

What roles do desire and disgust play in creative activity and aesthetic reception?

From a Lacanian perspective, humans are unique in their **dislocation from the Real**, taking up a position in the **Symbolic**, an order of signs. The rest of the chapter explores how works of art, and literature in particular, can easily be seen to function as "virtual" (immersive and interactive) worlds. The chapter concludes by noting that fantasy literature, in particular, despite its less than realistic appearance, often aspires to go beyond the "virtual," to lay claim to accessing a world both **"Real" and "virtuous."**

Our heads are already VR headsets

Virtual etymology - virtue / power of a god

stipulated def = intangible, not "actual"

the "Real" is always already virtual (Lacan)

### Lacan and Art

(1) from existence/being - to meaning (Real → Symbolic → Imaginary): framing the Real in some way

(1.A) Imaginary: audio/visual Gestalt sort of framing

(1.A.i) initial stage of mediation: e.g., mirror stage

(1.A.i.a) illusion → false sense of unity / ego - distorted

(backwards) - objectifies the subject

(1.A.i.b) first step in ("virtual") interpellation of the subject

(1.A.i.c) there is a "me" that is defined and expressed through

cultural codes

(1.B) Symbolic: meaning sort of framing

(1.B.i) completes move into virtual

(1.B.i.a) Lacan formulates Oedipus complex in figurative terms (no

longer about literal castration/phallus, although Freud is not only literal here)

Father comes between us and mother (caregiver who fulfills all our needs/wants)

(a bit traditionalist no? is mother always the first caregiver? well, corporeal unity...)

(1.B.i.a.1) disrupts dyad between cry (signifier) and milk (signified)

(1.B.i.a.2) applies to all children / not just boys

(1.C) **infant** (lit. speechless): immediate, but limited, "communication" (intuitive, corporeal) → **language**: mediate communication (uses the discourse of the other/superego -> i.e., communal linguistic codes)

(1.C.i) can say more/be more precise/develop abstract concepts, but also cut

off from physical immediacy (begins to see the world through the structures of language).

(1.C.ii) even the word "I" is not mine/ it's indexical —> applies to any and every speaker

(1.C.iii) proper names are meaningless because *too* precise and individualized (e.g., "flurbadurb")

(1.C.iii.a) if every word were unique, language would be impossible —> just pure immediate experience of diversity (but meaningless)

(1.C.iv) words are anemic stand-ins for the richness of experience

(1.D) Gaps: between concept and world (Locke / Kant), between words (signifiers) and concepts (signifieds) (because arbitrary)

(1.D.i) signifiers signify not because of positively articulated properties they have, but simply by being placed in a differential system (e.g., red in stoplight)

(1.D.i.a) this lack (the gap) is the source of desire for unity w/world, w/others, w/self, etc.

(1.D.i.b) "an unsaid desire that we can never quite articulate."

(1.D.i.b.1) infant doesn't just want milk - it wants mother's love/attention — constant fulfilment of desires

(1.D.ii) Names interpellate us into codified subject positions —> symbolic castration

(1.D.ii.a) FALSE CHOICE: "male/female—that is all that is on offer, take it or...take it: it's a nonchoice"

(1.D.ii.b) 3 kinds of people: those who can count/those who can't — 3 kinds of sexuality: male and female

(1.D.iii) childhood as the Edenic world of plenitude —> desire to return to this sort of unity/myths about paradise, etc.

(1.D.iii.a) subject (illusory(?) power - the I the cogito) / (subjugation - oppression/castration)

- becoming an "I" cuts us off from the Real (unitary plenitude with the world)

Hegel: immediacy - alienation - recuperation

Real (biology) - Symbolic (language/logic) - Imaginary (meanings/concepts/subject positions)

Works of art take two possible stands on our fractured relationship to the Real: express it (e.g., Nietzsche, Adorno, tragedy, postmodernism)

attempt to overcome it (Aristotle, organic unity, happy endings)

"restantiate a notion of plenitude/wholeness/unity"

Postmodernism plays up/intensifies the gap between signifier and signified

Saussure's semiotics:

Signifier (sound-image) = words, pictures, symbols, gestures

Signified (concept) NOT Ding-an-sich

BUT - intensional definitions require the use of more signifieds  
infinite deferral of meaning

(Peirce - interpretant = meanings/interpretations)

Magritte: *La trahison des images (the treason/treachery of images)*: "Ceci n'est pas une pipe"

BUT the words are part of the image, the title is part of the work

Q: Why not the treachery of words? A: Platonic legacy/Logos doctrine

What we take to be reality is always already mediated.

Bare facts are not available to us, facts are always encountered within interpretive frameworks.

Frameworks of

significance (which facts are worth looking for)

categorization (what shows up to us as facts divided in a particular way)

semantics (what do the facts amount to?)

validity (which facts count as evidence for an argument)

VR is presaged by art/literature

immersion - lost in a narrative/artwork (but different experience, recall Kant vs. Phantasmagoria/distraction)

interactive - arguments are always interactive / readers fill in gaps/imagine / fanfiction / jumping around in a story

hypertext - hermeneutic circle/spiral

Fantasy works make a stronger claim about connecting the Symbolic to the Real

audio-visual illusion, onomatopoeia: not the "Real" thing, but draw our attention to their illusoriness (I disagree entirely with this author's argument)

HH: The claim that these are gimmicks is logocentric chauvinism

They do not imitate the "Real"

Thing novels: stories told from the point of view of inanimate objects

Alienation: Brecht, et al - draw attention to the audience's role in constructing reality

Fantasy is closer to the Real than realism is  
(the truth in the illusion)

Fantasy: set in a 2ndary world (Tolkien)

(all literature is basically fantasy, though)

Tolkien: world building is an attempt at mastery / an escape from death (Freud agrees, Nietzsche dissents mildly)

"worlds need to be fully imagined; otherwise a reader's belief is lost, and he or she is "then out in the Primary [everyday] World again...looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside" (1964, 36)."

But all mediation requires belief (in fact, "belief" is all we have if we follow Hume) "Why, then, would secondary worlds like Middle Earth require more belief than the gritty satire of *American Psycho* (Ellis 1991)?"

literature requires not a suspension of disbelief, but the creation and maintenance of "literary belief" (cf. Aristotle/Wilde improbable vs. impossible)

the search for consistency in life / meaning in the world requires a similar sort of belief in cultural products / ideologies

(they work even if you don't believe, presumably because enough people do believe in them)

Kathryn Hume: "fantasy is not a separate or indeed a separable strain, but rather an impulse as significant as the **mimetic impulse** (see Aristotle)"

fantasy is not separate from reality - it structures reality itself. fantasy is the impulse to make sense of the world, to find underlying unity and meaning, to connect us to other people, to render pain pleasurable (e.g., Aristotle on corpses)

Tolkien sees fantasy as a natural human activity. BUT it is an expression of the natural human longing for the supernatural, the infinite, the unified, the meaningful.

"It was a sad tune," Eilonwy said. "But the odd thing about it is, you don't mind the sadness. ...[It's like feeling better after you've had a good cry]... It made me think of the sea again, though I haven't been there since I was a little girl." ...[At this, Taran snorted, but Eilonwy paid no attention to him]... "The waves break against the cliffs and churn into foam, and farther out, as far as you can see, there are the white crests, the White Horses of Llyr, they call them; but they're really only waves waiting their turn to roll in."

Trying to capture the metaphysical power of this that I was tapped into as a child (while I still had a memory of my immediacy) —> the hope that the stories/myths are true —> but then realizing it is not what you thought or had hoped for.

**fantastic Real: some place where signified and signifier are finally seen to be as one.**

**HH:** we are not justified in thinking that just because we experience a gap between our symbolic systems and the Real, that the Real is unified — we could never know! It may be that the Real is also fragmented. If meaningless, there is no underlying salvific unity. The gap may not just be how we experience ourselves relative to the world, it may also be the way the world is. The unity may be the illusion, not the fragmentation. The absent unity is part of the system of signification (we are the ones who long for it, but we also are the ones who imagine it). since we could never know - strictly speaking, we do not know what we're talking about when we talk about the "Real" - strictly speaking it is nonsense (Analytic point of view).

"our ideological mindsets, which can blinker readers as effectively as any VR headsets."

Lacan's main point, though, is that we still have a foot in the Real. Like his most famous follower, Slavoj Žižek, he rejects those poststructuralist thinkers who see everything as socially constructed; who see, in other words, the Symbolic as all that there is.

Total immersion, in other words, would mean precisely the loss of any sense of selfhood. (Hegel, Parmenides, desire)

Zizek on cyberspace "a frictionless flow of images and messages—when I am immersed in it, I, as it were, return to a symbiotic relationship with an **(m)**Other in which the deluge of semblances seems to abolish the dimension of the Real."

**HH:** (because it's only when I am cut off from the Real that the Real appears to me, however nebulously)

It is only within the limits of selfhood that I can glimpse the Real at all

(Žižek 1997, 155): The worry of cyberspace, then, "is not its emptiness (the fact that it is lacking with respect to the fullness of the real presence) but, on the contrary, its very excessive fullness (the potential abolition of the dimension of the symbolic virtuality)."

Cyber-Hyperreality abolishes the **gap** of the Real/Symbolic which is a necessary condition of my selfhood/subjectivity.

If there were no gap, life would be meaningless —> ameboid: base biological needs, either satisfied (in which case need continues), or not (in which case the need disappears together with the needer). It is the gap between needs and subjectivity that enables freedom (because it allows us to take a stand on natural causality).

if this were to become VR™ (in *Feed* the teenagers attend, disturbingly,

"School™"), then we might start to worry. Then, in fact, things might become so mediocre that, like the baby's cry for milk, they name them only once.

### **Fantasy realized is nightmare!!!!**

we would be reduced to an insensible stasis ("being-ful" rather than "meaning-ful" entities)

SEP Kristeva

Kristeva advocates feminist support for alienation that would not pretend to reconcile the rupture between body and law (what Lacan calls castration) and would refuse the solace of identity. (Like Adorno in this regard)

This insistence on the fragility and precariousness of identity can be grasped in the first instance by looking at Kristeva's understanding of the drives and language.

"the structural violence of language's irruption as the murder of soma, the transformation of the body, the captation of drives"

The abject exposes the precariousness of the subject/object divide, the fragility of identity, the need to constitute oneself against the threat of, and desire for, dissolution.

(2c) **Semiotic / Structuralist** (esp. post-1960): The mediation of reality is always present in film (Arnheim as well)

(2c.i) the array of techniques function like a linguistic code (system of signifiers)

(2c.i.a) the relationship of signs (signifier + signified)

and meanings is always conventional

N.B.: even if iconic / indexical (Peirce) - i.e., motivated (Metz)

- the meanings (Peirce: *interpretants*) are conventional

(2c.ii) conventionality of signs underlies the *interpellation of subjects* (Althusser/Lacan)

(2c.ii.a) Althusser: subject (~identity) is a system of signs

(2c.ii.a.1) sign system (ideology) organizes the world into distinct categories

(2c.ii.a.1.A) (e.g., nationality/culture, liberal/conservative, artistic/scientific, masc./fem. as a set of performative codes)

(2c.ii.a.2) these are conventional, not natural distinctions

(2c.ii.a.2.A) it may be that some underlying distinctions are natural (e.g., masc/fem)

(2c.ii.a.2.A.I) but (many/most of) the social meanings of these are conventional, as are the codes of conduct that instantiate

them socially

(2c.ii.b) Lacan: subject (~self) is a process not a thing

what sort of process? everything the subject does

(cf. Hofstadter) a system of isomorphisms between

patterns in reality and patterns in the brain

one pattern of reality picked out by patterns in the brain

is the patterning of reality by the brain (strange loop/self reference)

why the apparent unity? structure of language (symbolic register) (nothing -> thing, when made into a sign)

arbitrary bc not really descriptive of its (non)referent

(2c.iii) ideology is enabled by the erasure of technique

makes the staged appear self-evident (i.e., natural)

hence, the viewpoints of the narrating system are presented as basic, unmediated

of course not really *reality*, but suspended disbelief

(suspension of critical faculties)

UNPACK THIS

Derrida goes against structuralist idea of language as closed system universally shaping human culture (see Sapir-Whorf). Structuralism posits a total system of language that shapes the way individuals think / hence, it rejects the idea of the subjective mind as the center of knowledge because the language is already shaping the mind before any conscious thought. Earlier thinkers misidentified the self with autonomous actions. Hence language was seen as a clothing draped on the a priori structures of the mind.

**BUT** In order for a sign (word/concept, etc.) to act as a sign, it has to be repeated. The possibility of repeatability means that the a priori structures of the mind must be interwoven with the system of signs. In order for the signs to be meaningful, they have to adhere to the structure of the mind, but on the structuralist view the mind is structured by the system of signification. Derrida says Artaud is paradigmatic of avant garde because he rejects theater as providing content/meaning/communication/message in favor of erasing repetition/discursivity all together (see Ferneyhough).

Structuralist triads:

world (semiotic system) meaning

Althusser: base (ideology) superstructure

Lacan: real (symbolic) imaginary

Importance of arbitrariness of signs / differentiability:

signs are based on an arbitrary (conventional) union of sound-image (word) and

concept

horse / man as words have no necessary or "natural" relationship to their concepts

language is intelligible not because signs have positive meanings, but because we are able to tell the

difference between signs (no two signs are identical)

stop sign = "red" has no intrinsic meaning, it just

means not-yellow, not-green. It is a matter of convention that it is combined with the concept "stop".

signs are culturally instantiated

divide the world up in arbitrary/conventional ways

there is no meaning that is not always already within the convention (i.e., social, cultural context)

different languages have different divisions, but "Language" as a signifying system operates the

same way (this is the difference between "Langage and Langue".

Film messaging is based on conventionalized codes (cinematic techniques/ effects, narrative devices, etc.)

such conventions arrange the world in pre-formed categories from which we choose to construct our

personal identities (subject positions):

"the tyranny of a false choice". (e.g., codes of masculinity, codes of success, codes of appearance, etc.)

The ability to employ and understand the code effectively entails already being situated socially and ideologically within the the categories the code has helped create.

(where effective = substantial agreement between the intended and received meaning + evaluative agreement

- i.e., both parties think X is good/bad, etc.)

The meanings supplied by the conventions do not reach a reality beyond the conventions themselves - they present a "self-fulfilling prophecy".

-> Language doesn't hook on to reality in itself -> it is an internal play of signifiers  
-> the dictionary game, etc.

Since these constellations of meaning are not "real" (i.e., merely conventional) this is the register where ideology and the illusion of self/personal identity take root.



Hence, cinema and other cultural products become a vehicle for ideology in the stories they tell and the way they tell them (i.e., by “naturalizing” that which is historical or cultural, etc.) AND false ideas about subjecthood (personal identity).

If signs are arbitrary then meaning is ideological (or at least necessarily incomplete) — how we define concepts is influenced by the story we are trying to tell (or the biases we have).

Peircean semiotics posits, in addition to arbitrary signs, signs based on similarity (icons) and relations of causality/metonymy/reference (indices)

gives rise to distinction btw arbitrariness/identity

identity is illusory, bc it is based on improper attribution of substantial unity to diffuse, diachronous processes

All forms of inquiry are permeated by signs and are therefore cut off from “the real”.

hence: relations btw signifiers are symbolic (i.e., arbitrary/conventional/illusory) not mimetic

incl photographic images

“The spectator chains together the film’s signifiers on a grid of cultural intelligibility—an ensemble of assumptions and presumptions about the ‘real!’” — DN Rodowick

## **2nd Book: Analytic of the Sublime**

### **XXIII Transition from the Faculty Which Judges of the Beautiful to That Which Judges of the Sublime**

#### **1. Similarities BTW Judgments of the Beautiful and Sublime:**

##### **1. Both judgments are without concept/purpose**

1. not mere sensation (pleasant)

2. not bound to a concept (good)

##### **3. Objectively Universal / Subjectively Singular**

1. viz., as a determined product of human biology these faculties of judgment are common to all

2. the way these judgments APPEAR to us (how they are FOR us) is singular (i.e., I apply my judgment to different objects = singular, but we all have this faculty of judgment = universal)

#### **2. Differences BTW Judgments of the Beautiful and Sublime:**

1. Beauty is connected to apperception of form (bounded)

2. Sublime causes an experience of “cognitive dissonance”

1. it appears to us as unbounded (exceeding limits of conceptualization), while still totally present to thought

1. i.e., we are conscious of its transcendence of boundaries

3. Quality (Beautiful) [different from all other judgments - i.e., pleasant, good] vs. Quantity (Sublime) [more extreme than beautiful?]
  1. Beautiful: compatible with furtherance of life (self-preservation)  
Direct pleasure
  2. Sublime: the mind is attracted to the object, but is simultaneously repelled (terrified) by it
    1. cp. Todestrieb / Jouissance
4. Our pleasure in natural beauty derives from the sensation that a form is somehow pre-adapted to our judgment
  1. e.g., Logos doctrine, David Huron: Haydn quartets "were written for"\*  
the human auditory/cognitive apparatus
    1. \*were written in such a way that our perception of them seems  
"somehow pre-adapted to our judgment."
5. The sublime seems to contradict the sensation that a form is pre-adapted to our judgment (Kant: does "violence to our
  1. but at the same time it must be cognizable by the faculty of judgment
6. The sublime is not a property of an object but a subjective response
  1. Nature as art (not as mere mechanism)

#### **XIV Of the Divisions of an Investigation into the Feeling of the Sublime**

1. When run through the Analytic Categories of mind you get the same result as the beautiful:
  1. Quality: Disinterested
  2. Quantity: Universal
  3. Relation: Subjective purposiveness
  4. Modality: Necessary
2. Two modes of the sublime
  1. Mathematical
  2. Dynamic

#### **A. OF THE MATHEMATICALLY SUBLIME**

#### **XV Explanation of the Term Sublime**

1. question of magnitude
  1. a great something: quantity (experienced empirically)
  2. how great: not a definite concept / requires comparison for its meaning
    1. also requires concept of the measurement
      1. the magnitude of that measurement requires a concept
        1. leads to infinite regress
    3. ∴ magnitude can only be known comparatively not directly
2. when we say something is great we mean it is so in comparison to others of the same type

1. this is based on a standard assumed for everything of this type
  1. this standard is not mathematically definite
    1. it is aesthetic / subjective
    2. It can be empirical (means, averages)
    3. it can be a priori
      1. *"the greatness of a certain virtue or of the public liberty and justice in a country, or, in the theoretical sphere, the greatness of the accuracy or the inaccuracy of an observation or measurement that has been made"*
3. The sublime is that which is great beyond compare
  1. there is no standard for such greatness
    1. hence this sense of sublime is not to be found in objects of nature, but in subjective ideas
    2. *'The sublime is that in comparison with which everything else is small.'*
  3. this awakens in us an awareness of reason's superiority over imagination
    1. we are confronted with the infinite (absolute) while at the same time we are capable of thinking infinity (the absolute) as a whole
      1. the infinite is beyond sensation and yet is thought as a totality by reason, thus awakens in an awareness of the supersensible faculty of reason
    2. The sublime refers to the use of this supersensible (absolutely great) faculty in comparison with other uses which are small
      1. Hence the mathematically sublime is a state of mind, not a quality of objects
      2. *"The sublime is that, the mere ability to think which shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense."*

## **XVII Of the Quality of the Satisfaction in Our Judgments upon the Sublime**

1. The feeling of inability to adhere to an idea which is a law for us we term "respect"
  1. this inability is registered as a sort of pain
    1. the sublime is the pain that arises out of our inability to reconcile our imaginative apprehension of magnitude with a rational concept of magnitude
    2. Pleasure arises in our rational awareness of this gap
2. The mind is moved by the sublime, Beauty evokes restful contemplation
  1. movement of the sublime is like a vibration swaying between attraction and repulsion to/from the object
  2. this movement is a product of the conflict between imagination and reason (not a quality of the object itself)

3. This brings about the feeling that we possess a faculty of reason (estimation of magnitude) BUT
  1. the superiority of reason can only be made intuitively evident by the failure of imagination to imagine infinite magnitude (great, small)
    1. in other words, reason can posit infinite magnitude, but imagination cannot think it

## **B. OF THE DYNAMICALLY SUBLIME IN NATURE**

### **XVIII Of Nature Regarded as Might**

1. Nature = might that has no dominion over us
2. The dynamically sublime is like the mathematical sublime, except that here it is our own physical weakness in the face of nature that is inadequate, rather than the limitation of imagination.
  1. This requires a sort of fear before nature (Furcht)
  2. we can regard an object as fearful even if we are not afraid of it.
    1. this entails knowing we would want to resist something but also knowing that such resistance would be futile
      1. e.g., virtuous man fears god but is not afraid of him
  3. the coward cannot experience the sublime
    1. truly afraid and so doesn't experience the sublime as a product of resistance
    2. similarly, the libertine cannot experience the beautiful
  4. the sublime is not a quality of objects but is a subjective state/process in which reason conquers fear

### **PEL Kristeva**

What is the abject?

The rejection of waste/corpses (as the dead material of life)

Horror of the unnameable

lurks at edge of our awareness

indifferent to human suffering

"place where meaning collapses"

A psychoanalytic theory of the self / subject formation

reworks Freud's Oedipus complex

shifts focus away from desire

toward rejection

reworks Lacan's mirror stage

shifts focus from process of (false) unification

to process of othering (rejection of the mother/child dyad)

places abjection at an earlier developmental stage than Freud or Lacan

Freud: first we develop a sense of self/other

then treat the "mother" as object of desire  
then "father" thwarts our ability to adequately fulfill it  
shows us that "mother" has desires beyond us  
this forces us to individuate  
Kristeva: the rupture of the dyad happens before we form a sense  
of self/other  
as infants, mother/child is one organism  
our desires are one and the same (or at least  
"seem" to be)  
in order to develop self/other concept we have to reject  
part of this dyadic unity  
e.g., when we spit out that gross skin-covered milk  
but since there is no me, only we, the rejection  
is also a rejection of self  
I reject a gift from the mother/child unity -  
which is also a gift from me  
this gift was a symbol of her/our/my desire  
- i treat it as intolerable  
this leads to a split in the self - part of me is rejected,  
part of me is doing the rejection  
I still kind of love the part that is rejected (i.e.,  
fascinated / can't "look away")

**BUT** deny that I love it  
deny that it's part of me.

This dynamic continues into adult life  
we continue to both long for and dread that primal unity  
(shades of Eros/Thanatos)  
unity with nature / not yet a subject  
**BUT** abjection is an act of **resistance** against unity  
fight to maintain the self / individuality / subjectivity

Age-old trope (goes back at least to pre-Socratics)  
woman: chaos/infinity (e.g., apeiron)  
nature/emotion/mystery/Dionysius  
man: order/limit (e.g., peras)  
civilization/reason/clarity/Apollo

Horror:

When I see a corpse/bodily waste I reject the mortal part of me that is  
reflected back at me  
I reject this "beyond" but I also love it - I can't look away

Religion/Art:

Religion prohibits the abject  
Art (at least, Romantic art) plays with the abject by perverting the law  
even in classical art there is a sense that there is a surplus beyond  
the rules

just following the rules is not enough

Aristotle: "a certain magnitude"

Kant: genius

Creative activity as an attempt at immortality  
abjection of mortality / finitude

revision of Freud

what constitutes the subject  
pre-Oedipal development (narcissism)  
failure of healthy subject formation

structuralist/linguistic approach to psychoanalysis  
abject mix of horror/disgust  
as a move in subject formation

technical+poetic style  
poetics is a higher form of language  
abjection is based in individuality/neurosis  
is abjection pre-subjective?  
it is something within you  
it is not yet an object because you are not yet a subject  
expelling something from the self / rejecting that which is expelled  
motivation to move toward subject formation (i.e., the stick, not the carrot)

improper unclean: me and yet not me / maternal body-union - it has to be rejected  
for me to become me  
is it a necessary stage in subject formation or a or a necessary symptom (i.e.,  
paradox/problem) of subject formation?

abjection is a normal part of healthy adult life -

abjection is similar to the sublime: beyond understanding, beyond consideration  
abject is not an object facing me: **"what is abject, is radically excluded and  
draws me toward the place where meaning collapses"**  
The abject is opposed to "I" but is not wholly other, is not constitutive of my

selfhood (like in Hegel)

The object is part of me that I reject; neither me nor not-me —> the sublime is a subjective response to overwhelming stimuli, but not conceptualizable/objectifiable

ambiguity: epistemological object / object of desire (forms we give to the lack of desire)

object - we hate something within ourselves —> project it onto others

Kristeva is more interested in repulsion than desire. We not only desire the mother we also reject the mother

fraught relationship to feminism: wants to rehabilitate motherhood as locus for female subject formation

Freud/Lacan: Oedipal stage is critical for individuation

paternal principle: mother also has desires that are not about you. She is not just an object (desire gratifier), she also has subjective desires of her own

resolution of Oedipus complex is resignation - I can never get what I want

pre-Oedipal stage involves a rejection of the mother-child continuum

puberty age children also reject the mother in their rejection of childhood

bodily waste transgresses boundaries btw subject and object

bodily waste reminds us that we are material waiting to die - we see ourselves as objects

mother expels child in birth (we are born in blood urine and feces)

birth is traumatic/painful our first experience of the "external" world

Improper/Unclean

food loathing: Skin on milk

I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself.

the milk/food is part of me (as a newborn)?

it is only in rejecting things offered by parents (or rejecting the parents themselves) that we are able to individuate ourselves.

Children do this as a stage in their discovery that they are separate organisms from the mother.

spitting the mother's milk out is an act of individuation

what would the biological role of food rejection be?

(does not cause disease...)

skin on (mother's) milk is disgusting because it conflates "us" with "them" (sentient beings with food / food as both object and subject)  
Food transgresses subject/object boundaries  
—> our own identities are not solid

breastfeeding is a form of cannibalism / waste as food/nourishment  
mother's milk gives life / but it also takes the energy away from the mother  
life relies on death/my life is predicated on other's death  
in order to assert my individuality I cannot just accept what the parents give me -  
I must also reject  
so in spitting out the milk I am spitting the pre-Oedipal self out in the interest of  
individuating myself

Lacan read Hegel (shades of master/slave)

Kristeva there is a part of me in the thing I reject  
we are fascinated with the thing we reject (because it is in some sense us  
(maybe even the Real of our birth))

## JOUISSANCE AND AFFECT

Jouissance: the desire of the other

abjection is like the mirror stage — a form of individuation, but one where we  
become fascinated by the thing rejected

Marquis de Sade: is not in abjection because rationalizes everything, renders it  
meaningless, nothing is meaningful because nothing is forbidden - everything  
simply is

NOT repression - fascination

object: libidinal tendrils reaching out to objects in the world  
object: superego - forbids - the moment of castration, but I'm compensated in the  
pleasure of individuation, subject interpellation, my ego is a pacifier for this  
trauma

In abjection, we're basically fighting for our lives as individuals against being  
swallowed up by the rest of existence.

ego: object (objectification means "I am not that thing" - the self)



BUT also object of desire: which IS part of me, projection from lack

step 1: subject/object duality

step 2: project my desires onto those objects

superego (language): abject (nameless dread - splitting of the self - condemning the self)

we don't desire this, we don't name it/objectify it

phobia/phobic object is sort of like the object of abjection

abject is a failure of language to totalize the world

abjection presupposes the structure of language? —> is disgust present in children/animals?

**it requires us to feel the threat to our own subjectivity**

embracing objects of disgust is to deny the separation between self and other

abjection is the fear of being subsumed into the desire of the other (like the wife in Solaris)

but we also want oneness (Eros) unity, etc. Schopenhauer, etc. (Thanatos) Death Drive

Healthy Abjection is a longing toward life in individuation (it resists the death drive)

abjection also denies the materials of life because they carry the stench of death with them

Freud's theory of Individuation from the mother requires rejection (not just desire)  
Lack of differentiation —> rejection —> object/subject formation (desire)

If mother tries to prevent abjection it can be harmful (e.g., teenage breastfeeding)

Obsessive purity (exaggerated abjection) —> failed individuation

Too individuated (because not cared for) —> rejects too much of the adult world

Parents need to mirror distressing emotions without experiencing the emotions [e.g., oohh poor baby :( ]

parents need to attenuate their subjective responses, while still demonstrating appropriate responses to the infant so that the infant can come to symbolize those affects (a step in individuation) —> if parent responds with rage, or genuine fear, the infant's individuation will be thwarted

is misogyny always part of individuation (rejection of the mother)

mother's desire for another is terrifying (hence prohibitions on female sexuality)

PERVERSE OR ARTISTIC

"The object is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them (**e.g., THE MONKEY'S PAW**). It kills in the name of life (**LIVE REQUIRES KILLING, DESTRUCTION**)—a progressive despot (**FREDERICK THE GREAT, or JEFF BEZOS**); it lives at the behest of death—an operator in genetic experimentations; it curbs the other's suffering for its own profit (**NOT FOR ITS OWN SAKE - BUT AS A MEANS TO A SELF-INTERESTED END - cf Nietzsche on Morality**)—a cynic (and a psychoanalyst); it establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss—an artist who practices his art as a "business" (**RECOGNIZES THE OTHERNESS/ DESTABILIZING ASPECT OF ART WHILE REJECTING IT**). Corruption is its most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialized appearance of the object."

AS ABJECTION—SO THE SACRED / OUTSIDE OF THE SACRED, THE OBJECT IS WRITTEN

Religion, Art, and abjection:

Both art and religion utter and purify the object

Art: Catharsis (Aristotle/Freud)

plays with/enjoys the object - makes it pleasurable

"utters it and by the same token purifies it"

Religion: abjection is the profane (taboo) that sets up the sacred

transgression of the law, sin, chaos

rejects the object (says NO! thou shalt not!)

naming involves abjection of everything not named

writing as a mastery over death is a tacet recognition of mortality

borders are a proxy for the self (inside vs. outside)

Abjection in art and religion:

religion: obey the law

sets the sacred apart from the profane / object

sin: break the law

"Christian sin, a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian Word (Logos) as a threatening otherness—but always nameable, always totalizable."

atheism: ignore the law

repress the object

art: acknowledge the law but pervert it / make it pleasurable

JOYCE abject in the perversion of the rules of language  
pure signifier of music in letters (no longer about syntactical / semantic rules)

pure music = no reference —> free association in Freud  
plays with representation of disgusting things, but in a way that neutralizes their danger

if we can't talk about our problems they will manifest in symptoms  
art is a symptom —> abjection is the point at which meaning collapses  
but pleasurable meaninglessness can neutralize the fear / importance of the abject

reveals limitations of language —> revels in the abject as ineffable/inexpressable  
although this is not a rebellion in language (so maybe just ignores abjection, doesn't neutralize it)

(shades of Nietzsche on Tragedy: perverting the serious matter of the hole in our lives)

abjection as catharsis

Existentialists want to be clear-eyed that we can never achieve true unity with the world (or if we can it is only in death)

when people use drugs it is an attempt to recover that war maternal feeling of unity

Art sublimates abjection without consecrating it into a new object (e.g., the law / divinity, etc.)

art sublimates/diffuses the abject in a pleasurable way —> it doesn't just wall it off (through morality/the law, etc.)

"everyone with a mother is a misogynist" (hahah)