity' of objective time in #2; either way 'work and life' collapse.

The Outside

Time undergoes a further modification in TH's Outdoor piece #3. Here the Other factors in as *intuitive time* is explored. Maximum movement happens 'outdoors' where space-time is freed up from the usual institutional impositions. We might say that TH explores an 'inverted' city of Manhattan. Time-space that is overlooked by the symbolic order, which nevertheless structures it; not so easily understood as simply 'negative space' as what is 'negative' are the rhythms that are 'outside' the symbolic, which in turn, can deterritorialize it. As Heathfield (2009) puts it:

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> durational aesthetics give access to other temporalities: to times that will not submit to Western culture's linear, progressive metanormativity, its orders of commodification, to the times of excluded or marginalized identities and lives; to times as they are felt in diverse bodies. Time, then, as plentitude: heterogeneous, informal, and multi-faceted. (p. 23)

TH becomes a 'nobody' within the margins of the symbolic—homeless, having to face the violence of the 'outdoors.' He only becomes a 'some body' through chance meetings, and when he becomes only a 'voice' through the public phone system. TH calls this piece as "Walking out of Life"—meaning walking into the time-space that the symbolic order does not code and control, into a "smooth space" as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would characterize, avoiding all "striated spaces." These are the abandoned places and times, non-productive places where the homeless live. He is homeless as all social bonds have been cut, crossed only accidentally or contingently to survive.

This is 'intuitive time.' As Bergson (1998 [1911]) put it, intuition is "an inquiry turned in the same direction as art, which would take life *in general* for its object" (1998, pp. 176–177, emphasis added). The only time the contract for this Outdoor performance is broken is when he is 'arrested' by two policemen (May 3rd, 1982) for carrying a nunchaku in his backpack for protection, and forced into the police station. This intervention by the Law greatly disturbed Hsieh; it exposed him as being a state of exception. The judge who ruled on the case (Martin Erdmann) had read an article in the *Wall Street Journal* that discussed Hsieh's work. Fortunately, he let him go 'outside.' In the final court hearing, Hsieh was convicted of the minor crime of disorderly conduct. The entire incident was fortuitously captured on film by Claire Fergusson, a friend who was filming him at the time (Heathfield 2009, p. 44).

(For)giving Rope

The Other is introduced again in the Rope Piece (#4) where TH is tethered to another artist, Linda Montano, who could not be 'controlled' but only mediated via the rope. This performance is the apotheosis of the Spinozian query as to what a body can do: how does one body affect another body, and how in turn is it affected? Identity and intimacy are fully explored. The tensions between strangers (and lovers alike) are under scrutiny. Time and space are transmitted along with the tensions of that

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eight-foot rope (reduced to five and a half feet between them) as it choreographs the dance between them in ways that are unforeseeable. Time-space undergoes a hyperawareness of its structuring. Every second, it seems is *not* wasted, but why? Culture is constantly deterritorialized in this piece. Being tethered together brings to fore that we are all 'tied up.' To survive means to negotiate with the Other, especially male-female relationships that are so dichotomized in patriarchal and capitalist cultures.

While this performance is most easily understood as a durational investigation of aesthetic, social and political differences, or how the 'face' of the Other is to be negotiated from, say a Lévinasian stance (Lévinas 1994), what has not been suggested is that this performance heightens what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call "becoming-woman," the first necessary transformation of bodily identity that needs to be questioned in a male-dominated symbolic order. Kinesthetic re-attunements must have taken place as each body sensorium becomes re-conditioned through such a bounded intimacy. Although never touching, the mirror neurons were always firing; mutual durational sensory intrusions must result as an unconscious enfolding takes place between them. This exchange goes both ways. However, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) maintain, the male does not 'become,' as this is the primary masterful position in the social order. Becoming-woman refers to both sexes, as both need to recognize this primary structuring. It goes beyond simply gendering, and addresses the more mysterious questions concerning sex, a non-representational condition. In this regard, the Rope performance (#4) is an excessive virtual event, occurring before or after its actualization, officially ending at the end of one year as the contract stated. Thousands upon thousands minute incorporeal exchanges, which are too fast or too slow for perception, non-recognizable and invisible, must have taken place over the year between them, the 'year' being only in *media res* of such an exchange and entwinement. Did Hsieh take on her movements? Did she his? These actualized exchanges would be the determinations of virtual exchanges—the negotiations and unconscious body comportments. There was no need to 'touch' physically as touching was continuous at the virtual level.

Most dramatically we can say that the Hsieh-Montano coupling presents a renewed sexuality as an undoing or deterritorialization of the usual sex-gendered binary, no doubt formed during the hardships that were generated by differences, antagonisms and outright violent disagreements. These were the 'blank' days where they declined to appear before the agreed daily snapshot; the record shows a blacked-out but time-stamped

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image. Heathfield (2009) is right to see this performance, not as some heterosexual dynamics (the exemplar here is Mariana Abramović and Ulay early performative work, *Relation in Space*, 1976), but one of "hospitality, civility and ethics" (p. 51), which addresses the issue of inequality. Heathfield is right to say this is "a collaboration with a *strange*r" (p. 52, original emphasis), which goes both ways in this case. It is a "*dwelling together*, a dwelling that is always constituted by being with another in a fluid state of non-belonging" (ibid, original emphasis). *A Life* is revealed in the social being-for-the-other, or as Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) put it "being singular plural." The silence of this piece remains: all the recorded conversations between Hsieh and Montano are sealed up in perpetuity, never to be heard—documentation that self-erases, or rather documentation that keeps its secret in a crypt.

The Art of Non-Art

These four performances show Hsieh working "hard to waste time" (Performances #1 and #2) and the simplicity of "wasting time" (Performances #3 and #4). With One-Year Performance # 5, "No Art Piece" and Performance #6, A 13 Year Plan: Earth, the art-life relationship undergoes yet another mystifying shift: a shift that questions the very foundation of ART. Each performance is subsequently counteractualized in Delueze's (1990) sense; that is to say, each performance formed a 'problematic' that had to be revisited and reworked for a different result. The problematic might be stated as to whether it is possible that 'art-time' can be collapsed into 'life-time'? Whether the event of becoming can be continuous. It is to ask whether his last 6th performance – 13 year: Earth manages to 'solve' this problematic of time or not? Heathfield (2009) put it this way:

> The hugely unruly temporal dynamics of these works presses them beyond art-as-process, or art-as-event, and renders art as simultaneous to life. Hsieh's rendition of art as being-in-duration, as a life-course of becoming, directly raises questions of the nature of time itself, and his work resonate with the living forces of duration. (p. 13)

'Life-art' would then be a continuous surrender to the questioning of subjectivity (ego) as to its material limits in the grip of the 'natural forces' of the Earth, as implied by the title of the last 13-year performance. This

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now becomes a cosmic question. A totally 'letting-go' that immediately plunges you into the void of time, infinite and non-definable, what Deleuze (2001) called "pure immanence," or *A Life*.

Out of (Law)

Before making a schizoanalysis of the last two performances, it should be said that TH throughout his performances is a 'law unto himself.' What does this mean? Each performance had a 'contract' that stated what could and could not be done. It was a legal framework. In The Cage performance, an attorney (Robert Projansky) signed seals across every joint of Hsieh's cage (just like in an escape artist performance). Later, he drew up a witness statement certifying such an act of intentional incarceration. It is, as if, this was a sadomasochistic (S/M) contract between TH and 'Society.' He empowers himself as its representative, however, reverberations and traces of his illegal status are also present. Such a contract is 'perverse' as it fabricates a 'Law' that is outside the symbolic Law, yet, not to challenge it, as much as to live in spaces where the Law is blind or not in effect, where power appears mitigated. Much, of course, has been written about S/M contracts from a psychoanalytic perspective dwelling on perversion as resisting Oedipalization (Lacan 2014). But this is not the case here. TH's contracts are self-imposed laws, to set structures that guide him to exposing the 'outside' of Symbolic Law, not necessarily to challenge it.

In The Clock Punch performance #2, the clock was signed and sealed by David Milne, an executive director of the New York Arts Foundation; he also acted as a witness in verifying the authenticity of the punch cards. Here the SM contract was between TH and the powers of the NY arts community. The same was initiated with the rope that tethered Hsieh and Montano. Metal clasps were sealed and engraved with witness signatures. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the subject is subjected to the Law, and hence subject to the desire of the Other. Lacan realized late in his teaching that artists were perhaps those individuals who could break from this 'desire of the Other,' and in effect become their own symptoms by generating an alternative imaginary world. Lacan named this calling by the artist a *sinthome* rather than a symptom, and saw James Joyce (Seminar 23, 1975–1976) as such an artist who develops his Imaginary that breaks with the Symbolic Order of the Law. TH is no different. In many respects this was facilitated by the 'fact' that he was an 'illegal' immigrant to the U.S., and hence had to always cope with the Law.

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It should be no surprise, in effect, that Hsieh did not wish to be seen by the gaze of the Law, and if we think of an audience as completing the encounter to his art, they are effectively also the Law. He explicitly states that the audience was not necessary, and that, in Cage (#1) he did not engage with any onlookers who were allowed into the studio for a sum total of 19 times during the year. This aversion to spectators and the audience confirms that TH's art was generated 'for-itself.' Cage (#1) was a staging of simply his virtual Idea—or his imaginary which he lived with continuously for that period. In this sense, the performance was an 'interpassive' experience. Both Robert Pfaller (2000) and Slavoy Žižek (1998) identify interpassivity as the experience of where the 'object' does it all for you, like the clock in #2 which demands all of TH's mental energy to be 'punched.' However, the difference here is that such a psychoanalytic reading fails to note the disregard of the Other. The performances, oddly, do not need spectators. TH's performances 'do' it for you, certainly, but there is no engagement necessary by spectators, which gives us clues to these last two performances.

As a *sinthome*, an artist—a Law unto himself/herself, gives us some clues to TH's two last enigmatic performance where there is no audience, yet he remains an 'artist' in art-time; where there is no separation between 'art-time' and life as led, a division which had existed in the previous four performances. So, what is one to make of performance #5, "No Art Piece" where, in effect, TH disappears! If there is no audience, no spectators, is it still 'art'? Can life and art collapse in this way? The undoing of identity has been attempted before, most notably by Orlan who physically changed her body through her operational performances. In her *Harlequin Coat*, a bio-art performance supported and aided by SymbioticA, her identity 'disappears' as her skin cells are grown with animal cells to form a hybrid cell that is then displayed. But identity here is always spectacularized and 'gallerized.' Hsieh's #5 performance raises the problematic: if art becomes 'ordinary' is it art any longer? This is the dilemma of art-life.

For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming provoked by 'difference' is achieved in a zone of indeterminacy. "Becoming is involutionary, involution is creative" (TP, p. 238). If becoming is 'artistic,' there is no need for a spectator; it must occur within a particular ecology of desire. There must be a coexistence of relationships. Life understood in this way is 'passive' ´not 'active.' It is passive in the sense it is contingent. If TH produces nothing, why take him seriously? The paradox is laid out by Deleuze and Guattari (1983) as a relationship between becoming and reality. As they

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write, this is an "ongoing process of becoming [which] is the becoming of reality" (p. 35). Meaning that art and life are constantly making and unmaking one another; deterritorialization and reterritorialization are constant, with the representational territory being a metastable pattern for the illusionary 'present' that seems not to change. A Thirteen Year Plan: Earth (#6) can best be understood as the mandate of what an artist is to 'do' in a Deleuze and Guattari context; that is, to reveal the intensity of *A Life*. By *A Life* Deleuze and Guattari (1987; Deleuze 2001) are referring to creativity that *cannot be controlled*; that is not in the control of the artist; it is basically the inhuman in us and a suspension of *will*. Which is why performance #5 is a *blank*, sometimes referred to simply as 'Will,' which has been suspended in its usual meaning of subjective agency. The paradox of action as inaction addresses this. It is a cosmic concept: the void in us, or the nihilism that says life is ultimately meaningless. We only bestow 'meaning' to our actions. Such a problem is perhaps the most difficult to face, as this is where identity disappears, what Jacques Lacan (1994, pp. 207–208) called "aphanisis" or a "fading of the subject."

TH's search for *A Life* for 13 years, in effect, trying to disappear, means an attempt to seek out a passive vitalism that we do not control. The cosmic laws of *A Life* shape him 'doing time'; that is, being sensitive to 'becoming' where art and life meet and become indistinguishable. In this sense he is an 'untimely figure' in these performances (#5 and 6), an outsider to chronological time. No audience is needed for this: no spectacle, no artist looking back, no object, only the problematics of documentation, and there is none! In #5 TH drops the platform of 'art-life.' The statement of intent is: "not to do ART, not to talk ART, not to see ART, not to read ART" (Heathfield 2009, p. 296). In brief, all the ART he refuses belongs to the world of institutionalized art, representational art—and not *A Life*, which is his art, in short, "thinking-as-art." "He became an artist *without* art" (Heathfield 2009, original emphasis, p. 55). This is somewhat 'confirmed' when he capitalizes ART and uses the phrase "I **IIIII** JUST GO IN LIFE." What is negated by the **IIIII** is 'will,' that is the expressive attempt of the artist who does ART and does not reveal *A Life*. As the previous performances show, all the documentation is purposefully amateurish and banal, all the expressive modalities of the self—action, speech, envisioning—are stilled. The expressive sensibility of ART is undone—a work of self-e*X*pression.

In #6 he goes further as the cosmic 'Earth' becomes the new platform, the ecology that he becomes sensitive to. It is yet another counteractual-

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ization of his problematic. He lets the non-human shape his life. As he tells it, he travelled and 'survived' 13 years of grappling with the pre-subjective realm of non-volition, the realm of a voided self—voided of ego—the disappearance of ego. Non-identity is grasped only in the moments of becoming where time is that of Aion. "Perhaps the peculiarity of art is to pass through the finite in order to rediscover, to restore the infinite" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 197). Such a possible world through haptic vision is able to compose chaos in such a way that the quality of e*X*pression of *A Life* becomes visible. This then is a de-anthropomorphization of the self. Perhaps, TH stopping his search at the turn of the twenty-first century was a way to say he had failed? Deleuze and Guattari's mandate for the artist is to develop new affects, new ways of being. TH is certainly such an artist. It is best to leave this chapter with the last word from Adrian Heathfield (2009), who lovingly and with great care managed to present the lifework of Tehching Hsieh in his remarkable *Out of Now*. He writes, "Hsieh asks how a subject constitutes its sense of self, its freedom to act and speak; how it relates to its environmental outside, its sense of estrangement and belonging; how it experiences and makes itself in relation to another; how it defines and lives out the limits of creativity" (p. 57). Significantly, Heathfield uses the term "it" in this succinct summation. *It = A Life*.

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PART II

Human and Non-human Art/Educational Excess

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CHAPTER 5

Killing Them Softly: Nonhuman Animal Relationships and Limitations of Ethics

Mira Kallio-Tavin

Introduction

Contemporary art includes numerous examples of art projects dealing with the theme of killing an animal. Works that occupy a location of reinforcing human emotions violently are often condemned, promptly dismissed, and tabooed. It seems that in these tabooed artworks, the killing of an animal is not the ethically problematic area because, as we know based on daily human behavior, there seem to be little ethical problems around humankind killing other species. The reasons for questioning these artworks are more complex and layered than just the killing of an animal. The essence of these artworks speaks against ethics and what is usually highly valued in humanism. Based on people's reactions to these artworks, they seem to violate humanism in ways that strongly hurt people's emotions and feelings. It is curious to ponder how upsetting these artworks are to people, even though the same people take part in the daily mass killing of which we all are a part.

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_5

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This "noncriminal putting to death" (Wolfe 2003, p. 7) includes hunting, domestic subjection, and exploitation in the production of meat, medicine, clothing, energy, and transportation in most human efforts in industries, agriculture, zoological, ethological, biological and genetic consumption, and experimentation. As Derrida (2008) describes:

> All that is all too well-known; we have no need to take it further. However one interprets is, whatever practical, technical, scientific, juridical, ethical, or political consequence one draws from it, no one can today deny this event—that is, the *unprecedented* proportions of this subjection of the animal. (p. 25)

Humankind would not have accomplished its achievements in any scientific or any other area if there seemed to be an ethical problem with animal killing. The tabooed contemporary artwork has another type of ethical problem than just the killing of an animal. The problem concerns moral questions around the artists' intentions and their possibly *evil minds*. The first question is: Was it necessary? Killing just for art doesn't seem to be as justified as killing for some other reason. The second question is: How could they do it? The methods by which the artist has performed the killing seem crucial. The easy assumption is that there must be something terribly wrong with the person who calls themselves an artist. The artist's intentions are then viewed with suspicion and the doomed artist becomes monstrous to them.

From an ethical humanistic perspective, we are not supposed to kill if someone else is in front of us (Lévinas 2009). Monstrousness is connected to a singular person's ability to abandon ethical responsibility and perform an action that is cruel. The humanist perspectives discussed in this chapter lean on Lévinasian ethics on encountering with the other. As Lévinas asserted, the "face is what forbids us to kill" (2009, p. 86). In front of another living being, be it a critter or a person, we are open, exposed, and receptive. There is an ethical demand in the other's existence that interferes with our own liberty and freedom, limiting our violence, and it is difficult to refuse the responsibility that this limitation imposes (jagodzinski 2002). Somehow, we have liberated people who work in farming, or in any step in the meat and other industries, from this requirement. This double-standard position seems to trouble humankind surprisingly little.

In what follows, four contemporary artworks that address ethical questions on human/nonhuman animal violence are discussed. Guillermo Vargas, aka Habacuc, in 2007, tied a dog to a gallery wall to supposedly starve to death, a work called *Exposición N° 1*, which, according to the

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artist was to demonstrate people's hypocrisy about dogs starving to death in the streets of Nicaragua. Teemu Mäki, in 1995, killed a cat in his video artwork, *My Way, a Work in Progress*, to make a point about institutionalized objective violence. Both Habacuc and Mäki aimed at discussing audience reactions to contemporary art, as well as discussing societal grievances. The audience, in both cases, seem to react as if the artists performed the killings for fun, or because they had no sense of ethics (psychopaths perhaps), or at least without any compelling reason (e.g. eating an animal). I will discuss these two artworks together with two less violent, but still troublesome, artworks, Pekka Jylhä's *The Table That Wanted to Go Back to Being a Pond* and Huang Yong Ping's installation, *Theater of the World*. Both artworks are from the 1990s but have been presented in museums recently. In this chapter, I will discuss these monstrous artworks in the light of humanism, its ethics, and its possible hypocrisy.

Monstrous Artists

Guillermo Vargas, better known as Habacuc, presented a critical commentary on human double standards and cultural prejudice with his art project, *Exposición N° 1*, exhibited at the Códice Gallery in Managua, Nicaragua, in 2007. He tethered a dog to the gallery wall and assumingly did not provide food or water for the dog. On the wall was written "Eres Lo Que Lees"—"You Are What You Read"—written in dog biscuits. As a part of the display, the artist played the Sandinista (socialist political party, Sandinista National Liberation Front) anthem backward and set 175 pieces of crack cocaine alight in a massive incense burner. According to some media sources (e.g. Couzens 2008), Habacuc "wanted to test the public's reaction" (para 3), and was pointing out how none of the exhibition visitors intervened to stop the animal's suffering.

This demonstration of people's daily hypocrisy for not caring about dogs starving to death was not the only idea of the art work, according to Habacuc (Yanez 2010). His work was inspired by the drug-related death of a poor Nicaraguan addict, who was killed by two dogs. The key questions of *Exposición N° 1* were focused on societal negligence and ignorance. The assumingly privileged gallery guests did not try to free the dog, feed the dog, call the police, or do anything to help the dog. Instead, people behaved exactly as they always behave. They were having wine and snacks, at the same time as homeless people and stray dogs were dying on the streets of Managua. However, afterward they signed an Internet petition to

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prevent Habacuc from participating in the 2008 Bienal Centroamericana in Honduras. Although the petition received over four million signatures, and resulted in millions of furious people, not much has been done to save stray dogs. In addition, Habacuc signed the petition himself (Yanez 2010), perhaps pointing out that nobody is an outsider in the societal ignorance and structural violence.

Habacuc has not publicly clarified the dog's destiny. Juanita Bermúdez, the director of the Códice Gallery, stated that the dog was fed regularly (mainly by Habacuc) and was only tied up for three hours on one day before it escaped (Couzens 2008; Yanez 2010). What happened to the dog is not or should not, for the central thesis of this chapter, be the key ethical matter. While it might sound cruel to say so, it would be more important to consider how it is so easy for humankind to ignore violence and abuse when it is not happening in front of our faces, even though we are well aware of it. As David Yanez (2010) writes:

> *Exposición No 1* is one component of a larger work of art called *Eres lo que lees,* which employs misinformation and manipulates mass media via the Internet. One of the aims of this project was to demonstrate the hypocrisy in real world and art world ethics. Take a dog off the streets and put it into a gallery and it becomes an ethical phenomenon, while stray dogs and most real human suffering are ignored or given minimal attention. (para 8)

Teemu Mäki tried to bring the mechanisms of objective violence to people's notion with his work *My Way, a Work in Progress* (1995). In this 90-minute-long video artwork, he killed the cat with an ax and masturbated onto its dead body. The aim was to show an example of subjective violence, a type of monstrous and extreme violence that exists without any particular explanation and without any meaning (Mäki 2005). Subjective violence, such as war, animal slaughter, starvation, and ecocatastrophe was contrasted in the video against objective violence, the type of violence people participate in daily through politics and the consumerist structures of capitalism. Mäki's point was to discuss how millions are killed because the rest of us desire new clothes and cheap gasoline, but fewer get killed through subjective violent attacks, although those are usually the discussed examples of violence.

The political intention of the work aimed to influence a larger audience and shake their normative thinking. Mäki (2007) wanted to purposefully produce an artwork where people have difficulties identifying themselves. As I have earlier described (Tavin and Kallio-Tavin 2014)

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> Without a kind and virtuous character to identify with, Mäki hoped that the spectator would be disturbed by the video and would not be able to escape its ethical accusations; this would hopefully lead the audience to doubts and distress and, finally, to change. (p. 432)

This is not what happened for the most part. The audience reaction was pure anger, rage, and ultimately defense. The otherness of the artwork is too extreme, too monstrous—even though it is only in people's imaginations, as the work has not been displayed publicly—to be able to effect ethical consideration to generate change.

Most audience reactions were from the cruelty of the artist's actions, and from the idea that the cat was not just killed but suffered, and was perhaps even tortured. The legal consequences Mäki faced had, in fact, to do with lack of speed in the killing. It turned out that the axe was not sharp enough and the killer was not experienced enough. The difference in speed was just in seconds, but it never the less exceeded the law. Those painful seconds were the ones that counted.

Mäki's infamous artwork's finale, the 11th version, was completed 25 years ago (the first version of the work was made as early as 1988). During those decades, his audience had not largely been able to align with his criticism on institutionalized objective violence. Instead they "see" the little cat in their mind, even though *My Way, a Work in Progress* has never been shown in public. The video work was prohibited from display by the Finnish Board of Film Classification, defined as immoral and brutalizing (Mäki 2007). Within the past 25 years the world has not become less violent, and the form of objective violence has grown even more systematic and hurtful. In addition, the hypocritical statements have remained the same. Thinking in this way, Mäki's video artwork is still topical and its statements are still valid.

It is curious to consider these two artworks in the light of multiple artworks and other animal displays, such as natural history museums, which include killed animals, as it is clear that usually these animals have been killed, not found dead. In addition, they have been killed for art and most often for science, which is probably acceptable. Animal collections have been, after all, a significant part of the history of human education. Nobody protested when Pekka Jylhä presented his artwork *The Table That Wanted to Go Back to Being a Pond*, 1994–1995, at the Rovaniemi art museum, Korindi, in 2017. The artwork consists of three taxidermy seagulls and a glass board (see Fig. 5.1). The only reason this artwork was

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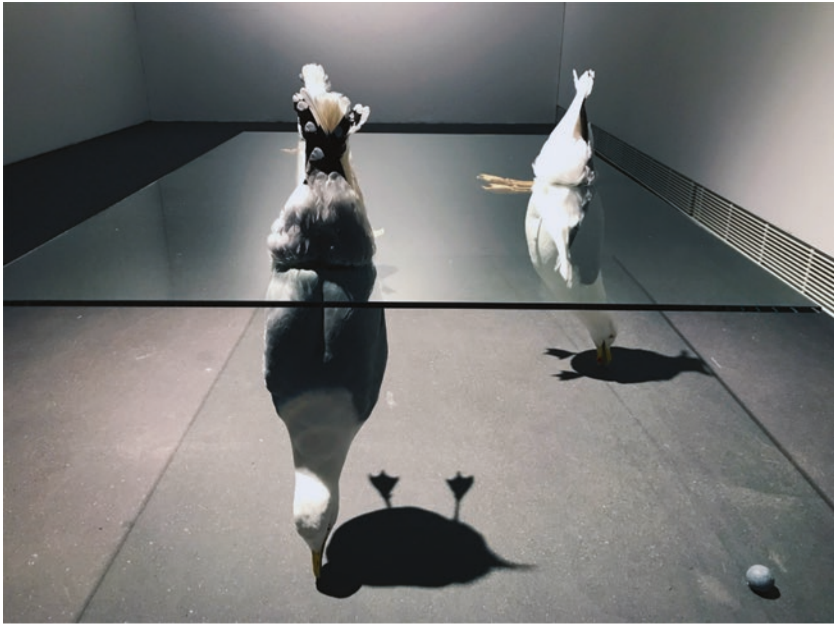

Fig. 5.1 *Pöytä joka halusi takaisin lammeksi* (The Table That Wanted to Go Back to Being a Pond), Jenny and Antti Wihuri foundation's collection, Rovaniemi Art Museum. (Image by Mira Kallio-Tavin)

in the news was for the poor condition of the seagulls, which were acting as the table legs. The artwork was in a danger of being removed from the museum collection and demolished. Jylhä wanted to remake the 20-year-old artwork, because otherwise it would have been "bad" and "sad" as he put it (YLE 2016). Interestingly, neither the artist nor the media mentions anything sad about the animals killed for this artwork. Perhaps this is because the killing was not shown as part of the artwork. Or perhaps shooting seagulls for art production is close enough to hunting, which is after all often considered an enlightening sport for privileged people, or an otherwise dignified practice.

Recently, the use of live animals in exhibits has been seen with suspicion. One example of this is the Guggenheim exhibition in 2017, *Art and China After 1989: Theater of the World*, curated by Alexandra Munroe. Huang Yong Ping's two-part installation *Theater of the World* from 1993

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was built as an architectural arena of life. The plan was to include snakes, insects, lizards, and turtles inside of the cage sculptures, formed as Chinese bronze sculptures of mythological animal forms. The concept of the artwork was that the animals would "battle each other to the death." Huang's design referred to the Benthamian panopticon (later taken up by Foucault): the metaphorical control in modern societies. It also referred to the Daoist methodological hybrid creature with the head of a snake and body of a tortoise. The museum, the artist, and the curator decided to act upon the protests directed to the Guggenheim and not include the animals in the work. It is somewhat unclear, though, whether the museum was worried more about the animals' well-being or the museum visitors and staff from their statement:

> Due to explicit and repeated threats of violence in reaction to the incorporation of live animals in the creation of this work, the Guggenheim is not presenting it as originally planned. Freedom of expression has always been and will remain a central value of the Guggenheim, but so is the physical safety of its visitors and staff. We deeply regret that, in this case, those values were in irreconcilable conflict. (Curated text on the Guggenheim NY wall, 2017)

Assuming the conditions for the animals would be confirmed, it makes sense to ponder, for the sake of possible hypocrisy, how museum conditions differ from caging animals in zoo conditions. Perhaps something that has been called "artists' freedom," or "freedom of expression" in the artist's profession appears as recklessness. There might be an idea that it is better if artists do not include living animals in their artworks, as they might not be responsible enough to consider their well-being. Throughout history there have been stories of irresponsible and adventurous artists, which have been connected to virtuosity and genius, perhaps even monstrousness, something that is difficult to control. Perhaps on the reverse side of genius, there lurks a possibility of evil.

The Ethics of Loving and Killing an Animal

Many viewers feel that they could never do *such a thing*, as killing an animal on purpose, in front of viewers, just for art. At the core of humanist thinking is ethics, which Lévinas (2009) described through the idea of the other's face. Lévinas explained how it is particularly the other person's face

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that stops us from killing (Lévinas 2009). When in front of the other, and when witnessing the other's suffering, it is against ethical human nature not to help the other. From another perspective, one individual cannot be sacrificed for many. This idea of human dignity is at the core of legal doctrine in most national and international laws and legislations. For example, the idea of killing one, even if it is to save thousands, is against ethical actions, as it is against the laws and legislations. The question in hand is to ponder whether the ethical encountering face to face has become so crucial for humankind that perhaps more covered violating practices seem secondary for critical consideration and are therefore bypassed without further speculation.

On the other hand, humankind has spent much time and effort taking the killing, exploitation, and suffering out of plain sight. This is the argument that Mäki and Habacuc tried to make by setting nonhuman animal suffering right in front of our gaze. Sacrificing one animal in order to improve a thousand others' lives was condemned by millions of people who considered themselves animal lovers, but, on the other hand, were taking part in the daily "noncriminal putting to death" (Wolfe 2003, p. 7) of animals. This double-standard position was taken up as early as in the times of the early animal rights movements by Peter Singer (1990), who paid attention in his writings on animal rights to how people who are interested in animal rights are often considered to be animal lovers. He emphasized that this is not, however, the best basis for animal liberation. Taking care of animals and taking animal rights seriously should not be based on loving—or hating, or actually on any emotion. Hence, civil rights were not based on minorities' cuteness or cuddliness. We can see how little, if any, influence there is on the human emotional animal relationship with animal rights. For example, people who own and love their pets often eat meat, produced in painful and suffering conditions. The ethical and responsible human relationship with animals becomes curious, even problematic, if it depends on human feelings or experiences of ownership, which all together remind us of slavery more than an equal relationship.

Singer (1990) describes how he was not particularly interested in animals, did not "love" them, or did not own any. But, he wanted animals to be "treated as the independent sentient beings that they are, not as a means to human ends" (Singer 1990, p. ii). Similarly, Wolfe (2003) writes:

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> We need to understand that the ethical and philosophical urgency of confronting the institution of speciesism and crafting a posthumanist theory of the subject *has nothing to do with whether you like animals*. (p. 7)

Singer (1990) emphasized the equality between different animal species and did not have any sentimental judgment to differ the slaughter for meat of dogs from pigs. The equality of species leads us to ponder the reasons for justification for killing animals in different contexts. According to Singer, there should be no hesitation in killing an animal for tastier food or more fashionable shoes. But killing for art, for example, seems quite prohibited (see e.g. Tavin and Kallio-Tavin 2014). Generally, people consider artworks that include an animal's killing extremely unethical and cruel. From a speciesism critical viewpoint, it is crucial to consider what makes it possible for most people to accept and be part of institutional, structural, and daily killing for multiple products for human goods, but be critical toward singular cases of killing for artistic purposes, even when the killing is done in order to make an ethical point. Perhaps, "eating well," as Derrida (2008) puts it, is more important than accepting an idea that humanism and ethics might not after all offer a sustainable and sufficient ethical argument.

Humanist philosophers have spent a considerable amount of time and effort clarifying how and why humankind is different from other animals, to sustain the human-centered approach to speciesism. As Derrida (2008) states, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lévinas and Lacan, and many others have explored human separation from animal species based on power, capability, and attributes, as their ability to give, to bury one's dead, to work, and to invent a technique. Some have emphasized the human ability "to respect the rights of others, and to possess a sense of justice" (Singer 1990, p. 8). In his *Letter on Humanism*, written in 1947, Heidegger (1977) explored the question of the *abyss* separating humans from other species. According to Mitchell (2003), Wittgenstein, Cavell, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guatarri, in addition to Lévinas and Derrida, have all "radically reshaped the traditional view of 'the' animal as a straightforward antithesis and counterpart to 'the' human" (p. xii). Humankind has been explained as different from other species because of intelligence and subjectivity, which are linked to language (Wolfe 2010). Wittgenstein stressed the meaning of language as a distinguishing factor with his well-known text: "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him" (Kenny 1994, p. 213). Sometimes the separation has been described through

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different nervous systems and different experiences of pain, memory, or lack of memory, different emotions and, as Descartes especially emphasized, the ability to share experiences on those matters, meaning the sociocultural part of human life. The boundaries of these ideas are pushed every now and then, for example, when it was discovered that chimpanzees and dolphins could be taught language.

Jeremy Bentham's well-known statement on the principles of morals and legislation on animals (1789) has been the leading ideology for animal rights: "The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?" (Derrida 2008, p. 27; Singer 1990, p. 7). The question of animal suffering and minimizing pain, including psychological pain and stress, has become a measure of ethical human actions toward animals. Beings who can demonstrate an interest in avoiding suffering should have rights to be protected, regardless of their species (Wolfe 2003).

The question of nonhuman animal suffering might have offered another option for nonhuman animal killing. As a consequence, humankind has defined what can be counted as a legitimate amount of suffering for nonhuman animals and what cannot. If killing is done without suffering, it is accepted. The fact that lives are ending is not as crucial as the fact that there is little to no suffering. Perhaps daily killing, even in masses, is accepted as long as killing is clean, smooth, soft and quick, and done professionally, and certainly not with a dull axe.

The Pedagogical Potentiality of the Monstrous

Animal oppression is still often a taboo within higher education and neoliberal capitalist societies (Fraser and Taylor 2016). Similarly to other big ethical questions, such as distribution of food and water, migration and racism, human utility toward nonhuman animals seems to be too difficult question to comprehend and is therefore often bypassed.

Critical animal studies (CAS) works against speciesism, and suggests ethically challenging perspectives to the social movement, adding to and partially aligning with disability studies, after the civil rights movement, feminism, environmentalism, and LBGT activism (Wolfe 2010). Speciesism is a matter of prejudice or a biased attitude in favor of the interest of members of one's own species against those of other species. Educational fields such as art education have a long tradition of taking standpoints on critical social issues and working actively against sexism, ableism, classism, racism, and other types of prejudice. Ethically thinking, critical animal studies

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perspectives should be part of contemporary art education. Questions on speciesism, animal rights, and sustainable food production, for example, are part of the ethical responsibility of inhabiting this globe. Many contemporary artists discuss human–nonhuman animal issues in their artworks. It would make sense to bring this conversation into museums and other cultural institutions, similarly to other forms of oppression (see e.g. Bayer et al. 2018).

Lévinas (2008) described how the human ethical relationship is closely connected to a situation where the human connection is in the vicinity, such as in a face-to-face situation. Humankind is not able easily to carry out ethical situations that are not in our neighborhood, or in our own backyard. Similarly, as a humanitarian crisis on another continent seems distant and abstract for so many, animal suffering does not seem to touch people deeply, who might otherwise even consider themselves animal lovers. Somehow the Western capitalist society structure assures a certain ethical apathy, when it comes to faraway people (no matter how "small" the world has become through globalization, traveling opportunities and digitalization) and nonhuman animals. As Fraser and Taylor (2016) state, it is capitalism in society that is the main reason for animals suffering.

The fact that both the artists Mäki and Habacuc and the Guggenheim museum received massive numbers of hate letters and death threats is another indicator to show how poorly the thoughts of humanistic ethics work as critique of these artworks. The potentiality of monstrous actions might be more powerful than it may first seem. Although the first reaction is rejection, something deeper might grow to evoke reactions; probably not the same reactions that the artists are claiming to seek, but perhaps ones that are able to express something important about our societies. They might also cause friction in the belief system we call humanism. McCormack (2015) suggests our moment in an economic, political, social, and cultural environment involves a resurgence of the monstrous, and inviting it to take different forms. She states:

> Many scholars argue that the monster is precisely a figure of crisis, instilling fear, anxiety and panic. Yet, while the monster may seem to mirror contemporary socio-political discourses and practices, it's always in excess of these constraining parameters. It leaks, oozes and refuses to be contained by the normative, often damaging, demands of state-induced terror. These monsters demand we look beyond what we thought were the limits of the normal, of contemporary thought and of relationality, opening up to other possibilities and perhaps other worlds. (para 5)

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The polarized world we live in, as in part resulting from humanism, is quick to judge monstrous actions as evil. Without advertising anarchism and terrorism, it is important to discuss the dimensions and complexities of the varieties of ethical behavior. Perhaps the people who got so angry with Habacuc's and Mäki's work are not so worried about the animals as they are about ourselves. The question becomes, what does cruelty toward one animal do to *me*, as a gallery visitor or as an art viewer? The humanistic gaze of the world might be tainted and it might become impossible to stay pure in this complex world.

Conclusions

Mäki's and Habacuc's artworks address the extreme boundaries of human ethics, and often leave people with defensive reactions, claiming the artists are abandoning their ethical responsibility. It is curious to ponder the amount of hate and violence expressed in the name of morality. The deep offense and strong fury these particular artworks evoke might insult, more than anything else, the art audience's humanity, rather than being based on a true interest toward nonhuman animals.

In so many ways, these artworks pinpoint the limitations of humanism: what can be done for hundreds, thousands and millions of individuals cannot be done for one, and what we witness happening in front of our eyes seems much more true, important, and serious than something we know as certainly happening, but just not in face-to-face proximity. Habacuc's and Mäki's artworks raise questions that should not have just one answers, although the audience has not often accepted the challenge, but instead has made it very clear that they can only tolerate one kind of answer.

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CHAPTER 6

Loss Is More: Art as Phantom Limb Sensation

Raphael Vella

Less, More, Too Much

Simplicity is a virtue: perhaps no other lesson in the education of generations of twentieth-century architects, artists and designers stands out as clearly as this. The ability to achieve more with less was not merely an aim but more like the very essence of modernist architecture and design. Associated with German-American architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the term *less is more* was shorthand for the avoidance of useless ornamentation, the achievement of a clean, rational design and the harmonious unity of geometry and matter (Johnson 1947). Of course, this aesthetic modesty does not fit as comfortably into the creative processes of many architects and artists working today. A case in point is contemporary Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn, for whom visual clutter represents a personal credo as well as a form of political resistance. Hirschhorn's provocatively overabundant installations are deliberately untidy, often employing ephemeral materials like tinfoil, cardboard, tape and trash and relying on the interaction of members of the public. In *Too Too—Much Much* (2010), installed at

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_6

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the Belgian Museum Dhont-Dhaenens in Deurle, visitors wore boots to trudge through mounds of crushed beverage cans dumped there by Hirschhorn in an act that was evocative of Georges Bataille's understanding of the heterogenous world of excess: a world characterized by transgression, human waste, festivals, dreams, violence and other forms of 'useless' expenditure (Bataille 1985). It is not a coincidence that the artist dedicated his project *Bataille Monument* (2002) in Documenta 11 to the French philosopher and has been openly hostile to Mies van der Rohe's modernist dictum, less is more. Earlier, Hirschhorn had written:

> I think more is always more. And less is always less. More money is more money. Less success is less success. More unemployed are more. Fewer factories are fewer. I think entirely in terms of economics. That's why I'm interested in this concept: more is more, as an arithmetical fact, and as a political fact. (Hirschhorn 1995, p. 122)

For Hirschhorn, aesthetic order and quality are therefore simply an elitist escape from reality, chaos, conflict and consumption. In opposition to the reductive urge of modernist art and architecture, the copious messiness of Hirschhorn's low-tech works strives to engage others in an egalitarian environment that often borders on the distasteful. Yet, as Boris Groys (2008) reminds us, contemporary art is often representative of "an excess of pluralistic democracy, an excess of democratic equality" and "an excess of taste" (p. 3), to the point of going beyond the artist's own tastes, let alone the public's. Groys argues that this excessive pluralism is the central paradox of contemporary art, and Hirschhorn's work embodies to some extent the contradictions of a process that simultaneously seeks social interaction and artistic autonomy, commitment to political goals as well as the possibility of ridding art and life of all value judgments. This is what makes 'less is more' a fraudulent notion for Hirschhorn; Mies van der Rohe's motto is the ultimate value judgment while *more is more* accepts everything and privileges nothing.

Artistic strategies based on this understanding of excess set out to eliminate the separation of the part from the whole; by devoting themselves to material and visual gluttony, details are rendered unimportant except in relation to everything else. In this scenario, art does not resort to the exclusivist tactic of isolating things or enticing visitors to focus on parts of a work or gaps within the work. Yet, can too little—conspicuous by its very absence, by a lack of completeness or anorexic logic—become as

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excessive as too much? Can less be more, not in the minimalist sense generally accorded to it by the language of design and architecture, but in the object's sinister destruction or partial disappearance?

Excess and Defect

Stated in the simplest terms, excess is usually defined as a degree, a mark on a scale that correlates things with others in terms of magnitude. On the basis of such a simple scale, a deficit would lie at the other extreme of a state of excess. This polarizing reasoning, equating *excess and defect* with *more and less*, is traceable to early scientific thinking, specifically the origins of zoological classification. In his *Historia Animalium*, Aristotle (1965) compares colors and shapes of animal body parts and concludes that "we may consider 'the more and less' as being the same as 'excess and defect'" (p. 5). From its beginnings, zoological thought hunts for a language rooted in observable fact and precise distinctions, predominantly proportional distinctions that separate one species from another belonging to the same genus, or even animals belonging to the same species. For example, birds with long beaks or feathers are distinguished from those with shorter ones; the proportions and radial coordinates of one animal's bones are formally similar yet measurably distinct from those of another.

Through a systematic study (or *historia*) of the variances among living things a spectrum of criteria can, in principle, be measured and ranged according to magnitude in Aristotle's system. Hence, those with more of a particular anatomical feature are said to be in excess, those with less are deficient or even a 'monstrosity'. As we know from the philosopher's work on ethics, the discourse of 'excess and defect' generally presupposes a mean or intermediate condition, which depends on given situations. Thus, Aristotle writes of virtue as a state of character that aims for a middle ground between extremes, locating, for example, the virtue of generosity between the extremes of stinginess and wastefulness. Analogously, in his view, good art must avoid excess and defect to preserve its good qualities and artistic integrity. One may say, along with the popular adage, that adding to or removing something from a good work of art is tantamount to its disfigurement.

Needless to say, Aristotelian moderation is not easily associated with contemporary art. Artistic practice has for decades located itself within the realm of the oppositional and the immoderate. Body imagery, anatomical norms and pain thresholds are continually being challenged in artworks

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and performances, from Chris Burden's crucifixion in 1974 to Petr Pavlensky's nailing of his own scrotum to the ground in Red Square, Moscow, in 2013. Anatomical 'monstrosities' have become relatively commonplace: a well-known example is Damien Hirst's *In His Infinite Wisdom* (2003), showing a stillborn, six-legged calf suspended in formaldehyde. Similar extreme works or "*esthétiques de la limite dépassée*" (Ardenne 2006) often hinge on an accumulation of signs—a surplus of violence, blood, trash, death, human excrement, sex and so on—and a correlational accretion in the intensity of emotions elicited by artworks at a time in history when the public has become desensitized by excessive exposure. This seems to be the approach, for example, of Kader Attia and Jean-Jacques Lebel in their 2018 exhibition *L'Un et L'Autre* at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris: visitors were assailed by a profusion of documents, objects and videos from various sources that bore witness to transhistorical practices of torture and human degradation (ranging from illustrations of torture dating back to colonial times to large-scale photographs of tormented detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq). This mass-coincidence of cruel cultural traits piles up an accumulative aesthetic out of human violence as it bombards a public that is already bursting at the seams with too much reality.

It may be worthwhile, however, to understand the visibility and public experience of an art that relies on loss or perceived 'defect' rather than accumulation—the corporeal, social and pedagogical implications of a more privative aesthetic. The public's engagement with loss—more precisely, the loss of a body part—will be explored inductively and through interdisciplinary analysis in the following sections, by studying an example of amputation in art and the conflictual or exclusionary discourse revolving around the amputee's body. We shall deal with a work that does not rely on a harrowing amassment of evidence but silently coerces its publics to experience and contemplate the political gap left behind by the event of partial disfigurement.

Loss as Metonymy

A well-known Gestalt principle of visual perception explains that the mind tends to seek closure in visible forms. Wholeness is, apparently, a strong visual and conceptual desideratum. An instance that comes to mind is an artistic event in Malta, which brought me face to face simultaneously with the seductiveness of the whole and the cultural relativity of public art and its interpretations. For the first edition of the Valletta International Visual

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Arts festival (VIVA), which I conceived and directed in 2014, I invited various artists to create new pieces in line with the general theme of the event, which dealt with the overlaps between art and politics. One of them, Maltese artist Austin Camilleri, came up with a life-size horse cast in bronze in China, which we installed on a high stone pedestal facing the new Parliament building designed by Renzo Piano adjacent to Valletta's main entrance. Everything about the stallion—its proportions as well as its pose—looked pretty standard; everything, that is, except the fact that its left foreleg had been amputated. Instead of its leg, the horse sported a small stump beneath its elbow.

Being both riderless and crippled, the monument was clearly an odd sight in the Maltese context, which is littered with rather bland bronze statues of political figures but has no tradition of equestrian statues. The title of Camilleri's work, *Żieme*—a truncated version of the Maltese word *żiemel* (horse)—amplified the sculpture's conspicuous nature (see Fig. 6.1). Like Georges Perec's absent vowel in *A Void* (2005, first published in French in 1969), a whole novel written without making use of

Fig. 6.1 Austin Camilleri, *Żieme* (2014), bronze. Installation in Valletta, Malta. (Photo credit: The artist)

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the letter 'e', *Żieme*'s missing consonant cried out for attention, its disappearance bringing to mind the animal's amputated leg, to which it corresponded visually.

Of course, that missing leg stole the show. On an island that is small enough to transform any incident into a national event, yet big enough to breed fierce divisions among its inhabitants, *Żieme* was destined for controversy. The bronze sculpture attracted many supporters among the local and international art crowd attending the festival, and this in itself was not surprising, given the fact that the proportional relations between the horse, the large square in which it was located and the architectural modeling of space by Renzo Piano collectively looked as enigmatic as a three-dimensional version of a metaphysical painting by Giorgio de Chirico. Many members of the public also loved the irony and political implications of stationing a lame animal in front of the main entrance to the parliament building. Others interpreted the proud pose of the upright horse as a triumph over its own affliction, a straightforward representation of disability that did not objectify the animal by emphasizing its unusual nature. Conversely, some saw its affliction as a satirical or metaphorical representation of an imminent or recent collapse of a particular political party.

Plenty of people on news sites' online comment boards, however, interpreted its 'defect' or lack of formal closure as a wanton mutilation of what was otherwise a whole, beautiful animal, a ridiculous deviation from the biological norm or mockery of disability. A retired professor of engineering argued on the comments board of the Times of Malta that in real life, the horse could not bear its own body weight on three legs or survive such a loss ("The mystery of Valletta's three-legged horse" 2014). Evidently, this impossible creature wouldn't fit into any *Historia Animalium*. Camilleri's subversion of a classical sculptural aesthetic quickly made many vocal enemies, for whom it was at best a capricious artistic whim, at worst a total waste of money. The monument was heavily criticized and made fun of on online fora while many called for its immediate removal, even though it had been intended as a temporary public sculpture from the start (Vassallo 2014). When it was finally transferred back to the artist's studio at the end of the festival, some interpreted this as a victory of common sense, a mitigating act of symbolic euthanasia.

Notwithstanding the criticism, there was something about the sculpture that prompted many people to continue discussing it even after it was removed from the square in Valletta. When the sculpture was shown at

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Kalmar Konstmuseum in Sweden in 2016, some online commentators interpreted this move as a 'loss' for the artist's native country ("Controversial Austin Camilleri sculpture" 2016). Nobody could ignore the fact that the artist had been very successful in making the public talk about something that actually wasn't there. The title's lipogrammatic gap and the absent fourth limb may have represented a master stroke for some and a source of ridicule or frustration for others but, regardless of one's viewpoint, the missing leg had become a metonymic replacement for the whole animal. Perched between a sense of shared loss and critical acclaim, the empty space beneath the horse caused a stir on a national scale by virtue of being more present than the rest of its body.

Although the subject in question was nonhuman, cultural perceptions about ability and disability were influential in public fora even when they weren't explicitly mentioned; the idea that disability is ultimately a tragic circumstance or stigma was assumed to be true by many on different sides of the debate. The general public's concentration on this singular attribute of the horse seemed to reflect society's tendency to reduce an amputee's life or personality to a perceived abnormality. There was very little, if any, attempt to understand the issue from the perspective of persons with disabilities or to transcend limited assumptions about identity and being human, as the field of critical disability studies urges us to do (Goodley 2013). Possibly, the creature appeared to some to be nothing more than a monster, comparable perhaps to 'monstrous races' like those with a single eye or leg or no mouth or neck, described in *The City of God* by Saint Augustine in order to explain that all human beings come from God (1965, pp. 41–45).

Yet, Camilleri's work also carried strong political connotations. The sense of an unachievable social totality or consensus was possibly the work's most significant political achievement in a country known for its bipartisan tendencies. The three-legged horse divided people on the basis of something that was no longer in existence, like a glimpse into the gaping wound of a historical or political reality that had disappeared but whose effects were still palpable. The leg's disappearance demanded a historical consciousness, for it was not possible to savor or critique the work without imagining which feature of the country's political and cultural history might have been amputated: Was it the country's stability? The long-term rule of the Nationalist Party? The traditional power invested in the country's parliament, supposedly its highest institution? The horse's stubborn stare offered no answers, and neither did the artist.

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Phantom Limb

Revolving as it did around an assumed wholeness stemming from the horse's disability, we could say, metaphorically speaking, that Camilleri's monument provoked a sort of collective phantom limb sensation—not a sensation in the sense of actual physical soreness but more like an impression of mental discomfort induced by this loss. Coined in the nineteenth century by Silas Weir Mitchell (1900), a physician who was employed with the Union army during the American civil war, the term *phantom limb* refers to a rather common sensation or even pain among amputees, sometimes lasting years after loss of limbs. Horrible injuries sustained during the war were often treated by amputating shattered limbs, sometimes resulting in death after soldiers in substandard conditions succumbed to shock, blood poisoning, gangrene, tetanus or some other affliction. Amputation was, in fact, the most common surgical procedure carried out on soldiers during the civil war and, among those who survived treatment, Weir Mitchell (1900) frequently noted the patients' persisting sensory awareness of their absent limb after amputation.

> I found that the great mass of men who had undergone amputations for many months felt the usual consciousness that they still had the lost limb. It itched or pained, or was cramped, but never felt hot or cold. If they had painful sensations referred to it, the conviction of its existence continued unaltered for long periods; but where no pain was felt in it, then by degrees the sense of having that limb faded away entirely. (p. 131)

A phantom limb sensation is like the ghostly afterlife of a lost limb, seemingly possessing a life of its own but ultimately inexistent. Analogously, George Dedlow, a fictive quadruple amputee created by Weir Mitchell in a narrative (1900), was thought to be a factual account by many readers. First published anonymously in 1866, the story of the unfortunate and miserable Captain Dedlow takes its readers on a tortuous journey that begins with the loss of the man's right arm after receiving a gunshot wound, then the amputation of both of his legs after being wounded a second time and finally the removal of his left arm after contracting gangrene in a hospital in Nashville. The story sounded sensationalistic yet still caused some readers to ask for the man's whereabouts in order to send donations; Dedlow became the personification of Weir Mitchell's 'phantom limb sensation', his inexistent half-body acquiring a real presence in the public's imagination.

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Writing about Dedlow's case in the context of Victorian culture, O'Connor (1997) states that the public's anxious reaction "points to a certain epistemological difficulty posed by dismemberment" and compares this reaction to interpretations of contemporary surgical diagrams of amputated hands or fingers: "Even the most faithful renderings of amputation play tricks on the eye, so that pictures of incompletion ever look only like flawed or incomplete pictures" (p. 756). Similarly, photographs of Camilleri's bronze horse shot from certain angles may look deceivingly complete, as though the mind does not easily endorse representations of amputation. One simply assumes that there are four legs beneath the horse's body rather than *Żieme*'s 'incomplete' Gestalt. Hence, the fourth limb in the sculpture is initially filled in or missed, then realization demands a double-take reaction and finally the gap commands public debate in a way that makes it more relevant than the remaining, much larger, body. Specter exceeds body. The lost sign exceeds the physical one. Less, or loss, exceeds more.

Part, Whole

We might ask, at the risk of sounding absurd, which of the two parts—the absent limb or the surviving body—is the real artwork? There is no need to enter into the complexities of mereology (the study of parts and wholes) here, yet the question of bodily Gestalt and loss is certainly relevant to an understanding of Camilleri's sculpture. The phantom residue of the lost object highlights a past condition of unity in what might seem to be a reversal of Lacan's mirror stage, which makes the child aware of its previous "fragmented" body (*corps morcelé*) once it encounters its specular image (Lacan 1977). Camilleri's statue dissects the animal's body into a vanished part and a surviving part and the work's force depends on the interplay between these two parts in a specific cultural context. We encounter this predicament in a literary work by a contemporary of Weir Mitchell who was also deeply affected by the American civil war: Herman Melville's fictional travelogue *Mardi* (2004). Melville's narrator in *Mardi* ponders, somewhat ludicrously, the subject of personal identity right after the native Samoa's arm has been amputated following a battle with pirates somewhere in the South Pacific. In a chapter ironically titled "Dedicated to the College of Physicians and Surgeons" (p. 174), the narrator describes how Samoa is severely wounded and decides, without much hesitation or anxiety, that his arm must be chopped off. Samoa assigns the task to his wife Annatoo, who administers three quick strokes of an ax. With the severed limb suspended from the topmast-stay, a series of questions arise:

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> Now, which was Samoa? The dead arm swinging high as Haman? Or the living trunk below? Was the arm severed from the body, or the body from the arm? The residual part of Samoa was alive, and therefore we say it was he. But which of the writhing sections of a ten times severed worm, is the worm proper?
>
> For myself, I ever regarded Samoa as but a large fragment of a man, not a man complete. For was he not an entire limb out of pocket? (Melville 2004, pp. 176–77)

Within the Polynesian milieu in which Melville's story is set, the narrator's questions about bodily criteria for personhood come across as a fleeting, Western philosophical interlude. Among Samoa's people, we are told, such accidents are mere 'trifles', nothing like Captain Ahab's revengeful response to a similar fate in Melville's (1952) better-known *Moby Dick*. Yet, Melville's questions bring to the surface an issue that seems inevitable in literary accounts, representations of amputation and many real-life cases similar to Dedlow's, particularly in the context of the nineteenth century's more pejorative outlook toward the subject: that of a person's, or indeed, animal's postoperative usefulness to others. Samoa is now a divided person, not one but two Samoas. What we see is only "a large fragment of a man" (Melville 2004, p. 177), just as Dedlow's limbless anatomy in Weir Mitchell's tale corresponds to a cruel destiny that makes him a 'lesser' man. Linking the unemployability, incompleteness and pain of a character like Dedlow to a corresponding loss of manliness would not have been a far-fetched conclusion to make in the Victorian world, as O'Connor (1997) has pointed out:

> A strong, vigorous body was a primary signifier of manliness, at once testifying to the existence of a correspondingly strong spirit and providing that spirit with a vital means of material expression. Dismemberment disrupted this physical economy. It unmanned amputees, producing neurological disorders that gave the fragmented male body—or parts of it anyway—a distinctly feminine side. (p. 744)

This 'feminine side' is hinted at even in some postoperative medical book illustrations produced and distributed at the time. A nineteenth-century print illustrating the primary amputation at the hip of a civil war veteran's left leg shows a reclining man from the back whose pose is remarkably similar to Velázquez's *The Toilet of Venus*, also known as *The Rokeby Venus* (1647–51) (see Fig. 6.2). Velázquez's Venus, the epitome of

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Fig. 6.2 An American civil war veteran, with an amputated leg at the hip. Nineteenth century. In Otis (1867). (Credit: Wellcome Collection)

female beauty and eroticism, is replaced by a half-naked male amputee sprawled on a blanket that also covers his genitals. This act of modesty or prudishness further serves to amplify the soldier's ambivalent gender, virtually representing the incomplete body as the result of some sort of sex reassignment surgery. The fleeting nature of Venus' beauty in the Spanish artist's painting, borne out by the blurry reflection in Cupid's mirror, corresponds to the ephemeral body part and the feminine appearance of the disabled soldier in the nineteenth-century illustration.

If a one-legged soldier represented the end of masculinity and military life in the nineteenth century, Camilleri's stallion could comparably be understood as the subversion of the power and importance historically accorded to equestrian statues—still standing and seemingly determined yet metaphorically castrated. As the artist hacks away at bodily conventions,

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the bronze horse bravely maintains a robust pose yet we know that its body is no longer serviceable. From the narrow perspective of animal labor and utility, a three-legged horse is more dead than alive.

The Performance of Loss

Of course, images of dismemberment produced by painters in the past or contemporary artists have several other implications, even positive ones, and have included images or sculptures of female amputees. Some of these inferences have already been discussed both within the context of art history and disability studies (e.g. Millett-Gallant 2010; Kuppers 2014; Millett-Gallant and Howie 2017; Garland Thomson 2017). Well-known works of art representing the subject include Francisco de Goya's *The Disasters of War* (1810–20), Théodore Géricault's paintings of severed heads and limbs, Joel-Peter Witkin's carefully constructed photographic tableaux, Odd Nerdrum's nightmarish paintings and Marc Quinn's marble statues of amputees. These and other works connote various, even contrasting, interpretations of amputation—from the brutality of war to the possibility of seeing casts of real amputees as a redefinition of classical sculpture.

In many of these diverse works, absence plays a key role: Géricault's macabre truncated limbs and heads are so shocking because they are not attached to a body, while Quinn's real-life models become modern, self-determining heroes in spite of their deviation from more conventional understandings of beauty or normality. The absent part e*xceeds* what we are given to see. The illustration of the actual preceding act of amputation—excluded from Géricault's paintings and many other artworks representing amputees—is usually reserved to the field of medical illustration, produced as pedagogical aid to show as graphically as possible specific dissection methods, sutures, flaps, stump closures, affected muscles and bones, surgical instruments, and so on. However, even when an artwork only displays a stump (as in *Żieme*), it conveys an undeniable performative undertone: the gap enacts, in absentia, the performance of dissection that divides the body into two parts. It is a reminder of a short-term operation with long-term effects, a quick process that transforms a regular horse into something other. Yet, it is this performative aspect that also permits us to move away from the medical discourse that, as Rosemarie Garland Thomson has pointed out, too often characterizes discussions about disability (Garland Thomson 2017). This ghostly breach in the body's framework transports us to a more ethical and affective zone, characterized by trauma as well as possibility.

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Peggy Phelan (1993) has argued that the central quality of performance is its ephemerality; for her, performance "becomes itself through disappearance" (p. 146). Performance thrives on loss, not visibility; its nonreproductive nature quickly drives it into the immaterial realm of memory. Enacted in the present moment, it survives as a mental trace that is analogous to grief, a rehearsal of death. Loss, Phelan suggests, is essentially an innate sentiment; we are prepared for the possibility of mourning even before we can articulate our experience of grief. In *Mourning Sex*, she describes an experience she had as a child to illustrate the significance of gaps in representation and the performative quality of loss. Little Peggy had torn out a pop-up anatomical model of a man from a colorful science book she owned and the resulting hole became for her a more potent enactment of the body than the previous, intricate representation of human anatomy, complete with veins and organs. This destructive act, she realized much later, was her first experience of the ephemerality of the theater of the body, her first act of performance art. Following the trauma of loss, our memory actively seeks the ungraspable things we cannot see any more; we envision those ephemeral actions and behaviors that are analogous to performance because their affective force in our lives depends precisely on the fact that they are so fugitive:

> I am investigating […] the possibility that something substantial can be made from the outline left after the body has disappeared. My hunch is that the affective outline of what we've lost might bring us closer to the bodies we want still to touch than the restored illustration can. Or at least the hollow of the outline might allow us to understand more deeply why we long to hold bodies that are gone. (Phelan 1997, p. 3)

This is, perhaps, where the real political and pedagogical value of Camilleri's horse lies. Instead of reproducing the whole animal's body, the artist performed its partial disappearance, leaving a wound that the public could not ignore. The sculpture's plasticity was 'unlearned' in a performative act whose surviving trace was merely a phantom limb, like the hole in Phelan's science book. Yet, unlike the science book—which was ultimately a personal educational aid—*Żieme* was a public sculpture in a contentious urban and cultural environment and this immediately propelled the empty space beneath the horse's body into the social and political domain. This also meant that the horse's stump and absent limb helped to launch a national debate about the role of art in the public arena. The sense of

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transience conveyed by this absence transgressed dominant iconographies of political power, revealing a disparity between conventional representations of power in Malta's squares and power itself.

Political wrangling is woven out of such spaces: spaces that engage society by refusing closure, spaces that signify hope or anguish, spaces that uproot lives because of the changes they usher in, and spaces that make people realize what they have just lost. This was also the spirit of Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar's *Skoghall Konsthall* in Sweden (2000), a paper museum he designed for a small town that previously had no facility for culture or communal activities. The minimal structure Jaar designed was constructed in a matter of days by workers from a paper factory in the vicinity that employed many of the town's residents. Twenty-four hours after its ceremonial opening and first exhibition, the delicate structure was razed to the ground by firefighters in a performance coordinated by the artist. This sudden appearance and disappearance of a cultural facility made the public aware of the fragility of art and a gap in their lives that they may not have been aware of prior to this performance. Members of the public were disturbed by the residual emptiness following the installation's immolation; in the words of Chantal Mouffe, the performance at Skoghall in 2000 contributed to a 'counter-hegemonic' move in a public site and testified to "Jaar's pedagogical strategy of never imposing his own vision but instead bringing people to articulate their own needs" (Mouffe 2013, p. 96). By performing such a disappearance, art galvanizes a questioning pedagogy, one that requires us to redraw the cultural lines we are accustomed to, unfix preconceptions and imagine different approaches to representation, power, normality and disagreement. A radical approach to education and social engagement through the arts cannot rely merely on dominant or self-referential forms of knowledge but challenges individuals with a sense of insecurity that emerges from the constant need to reinterpret one's political position, the perceived natural order of things and our relationship with our histories. Art does not disrupt power relations by suggesting clear alternatives but by offering people new spaces where they can stage their own possibilities.

Silent Victims

As Mouffe (2013) points out, art like Jaar's is so powerful because it acts directly on people's emotions and exposes them to different experiences. His work in Sweden was sited in a real-life situation in which people engaged with the 'agonistics' of public space as well as the possibility of

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contributing to a change. As we have seen, this is also how a fictional story about a quadruple amputee—George Dedlow—that nevertheless resounded with so much truth in the immediate aftermath of the American civil war gave rise to an empathic public response that reimagined a literary character as a real-life individual.

Needless to say, fiction often urges us to reflect about realities that cannot be consigned to a historical past. In 2018, Haifa Subay, a young Yemeni street artist, painted a public mural in Sana'a depicting a one-legged boy holding his own lower left leg in his two hands like a macabre gift (see Fig. 6.3). The image, entitled *Just a Leg*, refers to the many victims of land mines in yet another civil war that has killed, maimed, starved and displaced tens of thousands of civilians, that between the Houthis and pro-government forces in Yemen. Subay's mural forms part of her *Silent Victims* campaign, which aims to draw attention to the terrible losses that the people of Yemen, especially women and children, have experienced: the disappearance

Fig. 6.3 Haifa Subay, *Just a Leg*, 2018, two versions of a mural in Sana'a, Yemen. (Photo credit: The artist)

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of individuals, loss of limbs, shortage of water and food and widespread destruction of schools, housing and other important facilities. When I contacted the artist to exchange ideas about her work, she summarized this devastation in a single 'loss': the loss of childhood. She explained how, only one day after finishing the painting, she decided that the image would be far more effective if she whitewashed the boy's head, a move that might remind us of the more spectacular destruction of Skoghall's paper museum only 24 hours after the building's inauguration. In contrast with the sense of sentimentality that tends to accompany the notion of childhood, Subay's final image shows a headless body perched on a single leg—a poignant and eerily silent rendition of the indiscriminate carnage experienced by Yemeni children. This astute performance of loss unframes the boy's identity, hides his ethnic or political affiliation and reveals the blind spot in a conflict that, typically perhaps, places political representation above the real lives of its citizens, seriously jeopardizing the country's own future in the process. In this unpretentious image on a public wall in Sana'a, loss edits out representation, giving passers-by the opportunity of visualizing a recognizable face on that body and imagining a different world.

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CHAPTER 7

Extravagant Bodies: Abjection in Art, Visual Culture and the Classroom

Susan B. Livingston

"It looks like poop!"
"It smells like poop."
"No, it looks like shit!"
"Hey guys, language…."
"Well, it does look like dookie."

I'm in a classroom full of fifth graders trying to teach basic coil building with clay. The classroom teacher and I have already had to strike the word balls from my lectures. We now use "spheres" to make the noses on our ugly jugs. But I cannot escape coils; it's a coil building demonstration after all. And coils, no matter what I call them, look like poop. The coils are long, fat, cylinders of sticky brown mud. The students keep curling them into little poop emoji shapes and splattering them with their fists. Some refuse to touch the clay without nitrile gloves—they are terrified of getting dirty and are not convinced that this isn't some elaborate ruse to contaminate them.

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_7

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Every time the students congregate by the clay reclaim bucket to throw in leftover bits of clay, or by the second bucket where we rinse the clay off our hands before going to the sink, they shriek over the smell. "It's nasty!," they announce swirling their hands to the bottom of the buckets (even though we have told them it will smell better if they don't). "It smells like poop, I think it is poo!," they squeal poking at the muddy slop with a stick, releasing a foul odor of bacteria into the classroom and spraying bits of muddy muck across the walls. This occurs daily, like a ritual, and even after weeks of working with the students, and years of returning to the school to work with the same children on new ceramic projects, the poop-play persists. And while poop is the thing they gag over the most, they seem to find and delight in the abject wherever they can.

When using clay with children, you expect the mess. You anticipate clay getting everywhere, and you count on the sink backing up from kids who didn't wash their hands well enough in the rinse bucket and who have allowed globs of earth to circle down the drain and clog the pipes. Similarly, I am always prepared for the first round of poop jokes. In fact, I have the class say it with me, yes, "clay looks like poop." I ask them to repeat after me, "this looks like poo." Then we continue back and forth: *No, it is not poop; it is a type of mud. Yes, it is messy but it's not dirty in a way that will hurt you. Yes, the clay bucket smells, there is bacteria in clay. No, it won't hurt you*. What surprises me is that the poop commentary has no end. Oftentimes, children's jokes and stories escalate—if something is gross one day, it's mega-gross the next. But the poop remains constant; apparently poop is the grossest thing my fifth graders can imagine.

Beyond clay, I thought another group of fifth graders would enjoy Tip Toland's *Painting the Burning Fence* (2007), a life-size sculpture of an elderly woman, hair down, putting on bright red lipstick in a hand-held compact. This is typical of Toland's work of highly detailed, life-size or larger sculptures of the elderly and very young. I assumed the fifth graders would appreciate seeing something hyper-realistic, technically virtuosic—that perhaps it would remind them of their grandmothers. But no, they squealed, groaned, and generally went crazy with disgust, shouting, "UGH, what's wrong with her?" It occurs to me anew that there are a few things I have grossly misjudged designing this assignment.

The children's fascination with disgusting things doesn't really surprise me; I'm similarly fascinated by gross things. In my youth I loved Garbage Pail Kids®,[1] trading cards that depicted warped versions of Cabbage Patch Kids®[2] eating eyeballs or vomiting up worms. My love for the grotesque

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has persisted; even now in my academic career, I study disgusting art and visual culture; art that rots in the gallery, television shows that make your stomach turn. What continues to surprise me, but also resonates with me, is just how much my students enjoy the poop clay. I'm amazed by how important it is for them to tell me again, for the third week in a row; *Dr. Livingston, this clay is nasty, I think it might be poop*, all while they poke at it, preferably with a stick.

More Than Mud Pies: Children and Disgust

Much of my academic career has been spent trying to understand why unsettling, and often outright disgusting images appeal to people. I am particularly interested in revolting bodies: bodies that refuse normal categorizations and spill into the rotting, the dead, the obese, the disabled, and the sick. While disgust does not appeal to all, it does appeal to many people. From plastic dog poop that you can buy as a practical joke,[3] to a children's game of picking up Play-Doh doggie dropping,[4] to candy dispensers that poop out jelly beans,[5] disgusting objects are all around us. This seems particularly true when it comes to children's products. There are nose-shaped containers where liquid candy snot flows from the nostrils,[6] and Trash Pack™[7] collectible toys that are anthropomorphized mutant animals, germs and spoiled foods sold in their own little garbage can homes, even slime zombies[8] that vomit brightly colored sludge when squeezed.

Poop-themed toys seem to be a particular craze at the moment as articles about recent toy fads and the 2018 Toy Fair can attest to: "Poop is a really popular kids toy this year" (Cranz and Liszewski 2018), "2018 Toy Fair: Toy makers turn to the toilet for poop-inspired toys" (Pisani 2018), "Now poop is all over the toy aisle" (Associated Press 2018), "Why poop toys for kids are flying off the shelves" (Fickenscher 2017), and even "Aw, Sh*t! Poop-themed toys are actually trendy now" (Templeton n.d.). I can attest to this popularity myself, having seen multiple new poop-themed toys populating the aisles of major shopping chains. These include PooPeez™,[9] small poop and pee collectibles from the town of Kerplopolis with pun-based names like Pooper Man and Skid Mark, all sold in small plastic rolls of toilet paper. Also available is Spin Master™ Flush Force,[10] a similar line to the Trash Pack™ of collectible mutant creatures or *flushies* sold in their own little toilets, which you must fill with water and place the bagged toy in the bowl until the water can change colors and reveal the toy—hopefully one of the *super rare*, *unflushable* collectibles.

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These often-unsettling toys embody what Cross (2004) calls *cool* in his work on the changing aesthetic appeals of children's toys. They are urban, street, brightly colored, and they are most definitely not classically cute. However, Cross neglects to note in his analysis that these toys are also disgusting, oozing bodily fluids and mutating into monstrous forms. According to Cross (2004), cool toys tend to be gendered as masculine, but many *girlie* or femininely coded products also stray into uncomfortably yucky territory. Take for instance Monster High™[11] dolls, a Barbie™-like poseable doll that often features freakish bodies with disfigurements, scars, or other grotesque qualities. While Monster High™ dolls are nowhere near as oozingly disgusting as some toys, it would be remiss not to see them as offering monstrous bodies and a somewhat disgusting aesthetic, albeit mitigated by their model-like physiques, fashion obsession, and cuteness. Other traditionally feminine toys, like cute stuffed animals, have similarly been transformed into something closer to a monstrosity in Skelanimals,[12] plush toys that are black and decorated with embroidered bones and sold with the slogan "Dead things need love too" (Bernal 2005). Similarly, Furrybones®[13] are collectible figurines that feature skeletons dressed in various animal suits. Poop has even entered femininely coded toys in the form of Pooparoos™, very similar to Spin Master™ Flush Force. Each package comes with a Pooparoo and surprises that are soaked in the toilet bowl to reveal food objects and of course little piles of poop, which your Pooparoo can then with its moveable mouth eat and poop out its back end.

Children seem universally fascinated by that which also disgust, laughing at poopy clay, marveling at the grossness of slime vomiting toys, and even cuddling up with "dead" things. This is not singular to children. Adults default to bathroom humor as well, but disgust and the abject among children seem particularly taboo for many adults. But what is disgust, what is its relationship to the body, and why do we seem so drawn to it?

Discussing Disgust

Most of us are familiar with the feelings of disgust and the dizzying desire to get away from what is causing those sensations and reactions. Disgust is defined best by the reaction it causes. Dictonary.com defines disgust as causing loathing or nausea, a strong distaste, "repugnance caused by something offensive; strong aversion" and "to offend the good taste, moral sense, etc., cause extreme dislike or revulsion."[14] Disgust makes us flee. Evolutionary

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biologists and anthropologists have argued that disgust is an embodied emotion, existing to protect us from pathogenic dangers (Rottoman 2014; Ray 2012; Rozin et al. 1993; Rozin and Fallon 1987)

A taxonomy of disgust has been suggested by Kolnai (2004), which categorizes disgust into nine specific traits labeled as, "materially disgusting" (p. 16) including, excrement, secretions, dirt, disgusting animals, rotting food, imperfection, fat, diseased and deformed bodies, as well as putrefaction. But disgust is much more than a physical sensation. Korsmeyer and Smith (2004) explain that

> objects of material disgust share the impression of life gone bad, of flesh turning toward death and of a "primordial and profuse regeneration of life from the muck of decaying organic matter." (p. 16)

Disgust is predicated on excess: too much life or too much death, too much dirt, too much animalism, and so on. Excessive is generally understood as being outside the norm, immoderate, more than is desirable. Disgust then is an excess that has transgressed the boundaries of what is acceptable. According to Korsmeyer and Smith (2004) disgust is, "at work in creating and sustaining our social and cultural reality" and "helps us to grasp hierarchies of value, to cope with morally sensitive situations and to discern and maintain cultural order" (pp. 1–2). In this way disgust is linked to that which must be avoided, like dirt, disorder, and anything else outside the cultural boundary of the all-important hegemonic norm.

While disgust is most easily understood through the embodied mechanism of protection, disgust has gone beyond a reactionary feeling and has become a cultural marker applied to practices and people who are seen to similarly transgress our borders, in this instance, our cultural borders. Disgust, like its subject matter, is a slippery concept that becomes ever more problematic when it is used as a cultural marker. Nussbaum (2003) explains in her work on disgust, morality and the law:

> Thus, throughout history, certain disgust properties—sliminess, bad smell, stickiness, decay, foulness—have repeatedly and monotonously been associated with, indeed projected onto, groups by reference to who privileged groups seek to define their superior human status. Jews, women, homosexuals, untouchables, lower-class people—all of these are imagined as tainted by the dirt of the body. (p. 347)

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Nussbaum explores this problematic tendency to collapse the biological with the cultural in disgust. She criticizes how those things pathogenically threatening, like rotten food, are rejected in the same way as those who are constructed as threatening through their inability or unwillingness to adopt hegemonic norms, individuals and groups that menace our beloved, albeit exclusionary, cultural borders around class, race, sexuality, gender, able-bodiedness, even bodily size. While Kolnai (2004) and Nussbaum (2003) make sense out of disgust through the prevalent mechanics of exclusion, this literature often glosses over the powerful appeals of disgust throughout time and cultures. Disgust is most often categorized as a closed-circuit of exclusion where that which is threatening, either biologically or culturally, is spit out or rejected from the social body.

But then what causes our fascination with disgust? Miller (1997) discusses what makes us suspend our disgust response, like wiping the snot from a child's runny nose, or swapping fluids with a romantic partner. For Miller, disgust is far more flexible, and often muted by love. The appeal of disgust could also be wrapped up in the tantalizing power of transgression. Scholars have looked at how exposure to disgusts can heighten an individual's conservative response to moral issues, seeming to indicate that by its nature disgust is uncomfortable and makes us reject things (David and Olatunji 2011; Helzer and Pizarro 2011; Inbar and Pizarro 2009; Inbar et al. 2009, 2011). Yet, brand marketing research surrounding the use of disgusting images found that while disgust caused predictably negative reactions, it also heightened brand recall (Dens et al. 2008). Like painfully sour candies or vomit-flavored jelly beans,[15] we transgress borders between clean and proper and dirt and disorder by allowing small amounts of disgust into our lives because these experiences are memorable, shocking, and perhaps conversely pleasurable. Transgressions are a rite of passage for adolescence (Stallybrass and White 1986), often quite pleasurable (Duncum 2009) and in small forms thrilling, but they are also often used to maintain order and rule itself (Gilchrist and Ravencroft 2009).

Disgust accompanies many instances of transgression, and both disgust and transgression seem to upset order and the status quo. However, they often end up reinforcing hegemony, not overturning it (Gilchrist and Ravencroft 2009). With this in mind, it seems that while many children's products and youthful fascinations appear to be merely disgusting, something more is needed to explain their continual appeal and repeated representations. If slimy toys were simply disgusting, they would not necessarily appeal enough to children to pester[16] their par-

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ents into buying them. Disgust must somehow be mitigated and reformulated to be appealing enough to counteract the inclination toward pure rejection. I believe that the abject can aide in understanding some of the complex utilization of disgust in instances where we are simultaneously fascinated and revolted.

Not Subject Nor Object: But Abject

Julia Kristeva, in *The Power of Horrors* (1982), outlines the idea of abjection as a fascinated victimhood. Working through ideas from Bahktin and Bataille, as well as biblical and other religious texts, the writings of Ferdinand Celine, and relying on a foundation of both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Kristeva looks at how foundational moments of ego formation are predicated on exclusion. According to Gutiérrez-Albilla (2008), Kristeva

> rethought Bataille's concept of abjection from an anthropological and psychoanalytical perspective in order to address the constitution of the subject in its negative aspect, emphasizing a subject position which is located at the border between its own subjecthood and objecthood. (p. 69)

Disgust then relies on a binary distinction between cleanliness and dirt. However, Kristeva identifies a whole host of liminal materials that exist somewhere between subjecthood and objecthood, a category of the abject. Take, for instance, shit. Traditionally speaking, shit is disgusting. It stinks, its tactile qualities are sticky and even oozy, and it may even harbor disease-causing agents. However, shit is often not simply rejected. Babies joyfully play in their own excrement, my fifth-grade students are obsessed with clay for its excremental properties, adults can buy fake dog poop as a joke, and our texts are littered with poop emojis. For an object that should invoke disgust and direct rejection, shit always seems to return in one form or another, seemingly unflushable from our cultural conscious. For Kristeva (1982), this makes complete sense, as shit occupies an interstitial space of abjection. Feces is more than a simple object; it once resided within our bodies. It is full of us, quite literally as feculence is full of discarded human cells. When it leaves our bodies, it carries with it an impression of our insides, a cast of our intestines, and a map to part of ourselves we will never see. Shit has felt good and brought us a certain amount of pleasure through the relief of defecation or even holding it in for pseudo-

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erotic pleasure (Freud 1949/2011). We have become attached to this object of ourselves, and cannot simply reject it.

The rejection of the abject, unlike disgust, is almost always incomplete. Perhaps this is the result of the personal function and benefit of the abject to the individual. According to Kristeva (1982), the abject helps in our own ego formation through rejection. Her most commonly cited example of the abject in ego formation is a hypothetical scenario in which parents give their child milk with a skin on it, the child spits the slightly off-milk out. However, this goes beyond the mere rejection of milk, metaphorically the child is rejecting the parent's desires, and in that rejection forms their own identity and ego. Kristeva (1982) explains:

> "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 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*. (p. 3)

This is, of course, a simplified and condensed explanation of the role of abjection in ego formation. We create ourselves, not merely through what we do, but oftentimes more through what we reject and will not do. These rejections are incomplete, the child will eventually drink milk, go to bed, obey their parents—these actions then serve to internalize a super ego that follows rules. The rejected returns in abjection, it haunts from the periphery, because we need to continually rebuild and reestablish our ego through rejecting it again.

The abject comes from us, as the abject most often is a menacing reminder of the body's eventual mortality. The abject returns through its connection to the body. As Kristeva (1988) explains, the abject may seem like an outside threat, but "it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from inside" (p. 135). Moreover, this internal yet liminal threat is pleasurable, causing jouissance, a type of painful pleasure (Lacan 2007; Kristeva 1982; Zizek 2007). Kristeva argues that the most abject object is the corpse; as a dead body, the subject becomes object, and is a reminder of what we all destined to become but must thrust aside to continue with daily life. At various points in history, from ancient Greece through the Enlightenment, the body was theorized as sealed; a closed envelope of skin. In art and aesthetics, it was often asserted that "wrinkles and folds [were] ruined regions" of the body (Winkelmann cited in

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Menninghaus 2003, p. 52) and "veins become creeping worms" (Herder cited in Menninghaus 2003, p. 53). Blemishes, fat, scars, body hair, even interior organs, ruin the illusion of bodily perfection (Menninghaus 2003). Ugliness in this context suggests moral ruin as well, since the body is "the prime symbol of the self and prime determinant of the self" (Synnott 1993, p. 2) making an uncontrolled body the hallmark of a similarly excessive soul. This controlled, temple approach to the body leaves no room for the abject or poop, let alone the corpse. The body is in constant flux, messy and unfinished—and we are always chasing ways to understand the inevitable change of state (Becker 1997).

Social Abjection

Individually, collectively, and culturally, bodies seep beyond their borders with runny noses and explode outward in rivulets of vomit. When it is the sociocultural body whose borders are breached, this is termed *social abjection*. Like individual abjection, the body politic similarly maintains hegemony through exclusion. Butler explains this in her work, *Bodies That Matter* (1993), writing:

> This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. (p. 3)

For Butler, hegemonic subjectivity is created through the expulsion of its binary opposition, the marginalized, into unlivable zones of otherness and abjection. These zones are full of people who are denied subjectivity—denied full being in the body politic, but cannot be objects as human. The abject is what Bauman (1993) describes as the second member of our social dichotomy, "the other of the first, the opposite (degraded, suppressed, exiled) side of the first and its creation" (p. 14). The socially

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marginalized are abject others, the detritus of white supremacist capitalist hetero-patriarchy, which continually forms and threatens the norm. Social abjection describes all the ways in which the individualistic concept of abjection as ego formation as described by Kristeva can address issues of racism (Hook 2006; Scott 2010), immigration, xenophobia and disability (Young 1990), homophobia (Butler 1993), and classism (Tyler 2013), even environmental devastation and colonialism (Chanter 2008). Where the individual abjects themselves through the jettisoning of waste creating their own ego in the process, so the state reifies the borders of hegemony through the expulsion of the marginal. Elsewhere I have argued that oftentimes visual art engages in what would aesthetically be considered personal abjection, that is, bodily waste, monstrous bodies, and the corpse as a visual metaphor to deal with larger issues of social abjection (Livingston 2016). A close interrogation and reframing of abjection, particularly abject art, with Butler and other's social abjection scholars in mind, opens up a realm of possible sites for resistance through the contemplation of, and empathizing with, the marginal and excluded.

Abjection in Art

Many artists have been fascinated by the body out of bounds, much like my fifth graders, taking delight in explorations of abject visuals of excess through shit, fat, vomit, and corpses. Take the anonymous Flemish *Satirical Diptych* (1520) in the Université de Liège collection in Belgium, which features a man on one side, and his bared up-turned buttocks on the other side with a thistle plant growing from his asshole. The diptych is accompanied by a textual joke: the front says do not open, while the inside says, I warned you. To understand this, one must understand that the image was naughty, or carnivalesque. Its diptych form is a reference to religious art, but its combination with the excremental was not the deep kind of sacrilege we might consider it today (Hyman and Malbert 2000).

While the abject has always been present, oozing out from behind hidden corners, it is fair to say that contemporary art is closely tied to abject visual representations. Tom Friedman's *True Love* (2004) provides a literal encounter with an abject substance as the work features a butterfly resting on a sizable pile of shit on the gallery floor. While shit can be fascinating because of its attachment to the body, it is also disgusting. The inclusion of the butterfly seems to ensure that the work is not fully rejected, that there is something beautiful to captivate the viewer and defy complete rejection.

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The now infamous *Sensation* show at the Brooklyn Art Museum from October 1999 to January 2000 is a prime example of abject art's appeal and its controversial nature. The show was met with protests, followed by then New York Mayor Giuliani filing a lawsuit against the museum and its director for using government funds to show "sick stuff" (Kammen 2007, p. 294). However, it was also an incredibly successful and highly attended show that prominently featured dung, death, and monstrosity (Kammen 2007). Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996) depicts the holy mother using elephant shit and surrounded by pornographic collaged putti was on center display. Damien Hirst's formaldehyde work was also featured with pieces like *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), his now infamous Tiger Shark preservation, as well as other tanks with sliced animals like *This Little Piggy Went to Market* (1996). Among the eight works of Hirst's at the exhibition was *A Thousand Years* (1990) which was a closed biome in two large glass vitrines, one of which contained a box of fly larva, the other contained a decapitated cow head and a bug zapper. During the show, larva from the box were born, migrated to the second vitrine searching for food, and then laid their eggs in the rotting bloody cow corpse, before completing their life cycle, by flying into the electrified bug killer and dying.

Hirst's work brings the excluded and rejected into the gallery in the form of the corpse and invites the viewer to both look at and think about our own eventual end through the rotting corpses littering the space. One could argue that death was the primary subject for art, particularly Western art, thinking of the deaths of famous warriors like the Greek hero Hector, even images of the crucifixion. Historically, death is rarely depicted in all its rotting and putrid glory, though, as most of these images are beautified and romanticized in ways that suppress the reality of rot. When decomposition does make an appearance, like in *Raft of the Medusa* (1818–1819) by Gericault, it's presented at a distance, as a representation on canvas, as opposed to actual flesh placed in the gallery.

Jenny Saville's typically heroically scaled oil paintings of fat bodies were also included in the *Sensation* show. The abject as excess and overabundance can be depicted through the fat body, a trope which Saville often engages. LeBesco explains in *Revolting Bodies?* (2004), "Viewed, then, as both unhealthy and unattractive, fat people are widely represented in popular culture and in interpersonal interactions as revolting—they are agents of abhorrence and disgust" (p. 1). The body out of bounds then becomes a threatening body because of "the association of corporeity with

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fluidity-indeed, a polluting, contaminating, and viscous liquidity… posited as noxious, venomous and virulent" (Braziel 2001, p. 243). Fat, because of its protean, fluid, anxiety-ridden nature, becomes abjection manifested in excess.

This can be seen quite clearly in Saville's works, as in her painting *Propped* (1992), in which the female figure's corpulent body seems to swallow the stool beneath her. The figure in *Propped* relates the fat body to the grotesque and the monstrous. The figure's hands are oversized and fat beyond the proportions of a real body, and they become claw-like, digging into and almost subsuming the figure's huge fleshy thighs. One critic explained that the painting "conjured up every woman's worst nightmare of how she might look with no clothes on: huge expanses of quivering milky blubber filled with watery blue veins and scored by stretch-marks bore down on spectators like some life-sucking *blancmange*" (Milner cited in Meagher 2003, p. 25). Henry also describes Saville's images as "every woman's nightmare: vast mountains of obesity, flesh run riot, enormous repellent creatures who make even Rubens's chubby femme fatales look positively gaunt" (cited in Meagher 2003, p. 27). Saville's paintings become monstrous all through the inclusion of unrejected waste in the form of beautifully painted rolls of flesh.

It would seem that in many ways, the *Sensation* show was about more than emotive thrills and in large part about abject bodies. Of course, *Sensation* is not the only home of abject art, works that either depict or implicate the excesses of the body can be found in the works of many performance artists. Paul McCarthy coats himself in food products in a simulation of bodily fluids and spits up half eaten hot dogs in a pseudo-sexual infantile regression (Levine 2010). Keith Boadwee uses his own body as a site of abject transgressions when he inserts paint into his rectum and then in video performances defecates the paint across canvases. This work deals explicitly with the body's production of waste through a gesture that both mimics Pollock's masculine abstract expressionist work, and subverts it through the queer inclusion of the anus as a site—not of debasement—but of creation (Jones 1998). Abject performances are not limited to the realm of fine art but have entered the mainstream through popular media and movies. The performance artist Millie Brown[17] recently gained mainstream clout after performing with Lady Gaga in "Swine" at the SXSW Festival in 2014, where the performance artist vomited green goo all over Lady Gaga (Friedlander 2014). While far from mainstream, the abject is certainly becoming more accepted as a mainstream peculiarity fascination.

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So, What About That Classroom Poop?

The institutional art world has embraced the abject with the valorization of shows like *Sensation* (1997), and artists like Damien Hirst and Chris Ofili. However, the field of art education in the United States in particular often avoids *difficult* art, usually meaning contemporary art. In large part, firstly, the target audience for art educators is children, and secondly, the modernist tradition of art education shuns contemporary art works and practices because of their conceptual complexity and political content. Burgess (2003) explains this reticence toward contemporary practices: "In secondary education teachers often shy away from most contemporary art because they consider it too difficult, an art 'full of monsters, replete with vulgarity and coarseness'" (p. 108).

However, excessive bodies that shit and ooze are powerful, causing deep emotive responses. Moreover, an in-depth contemplation of those bodies offers unique opportunities for empathetic connections with otherness. Burgess (2003) cites Becker, who "claims that art that appears complex, which deals with subjective or psychological concerns, is often considered obscure and inaccessible to those outside the art world" (pp. 113–114). Abject art is mundane and vital, profane and sacrosanct, psychoanalytic but also as accessible as a fart joke. While abject art and abject substances may make adults and teachers uncomfortable, children not only want interactions with the abject, they glory in them. Burgess (2003) explains that monsters, those things which are dangerous and disgusting, are "forbidden entry to the classroom, roam freely in the playgrounds, where students confront 'real' life experiences" (p. 108). Students encounter the difficult, violent, and disgusting elements of life all the time, and by barring their admittance to the classroom, we do a disservice to our students who both want and need a space to work through complex and competing emotions. Burgess (2003) argues:

> Art educators do young people a disservice if they confine contemporary art's "monsters" to the playground. Rather they should coax them into the classroom, where young people can confront them and allow them to enrich their developing subjectivities and inform their art production. (p. 120)

Rather than coaxing the monsters in quietly, perhaps we would do better to throw open our doors to different bodies and through that otherness more broadly. Kearney (2003) explains that monsters represent

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"uncontainable excess" (p. 3), they are a corporeal performance of alterity (Nealson 1998); monsters are the abject other. Instead of avoiding them in their many forms, art educators would do better to take the poopy clay coils by the balls and encourage our students to become comfortable with their own monsters, their own bodies, not through conquering them but by befriending them.

Notes

1. For more on Topp's Garbage Pail Kids: Topps. (2012). Garbage Pail Kids. New York: Abrams.
2. For more on Cabbage Patch Kids: http://www.cabbagepatchkids.com/
3. See the Joke Shack's wide variety of fake poo: http://thejokeshack.com/fake-poop/
4. Doggie Doo: The Game produced by Goliath: http://www.doggiedoo-game.com/
5. For example, Treat Street Poopers (http://www.myfavoriteco.com/poopers/poopers.html) or Candy Crate Poopers (https://www.candycrate.com/pocadi.html).
6. Hose Nose from Kandi Kastle Inc. (http://www.nationwidecandy.com/snacks/items/651.htm). Kandi Kastle Inc. has created a number of disgusting candy products, see: Hair, J., Lamb, C., & McHale, C. (2008) *Essentials of Marketing*, Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, p. 319.
7. See Slime Zombie: https://www.hawkin.com/slime-zombie
8. See more on the Trash Pack™ from Moose Toys: http://www.trashpack.com/us/
9. For more on Poopeez™ see: http://poopeez.com/
10. For more on Spin Master™ Flush Force see: https://www.spinmaster.com/product_detail.php?pid=p21536&bid=cat_flushforce
11. For more on Monster High™ see: http://play.monsterhigh.com/en-us/index.html
12. For more on Skelanimals see: https://www.facebook.com/pg/skelanimals/about/?ref=page_internal
13. For more on Furrybones see: http://myfurrybones.com/about-furry-bones/
14. Dictionary.com is a website that provides definitions from multiple official sources including Random House dictionary, Collins English Dictionary, and the American Heritage Dictionary, among others. While I realize it is perhaps more professional to use a single, well-established dictionary, my work is purposefully democratic and engaged in challenging hierarchies of taste. With that in mind, it seemed counterintuitive to use something for elitist purposes, particularly since dictionary.com uses officially published definitions.

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15. Disgusting flavored jelly beans became popular after the Harry Potter™ books inclusion of the fictional Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans, which were made a reality by Jelly Belly®. The beans include flavors like ear wax, vomit, rotten eggs, and earthworm. Gross flavors are now included in the Bean-Boozled line, where ten disgusting flavors are mixed with look-a-like tasty flavors, becoming a game of who gets skunk spray versus licorice. See https://www.jellybelly.com/beanboozled-jelly-beans-3.5-oz-mystery-bean-dispenser-4th-edition-/p/93965 and https://www.jellybelly.com/harry-potter-trade-bertie-botts-every-flavour-beans-1-2-oz-box/p/98101
16. Pester here is an allusion to "pester power," or the ways in which children deploy buying power in capitalism even without having access to capital themselves (Nicholls, A.J. & Cullen, P. (2004), The child-parent purchase relationship: "pester power," human rights and retail ethics. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 11*(2), pp. 75–86).
17. For more on Millie Brown, see: http://milliebrown.world/about/

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CHAPTER 8

Pedagogical Sacrifices: On the Educational Excess of John Duncan's Darkness

Juuso Tervo

In May 1980, American artist John Duncan crossed a threshold, or to be more precise, a bundle of interconnected thresholds that delineate what seems right for someone—anyone—to do to themselves or others. Duncan, wanting to "punish [himself] as thoroughly as [he] could" (Duncan 2006, "Blind Date"), had sex with a female corpse he had been able to find for his use from a Mexican border town. After conducting this act, Duncan got a vasectomy so that his "last potent seed [was] spent in a dead body." To finalize the work, *Blind Date* (1980), he organized a public screening in Los Angeles as part of the Public Spirit performance art festival, where he first described his reasons for doing what he did, and then played an audio recording of the coitus. Duncan had intended the event to be an opportunity to engage in a discussion of work but, for his surprise, the audience, mostly shocked, left without saying a word. Decades later, Duncan explained that

> [*Blind Date* was] a form of sacrifice to humanity as a whole, to everybody waking up. If people see what you do as such a heinous act that they are repelled … that they are just stunned, really shocked at themselves, at

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_8

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> something that's within themselves as well. That helps them to wake up to something within themselves that they wouldn't otherwise see, and that helps everybody. (Gonzalez Rice 2016, p. 122)

What Duncan had wished the audience to see were the deleterious effects of hegemonic masculinity, especially how men were taught to either hide their emotions or deal with them only through anger and violence. Duncan, himself raised in a strict Calvinist household, wanted to demonstrate that

> the intense hostility I was aiming at myself was simply an extreme version of very widespread, socially supported behavior, to set an open example of where such an upbringing can lead, to encourage others to examine similar characteristics in themselves and hopefully learn to avoid causing themselves or those around them to suffer in this way. (Peralta 2007, para 34)

After the initial silence at the screening, the LA art community responded extremely critically to *Blind Date*, eventually making Duncan leave the United States for good.[1] Even though he still continues to make video art, sound art, installations, and performances, art historian Karen Gonzalez Rice (2016) has observed that Duncan has remained largely neglected in art historical scholarship and *Blind Date* has taken its place in contemporary art canon mainly as a "cautionary tale for young artists" (p. 89), showing simply how certain thresholds ought not to be crossed.[2] Does this mean, then, that his self-sacrificial act was all for nothing; that it was as *useless* as his semen inside the cadaver?

In this essay, I approach Duncan's self-sacrificial artistic practice from an educational standpoint. My focus is not arbitrary. Duncan himself has repeatedly insisted that his practice involves a profound educational motif. "The thing I'm looking for in all forms of the art I make," he has claimed, "is to learn, to discover everything I can about what it is to be alive" (Ricci 1997, para. 2). Along similar lines, Thomas B.W. Bailey (2012) has argued that instead of aiming to "reproduce terror for its own sake," Duncan creates works where "projection and simulation of threshold situations are learning experiences for artist and audience alike" (pp. 268–269). These learning experiences are not, however, cumulative enterprises that would simply fill gaps in existing knowledge. Having experienced *Blind Date* as "a step towards my own death" (MacAdams 1981, quoted in Gonzalez

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Rice 2016, p. 121), it is clear that, for him, learning about life is at the same time a death rehearsal, destruction of the very object of learning. Seen from this angle, Duncan's approach to education entails a profound experience of a limit; a limit between affirmation and negation, learning and unlearning.

This requires further elaboration on what kind of education emerges from Duncan's artistic practice and how to understand his sacrificial gesture in educational terms. If, as Duncan has argued in an interview, he has never been interested in "shocking [himself] or anyone else," but instead attempted "to somehow find a way to tap into [his] inner self, and hopefully to encourage others through [his] work to do this" (Ricci 2005, para 2), it is worth examining how, in his artistic practice, learning (i.e. tapping into his inner self) turns into teaching; into lessons like *Blind Date* or *Maze* (1995), in which Duncan locked himself and seven strangers in total darkness naked, without knowing for how long or what to expect. I claim that rather than understanding his artistic practice as a representation of hegemonic masculinity and its discontents—that, in educational terms, it is the representation of hegemonic masculinity that does the teaching—his self-sacrificial will to cross thresholds points to an artistic and educational practice where it is the actual event of learning itself that teaches, an event that remains both practically and figuratively in the dark.

Taking a cue from Gonzalez Rice's informative and profound discussion of Duncan's artistic practice (2014a, b, 2016), I position Duncan's self-sacrificial art/education in relation to Calvinist Christianity, which, as noted above, had a strong impact on him when growing up. My intention is to better understand, through Calvinist theology, how and why does his art/education manifest itself in extreme experiences of limits, where, as he has stated, "the essence, especially now, is not so much the communication of an experience as it is the experience itself" (Kitchell 2011, para 4). I claim that these experiences, often involving total darkness, graphic imagery, and intense noise, resist to be read as mere transfer or exchange of knowledge via representation. Rather, they unfold an experiential artistic and educational practice that puts both learner and teacher in peril, forcing them to cross through the threshold between the known and the unknown without any guarantee of the outcome.

My focus on the event of art/education over representation leads me to diverge from Gonzalez Rice. Even though she also emphasizes the indeterminate and non-communicative aspects of Duncan's practice by

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describing his work as "endurance art" that "challenges audiences (in the moment and beyond it) to witness *without knowing how to respond*" (2016, p. 4, emphasis original), she nevertheless utilizes the figure of a prophet as well as Calvinist jeremiad—communicative tropes par excellence—to discuss Duncan's "confrontational aesthetics" (p. 89). According to Rice:

> From [Duncan's] earliest endurance actions, his work has been embodied the tensions of testifying to an abusive past while acknowledging his own complicity in perpetuating further violence. Caught within these contradictions, and complicated by his neo-orthodox conviction in the continuation of total depravity, Duncan has nevertheless stood as prophetic witness to his vision of halting cycles of violence. (p. 124)

While this might help to conceptualize Duncan as a learner who struggles to communicate past experiences of trauma, his repeated effort to show and teach the audience *something* by disrupting their vision, hearing, and/or sense of touch unfolds an education where the act of showing is always coupled with concealment; where mere representation simply seems not to be enough. One can think of *Move Forward* (1984), for example, in which Duncan played intense noise in total darkness for 20 minutes, projected violent and sexual imagery on a paper screen, and ended the performance by setting the screen on fire. Here, Duncan battles his own speech, rendering its communicative as well as educative aspects inoperative in order to engender a sense of a limit that he invites the audience to cross. By approaching Duncan's confrontational aesthetics through Calvin's critical stance toward every representational practice that can be understood as idolatry, I offer a reading of Duncan's art/education where his darkness—both concrete and metaphorical—does not stand as a *representation* of a traumatic event, but as a *real* event of rupture that, in Calvinist sense, embodies the indeterminacy between individual fate and universal history.

For art education, I see that Duncan's practice helps to tackle the broader intricacies of educational thought embedded in the desire to bridge the gap between the particular and the universal. If art really opens a possibility to tap into one's inner self—a self that, nevertheless, belongs firmly to a universalized realm of humanity—works like *Blind Date* point to the contested limits of these realms; limits where education always, in some way or another, takes place.

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Sacrificing the Self

Duncan's interest in positioning the human body—sometimes his own, sometimes the audience's—in the center of his artistic practice can be seen to belong to the trajectory of post-WWII American art that, as Helen Molesworth (2003) has put it, searched for a "new aesthetic criteria" in the wake of the "liberation of art from traditional artistic skills, the production of a unique object, and the primacy of the visual" (p. 29). Having moved from Kansas to Los Angeles to study at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in the early 1970s, Duncan became involved with various facets of these new configurations of aesthetic experience, especially with time and site-specific practices.[3] At CalArts, he was instructed by artists such as Allan Kaprow—who, according to Aram Yardumian (2012), introduced Duncan to the works of Vienna Aktionists and the conceptual music of Steve Reich, Pauline Oliveros, and Mauricio Kagel—as well as Wolfgang Stoerchle, whose performances had a profound influence on Duncan. In fact, Duncan was present in Stoerchle's final performance *Untitled* (1975) a few months before his death, in which Stoerchle asked to perform oral sex on a male audience member, explaining the audience why such an act was in stark contrast with the moral codes of his masculine upbringing. The performance, which ended with Stoerchle's failure to get the volunteer's penis erect, left Duncan "weeping" (Gonzalez Rice 2014a, p. 152), resonating with the kind of sacrificial teaching and learning he would later utilize in *Blind Date*.[4]

In contrast to time- and site-specific pieces like Stoerchle's, Duncan's early performance works often involved unsuspecting audiences in everyday life situations. For example, after being physically attacked by a group of strangers—an experience which aroused in him a strong fear of being killed—he became interested in the possibility of inducing similar experiences in others. This led to *Scare* (1976), in which Duncan, wearing a mask, knocked on two of his male friends' door. Upon opening, he shot blanks straight at them and ran away. As these men later confirmed to Duncan that they had indeed thought they were being shot to death, it is fair to say Duncan succeeded in his initial aim.[5] That same year, he did *Bus Ride* (1976), in which he inserted fish extract with aphrodisiac properties to the ventilation system of the LA city bus he was driving at the time with the intention to see how it affected passengers' behavior. According to Duncan (2006), the extract did have an effect on the passengers: a normally quiet passenger kicked a pregnant woman and a group of school children started

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attacking each other. As events of art/education, these disruptions of the everyday through a sense of dying or conjuring “repressed sexual impulses” (Duncan 2006, “Bus Ride”)[6] can be seen to point to an event of transformation where an unsuspected element unfolds something primal embedded in the everyday; something that remains hidden under its veil of normalcy and can be seen only by puncturing through this veil.

Through artist Suzanne Lacy, Duncan was introduced to feminist artists and activists in LA, specifically at the Woman’s Building where he attended feminist consciousness-raising groups. Gonzalez Rice (2014b, 2016) has emphasized the profound influence of these experiences in Duncan’s practice, noting how he began to utilize feminist strategies in his artistic work in order to connect personal experiences of trauma with systemic power-relations. Like in feminist performances such as Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1963), he began to put his own body (instead of others’ as in *Scare* or *Bus Ride*) on the line when exploring the societal dynamics of hegemonic masculinity, producing performances that, according to Mike Kelley, received very mixed responses from his feminist colleagues (Duncan 2006, “John Duncan: Los Angeles, late 1970s/early 1980s”). These works include *Every Woman* (1979) in which Duncan went hitchhiking in Hollywood on two separate nights, one time dressed as a woman and the other as a man, in order to see what kind of threat of sexual violence lone women experience in the streets. *For Women Only* (1979), which explored the connections between pornography and male sexual violence, consisted of Duncan showing pornographic films to an all-female audience and inviting them to abuse him sexually afterward. In both cases, the performance did not go as Duncan had expected: in *Every Woman*, no driver picked up Duncan when dressed as a woman, but he got sexually assaulted by a driver who had picked him up as a man. In *For Women Only*, only one woman came to see him after the film, only to discuss her experience rather than to abuse him.

It could be said, then, that the new aesthetic criteria for artistic practice discussed by Molesworth (2003) meant in Duncan’s case a dispersal of his own experiences of violence, sexuality, and fear of death into the social fabric of the everyday. As such, these works can be understood to entail an educational motif that offers an access to male socialization aside from mere cultural reproduction. As dramatizations of repressed, albeit very concrete elements of the everyday—like the link between violence and sexuality in *Every Woman* or violence and death in *Scare*—they act as events of learning and teaching intended to demonstrate the relation

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between an individual human body and the signifying process of its socialization, such as the male body and the range of culturally accepted behavior it may present.

It is this contested relation between the particularized body and the universalized culture that helps to better understand Duncan's willingness to see works like *Blind Date* as a self-sacrificial gesture and how this sacrificial element relates to the educational aspects of his art. After all, as a ritual practice, sacrifice brings together seemingly opposite realms (i.e. the divine and the worldly; the invisible and the visible) and works as a balancing act between them.[7] Since, for Duncan, the individual body bears the mark of hegemonic socialization, his sacrificial event of learning can be seen as an attempt to have the body truly experience the universality of its individuality, reproduced through endless cycles of mimetic repetition. This universality is what the event of sacrifice both affirms and destroys: in works like *Every Woman*, *For Women Only*, and *Blind Date*, Duncan's self-sacrificial embodiment of hegemonic masculinity affirmed male sociality to the point of its destruction.

Read from this angle, Duncan's desire to make himself an open example can be understood as desire to stand as a universal, absolute figure of hegemonic masculinity. As an exemplary figure put aside to stand for humanity as a whole, his self-sacrifice destroys the whole it marks, opening a possibility to break out from the mimetic chain of hegemonic socialization. It is this ecstatic dramatization and subsequent destruction of his own figure as a learner who learns too much and too well about hegemonic masculinity that allows him to reconstitute himself as a teacher who invites others to learn, to reach the limits of their present self and break through them. Duncan's coitus with a corpse can be seen to stand as a universal pedagogical gesture that turns against its own universalism, a final act of mimetic learning that ought to undo the profound violence embedded in the inscriptive force of its mimesis.

If this is the case, why has this lesson turned into a cautionary tale, an example of artistic practice that simply went too far? Instead of opening a possibility to explore new territories of what it means to be alive—that is, giving an open example of how to learn otherwise than merely through mimetic repetition of existing structures of power—Duncan's self-sacrificial learning in *Blind Date* unfolded a rather different kind of lesson: it seemed to represent his own psychic tribulations, not humanity's as a whole. This shows how the universality embedded in his sacrificial gesture does not turn easily into a lesson about counter-universalism as he might have

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intended, but simply into particularism operating outside of social norms, an anomaly, a bad apple. In other words, the necessary exclusion operating in the heart of his self-sacrifice merely casted him off for good, turning him into a self-proclaimed pariah whose practice still engenders deep suspiciousness.[8] Wanting to wake humanity from the collective slumber of hegemonic masculinity, Duncan himself seemed to be the one dreaming.

This does not mean that there are no lessons to be learned from *Blind Date*. When pointing to this contested relation between the universal and the particular, I see that Duncan's self-sacrificial act as an act of substitution (i.e. killing himself as a figure of hegemonic manhood) raises profound questions concerning the status of his art/education as *representation*; that is, what is being substituted with what and how does this substitution resonate with Duncan's aim at creating, not merely communicating, immediate experiences of art/education. In lieu with Molesworth's (2003) discussion concerning post-WWII American art, it is worth asking how to understand Duncan's sacrificial art/education as a simultaneously mediated and unmediated act that *embodies*, not only *represents*, its societal context?

It is here where Calvin offers an important aid for further elaboration. Calvin, who insisted on an absolute distinction between the worldly and the divine while simultaneously asserting that the absolutely transcendent God is absolutely present in the world, put famously a strong emphasis on *real* effects of faith and critiqued harshly all religiosity that seemed to conflate God with worldly images. As Thomas H. Luxon (1995) formulated Calvin's suspiciousness toward idolatry, "it is the depraved nature of human beings always to conjure presence into the index of the absent, and then to mistake that index for the presence of the absent one" (p. 46). This meant that the word of God had to be stripped off from all unnecessary mediation in order to be experienced directly and, most importantly, so that the mediation itself will not take the status of deity, as in the case of the golden calf. I claim that Calvin's call for an unmediated faith helps to better understand the universality Duncan's self-sacrificial art/education, especially when it comes to the very event of crossing a threshold into the dark.

Calvinist Sacrifices

Gonzalez Rice (2016) connects Duncan's artistic practice to the trajectory of Presbyterian neo-orthodoxy prevalent in North American Protestantism of the twentieth century. She sees the jeremiad, a Calvinist rhetorical device that "offers a bitter critique of the present moment resolving in a

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prophetic vision of a purified future" (p. 99) as an important model for works like *Blind Date*, testifying about victimhood in hegemonic male socialization. Noting how visual representations of Duncan's works often leave the very event they testify untraced—like *Blind Date* is represented with a picture of him getting a vasectomy or *Every Woman* as a picture of an anonymous, dark street—Gonzalez Rice claims, "Duncan's public exposure of his own absence, his own numbing deadness, stands as a prophetic witness and visual substitute for the violence, aggression, and internal death imposed on boys and men through patriarchy" (p. 125).

In educational terms, Gonzalez Rice's reading suggests that it is the representation of the event of Duncan's self-sacrifice that educates, not the event itself. This analysis confines the event firmly to an inaccessible past, eventually making its lesson simply a matter of communication. This, however, leaves the question open why to even bother to *actually* have sex with a corpse for the sake of humanity and not simply represent such act?[9] If one is to read *Blind Date* and Duncan's other works as Calvin read the Scriptures, the reality of the event (Biblical for Calvin; coitus with a corpse for Duncan) is not a matter of the past, but is truly present in every historical moment, in every event of hegemonic male socialization. Thus, instead of seeing Duncan's art/education as a way to work through traumatic absences—that is, to substitute the event with a representation of it—Calvinist framework forces us to pay attention to what kind of universalized presence does works like *Blind Date* entail.

Here, it is worth looking more closely on Calvin's doctrine of total depravation and its connections to representation. Calvin's theology located the locus of religiosity from worldly affairs strictly to the transcendent God alone, stemming from an assertion that, as B. A. Gerrish (1973) put it, "the justice of God is hidden from us, and we can only bow before it in humility" (p. 281). This hiddenness does not mean that God is absent from the world. Calvin (2002), quoting Psalm 104 that describes God as "wrapped in light as with a garment," argued that God's

> essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse. (p. 40)

In other words, despite being absolutely transcendent, God is also absolutely present in the world, which positions a true believer within the

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gap between this world and the world beyond. Since for Calvin, humans themselves do not get to decide whether they will be saved or damned, human existence is marked by a fundamental undecidability in the face of the future. Duncan's description of his childhood and youth growing up in a Calvinist Presbyterian household gives a glimpse of what this can mean in practice:

> Suffering. Misery. Denial. Of physical pleasure, especially sensual. Sex taboo for inclusion even as a reference in conversation, let alone frank discussion. Questions about details in the Bible … strictly forbidden. Humor forbidden during visits from relatives. All positive references to black people forbidden. What that left to encourage was work. Especially hard, dedicated work that others took for granted, didn't fully recognize or failed to understand. (Peralta 2007, para 27)

This onerous uncertainty, manifesting itself as suspiciousness toward otherness and commitment to hard work, requires absolute devotion to a truth that exceeds human reason; a truth that, nevertheless, is omnipresent in the world. Following the apostle, Paul's warning that "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), the limits of human reason are always at work. These limits prevent humans from seeing the *true* nature of the world and, most importantly, strip them off from free will.[10] Rather than accepting this partiality and making one feel home in the human world, a true believer must *believe* that both pleasures and torments of this world are merely secondary, passing images in face of the reality of divine salvation and, subsequently, that the torments of Hell are similarly real but diametrically opposite to it.

This brings an important aspect concerning the relationship between the particular and the universal discussed above. For Calvin, salvation is not a question of individual will, but rises from an unmediated submission to the will of God:

> Faith consists not in ignorance, but in knowledge—knowledge not of God merely, but of the divine will … By this knowledge, I say, not by the submission of our understanding, we obtain an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. (Calvin 2002, pp. 336–337)

Behind individual agency, there is always another, a more constitutive layer of time and causality that remains beyond the hands of the individual but, nevertheless, has a profound impact on their fate. For Calvin, this

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other layer is God's hidden plan, revealed partially through Jesus and his sacrificial death. For an individual, this means, in Paul's words, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:19–20). This second birth, obtained through sacrificial death, splits the Christian life in two, to the worldly temporal life and the divine-eternal life, that only true faith can bring together.

When Duncan's self-sacrificial art/education is examined within this context, the step toward his own death as a destruction of the figure of hegemonic manhood in *Blind Date* is not simply a *representation* of violence inherent in patriarchy, but an attempt to truly embody it. Like Paul depicted Jesus as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), Duncan sacrificed himself as the last product of repressive male socialization who, as Calvin speaks of Jesus, came to "separate us from the world, and unite us in the hope of an eternal inheritance" (Calvin 2002, p. 332). By forming a totalized unity between the individual and the process of socialization, his art/education unfolds a *real* experience of all the pleasure and suffering this violence gives rise to. This *real unity* stands as the truth of hegemonic masculinity: it is an ultimate act of free (worldly) human will that is fundamentally separated from the inner (divine) self that Duncan wishes to tap into through his works. Akin to Christian second life, this inner self remains beyond the bounds of representational logic that substitutes one's true self with a deleterious image of masculinity through a mimetic chain of repetition. The only way to reach this inner self is to destroy the representational veil that covers it, eventually opening a possibility for a truly universal learning. Such desire to reach true, universal grounds for art/education beyond the bounds of representation can be seen to resonate with how Duncan responded to a question concerning what kind of feedback he gets: "When [the feedback is] genuine, response passes beyond any local cultural filters and comes from somewhere universally human" (Ricci 2005, para.12).

Calvinist insistence on real, unmediated faith forces us to examine Duncan's art/education aside from its mediating function. From a strictly Calvinist position, Gonzalez Rice's reading of Duncan as a prophetic preacher is in danger of turning works like *Blind Date* into merely *allegories*, not actual acts, of violence embedded in patriarchy. This is not to say that this is Gonzalez Rice's intention. Rather, the problem stems from what Calvin would see as a conflation of index and presence; that the obscured documentation of the act stands as the act itself and that it is this substitution, not the act itself that teaches about trauma

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and victimhood. Keeping with Calvin, what educates in Duncan's self-sacrificial art/education is not its ability to *represent* trauma—this, after all, would confine the discussion to the realm of the image, an idolatrous move for Calvin—but its ability to embody what human will is *actually* capable of doing and, most importantly, demonstrating the fundamental futility of this capability by *spending* his *last potent seed* in a dead body.

Hence, the Calvinist lesson of Duncan's art/education is, strictly speaking, that *true* learning is like a blind—yet *real*—act of faith. Occupying an indeterminate time and space between salvation and damnation, such art/education uncouples learning and teaching from the individual will and puts forward an idea that the event of art/education itself is always bound to something that exceeds it; something that cannot be reduced to worldly time and causality. Rather than remaining purely transcendental, this excess is very present in the world, like Duncan's semen inside the cadaver. Coming close to what Georges Bataille (1988) calls an inner experience that dramatizes existence through ecstasy, Duncan's art/education intensifies the limit that art/education always is to the point where the tension between two lives and two destinies of human existence is not resolved somewhere in the future, but is acutely present in every human act.

Dark Teachings

In his later works, Duncan moved away from practices that subject his own body to the dynamics of social violence toward installations where the audience or a group of volunteers are invited to enter into a complete darkness without knowing what to expect. In *Pressure Chamber* (1993), for example, he had the audience members enter alone naked in a ship container, where they were exposed to intense noise of motors attached to the walls. In *Voice Contact* (1998–2000), the audience walked around a darkened hotel room, again naked, being guided by a whispering voice and simultaneously disoriented by an undulating drone. In addition, similar utilizations of complete darkness can be found also from *The Grotto* (2006), *The Courtyard* (2007), *The Gauntlet* (2008), and *Black Box* (2014). When discussing these works, Duncan has argued that *seduction* has taken an equally important place in his artistic practice as confrontation, noting that,

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> when audiences stiffen their resolve expecting to be shocked or outraged, seduction can be even more powerfully disorienting and equally effective to direct attention inward again which in my case is the reason behind making the art in the first place. (Ricci 2005, para 2)

In another interview, he has expressed the same issue as a willingness to "get spectators to at least meet me halfway as participants," arguing that "the extent the work reveals itself to a participant depends on whether or not the participant allows it to do so, on each person's attitudes and character" (Kitchell 2011, para 4).

Even though this approach might leave the lesson of the artwork more open-ended than works like *Blind Date*, such invitations to darkness strongly echo his self-sacrificial art/education where disruptive events of learning turn into events of teaching. By intensifying the urgent indeterminacy between knowing and unknowing, Duncan's darkness halts a clearly defined movement from ignorance to knowledge, leaving the audience with a deep sense of uncertainty concerning the actual ends of the artwork. This certainly creates a sense of mystery around his practice. As Bailey (2012) has put it, "the more he reveals himself, going well beyond the accepted boundaries of 'confessional' artwork in the process, the more mysterious or enigmatic he seems to appear to the uninitiated" (p. 295).

While it would be easy to keep up with Bailey's reading and simply state that one needs to be properly initiated to Duncan's practice in order to fully appreciate it, it is important to critically reflect on what kind of dynamics of power does this intimate indeterminacy entail. After all, his urge to create threshold situations implies that he perpetually positions himself as a mediator who has the ability to embody *truly* universal knowledge; knowledge that, like God's hidden plan, can be accessed only through a revelation of what is fundamentally incomprehensible. Moreover, his authority to do so seems to stem, like the "genuine" feedback he receives, from "somewhere universally human" (Ricci 2005, para.12). In short, it remains still open on what basis does he claim to recognize and reach this hidden plane of universality.

By inviting the audience to seek the truth from the dark, Duncan relocates the universality of art/education from the realm of representation to an a-temporal, ahistorical plane of humanity—a plane that, in Christianity, marks the hidden presence of God. In lieu of Pauline faith as interpreted by reformers such as Calvin, he internalizes the truth of the world by removing its representational, worldly veil. Paraphrasing Paul's dictum,

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"The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6), Duncan's art/education kills the letter in the name of true, spiritual education aside from mere mimetic cycle of repetition. It finds its core from an ability to reach out from the external world of images into the inner self that, nevertheless, exceeds the bounds of an individual body. As an exemplary learner, he acts as a universal teacher who stands firmly on the limit between these worlds, asking the audience to trust his abilities to lead them to their inner selves, to the dark. While this might be a leap of faith for the audience, Duncan will always be there to catch them, since the self he sacrificed in works like *Blind Date* and *Every Woman* has always returned from the darkness of death, stronger than ever.

Conclusions

Duncan's willingness to set up an open example of the systematic violence embedded in hegemonic masculinity and his interest in creating intense experiences of indeterminacy offers an entryway to artistic and educational practice where the relation between particular and universal is being constantly tested. By sacrificing himself for the sake of *truly* universal knowledge, Duncan transforms himself into a teacher, a messenger of truth, whose relation to knowledge is both affirmative and destructive. Following Calvin, the truth of learning and, subsequently, of the world cannot be found through a mimetic identification with the things of this world but can be accessed only by breaking through the normalcy of the everyday. Thus, it is not some temporally absent realm of truth that remains in the dark. Like those utterly bright characters informing the glory of God for Calvin, Duncan's darkness stands as an absolute devotion to a present that is never truly identical with what it seems to be.

Even though Duncan's genuine intention seems to be a liberation of artistic and educational practice from a mimetic repetition of existing models for human life, his self-sacrificial art/education eventually reestablishes another frame of universal belonging, delineated by his exemplary ability to cross through the limit between the external world of representations and the inner realm of *true* self. The challenge that Duncan leaves for art education is, then, how to grasp the immanence of artistic and educational events of disruption without constituting yet another plane of universal truth that governs its movement from the known to the unknown, into the dark.

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Notes

1. As Duncan retrospectively described the situation in an interview, "The decision to leave the United States came from a sort of push-pull situation between ex-lovers, close friends and their associates on one side of the Pacific making a determined effort to block any and all public displays or references to my work after failing in their attempt to send me to prison, and audiences on the other side sincerely interested in listening to what I had to say on what BLIND DATE as well as my work in general – was about" (Peralta 2007, para 42).
2. Indicative of this approach is how Linda Frye Burnham, the editor of *High Performance* magazine at the time, left Duncan unnamed when explaining her decision not to publish anything about *Blind Date* in 1980. See Burnham (2014).
3. While Duncan's early involvement with experimental music scene in LA and his later career in sound art is an important part of his oeuvre, in this essay I will focus mainly on Duncan's performance pieces and installations. An informative overview of Duncan's career in sound art can be found from Bailey (2012) as well as from *John Duncan. Work: 1975–2005* (Duncan 2006).
4. Interestingly enough, Yardumian (2012) recounts: "Driving home [from the morgue Duncan] found he was unable to weep, he was beyond weeping" (para 10).
5. One of them was artist Paul McCarthy, who also documented Duncan's works such as *Every Woman* and the image of him getting a vasectomy for *Blind Date*.
6. By "repressed sexual impulses," Duncan refers to William Reich's *The Mass-Psychology of Fascism*. Reich's influence in Duncan's practice is also visible in his series of works based on Reichian breathing exercises, *No* (1977), *Out* (1979), *Signal* (1984), *Cast* (1986), *Incoming* (1993), *Gate* (1994), and *Kick* (1991–1995).
7. My understanding of sacrifice is indebted to Rey Chow's essay "Sacrifice, Mimesis, and Theorizing Victimhood," in Chow (2012).
8. For example, the International Artist Studio Program in Sweden prematurely terminated Duncan's residency in 2001 after they learned about *Blind Date*. Duncan was able to continue his residency after winning the case in court.
9. Ironically, it was the lack of concrete evidence of this act (the audio recording was not considered as such) that made it impossible to press charges against Duncan.
10. As Calvin (2002) put it, human will is "bound by the fetters of sin" (p. 165).

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PART III

Dead, Shocking, and Monstrous Art and Popular Culture

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CHAPTER 9

Hybrid Creatures and Monstrous Reproduction: The Multifunctional Grotesque in *Alien: Resurrection*

Henriikka Huunan-Seppälä

Contemporary media culture abounds with grotesque figures, bodies and acts. The grotesque takes the form of slimy monsters, human–animal hybrids and twisted minds; of smashed flesh, body fluids and obscenities; of sadistic terror and masochistic enjoyment. Far from being harmless fancy, grotesque imagery functions in dynamic interaction with cultural norms, taboos and ideals, pointing to the ultimate fears and fantasies within our cultural imaginary. The focal point of this imagery is the grotesque body—whether fantastic, mythological, monstrous, anti-ideal, caricatural, grotesquely gendered or mutilated. Under the guise of fantastic fiction, grotesque representations have a unique, yet unacknowledged, role in affecting cultural valuations.

The current chapter is based on my doctoral dissertation, Huunan-Seppälä, H. (2018). *Unfolding the unexpressed: The grotesque, norms and repressions* (Doctoral dissertation). Helsinki, Finland: Aalto ARTS Books.

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_9

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One way to untangle the power of the grotesque is to look into the functions it performs in representation. By diving into one of the most classic filmic examples of science fiction horror, *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), this chapter explores the functioning of the grotesque within a representation, enlightening the needs the grotesque possibly satisfies within the viewer, and its wider cultural significance along with its educational potential. Understood in a wide sense, the grotesque is characterized by category violation, metamorphosis and surpassing of body limits (Bakhtin 1965/1984; Carroll 2009).

With its exuberances and transgressions, the grotesque embodies excess but also lack. In the grotesque, extreme corporeality and materiality combine with negation and absence; the tangible and the transcendental ambiguously coincide. Because of its materializing capacity, the grotesque is apt to represent the missing signified, functioning as a symbolic support for the absence of meaning (Huunan-Seppälä 2018). The outcome may be an absurdity with no apparent meaning, or an atrocity that conveys a signified, like extreme anxiety, for which no other signifier exists. As a materialized fantasy of the absent, the grotesque may represent even the 'unrepresentable', the excess of meaning that is the Real. In the Lacanian universe, the Real is the lack at the core of our being, the void of the lost fullness (Homer 2005).

Directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) is the fourth part of the *Alien* film series (1979–2017). Along with the iconic Alien monster, created by H. R. Giger, it stars Sigourney Weaver as Ellen Ripley and Winona Ryder as Annalee Call. The other characters mentioned herein are Larry Purvis (Leland Orser), General Martin Perez (Dan Hedaya), Doctor Mason Wren (J. E. Freeman), and Doctor Jonathan Gediman (Brad Dourif). An illustrative specimen of its genre, *Alien: Resurrection* represents the heritage of horror stories in which apocalyptic beasts rise up from some abyss and present a threat to humanity. The film's main thematics revolve around the opposition between human and non-human, and the theme of monstrous reproduction, maternity and cloning. As an incarnation of utmost alterity, the Alien monster also represents the hostile, unknown side of nature. Importantly, the film offers a multifaceted view on the grotesque body, including the cosmic, monstrously procreating alien body; the mutilated male body as attacked by the Alien; the evil scientist's body representing human monstrosity; and, finally, the heroic trans-categorical body of the female protagonists. With its insides revealed or integrated into the alien maternal organism, the mutilated

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male body also becomes an abject body. In Julia Kristeva's (1982) account, abjection refers to a violent feeling of repulsion—entwined with attraction—toward bodily insides, body fluids, wastes and the corpse as a reminder of sickening materiality. Through the hybrid heroines, the film addresses questions of identity, femininity and alterity.

In terms of the main plot, the film tells the story of Ripley, a clone of late Ellen Ripley, continuing her struggle to save the Earth from the lizardy Alien species. In a spaceship, as part of a clandestine army operation, Ripley gives birth to the Alien Queen. With its rapidly growing offspring, the Alien soon gets loose, invades the ship and starts to kill the humans on board. With the help of Call, a humanoid robot, Ripley, leads a group of survivors to the rescue ship. The mother ship enfolds many dark secrets, including an enormous Alien hatchery, a nest and a room of failed clones. In the end, the Alien Queen breeds with Ripley to produce a next-generation Alien.

The theme of monstrous reproduction is present throughout the film, starting from the principal setting, the ominous spaceship, turned into a zone of breeding, hatching and birthing—a sphere of the maternal-feminine. In its procreative mission, the Alien also makes use of human bodies—either as hosts for embryos or as nourishment for eggs and newborns. As a grotesque embodiment of female sexuality that is excessive and out of control, the Alien organism evokes the threat of annihilation and loss of subjectivity, materialized in the threat of being literally engulfed by an abject maternal organism. The Alien monster represents thus the primal fear of the breakdown of boundaries between self and other. As claimed by Barbara Creed (1993), the representation of the monstrous-feminine, as constructed within patriarchal ideology, is based on woman's maternal and reproductive functions, which reflects the conception of female sexuality as fascinating but fearsome. In Luce Irigaray's (1991) view, the absence of accurate representations of female sexuality has led to its association with anxiety, fear and disgust. The *Alien* film dwells precisely in the taboo aspects of the female body and sexuality, pregnancy and childbirth, culminated in the grotesque birth scenes and the hatchery as a monstrous womb that is horrifyingly generative and all-incorporating. Through the characters' encounters with the maternal organism, the bodily relation with the mother is represented as abject, marked by morbid attraction and repulsion.

Connecting womanhood with monstrosity, already the beginning of *Alien: Resurrection* is revealing. The film starts with an image of Ripley's cloning, her naked body floating in liquid inside a glass tube. While the

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body transforms from an infantile to an adult body, we hear Ripley's voice saying: "My mommy always said there were no monsters. No real ones. But there are" (Carroll and Jeunet 1997). Ellen Ripley is a spaceship lieutenant who died 200 years ago, trying to kill the Alien species. Before dying, she got impregnated by an Alien. The scientists have clandestinely cloned Ripley, with an Alien embryo in her body, in order to resuscitate and exploit the powerful species. In the spaceship, after the birth of the Alien Queen, both the Alien and Ripley—or the 'host' as they call it—are kept in captivity and treated like test animals.

In this *Alien* film, Ripley is a grotesquely trans-categorical being: as a clone of Ellen Ripley, she is both dead and alive, with and without identity, and only partly human as endowed with some Alien genes. Despite her deficient condition as a subject, a human or even a living being, Ripley is yet the most humane character in the film. At the same time, as a hero, Ripley represents the fantasy of an ontologically hybrid being as the savior, recurrent in myth and legend—exemplified by such figures as Heracles, the Greek half god, half human protector of mankind, Jesus in Christianity and Ganesha, the Hindu deity with an elephant head. In her grotesque anomaly, Ripley is also a revealing representation of woman. Through her association with the Alien beast, she incarnates woman's alleged alliance with Mother Nature. Also, the scientists see Ripley as a piece of nature to be oppressed and exploited. However, with her superhuman powers, she releases herself from captivity and starts to follow her own agenda. This makes Ripley an archetypal woman warrior, like the heroines who "reject the roles society has carved out for them", who "struggle against dominant stereotypes of female sexuality, and come into conflict with male power in their attempts to define their own identities" (Creed 2007, p. 16). For the audience, Ripley is likable in her non-conformist and justified rebellion, having no respect for the established order. As an emblem of outsider identity, she is also identifiable. Despite—or perhaps because of—her trans-categorical constitution, Ripley embodies a universal sense of otherness and incompleteness, found in all humans.

What is important from the point of view of her grotesque quality, Ripley manages to turn her ontological 'deficiency' into strength. Fulfilling the fantasy of appropriating the mysterious powers of nature, and of the maternal-feminine, she takes advantage of her maternal and bestial qualities in order to survive. In her struggle against evil, these qualities—such as heightened instincts and toxic blood—prove the most powerful. Through her instincts, Ripley *just knows* things, like the intentions of the

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Alien Queen. In this way, the feminine 'excess-in-lack' entails a departure from the Symbolic—and a convergence to the Real. In the Lacanian framework, the Symbolic corresponds to language and culture, while the Real refers to traumatic rupture, to the fundamental lack and lost fullness (Homer 2005). Through Ripley, the feminine is associated with the idea of contingent knowledge beyond the Symbolic. According to Lacan's (1975/1999) formulation, "*woman* does not exist" refers to the idea that she is "not-whole" (pp. 7–10). However, as not-whole, "she has a supplementary jouissance compared to what the phallic function designates by way of jouissance" (pp. 72–77). The idea of contingent knowledge also resonates with Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) view of madness. Representing "inverted wisdom, inverted truth", madness liberates the subject from the "false 'truth of this world,'", no longer dimmed by commonplace ideas (pp. 39, 49, 260).

In *Alien: Resurrection,* another important character is Call. As revealed in the latter part of the film, she is a humanoid robot, hot-tempered but goodhearted. She gets shot and apparently dies, but after a while returns. Noticing an odd cavity in Call's chest, Ripley discovers that she is a humanoid: "I should have known. No human being is that humane" (Carroll and Jeunet 1997). The relationship between Call and Ripley evolves from initial suspicion to mutual understanding and friendship. As Call confesses to Ripley: "At least there's a part of you that's human … look at me … I'm disgusting" (Carroll and Jeunet 1997). Outlaw identity turns out to be something that the two women have in common.

A mixture of animate and inanimate, of human and machine, Call is categorically ambiguous, similar to Ripley. An example of the *technical grotesque*, her figure is based on an alienating fusion of organic and mechanical elements—either mechanical objects that are brought to life or human beings that are made mechanical (Kayser 1957/1981). Call's beautiful surface conceals a grotesque body that consists of emptiness, mechanical parts and white foamy substance, as revealed through the bullet hole in her chest. With her flawless beauty, she embodies the myth of woman as beautiful on the outside but hideous within. Examples of this vary from the Greek Sirens and Eve from the Book of Genesis—responsible for the fall of man—to such figures as Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* (1989), the octopus-like sea witch who adopts the appearance of a beautiful young woman. Call also represents the (male) fantasy of a mechanical doll woman. However, instead of being docile and serviceable, or evil and insensitive, she is intractable and rebellious, heroic and humane. Together,

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the two female protagonists embody a monster and a machine. With their grotesquely gendered bodies—closer to nature or to the world of objects—they are not proper women, and not "whole", conforming to the Lacanian (1975/1999) idea of the non-existing woman. Their status as a clone with impure genes and a humanoid can also be read as an allegory of class or race. The heroines represent thus disvalued races and second-class citizens, at odds with the power elite, embodied by the male officers. On the other hand, the two women may be seen as transhumanist creatures, improved versions of regular humans, as physically and morally superior to them.

In charge of the cloning project, the three leading male officers—General Perez, Doctor Wren and Doctor Gediman—operate in the field of science, medicine and the military. In the film's ideological pattern, they represent exploitative phallic power and patriarchy: the oppressive system characterized by corruption, cruelty and sadism. With these men, phallic power is diametrically opposed to the subordinate feminine, represented by the female protagonists and the Alien. In fact, the entire film is based on a struggle between the hegemonic and the marginalized; between the maternal Real in its horrendous guise and the paternal Symbolic in its tyrannical guise (Huunan-Seppälä 2018). However, through the grotesque return of the repressed, the power relation is turned upside down. Also, through the men—the antithesis of courage and integrity—phallic power is revealed a scam.

Importantly, even though they are 'regular' humans, the male officers are grotesque through their inner monstrosity and cruel actions. During the latter part of the film, after the hegemonic power system has been overcome by maternal power, the male officers also get humiliated and punished in most grotesque ways, matching their evil specificity—for example, serving as a snack for a newborn Alien. Nature, that they thought they could exploit, strikes back at them. The men are literally devoured by an abject feminine organism—a true materialization of the Real as the pre-Symbolic state of lost fullness (Homer 2005). Justified revenge gets its culmination in the payback executed by the Aliens, serving as an instrument of cosmic justice—ultimately targeted at the system of legitimate structural violence. The grotesque punishment clearly conveys an objection to the men's ideological stance. In the film, the true monsters are, in fact, these men. Similar to the *womb monster* or the *mad doctor à la* Frankenstein, as explored by Creed (2005), they attempt to create life without woman, trying to appropriate the powers of the womb. The male scientists, "representing the civilized savagery of science and technology"

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(p. 60), bring forth monsters, but also become monsters themselves, as associated with the *primal uncanny*, that is, the realm of woman, death and the animal. Moreover, through the men's creations, the clones hidden in the spaceship—the grotesque by-product of legitimate systemic violence—the polished image of scientific progress is undermined.

As for the Alien monster, its intricate morphology is a combination of lizard-like qualities, technological features and human attributes with sexual connotations. The creature is slimy, its skin is black and moist with a metallic shine, and its composition includes details which give to it a machine-like demeanor. Besides its big lizardy tail, its most conspicuous body part is the pointed head with a posterior extension, together with the mouth and the salient sharp teeth, covered with slime, some liquid constantly flowing out of the mouth. Its tongue, that it thrusts out to strike the victims, has another pair of teeth. Thus, the Alien is a grotesque monster *par excellence*. In its hybrid constitution, it is similar to biblical abominations of the unholy confusions of species like the creeping, crawling and swarming animals belonging to the realm of the grave, death and chaos (Douglas 1966/2002). Its crossbreed anatomy also makes it a gloomy version of *grottesca*, the Roman ornaments as the etymological source of the grotesque, interweaving plant, animal and human forms, as if giving birth to each other (Bakhtin 1965/1984). Above all, the Alien represents ominous grotesque powers that remain mysterious, incomprehensible and impersonal, like the ghostly *It* invoking the demonic aspects of the world (Kayser 1957/1981).

The most particular feature of the Alien monster is its association with threatening sexuality. With its prominent mouth and teeth, the creature constitutes an image of *vagina dentata*—in line with Freud's (1899/2010) transposition theory, whereby the lower body parts are transposed onto the upper ones. At the same time, considering the monster's phallic head and tongue resembling a toothed penis—that it uses to pierce the victims—the Alien also engenders an association between male sexuality and monstrosity. Like a conglomerate of archaic fears, the creature constitutes a doubly terrifying image: the phallic penetrator and the vaginal castrator all in one. With its procreative *raison d'être* and association with monstrous-feminine reproduction, the Alien is a grotesque materialization of the repressed maternal. Disgusting and fascinating, it is an object of primal repression—like the Kristevan (1982) abject, confronting us within the domain of the *maternal*, but also within the *animal* sphere, operating on the fragile border where identities, barely existing, are fuzzy, animal and

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metamorphosed. Alien's slimy, pulpy and toxic secretions, along with its visceral reproductive practices make it an epitome of abjection—expressing the forbidden desire for the abject. Through the Alien, the repressed returns with unprecedented force. In the Kristevan universe, the return of the repressed refers essentially to the abject threat of the maternal body, or to what is prohibited by the Symbolic order, whether related to identification with the mother, or to the mother's *jouissance* (Oliver 1993).

Extremely far-off from humans, the lizardy, automaton-like Alien species materializes the fear of otherness, of the unknown. At the same time, there is something uncannily familiar in the Alien: with its obsession with procreation, its exploitative habits and aspiration to rise above the other species, it appears as a grotesque reflection of human nature. The theme of human monstrosity is further developed through the failed clones of Ellen Ripley—not only representing the evil scientists' doings but also the unity between living beings. In a hidden room, floating in yellowish blurry liquid, the dead clones are severely deformed creatures combining human and Alien features. They are all mixed up in horrible ways: tails and teeth attached to misshapen female bodies, a second mouth on the cheek, an eye placed on the back and so on. The hybrid clones are analogous to the grotesque metamorphosis on which life is based: the mysterious origins of every mammal, either human or animal.

In the hidden room, Ripley hears moaning and finds a living clone woman lying on a bed. Endowed with some Alien features, she has a face almost like Ripley's face. Her upper body is naked, which reveals her breasts and incisions on the chest and stomach, left open. A tube goes into her body through an incision by the navel. Gasping for breath, she barely manages to utter the words: "Kill me" (Carroll and Jeunet 1997). As a suffering mass of flesh with human consciousness, the clone woman embodies the idea of the common zone between man and beast, reduced to a piece of meat through suffering (Deleuze 1981/2005). Deeply upset, Ripley grabs a flamethrower, and furiously burns the clone woman, and all the clones, the glass tubes blowing around. Facing the clones, Ripley is forced to encounter herself as one of these dreadfully hybrid, incomplete creatures that represent her own prehistory, but also an alternative present time. The clones are ambiguously her and not-her, familiar and unfamiliar; a point in which identity, the limits between self and other, and the categories of time and place, collapse.

In the spaceship, the Alien organism also takes the form of a hyperbolic hatchery and of a oneiric nest. The hatchery is a uterine space full of large

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pulsating Alien eggs and reproductive matter spread all over the place, with elements reminiscent of fetal membrane and networks of blood vessels. The Aliens also store living humans in the hatchery, planting them in sticky pulp for later use. As a place of disgusting otherness with an uncanny appeal, the hatchery conveys the repressed fantasy of return to the womb. At some point, Ripley hears the call of the Alien Queen. As if driven by an irresistible biological necessity, she is drawn to a nest that looks like a black, pulsating ocean made of swarming Alien bodies. Ripley is shown lying on this mass, with her arms widespread, looking drowsy, even voluptuous. With her black wet hair and dark glossy leather outfit reminding of the Alien skin, she seems united with them, only her pale face and arms standing out. The nest is an oneiric place marked by dissolution and reunion, oblivion and reminiscence: a materialization of the loss of self and of the unknown. It is an undifferentiated maternal space marked by "an endless movement and pulsation beneath the symbolic" (Homer 2005, p. 118). The nest, as the enigmatic *black hole*, also refers to the archaic mother, dedicated to the procreative principle and yet oriented toward death and extinction, the original oneness of things (Creed 1993). Pointing to female genitals, the primeval black hole generates horrific offspring, and threatens to incorporate everything. Lying in the nest, Ripley's serene, nearly orgasmic presence suggests *jouissance*, pure enjoyment in the Real—accessible only through the subject's violent and painful rejoicing in the abject (Kristeva 1982). Simultaneously attractive and repulsive, the nest manifests the subject's nauseous enjoyment, "the abyss, the whirlpool of enjoyment threatening to swallow us all, exerting its fatal attraction" (Žižek 1992, pp. 135–137). The nest is a nightmarish but alluring place promising symbiotic closure and *jouissance*, expressing a hidden yearning for the undifferentiated. In the film, symptomatically, the Alien nest is a place of mysterious conception: a transfer of Ripley's human reproductive system to the Alien Queen. The Alien Queen is thereby able to breed in a new way and carry an Alien creature in her womb.

The Alien Queen in labor is a horrifyingly grotesque sight. Differing from her former appearance, she now has a more insect-like anatomy, with small jointed front legs and a head akin to a pirate hat. Most conspicuously, she has a huge, pulsating abdomen. Like a giant arthropod that is about to burst and reveal its horrible insides, the Queen constitutes a hyperbolic image of monstrous pregnancy. A birthing woman is thereby assimilated to an abominable insect-like creature—reflecting the taboo of the birth-giving female body as an essentially abject body, reminding man

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of his debt to nature (Ussher 2006). Finally, the abdomen cracks in the middle, the Queen roars, and the Newborn, covered by a transparent membrane, pushes itself out.

Another grotesque birth scene in the film is the male birthing—a nightmarish version of "couvade", or the ancient fantasy of man giving birth (Creed 2005). The scene is an exaggerated, aestheticized travesty in which the horror and violence of childbirth is pushed to the limit. Blood springs up from Purvis's, the birthing man's, mouth and ominously bulging chest, as the Alien baby bursts its way through his ribcage. One of the evil scientists, Doctor Wren tries to kill him, and they start a furious fight. As Purvis emits a long, fierce labor roar, the camera 'enters' his body through the open mouth, going down the gullet, until encountering the face of the screeching Alien. As the Alien bursts out of the man's chest, it simultaneously pierces Doctor Wren's forehead. The two males and the Alien baby form a grotesque conglomerate of bodies. The horror is instigated by the visual analogy between the Alien cub and an erect toothed penis, shaking the intelligible order of bodily categories. The scene constitutes an example of male bodies that, in order to become grotesque, are endowed with characteristics associated with the female body (Creed 1993).

As for the Newborn (the next-generation Alien), it is born of a mysterious union between Ripley and the Alien Queen. As its first task, the Newborn kills its birthing mother, the Queen. It detects Ripley, approaches her and roars softly. With a tender gaze, recognizing Ripley as its mother, it licks her face with its long pink tongue. As a mother against her will, Ripley is as far from an indulgent mother as the Newborn is from an endearing baby—and yet their encounter is not without tenderness. Altogether, the film's grotesque presentation of motherhood constitutes a sharp contrast to the idealized imagery: the mother is merely a host that may die after fulfilling its procreative purpose, and even the mother–child relation is a matter of survival of the fittest. At the same time, in the film, motherhood is displayed as strength, an insuperable advantage for Ripley in her battle against evil. Through grotesque ambiguity, altogether, motherhood is liberated from customary idealizations.

The Newborn is a grotesque monster—perhaps even more than an ordinary Alien because closer to humans. Its face is like a human skull devoid of flesh, with deep eye sockets and a nose stump. It is beige by color, and its complexion is leprous, lumpy and slimy. Its mouth and the back of its head, with the posterior extension, resemble those of an ordinary Alien. From its mouth comes out vapor and slime. Even as a neonate,

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it is bigger than a human, and it seems fully developed. The hybrid morphology of the Newborn includes thus features of a lizard-like animal, of a dead human, and, with its flat, hanging breasts, of an old woman. The withered breasts, as a sign of monstrosity, is related to the taboo of the aging reproductive female body, culturally positioned as the epitome of the abject (Ussher 2006). Originally, the Newborn also contained both female and male sex organs, removed during post-production. As an outlaw creature, the Newborn is born of an incestuous feminine union—even though Aliens are less of individual beings, and more of ghostly replicas of the Alien species. Like Ripley, it embodies the age-old fantasy of illegitimate breeding between humans and animals or monsters. At the same time, it may be a reminder of the long tradition of female monstrosity, of woman's historical association with monstrosity and the production of monsters—as closer to nature, more carnal, and thought as capable of copulating with animals (Creed 2005).

As the final resolution of the film, Ripley jumps into the rescue ship at the very last minute, followed by the Newborn, and the ship takes off. To kill the Newborn, Ripley throws a bit of her own corrosive blood to the vessel window, eroding a small hole to it. Unprepared to an attack by its 'loving' mother, the Newborn is blown toward the hole, starting to come apart, roaring in pain, its blood spreading to outer space through the hole. In tears, Ripley silently utters "I'm sorry" (Carroll and Jeunet 1997). Within the oddly sentimental scene—grotesquely concretizing the imminent separation between parent and child—one has compassion for Ripley, the mother who must let her child go, but also for the credulous creature, pictured with a miserable face, as terribly betrayed by its mother. The Newborn is literally turned inside out, its insides bursting outside, as hurled into its nonbeing. Significantly, the creature's blood and dismantled flesh are sucked into outer space through a tiny hole, a lethal vortex—as shown from the outside, resembling a bleeding vagina. Conveying the fantasy of a final reunion with the cosmic whole, the Newborn goes back to where it came from: the archaic mother, retrieving what she once generated. Through the grotesquely cosmic vagina, the creature is sucked back into the black hole of extinction.

Altogether, how does the grotesque function in *Alien: Resurrection*, and what explains its educational potential? As seen in the film, the grotesque concretizes ultimate fears and fantasies, and points to taboos and ideals, embodying the most concealed repressions and morbid desires. In this way, the grotesque functions as a mediator between the Symbolic and

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the Real, between the cultural surface and the collective unconscious. Through abject corporeality, the grotesque also provides an experience of the uncontrollable—and offers an illusion of control through the grotesque monster, more manageable than nonspecific evil or anxiety. The grotesque thus gives a body to the invisible, the unbearable and the unrepresentable. As an unfathomable transition from being into nonbeing, also death is grotesquely materialized through the Newborn's nauseating suction into outer space. With its hyperbolic nature, the grotesque levels the extreme. Expressing cosmic justice, it also provides an ultimate payback—as exemplified by the evil men that get to taste their own medicine, grotesquely served to them by the very object of their exploitation.

As an emerging pedagogical tool, the grotesque not only functions as a revelatory agent but also as a subversive force. The grotesque is able to dismantle ideals by enlightening the Bakhtinian (1984) underside of things—such as the downside of science and technology, or the pernicious side of nature and procreation. On the one hand, the grotesque may instigate taboos, like when consolidating the association between monstrosity and the female reproductive body. On the other hand, the grotesque is able to expose naturalized assumptions, like the idea of deficient female subjectivity. Gender-wise, grotesque female figures may have greater liberty to perform their gender 'wrong', thereby enlarging the sphere of conceivable femininity. Through the hybrid heroines with audience sympathy, the *Alien* film efficiently teaches the valuation of otherness, incompleteness and humanity.

As exemplified by *Alien: Resurrection*, the grotesque performs several operations in representation, satisfying various needs within the viewer. This makes the grotesque highly alluring and consequential. With its excesses, the grotesque expresses instinctual freedom, and materializes extreme emotions. Reconnecting with the archaic layers of the psyche, it gives access to prohibited pleasure and pain, enabling to rejoice in morbid fantasy and to process lack, loss and chaos. In a pleasurable manner, the grotesque exacerbates and turns upside down: reverses power relations, and scavenges society's hidden structures, making visible both the repudiated and the taken-for-granted. By sustaining and dismantling myths and stereotypes, the grotesque rearranges categorical limits, and constantly redraws the lines between what is considered as normal or abnormal, desirable or despicable.

Affecting our stance to normativity and difference, the grotesque also has wider cultural significance. As a versatile meaning-making tool, the

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grotesque can be harnessed to serve different ideologies and educational purposes. Under the guise of fantastic fiction, it may affect people unnoticed, luring the viewer into accepting the embedded ideology. Operating at the level of myth, metaphor and desire, the grotesque may prove insidiously influential. Popular and widespread, the grotesque may ultimately influence people's attitudes and valuations. Like in the *Alien* film, it can make marginalized existence visible and identifiable. In art and visual culture, the grotesque can make a powerful educational impact.

In an era marked by appearances, images and first impressions, media education is needed more than ever. The development of a critical stance toward media representations entails the realization of their constructed nature. The ideologically biased aspects of representations can be revealed by the mechanisms of the grotesque, the manner in which the grotesque produces significations in interaction with norms and repressions. Applied to media education, the study of the grotesque can enhance critical thinking, supporting the ability to discern ideological meanings embedded in images. The study of the grotesque can make media imagery more transparent to us, demonstrating how representations interact with our conscious and unconscious thinking modes, drawing on our fears and fantasies.

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CHAPTER 10

Anatomy of Shock: What Can We Learn from the *Virgin-Whore Church*?

Annamari Vänskä

'I believe that one day an artist will demonstrate how child pornography as a subject can be treated professionally in this country', lamented Asko Mäkelä, director of the Finnish Museum of Photography, in the culture section of *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper on 14 June 2008. Mäkelä was referring to the artwork *Virgin-Whore Church* (2008) by the artist and researcher Ulla Karttunen (see Fig. 10.1), known for showing art in everyday environments, making art from banal materials and for questioning power relations in art and reality (www.ullakarttunen.com). According to the artist, the *Virgin-Whore Church* (2008) criticized the child pornification of mainstream porn. The work contained in Karttunen's exhibition not only falls within a series of large-scale media controversies to hit Finland in recent years, but it also stands out from them. It was not generated by the media but by the art world itself.

As offenses tend to do, the stir caused by Karttunen's installation tore open an established taboo or moral code in society: this time, it was the question of child sexuality and sexual abuse. In other words, an offense is a

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_10

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Fig. 10.1 Ulla Karttunen, *The Virgin-Whore Church* (2008) as displayed in the Kluuvi Gallery. (Photograph: Ulla Karttunen)

guardian of morals. It sheds daylight on the flipside of the prevailing norm and tests the limits of general acceptability. The logic of an offensive art work is based on causing moral confusion, and as such, it contains potential for the redefinition of social and moral codes. In Karttunen's case, however, the offense did not lead to a redefinition but a tightening of moral codes. It also led to legal proceedings being taken against the artist, who was accused of distributing sexually offensive imagery of children.

Although this chapter springs from the sensation caused by Karttunen's *Virgin-Whore Church*, I look at the work more broadly in the context of contemporary art and its history, and in relation to certain other controversial twentieth- and twenty-first-century works of art shown, among others, in various arenas of Karttunen's exhibitor, Helsinki Art Museum. When Karttunen's work is seen in the context of the museum institution's exhibition policy, the reactions it caused start to appear rather excessive. Viewed within the continuum of the history and theory of art, it seems hardly worse than conventional. This is because history proves that the

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disapproval engendered by artworks and judicial sentences given to artists are by no means rare; in fact, they fall squarely within the traditions of contemporary art and twentieth-century-modernist avant-garde, in which shock and excess have played a central role in facilitating dialogue between art and society.

In the case of Karttunen, this factor was completely obscured by the media outcry, the content of the work and the legal proceedings.[1] The debate around the work was distorted, not least because despite everyone having a very firm opinion about the work, hardly anyone actually managed to see it before it was closed down by the museum and confiscated by the police. Unlike what the media commotion and the artist's sentence would lead one to believe, the offense did not lie in the sensitive and illegal content of the artist's work. From the perspective of art, the offensive was the art-historical ignorance or indifference displayed, in particular, by the museum that had chosen the work for its exhibition. I believe the director of the museum, Janne Gallen-Kallela-Sirén, refused to stand up for the work or for the artist. Furthermore, the museum's directorate seemed to unquestioningly accept the interpretation of the police, according to which Karttunen's installation could not be viewed as anything but child pornography. Had the leading lights of the Finnish art world contextualized Karttunen's work within the institution's exhibition policy and the history of Finnish and global contemporary art, and used this to justify the presentation of the work, the outcome of the shocked reactions or the trial ensuing from them might have been different.

Virgin-Whore Church: The Birth of the Shock

The scandal began with the artist-researcher Ulla Karttunen setting up an exhibition titled *Ecstatic Women—the Holy Virgins of the Church and the Porn World* at the Kluuvi Gallery, which was managed by Helsinki Art Museum. The exhibition included an installation named *Virgin-Whore Church*. The supporting documentation for the sentence of the Helsinki District Court (2008b) describes the installation as consisting of a lightweight temporary car shelter made from tent fabric. On the walls and floor of the shelter were pictures printed from web pages featuring young women named on the sites as 'teen babes', 'teen sluts' and 'virgin whores', contrasting inexperience with experience (Karttunen 2008a). In the photographs the police returned to the artist, one can see young women posing as children, with pigtails, dental braces and childish clothes such as

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miniskirts and knee socks, licking ice cream. When these symbols of innocence are juxtaposed with a knowing and seductive direct gaze, heavy makeup and a grown woman's large (enlarged) breasts, together they might be interpreted as creating the figure of the 'teen whore'.

Additionally, the walls of the tent were circled by a vine of thorns made from barbed wire and text written by the artist criticizing the existence and easy availability of the featured imagery. In the text, Karttunen stated for example that even though the imagery was illegal, it could easily be viewed, distributed and printed from the internet without any intervention. The exhibition as a whole included other imagery besides the installation—for example, photographs of 'contemporary Virgins', that is, images of models taken from advertising—but it was entirely ignored in the ensuing debate and the legal proceedings. In other words, it was not considered to be of any significance in relation to *Virgin-Whore Church*, even though within the exhibition it was intended to set a context as to how commercial culture and advertising utilizes the figures of sexualized women and young girls in catering for diverse needs and desires. It was more pertinent to the case that Karttunen had also made and printed 100 copies of a brochure for the installation. The brochure included some of the same images as the installation but also separate images of young girls pictured, for example, having oral sex with a man dressed as Santa Claus who threatens them with a knife. In the brochure's text, Karttunen (2008a) strongly berated the very existence of the imagery in question:

> The work is an installation that excoriates the current values of our culture. The altarpieces of the garage church were taken from online porn sites, which make up today's most heavily consumed cultural product. […] The church and porn are assumed to represent opposite values. And yet they share an almost identical paradox: online porn swears by the myth of the virgin whore, and the church by the virgin mother. […] The work questions the manner in which the sacred concepts of market economy, technology, freedom of expression and tolerance are used to justify the world being turned into an open human meat market. Childhood has been commercialized and means nothing more than fresh fodder for the profit-maker's economic prosperity.

From the artist's point of view, the offense lay not only in the fact that the imagery in question existed and was freely available for download in the first place; what was also shocking was that while our culture denounces child abuse, it also makes enormous financial gains from women and

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girls. This was the conflict that Karttunen wanted to bring to public attention, debate and moral judgment. The artist's aim was to assume a moral-ethical stance on child pornography and its adjacent phenomena before the public, and to convince the public to share this stance. In her view, the installation was a denunciation of child porn, in the form of a conceptual and political work of art. Its aim was to raise awareness in viewers and educate them in media literacy.

According to information from the media and to the District Court's documentation, the chain of events following the exhibition's opening was as follows. On the morning after the opening event, one of the exhibition's guests, named as a 'jewellery artist from Helsinki', made a disapproving phone call to the information officer of Helsinki City Museum concerning the imagery displayed in the exhibition. When the director of the museum Gallen-Kallela-Sirén was made aware of the guest's message, he made no effort to defend the artwork or its place as a welcome opener of debate, which was what the artist had intended. The director, who had not seen the artwork prior to its denunciation, did not find out more about it by discussing its content with the artist, as one might have expected. Instead, he convoked the directorate of the museum, which decided to close off access to the work until it had formed a better understanding of the material therein (see Fig. 10.2). The board of directors considered the work to be 'highly violent' and to contain 'outrageous child pornography', which was in line with the artist's views. The directors did not, however, appreciate the artist's motives in displaying the imagery or take into account the nature of contemporary art as a sometimes polemical and excessive conversation opener. Instead, they interpreted the work out of its artistic context and deemed it *as* child pornography, rather than as its *representation* or *commentary* (Jyränki and Kalha 2009, p. 39). In this way, I believe the museum lost an opportunity to carry out dialogue and debate: it lost its educational opportunity.

This opportunity would have possibly been missed in any case: the jeweler who had called the museum had also complained about the artwork to the police, who immediately arrived at the gallery to check the situation, having being told that 'the Kluuvi Gallery was displaying child pornography' (Helsinki District Court 2008b). Based on the jeweler's interpretation, the police—who understandably do not stand for art criticism but for law enforcement—considered a large part of the imagery to possibly fulfill the definition of child pornography as given in the Criminal Code of Finland (CC 17:19):

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Fig. 10.2 Museum directory uninstalling the work *The Virgin-Whore Church* (2008). (Photograph: Ulla Karttunen)

> A person who unlawfully has in his or her possession a picture or visual recording which depicts a child in [a] sexually offensive manner. . . . shall be sentenced for possession of a sexually offensive picture depicting a child to a fine or to imprisonment for at most one year.

The ending of the scandal is widely known to Finns, thanks to media coverage. The artwork condemning child pornography was paradoxically judged to comprise child pornography in itself, and the artist, who saw herself as a denouncer, was denounced and convicted for possession and distribution of child porn.[2] The work did not engender the public debate that the artist had intended but led instead to a preliminary investigation, a search of the artist's home, confiscation of the artist's computer and the sentencing of the artist in the Helsinki District Court (2008b). This was the offense that was covered by the media, filling the main news broadcast on Finnish TV, radio programs and newspapers, including *Helsingin*

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Sanomat, *Turun Sanomat* and *Uusi Suomi*, with debates as to whether *Virgin-Whore Church* fulfilled the criteria of child pornography or not.

The media began processing the case after the artwork had been confiscated by police. In just under a month there were more than 30 articles on the subject in Finnish newspapers alone. Additionally, Karttunen appeared on television and radio, and researchers thrashed out the subject in various discussion programs. The cultural journals *Taide* and *mustekala.info* also took part in the debate, as did the general public, in various ways and on diverse online forums (e.g. Jyränki and Kalha 2009, pp. 111–152). Many art experts discussed the event neutrally, displaying some understanding for the artist. Among others, the highly esteemed Finnish art critics Marja-Terttu Kivirinta from the leading daily paper *Helsingin Sanomat* and Otso Kantokorpi from the online newspaper *Uusi Suomi* were able to distinguish between child porn criticism and child porn itself. Immediately after the confiscation of the artwork, on 15 February 2008, Kantokorpi wrote[3]:

> Naturally, what makes the issue problematic is the fact that Karttunen's work is clearly critical of society and takes a stand against child porn. So, what is an artist allowed to display if she is to criticize the phenomenon? This case may set a highly significant precedent.

In spite of this statement, the second part of the scandal ended on 14 March 2008, with the decision of the police, based on the complaint received, to charge the artist with possession and distribution of sexually offensive imagery (Helsinki District Court 2008a). After being questioned by the police and having 50 'less offensive' images returned to the exhibition, Karttunen described the case in *Uusi Suomi* (2008b):

> For me the real crime is that children can in the first place be forced to appear in these images, whether they are 'more' or 'less' offensive. In other words, using the images is not the crime; creating and printing them is. In today's world it shouldn't be impossible to trace the authors of images, but no one does anything about that; instead they arrest me, who am overtly denouncing this material and using it to draw attention to a silenced phenomenon.

Karttunen considered her conviction to prove her point. Meanwhile another problem raised by the conviction, from the perspective of art in particular, was related to the possibilities for socially critical art. After the charges were read, newspapers and discussion forum users wondered

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whether the police are really equipped to act as art critics. Viewed in relation to modernist art history, the answer is yes. Recent contemporary art history indisputably shows that artworks and artists have all the better chances of ending up on the pages of history books, the greater a stir that is caused. A controversy and an ensuing court case are often a springboard to stardom: the scandal becomes a part of the production line for canonical art, and of the process of writing the history of meaningful art.

Modernist Avant-Garde and the Ethos of Shock Art

Historical avant-garde (Bürger 1974), and later art movements that have utilized the element of shock, as well as new genre public art (Lacy 1995) provide historical context for *Virgin-Whore Church*. The German literary critic Peter Bürger (1974) writes in his Marxism-inspired art theory that the place of art in bourgeois society is complex. The creation and discussion on art must take the surrounding society into account—that is, the ideological environment within which the art was produced, distributed and received plays a major role. Art must not be seen solely as an aesthetic object. This leads to the idea that art is not an image or copy of reality, but a reaction to defects in society. According to Bürger, the basic task of modern avant-garde is to refurnish art with its critical potential.

Bürger's diagnosis identifies the problem as the fact that in capitalist culture, efforts are always made to neutralize the possible political content of art, in order to turn it into a sellable commodity and an advertisement for the prevailing ideology. As the culmination of such development, he cites late-nineteenth-century aestheticism, that is, the 'art for art's sake' movement, in which art retreated completely into its own bubble and lost its social relevance. As a remedy, the theorist recommended the avant-gardist movements of the early twentieth century that represented what he called 'historical avant-garde', meaning Dadaism, surrealism and Russian constructivism, which strove to reinstate the lost social and socio-critical significance of art. The historical avant-garde did this by producing shock effects with the aim of criticizing age-old, outdated ways of thinking and opposing the dominant zeitgeist. Another German philosopher of art, Theodor Adorno (1970/1986), also emphasized the healing effect of shock; when viewers are confounded by what they see, they are able to view reality from new angles, which gives them potential to change the

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predominating order. In this way, he thought, art has the ability to remove unwanted refuse from society and from art itself.[4]

Later on, in the 1990s, the visual artist, writer and activist Susan Lacy took the ideas of art and engagement further (Lacy 1995). She coined a new concept, 'new genre public art', which she explains to be a new form of artistic engagement with the audience. Although Lacy explains that the new genre public art often happens outside the confines of art institutions, it is also a term that has social or political relevance. Lacy identifies different types of artists: artist as experiencer, artist as reporter, artist as analyst and artist as activist (Lacy 1995, pp. 174–176). Of these, Karttunen worked just like Lacy's 'artist as reporter': 'In the role of reporter, the artist focuses not simply on the experience but on the recounting of the situation; *that is, the artist gathers information to make it available to others.* She calls our attention to something' (Lacy 1995, p. 175. Emphasis added).

If Karttunen's work is seen as being influenced by ideas of the so-called historical avant-garde and new genre public art, it can be understood as a textbook example of politically engaged shock art. Karttunen specifically reported or represented information, the society's 'unwanted refuse' in a public space, the city art gallery, without altering it in any way. She made people look at an aspect of the world: the shocking reality of child porn, with the aim of eliciting a reaction and activating the public to change the situation. The public—at least one of the guests at the opening—was certainly shocked by Karttunen's report. The problem was that the public did not respond according to the formula for shock art. Instead of using the work as a springboard for a fervent attack against child porn, they directed their resentment toward the artist. Does that mean that *Virgin-Whore Church* failed as a work of shock art? Or is it that the shock caused by the work's content was so violent that the public would rather close their eyes? The latter was at least the view adopted by Ulla Karttunen herself, writing in *Helsingin Sanomat* (4 March 2008b):

> If the news is distasteful, it's better to denounce the messenger as a criminal. This maintains the peace and quiet, and model citizens can go on doing nothing about the problem itself.

In her statement, Karttunen clearly sees her role as that of the reporter. It also seems that she succeeded as a reporter: her message was heard. However, as a piece of shock art, it failed. The audience did not react to

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the work in the textbook manner. In the end, the shock turned against the artist, and all that was needed was one visitor's reaction and complaint. When the museum did not stand up for the artist, the end result was that the work fell out of the sphere of art and into the chilling reality of child porn, and the artist-researcher became a porn distributor instead of a reporter of it. In this case, the worst-case scenario for the risks of using the shock effect was fulfilled. Having recovered from the upset, the public did not start to wonder what it could do to fight against child porn. It was, and remained, merely upset.[5]

Shock-Infused International Contemporary Art

Karttunen's work falls within the history of Helsinki Art Museum exhibiting international shock art and within a set of international artworks slated for child pornography, such as the Australian 'Bill Henson scandal' which also took place in 2008 (Angelides 2011, pp. 101–125). Although the controversy around Ulla Karttunen's installation was the first offense related to representations of childhood in Finland, it was by no means unique on a global scale (Smith 2004, pp. 5–16; Meyer 2003, pp. 131–148; Taylor et al. 2002). Within the Finnish art context, it could also have been interpreted differently. The exhibiting venue, the Kluuvi Gallery, has been known as an arena for experimental, non-commercial and progressive Finnish artists within the museum's exhibiting operations and art pedagogue.

Until Karttunen, it had been possible to show art there that tested various limits and boundaries. In comparison, the museum's main arena, the Tennis Palace, has focused on showing fine art that is internationally well established. Particular attention should be paid to the museum's exhibition profile: The Tennis Palace has distinguished itself in putting on exhibitions that have caused great sensations abroad. This may have gone unnoticed by the Finnish art audience, because by the time an exhibition reaches Finland, the scandals have long faded and the public is offered art whose aura is simply brightened by the echo of its bygone notoriety.

The museum has, for example, shown such American artists as Andres Serrano (2001), Bettina Rheims (2004), Jeff Koons (2005) and Sally Mann (2008)—the last of these during the period of the director Janne Gallen-Kallela-Sirén. Serrano's star came into the ascendant in New York on 18 May 1989, when a politico-religious performance was carried out around him. The protagonists were senators Alfonse D'Amato and Jesse

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Helms, who represented the far right and claimed to defend morals and religion, the artist himself and his photograph *Piss Christ* (1989), seen to symbolize depravity and moral decay, and the media, which took possession of the event and brewed it into a public scandal. Senator D'Amato severely recriminated Serrano after seeing the photograph (which was also shown in Finland in 2001), while Helms declaimed that taxpayers' money should not be used to fund such 'obscene and indecent' art. The photograph which so offended against American morals features a miniature crucifix made of wood and plastic that glows with divine light.

As a work of art, the photograph is by no means shocking. What caused the stir was the technique by which the divine or dreamlike glow in the picture was achieved: by submerging the crucifix in a container filled with the artist's urine and shining a light through it. More than the photograph itself, it was the combined meaning of the image and its title that caused the late-1980s' uproar: the information hidden in the title concerning the origin of the divine glow. Having the resurrected Christ, a symbol of purity and innocence, associated via an obscene title with human waste was too much for those who saw themselves as guardians of morality of the day. But, like many scandalous art works, the *Piss Christ* (1989) made Serrano a world-class artist, as proven by the blurb for Helsinki Art Museum's later exhibition (http://taidemuseo.hel.fi/english/tennispalatsi/programme/serrano.html):

> In the 1980s and 1990s, very few photographers caused as much dispute as Serrano, and his photographic comments on racism, freedom of speech and the limits of artistic freedom have caused strong reactions everywhere.

The museum contextualized the exhibition by placing it in a series of politically charged contemporary art exhibitions, in which the theme of sexuality was analyzed from different perspectives by many major twentieth-century photographers. What was particularly interesting in the Serrano case was that the exhibition was marketed, even before its arrival, as a sensational event involving contentious subjects. The tabloids tried to stir up controversy, with *Ilta-Sanomat* newspaper, for example, publishing an article titled 'Andres Serrano's Controversial Piss-Christ Arrives in Helsinki—Will Finns, Too, Be Upset by the Sensationalist Artwork?' (Lappalainen 2001, pp. 38–39). I was one of the experts consulted by journalists concerning the provocativeness of the work and the exhibition (ibid., 39). Like the Finnish art audience, I failed to be shocked by Serrano's *Piss Christ*; rather,

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we agreed with the exhibition's curator Malin Barth and the director of Helsinki Art Museum, Tuula Karjalainen, who said that 'Andres Serrano's work is perfectly beautiful and Catholic' (ibid., p. 38).

A second example of the museum's exhibition policy is Jeff Koons, whose retrospective was seen at the Tennis Palace in Helsinki between January and April 2005. Koons caused a stir, and rose to worldwide fame, with his artwork series *Made in Heaven* (1992). In the photographs of the series, Koons poses with his then wife, the porn star and Member of Parliament, Ilona Staller in highly explicit poses borrowed from the world of pornography, amid an artificial, studio-constructed Garden of Eden. Although Koons has linked the works to Biblical paradise imagery and called the figures 'the Adam and Eve of the contemporary media age', rhetorically linking the works to Eden and to the purity and innocence of paradisiacal love, and attempting to erase any sleazy connotations from the imagery, audiences have without exception raised questions of whether they constitute art or pornography. In the pictures, Koons appears nude—innocent?—whereas Staller wears visible makeup, white lace underwear and high heels, which give her a somewhat more depraved look, despite the clothes being white and having a signature wreath of flowers in her hair.

What is relevant in relation to the Karttunen case is that, in spite of this, Koons's work has invariably been defended as art by the art world, and he has been praised for turning the everyday into art (Suvioja 2005; Wiklund 2005), for glorifying the banal (Saari 2005, p. 14), for casting an ironic eye on consumer culture, for presenting porn-inspired compositions in a romantic and warm light (Hyvärinen 2005, p. 12) and so on. According to the amanuensis of the Helsinki Art Museum Erja Pusa (2005, p. 14), Koons has explained that for him, the *Made in Heaven* series is not porn, because the sex in it is sanctified by love, and that his aim is to free people from the guilt-ridden shame associated with their bodies.

Similar views have been expressed by the art experts and renowned curators who support Koons and who have worked hard to forge links between his work and the canon of the masculine Old and New Masters: Gustave Courbet, Édouard Manet, Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol (Ueland 2004, p. 142). Besides these, Koons's sources of inspiration have been cited as the Baroque and Rococo periods, the paintings of Jean-Honoré Fragonard and François Boucher, Masaccio's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (ibid., p. 143) and the works of Roy Lichtenstein, Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo (Koons et al. 2004, p. 75). All this talk surrounding the artworks has

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turned them into pure high art, although the effect could have been the opposite—after all, conservatives and Christians accused Koons of disseminating pornography.

The third American artist I want to draw attention to in this context is Sally Mann, whose work was shown at the Tennis Palace just before Karttunen's. In terms of exhibition tactics, showing Mann and Karttunen almost simultaneously in different arenas of the same museum was a stroke of genius: they both invited discussions on the eroticization of the figure of a child. Sally Mann has built her career on the fame achieved from photographs she took of her own children between 1984 and 1995 (Higonnet 2006, p. 401). The pictures, described as 'disturbing', received a lot of publicity and sold well. Like those of Serrano and Koons, Mann's career is constructed upon controversy and the negative reactions caused by her works. As in Karttunen's case, the controversy around Mann is related to the question of child abuse. The accusation against Mann is that because her photographs are sexual and violent in content, they constitute abuse of their subjects—and even engender child abuse by fostering an atmosphere of acceptance of it (ibid., p. 409). As a mother, therefore, Mann was seen to crudely sacrifice her children at the altar of art.

In Mann's photographs, her children, often naked and bruised, stare knowingly into the camera. Although the children's rude poses are at odds with the modern, middle-class ideal of childhood innocence, the pictures are not ugly. On the contrary, the subjects are presented as beautiful. This conflict of content and form has riled a lot of people. It has been suggested, for example, that Mann aestheticizes child abuse and seduces the viewer to become immersed in the fantasy of aestheticized childhood. Like Robert Mapplethorpe, Mann has been accused of promoting child pornography (Higonnet 1998, pp. 182–185; Kleinhans 2004, pp. 21–22; Stanley 1991, pp. 20–27), and she has been considered as 'dangerous' an artist as Mapplethorpe, Serrano or Jock Sturges.[6]

The crucial issue about Sally Mann in this context is that she, too, was once accused of distributing pornifying images of children and of child abuse. This had been forgotten by the time of the exhibition in Helsinki, except for one complaint being made to the police that the exhibition disseminated child pornography. Interestingly, the same museum director who accused Karttunen of presenting child pornography stated in Mann's case that the museum would take no action against her because Mann's works were 'art' (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 2009). Although the question of whether the photographs constituted art at all was raised in relation to

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Mann, she was defended by invoking the history of photography and studies of children by photographers such as Lewis Carroll, Margaret Cameron and Edward Weston—also cited as justifications for the museum not taking action.[7]

Mann was also protected by her gender and relationship to the children: because she was a woman and her subjects' mother, she was not considered capable of exposing them to pornification. The situation was different for her contemporaries, Sturges and Mapplethorpe, whose relationships with children and gender—and, in Mapplethorpe's case, his open homosexuality—led to accusations of pedophilia, even though their photographs hardly differ in style from Mann's images of children and adolescents (Meyer 2003, pp. 131–148).[8] In contrast, in the case of Ulla Karttunen, no one brought up her gender in her defense, despite the fact that the history of mainstream feminism is specifically linked to vehement repudiation of pornographic imagery (Cornell 2000, pp. 19–168).

Feminists Against the 'Male Gaze' and 'Pornographication of the Mainstream'

Feminist art history has written extensively on how women and girls are subjected to the 'male gaze' (Mulvey 1975/1989, pp. 14–26) as muted objects of male desire. This theoretical tradition has made a point about the long history of art as the repository of (visual) violence against women: art as a sign of a cultural construct that objectifies the bodies of women and girls as images but denies them social agency. Many artists, including Carolee Schneemann, Shigeko Kubota and Annie Sprinkle, have challenged the 'male gaze' and aimed to reclaim women's sexual agency through their work. This is also a strategy which could be seen to have fueled Ulla Karttunen's installation. As a feminist intervention, *Virgin-Whore Church* can be interpreted as an instance of 'oppositional gaze': a gaze that politicizes the premise of seeing (hooks 1999, pp. 307–319). The aim of the oppositional gaze is to challenge and unravel the norms and power relations of the cultural gaze that positions the bodies of women and girls as objects, which is ingrained in the discourses of art, science, popular culture and pornography (Lippard 1976/1995, pp. 99–113; Forte 1988, pp. 217–235; Nead 1992).

This perspective creates an interpretation in which the installation is seen to expose how women and, in this particular case, little girls are

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framed through the patriarchal Master/Playboy culture, despite decades of feminist resistance. Reading the work in this context suggests that Karttunen is a classical feminist artist with an aim to educate the public and to raise awareness through shock and feminist guerrilla-tactics by constructing a garage filled with in-your-face wanking material. The clue of the gesture is an intervention in subordinating power structures that not only subordinate girls from early on in life but also position boys and men as those who abuse girls and women. The work seemed to suggest that despite advances in gender equality, there are still many areas where patriarchy is still true today.

At the same time, the artist's method of bringing real porn, downloaded from the internet, into the gallery was also reminiscent of the technique created by the anarchist philosopher Guy Debord and his Situationist International (Debord 1967/1994; Pyhtilä 2005). They challenged the idea of consumer culture and gave advice on how to criticize everyday life, which had, already in Debord's lifetime, become defined through commodities and their advertising. Debord argued that relationships between people had commodified, and that advertising had become the 'glue' that holds different groups together. He also warned that the use of shock effects is not without problems; that they might be easily 'recuperated' by those against who the shock was intended.

Nevertheless, the *Virgin-Whore Church* followed the situationist tactic by suggesting that the little girl has become the ultimate commodity in contemporary culture, and that porn and pornified advertisements are the 'glue' that holds the pedophilic culture together. Paradoxically, the reactions elicited by Karttunen's installation suggested 'recuperation of meaning' (Vaneigem 1967/2012), or the impossibility of critical discourse: the work and the aimed debate turned against Karttunen, to serve those institutions and structures of power that the installation had tried to challenge and call into question. The case thus also shows how difficult these kinds of interventions are, how difficult it actually is to challenge the structural (and actual) violence that feeds on objectifying women and girls in contemporary market-driven economy.

Finally, the installation can also be seen as an instance of that discussion that has circled around the idea of 'pornographication of the mainstream' as described by the media studies scholar Brian McNair in his book *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratization of Desire* (2002). According to McNair (2002, p. 61), the Western culture has slowly but firmly become increasingly pluralistic and accepting in terms of sexuality

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which has blurred the categorical boundaries between pornography and other forms of visual culture, especially those between art and pornography, fashion and pornography and advertising and pornography. The concept of 'pornographication of the mainstream' thus refers to a process that has pushed toward more explicit representation of sex and sexuality and that has been fueled by commercialization. Paradoxically, it is also a concept that has been shaped by social movements: sexual liberation of women and sexual minorities. McNair's main argument is that since the Second World War, the West has moved toward what he calls a 'striptease culture', that is, a culture in which the everyday life has been 'sexualized'. This in turn means that sex has not only become more accepted or commodified, but that it has also become a tool for something else: a means to gain visibility, fame and prestige.

Thinking about the *Virgin-Whore Church* from the perspective provided by McNair and Karttunen's own explanations, it is evident that one of her aims was also to take issue with the so-called pornographication of the mainstream. After Karttunen, this tendency has even increased with the launch of different social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, the logic of which largely rests on visual representations and posing. These platforms are filled with images, both still and moving, that link sexual allure, self-branding and -promotion seamlessly together which transforms the installation almost into an omen. The artist's gesture, reporting indecent images, also becomes an uncanny precedent of what is happening now on a regular basis on platforms that are based on uploading and sharing photographs and videos to 'friends' and 'followers'. These platforms also have rules that regulate the types of images that can be posted online as well as user guidelines giving advice on disclosing images if they are violent, discriminatory, unlawful, infringing, hateful, pornographic or sexually suggestive. 'Disclosing images'—an expression also used by Karttunen—has become a normal act in contemporary culture saturated by images. This begs the question whether the installation was ahead of its time and was therefore not understood as an act of disclosure.

Be as it may, interpretations of what constitutes a 'harmful image' have become the subject of continuous debate in the social media, for example. Now, there is even a new genre of activist art on images that the Instagram has censored (Bystrom and Soda 2017). Things have progressed since Karttunen's piece. Now the social media platforms are filled with hashtags that aim to disclose images or people that have abused women or young girls.[9] This may be pure speculation but had Karttunen

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made her installation in the latter part of the 2010s, it would most likely also have been understood as an activist 'hashtag art piece'. It would most likely have engendered a campaign aimed at exposing those who treat young girls as piece of meat.

Conclusions

What can we learn from the controversy around the *Virgin-Whore Church*? Apart from proving that in today's culture, childhood is a public spectacle, it also shows the increasing role of the law as critic. The work also marks a shift in time that has happened with the emergence of social media. Nowadays an artist can be an initiator or a facilitator of a chain of events in exposing social ills. The rules once coined by the avant-gardists and applied by their historical followers such as Ulla Karttunen may just have become useful for the first time with the possibilities offered by social media. It remains to be seen how artists will use these possibilities—like it also remains to be seen whether and what kind of responses this may engender in those who would rather see that nothing changes.

Acknowledgment My thanks to the researcher and artist Ulla Karttunen for the loan of the images and for Eva Malkki for the translation.

Notes

1. The court case related to Karttunen's artwork has been extensively examined by Juulia Jyränki and Harri Kalha (2009). In this chapter, I will not cover the legal process concerning the scandal, focusing instead on the installation from an art-historical perspective.
2. Jyränki and Kalha (2009, pp. 181–182) point out that the court documentation shows that the judge examined the artwork by herself in order to determine whether it constituted child porn or not. The authors do not consider it self-evident that a judge should be better equipped to assess the content of the work than an art researcher. The judge's assessment has much more serious consequences than that of an art expert, however: whereas the latter's views remain at the level of personal opinion, the former has the power to pass sentence in the form of a fine or imprisonment.
3. All newspaper citations have been translated from Finnish to English by Eva Malkki.
4. There are many interpretations of avant-garde art and theory (cf. e.g. Hautamäki 2003; Sederholm 1994; Siivonen 1992). Irmeli Hautamäki

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(ibid.) approaches both Bürger's theory and those who reference it critically. In her view, the main problem is that Bürger claims that the avant-garde strives to entirely dismantle art as an institution and to fuse art with life. I do not want to quibble as to what Bürger may actually have said or meant; I am more interested in how his theory has been elaborated upon by others.

5. On the other hand, one might ask whether the shock could have been mitigated if the work had been left on display and the public had been given the opportunity to familiarize themselves with it and with the phenomenon behind it.
6. In his article 'Art and "Perversion": Censoring Images of Nude Children' (1991, pp. 20–27), Lawrence A. Stanley writes about cases where the American police had raided artists' studios and ordinary people's homes on grounds of their having pictures of naked children developed. According to Stanley, the war against child porn has led, in both the United States and Europe, to the law sexualising even nudity in children, although its ultimate objective has been to protect children from sexual abuse.
7. In his book *Darwin's Camera* (2009), Philip Prodger suggests that in the nineteenth century Lewis Carroll and Julia Margaret Cameron, in particular, influenced how childhood was portrayed in scientific pictures. This was based on the idea of the authenticity of the camera. From the perspective of cultural research, this sounds fairly questionable but in science—brain research, for example—there is still strong faith in the ability of imaging technologies to accurately depict reality. The same applies to child porn images, which are believed to represent genuine situations.
8. Robert Mapplethorpe was branded a pervert and pedophile based on photographs that featured Jesse McBride and Rosie (1976), who were children of friends of his. In Mapplethorpe's case, the accusation was principally derived from some of his other photographs, in which he pictured himself and his friends in sadomasochistic garb. In other words, it was Mapplethorpe's homosexuality that made him a pedophile in people's minds. Naturally, this is highly unjust, especially when advertising imagery, for example, is freely allowed to utilize the eroticized figure of the child (cf. Mohr 2004, pp. 17–30; Vänskä 2017). There are exceptions, however: in 1995, Calvin Klein was forced to withdraw an advertising campaign in which models who were made up to look underaged appeared as victims of sexual abuse (cf. Tucker 1998, pp. 141–157; Kleinhans 2004, pp. 18–19; Vänskä 2017, pp. 111–130).
9. One such campaign is the #MeToo which was started in October 2017 by the actress Alyssa Milano's tweet in which she called for women to share publicly their experiences of sexual harassment and assault (Slawson 2017). Since then, the campaign has become one of the most effective and globally dispersed campaigns, and it has exposed structures of patriarchal power abuse in a similar way Ulla Karttunen also aimed to do.

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Legislation

Criminal Code of Finland (CC) (19/12/1889).

Legal Documentation

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CHAPTER 11

Sending Chills Up My Spine: Somatic Film and the Care of the Self

Max Ryynänen

My whole body became blurred following the extreme violence of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986). My feet felt itchy while I watched Ethan Hunt (played by Tom Cruise) climb the walls of the Burj Khalifa skyscraper in *Mission: Impossible—Ghost Protocol* (2011). It is not that an art house classic like Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*, 1957) would not somehow *touch* me. On the contrary, the emotional anxiety produced by *Wild Strawberries*, where an old academic, recalling his past during a long car ride through Sweden, regrets the mistakes of his life and faces growing senescence, has always made me feel physically uncomfortable.

Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 and *Mission: Impossible—Ghost Protocol* exemplify the way many feature films built on *immediate* somatic stimulation. In *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, the chainsaw-wielding maniac Leatherface raised, together with his dreadful, violent clan, barely controlled, but still manageable, fears and disgust in me. When Ethan Hunt climbed the Burj Khalifa in *Mission: Impossible—Ghost Protocol*, it led to

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7_11

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stimuli in the soles of my feet, but I also felt my muscles getting tense during many other moments during the film, especially when narrative tension went hand in hand with acrobatic action.

Immediate somatic stimulation is commonplace in contemporary film. Both *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* and *Mission: Impossible—Ghost Protocol* would be an easy target for the classical mass culture critics who viewed entertainment products as companions for (what has traditionally been called) passive consumption (see e.g. Rosenberg and White 1957, 1971). It does not require much intellect to sit down on the couch and watch them. Both films, however, make the body active through their somatic stimulation and you could say that, when watching them, you become an active somatic viewer. The excessive stimulation these films offered also provided me with a possibility to reflect on my own boundaries and ways of being in my body. I believe the success of effect-driven films is based upon the fact that people enjoy being shaken up. I also think that, when watching them, you often consciously go for active body time. No doubt, when we watch physically stimulating films, we also reflect on our bodies while watching them.

In this chapter, I sketch out my idea of *somatic film*, that is, film for which the immediate stimulation of the body is essential. The first part, Somatic Reactions, Somatic Interpretations, is my attempt to shed light on the way bodily reactions are produced by films. I also make remarks about the role of somatic film in the history of film and film discourse I talk about *suspense-based somatic film* and *shock-based somatic film*, the former basing its stimulation more on narrative suspense and the latter on filmic tricks, which immediately stimulate the body. In part two, Somatic Education, I discuss the learning processes that are at stake when we watch films with our bodies, and connect them to Stoic practices, where searching for one's own boundaries was a key for understanding the self. The Greek and Roman Stoic philosophers already gave us a preliminary framework for discussing learning from filmic (somatic) excess. My idea is that we can think that watching somatically stimulating movies could also be one form of the care of the self as proposed by the Stoics, and later discussed by contemporary thinkers like Michel Foucault. Do we watch films to understand ourselves and to learn from our bodies? I am convinced that we do at least sometimes. And this is what I aspire to raise awareness about in this chapter.

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Somatic Reactions, Somatic Interpretations

In his article "Musical Frisson" (2000), Jerrold Levinson uses a term with French origin, "frisson", to refer to some bodily reactions which occur while we listen to music. Frisson could be translated into 'chills' and in Levinson's work we are talking about chills produced by cultural products.[1] One of the directions that the article takes is that it asks what the role and meaning of these somatic experiences are, as we have not traditionally been viewing them as central for music.

Most of us have experienced in our aesthetic encounters waves of pleasure on the skin and we have felt the skin hair rise more than once while listening to music or while watching a film. Some people, Levinson says, call this a "skin orgasm" (Levinson 2000, p. 65). It is quite the same mechanisms that raise our skin hair and send chills up our spine. Examples of key works that cause this sensation, if we look at mainstream Western music (which Levinson focuses on), are the opening sequences of Brahms' *String Quintet in G op. 111* and Pink Floyd's album *Final Cut* (Levinson 2000, pp. 67–69). One can easily track the phenomenon in other musical traditions too. My spine and skin become stimulated when I listen to some forms of Carnatic (i.e. South Indian) music, for example, T.M. Krishna's work, where hypnotic rhythms become intertwined with extended, high-pitched tones. Likewise, my spine gets easily massaged by the uncanny fibrillation of the biwa (Japanese lute).

When I think about the biwa, I end up reflecting on my film experiences. This classical Japanese instrument appears in many Japanese ghost and samurai movies, in moments where the filmmaker(s) intends to raise the intensity. My favorite film in this sense is Masaki Kobayashi's *Kwaidan* (1965), where Toru Takemitsu's music uses the biwa quite well to increase the tension when one should fear ghosts. In the music for a section on the Dan No Ura, a historical battle that took place in 1185 between the Minamoto and the Taira clans (the origin of many ghosts in the film) the biwa pinches me, producing both pleasure and awkwardness, and a chill that lands quite in the middle of my spine. Music and image often work hand in hand in film. Hysterical high-pitched music and low frightening sounds are methods which, together with a well-selected image (a hand with a knife approaching), help to activate the body. I have myself tested this by watching horror films without sound. At least sometimes this results in quite a shallow experience.

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Watching horror films is definitely one of the moments in life when we are ready to become stimulated somatically, although we might not think about it in everyday life. At the same time, it is understandable that if you want to keep a film intellectual and rewarding for focused contemplation, it might be wise to not stimulate the body of the viewer too much, as it easily distracts reflection, and puts an emphasis on the body (this might be the reason why the most somatic films are lowbrow or mainstream, not often art house productions). It is a well-known fact that our bodies can be stimulated through the narrative, the discourse in the film, and the beauty (or rudeness) of the footage (stimulating disgust). Narrative suspension can, at its peak, make my stomach muscles tense. Rude discourse can make a viewer blush. And the beauty of the footage can make us feel sensual. Our bodies can also be moved following only words, as many of us know from poetry, which can make the heartbeat and warm the chest. Romantic dialogs (even without any visible sensuality) and Chaplin's deeply humanist speech at the end of *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin 1940) 'touch' us (the metaphor here is not a coincidence) and raise the response. Artists throughout the ages have not been focusing just on our intellect. They have stimulated our bodies as much as gurus and tricksters, who work hard to take our breath away and raise dread. Hypnotic drumming has overshadowed attentive listening and called for dance. Sometimes sculptors have not worked on eloquence, but on sheer mass that, when well-formed, accentuate the presence and feel of the material.

Still, film has brought new sides to somatic stimulation in the arts. Vivian Sobchack writes in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004), especially in chapter 3, "What My Fingers Knew", about the way films, like Jane Campion's *Piano* (1999), raise tactile reactions and bodily responses. The way the fingers of the protagonist's fingers are shown all through the movie (she plays the piano) and the way they are cut at one point, really is something felt in the fingers of (probably most) viewers (Sobchack 2004, pp. 53–84). It is interesting, though, that Sobchack, who otherwise boldly focuses on the body of the film viewer, cannot break ties with highbrow film. I think action, horror, and other genres of lowbrow or mainstream film are much more affecting the body than the films that the traditional critics appreciate.

There are films where we really do go through a 'workout', as they are so somatically intense to watch. Some are designed for vertigo in movie theaters, like *Spider-Man 3* (Raimi 2007), where one swings through the city high up and at speed together with the protagonist. Some work on

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any screen, like *The Perfect Storm* (Petersen 2000), where one is forced to gaze through a thread of footage with cut frames and frantic editing on huge water masses and a group of fishermen trying to survive—all adding to the feeling of panic and increasing the adrenaline levels. Without overthrowing old film concepts, genres, and categories, I would like to introduce the neologism 'somatic film' here, and the 'somatic interpretation' that we make on films with our bodies. It can be about the itching we feel in our soles when Harold Lloyd, in *Safety Last* (1923), hangs from the pointer of "the 12-story Bolton building" (in real life the 10-story International Savings Building in L.A.), or when our bodies perform a sudden-shock reaction when Jack's (played by Jack Nicholson) ax hits the door (we are posited with the victims on the other side of it) in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980). The two examples, from very different decades, give us a hint of the length of the tradition at hand.

We live through many films more with our bodies than with our 'intellect', not to aspire to add any weight on the classical Middle Eastern and Central/Southern European accent on the division of mind and body, but just to recognize that sometimes the stress is in the body more than in discursive thinking. The success of effect-driven films must at least partly be based on the way people enjoy being shaken up or forced to touch their limits. Discussing somatic film could be one new way of conveying how we sometimes are active even if we do not concentrate on something intellectually. Sometimes couch potatoes are just cynical projections by intellectuals and hierarchy-driven elitists.

The way the stress on intellectual reflection takes over is, of course, an already overly well-known story. The system of art, is a quite recent (mid-eighteenth century) formation binding together the aesthetic cultures that upper class Central European males in early modern times considered to reward autonomy and support (Kristeller 1994; Tatarkiewicz 1980). It continued on the path that John Dewey (1980, Chapter 7) traced back to the Greeks, the 'people' whose written thinking reflected the world view of the non-working upper class, which, as it did not have to have its souls "twisted following physical work", as Aristotle puts it (Aristotle 1999, Book 8: 1342A), debased physical activity. Of course, it is plausible to think that there might be some roots for this deep in the Middle Eastern religions too, where the body was often more of a locus of problems than anything else.

There have also been exceptions to the case, and some of them are connected to film. In Gilbert Seldes' *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924), the author,

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who thought it would be good to produce an institutional framework for popular culture, which could then offer an alternative to the system of 'art', proclaimed the need to support slapstick film, against the emerging trend to make films increasingly like bourgeois theater plays (Seldes 1924, pp. 310–312). Seldes thought that film was original as an aesthetic culture, and among other features like its speed, its physical slapstick nature was endangered with its development to become more highbrow. For Seldes, the stupidest thing was turning films into copies of bourgeois plays (e.g. Tolstoy filmatizations represented this development).

Seldes is not the only one reacting this way, as other theorists of film at least noted the physical way slapstick (e.g. Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton) provided a fresh take on culture. Henry Parland wrote in 1970 that montage, faster cutting, made East European film special (Parland 1970). For Walter Benjamin, shock, which he thought especially film produced in its audience, was one of the key concepts for understanding modern culture, and it formed one of the biggest threats to the old, slow, upper class, and cult-driven experience (*Ehrfahrung*) (Benjamin 2008). In tracing the way the body needed more stimulation that resonated with factory work and its daily shocks, for example, he claimed that the Tivoli and other modern entertainment practices had an important role in the big picture (Benjamin 1997). Tivoli actually could form a good analogy to somatic film. The critical reaction toward the late 1920s talkie was also often on its stiffer nature (e.g. Parland 1970; Seldes 1924). Something must have been lost (or at least felt to be lost) as film gained a soundtrack and slapstick comedy died. The silent slapstick film had worked more on and through the body, not being classically theater-like. As Dario Fo points out in his study on Totò, a major part of early film comedy technique came from street theater and vulgar entertainment (Fo 1995).

Throughout film history, we have seen people falling, buildings explode, and the speed of cinematic language accelerating faster in a way that has, from time to time, activated our bodies in a way no other art form has. New heights have craved for new ways of (somatic) coping. Anyway, the new modes of commercial film in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century have taken a step further on this path. With horror, pornography, and fast-paced action films filled with visual tricks, we have entered a new stage of somatic film. Films are rawer, faster, and often ingeniously well-done effect-wise. I wonder how much that is connected to the way today's educated classes work to understand their bodies, from

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diets to gyms and Pilates (see e.g. Shusterman 2012). Has the growing trickery of working on our bodies through film a connection to the contemporary overall interest in the body? The body of today's film viewer receives 'skin orgasms', chills in the spine, itching in the feet, and unpleasant kinesthetic reactions from seeing people being shot, mutilated, and tortured on screen. In the silent film era or during the Golden Age of Hollywood (1950s), it would have been a sheer impossibility to watch films where someone's eye would pop out or to watch a knife go through the skin (an Italian giallo genre 'treat' from already in the 1970s). Now, this is a commonplace at least for some segments of the film audience.

Herbert Marcuse, in (1969) *An Essay on Liberation,* discusses the potentials of mass culture by appreciating new youth movements (hippies) and their new sensual practices. We do not find somatic film at the center of attention, but he mentions that (noisy) music and long hair were maybe able to break some of the key metaphysics of Western Culture. Marcuse talks about a new sensuality throughout his book but does not mention film. Couldn't film have been a part of this utopian, emancipation-driven dream? Film had just started to touch the body in new ways. Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1960) still raises disgust in contemporary viewers by showing horrifying operations with face skin. Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) took the body of the protagonist and her fears/disgusts so close to the viewer that this has somewhat not been outdone since. And George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) took horror and corpses, including the audience's reactions to them, to the forefront of commercial success.

The new 'care of the self', which, I claim, accompanied the new more somatically oriented film practices, was coined by Michel Foucault in his 1984 *History of Sexuality.* Organic food, aerobics, yoga, tai chi, and other practices, including (experimental) sexuality, made Foucault, already at an early stage of this development (which is now stronger), see these practices as something related to the old Greek Stoic way to think of self-care. Care does not always have to be subtle and harmonic, as we know from aerobic exercise and massage. One could, of course, argue that there are many problems with somatic film, starting from them being not beneficial for people with fragile minds but, on the other hand, the same applies to physical exercise, which does not work for everyone (e.g. if one has a serious heart problem). What is notable is anyway that there are cultures that people use in a somatic sense, and both sporty well-being and film could be thought of as analogous.

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Before going into film as self-care, we need to work out a more detailed description of somatic film, and then turn our gaze to somatic interpretation, before we finally go into learning from our bodies, the way people intensify their *physis* (φύσις, Greek for nature, also stressing growth and natural development) while watching films. Looking at magazines such as *Sports Illustrated*, people are well aware of the bodily tensions exciting matches stimulate in them, and the way these tensions are relieved by goals (e.g. in ice hockey) and/or changes in the game. Games seem to not just be 'cathartic' (Russell 1999); they also bring about laughter, tears, and other reactions, and sport journalists seem to be well aware of this—which is weird, if you think that movie critics do not usually write about somatic reactions (not that I would have, at least, noticed, and neither has Vivian Sobchack (Sobchack 2004, pp. 53–54)).

The feeling when a good thriller quits its massage on our receptive bodies, might be quite similar to the feeling we have after an exciting game. We feel relieved. Classical thrillers keep our bodies in tension. In Alfred Hitchcock's *The Rear Window* (1954), a man in a wheelchair witnesses a murder through his window. The killer sees that his criminal act has been noticed and the rest of the film lays its tension upon what follows. It proceeds through our sympathy for the protagonist and our excitement about what could happen to him, and I recall that I reacted physically the first time I watched it. Here, the somatic film stimulates us through quite traditionally appreciated artistic methods, like narrative suspense. I'd call this type of films and passages in these films *suspense-based somatic films*, as they do not impose on us nearly anything, and the somatic reactions lean on our interest in starting to build a relationship with the protagonist and the plot. Music (in Hitchcock Bernard Herrmann) plays its part, of course, together with physical activities on the screen (chases) and well-chosen images and visual perspectives, but in this type of classical thrillers, the suspense is still central. Thrillers are quite physical, but they usually lack the practice of immediate somatic stimulation, although we might be scared up once or twice as a hand (or a knife) suddenly lands on somebody's shoulder.

If this suspense-based somatic film still stresses something else, the second type of somatic film I'd like to recall here is the one where, like in the classical case of slapstick and Harrold Lloyd, our bodies become stimulated by the filmmakers' attempts to produce immediate reactions in us. This type you could call *shock-based somatic film*. A good example is showing, when someone is hanging from a cliff, that there is nothing under

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his/her feet, except 200 meters of air. This we can feel in the soles of our feet. Sometimes the bodily nature of the film is excessive. They go over the line of what we can take, consciously, and only the suspense of the narrative or a promise that the film will be easier to watch for a while makes us continue. If the famous cutting of the eye in the beginning of Salvador Dali's and Luis Buñuel's *Un chien Andalou* (1929) was a surrealist attempt to invade our unconscious, torture scenes and bloody (and ethically unfair) mistreatments of people in cult films like Takashi Miike's *Ichi the Killer* (2001) or Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) are and were attempts to take the visual violence over the line what the viewer in some sense can digest, only to get back to a more narrative practice after the 'worst' scenes. These films are about excess, touching upon boundaries of what one can take. At least my own experiences of them are predominantly somatic and with some of them, like Miike's work, I had to work on myself for hours after the film with an uncomfortable feeling in my stomach.

This, what we cannot take, has been an issue in film since Walter Benjamin, who in his "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) discussed shock as something that is not digestible (Benjamin 2008). For Benjamin, this meant something that is too fast or not yet something we could adapt ourselves to, but it was about experience pretty much without any bodily side paths, and so it does not really touch upon what we are discussing here. What I would like to address is the way the Stoic philosophers discussed self-studies and self-care through the study of our boundaries. I hope it could lead us to think more reflectively on the issues presented herein.

Somatic Education

In the 1990s, media theorist Derrick de Kerckhove claimed that the fast-paced development of media images might be developing phantom limb experiences to us; de Kerckhove's point was that we react to images where, for example, organs or limbs appear as they would belong to us (de Kerckhove 1997). Phantom limb here is, of course, too much said and we are talking about a metaphor, but at last in some cases in the examples portrayed earlier, like in showing people climbing and making the viewers feel itching in their soles, de Kerckhove's intuition makes sense. The agenda of new media theory has always been about understanding our relationship to media, and what we can learn from it, but the interesting thing is that what de Kerckhove wrote about has not

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become an everyday issue for us. New media have not made us use VR helmets, and even if our technological equipment has developed a lot, it is mostly downshifting our experiences, as moving images drop from being on a big TV screen to appear on small pads and mobile phones. Feature films have, however, acquired a role that is more in the direction discussed by de Kerckhove, forcing our bodies to be in an active dialog with images.

A key 'phantom experience', if I am allowed to use this metaphoric expression in a shallow way, for me is the way hands are cut off with Samurai swords in the bloody battles of Toshiya Fujita's *Lady Snowblood* (1973). Sometimes while watching the film, I can feel a small itch in my hand when a hand in the film is cut away. What am I actually learning about? Kevin Tavin's and Mira Kallio-Tavin's "The Cat, the Craddle, and the Silver Spoon" (2014) discusses the importance of excessive artworks for art education. The point of Tavin and Kallio-Tavin is that extreme works of art, for example, Zhu Yu's *Eating People* (2000), where the artist claimed (lied) that he ate a fetus, force us to face our human boundaries. Encountering problematic, boundary-pushing works lead to ethical reflection. Although my topic here is more somatic, it is important to note that this attitude of contemporary art education is not far from some of the passages in the *Care of the Self* (1984) by Michel Foucault, a book that works a lot on rethinking the heritage of Stoic philosophers. The early philosophical ideas of care of the self were often connected to medicine, but also to issues like how to live a moderate life, how to leave a beautiful memory of one's life (ethics), and/or how to learn to know oneself (Foucault 1984, pp. 189–210 (2:5)). According to Foucault, the Greeks laid out a whole system of self-care that included recipes, research practices, and training methods (ibid.).

One point in Foucault's text concerns the use of excessive methods for understanding oneself. These might be thought of as auto-pedagogical practice. The idea was to gain strength and self-control, through flirting with one's own limits. The examples given are close to absurd, like the one Plutarch (ibid.) mentions, where strenuous sports exercises are followed by serving a whole table full of delicacies, which are then just looked upon, and after that given to the servants (here, we can note the extreme privileges of ancient philosophers). Foucault also talks about self-reflection, or being a self-reflective person (lat. *speculator*), who studies himself. Seneca uses the Latin word *excutere*, which points to shaking and agitating. This is definitely something filmic entertainment does.

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Studies on popular culture consumption seem to point to a high understanding of consumption and its meaning for the consuming subject, and it is not just once or twice that I have heard people talking about listening to doom music or watching horror films as a purifying (cathartic[2]) activity. Definitely, some of our practices with excessive film are about training ourselves or testing our mindsets for the unknown and the future unprecedented events (horrifying situations, death). We work on our boundaries. What would the Stoics have done if they would have had films to play around with so that they could learn about themselves through them? (We can imagine their servants putting the DVD in.)

Looking at what we are offered in the Cinema, Netflix, and HBO, I think that this is not just commonplace in contemporary culture. It is not just about playing around with our bodies through film. People must also use these materials for a variety of reasons. We need to learn more and interview people about their bodily experiences of feature film (to my knowledge, this has not been done yet). Thinking about classics of reception studies, John Fiske's *Television Culture* (1988) shows us an incredible variety of different types of viewers of television, but none of them focuses on the body. As I have already pointed out, strong somatic reactions do not necessarily support calm intellectual reflection, and it is no wonder that art house movies, when intellectual, do not aim very much to immediately stimulate the body. In some sense, you could say that commercial entertainment has pioneered somatic film and even made it commonplace in contemporary life. The body in commercial films has its own niche and one thing for the future could be mapping out all the possible physical reactions we have with films. It would be too farfetched to say that you have to choose to be either somatically or intellectually attentive. That is definitely not the case always, as we know from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), where strong colors, hypnotic music, and manipulative visual language do not put a sordino on our intellectual labor as bystanders of the drama.

But maybe those moments when we are strongly manipulated, even in that film, for example, in the semi-psychedelic cuts showing graphic maelstroms, or when the female protagonist, played by Kim Novak, is shown in a way (accompanied by hysterical music) that forces the viewer to think about the idea of whether this is the woman who died earlier in the film. These are moments when our intellect and our bodily system strongly come together, in a way that John Dewey maybe anticipated in his *Art as Experience* (orig. 1934), where this holistic experience was something that

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he felt art is lacking, and that he wanted to have in it more centrally. Dewey was interested in singing while working, hunting in different collective (body) constellations, and other issues of aesthetics and the everyday, where the living creature would most holistically engage with art and beauty (Dewey 1980).

Getting back to the most intensive moments of *Vertigo*: for a moment, you can listen to the body and its reactions, and maybe at best gaining a balance with the intellectual/artistic reflection and the bodily flow with its heights—first the body leads, then the mind…and vice versa. There are moments of balance. In non-filmic, middle-class, Western life, my body is never really, really shaken. Maybe film, in the end, is, besides moderate sports, eating, excretion, and sex, the major way of being in touch with the body? My reactions to films show that my body is not always sure where reality ends and where the film starts (why would I otherwise react heavily to heights in *Cliffhanger* (Harlin 1993)). Whether one believes that we can still experience a totally pure non-filmic life or not, as we are so immensely surrounded by images, it is anyway clear that in film, paradoxically, our body is sometimes notably alive. And as scholars have used too much time and energy on studying the intellectualist side of the arts, film included, could it be that this tradition of reflecting and learning from our bodies could show new directions for art research and art education?

The way people could realize how their bodies might react regarding heights and enjoying the way the body gets worked-out following audiovisual stimulation, might even become a whole new sub-branch of educating about the arts, as, if people really often use arts in a somatic way, reflections and consciousness on this could take the experience to new levels. If people need teachers to help them to ski and enjoy winter sports, why couldn't they get a helping hand for their verbal and conscious reflection of what their bodies do when they watch films?

So besides becoming more conscious about our own film watching practices and our bodily activities during our moments with audiovisual media, we might want to take the lead in helping others see the same as what we already know, and, of course, to learn from their possibly different experiences. Although one can just let the body think, the dialogue with the intellect—not to polarize these two matters—is still always the richest way of engaging with art. Luce Irigaray's classical text "The Wedding Between the Body and Language" (2004) illuminates the connection of words and body (parts). Could we say the same about film? The wedding between the body and film is still an issue that craves for illuminative work.

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Already Seneca, my favorite Stoic, wrote that people travel too much, as most of the things happen inside of the human being (Seneca c. 65). As the Stoics were not just thinkers of the mind, but bodily experimentalists too, I think we can read this pointing to our somatic interiors. Think of this when you go to the movie theater or when you watch shows and movies on Netflix.[3]

Notes

1. Levinson's work is based on psychologist Jaak Panksepp's studies conducted in the 1990s, which Levinson adds a more theoretical, critical framework on (Panksepp 1995, quoted in Levinson 2000).
2. The Greek root of the concept comes from medicine (purification). Have we read Aristotle's use of the concept too much as an allegory? Maybe he meant to really mark the physical side of the experience with the concept?
3. My somatic approach and reading of Foucault here has been very much influenced by Richard Shusterman's philosophical work on somaesthetics. I here want to express my gratitude for his teaching and mentoring.

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K. Tavin et al. (eds.), *Art, Excess, and Education*, Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21828-7

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