

Toward a Poetics of Cinematic Disgust

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In this essay¹ I try to categorize the range of artistic options that filmmakers currently have at hand to evoke bodily disgust.² Or, to reframe this approach in a slightly different manner: If we examine the variety of disgusting scenes at the movies, how can we usefully distinguish them? My aim is to provide a number of brushstrokes for a broader panoramic picture of disgust. I consider this essay a first step toward a poetics of cinematic disgust.³

Now, to some readers this endeavour might sound baffling. How can we even think of using the words ‘artistic and ‘disgust’ in a single sentence? Disgust is too easily evoked; nothing artful or even craftsman-like seems to

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² The bodily disgust I am talking about necessarily has a strong phenomenological feeling dimension. In this essay I will not consider intellectual-moral and existential-dispositional disgust. This is not to deny, however, that bodily and moral disgust are often strongly intertwined. Leon R. Kass even speaks of a ‘wisdom of repugnance’: ‘Revulsion is not an argument [...]. In crucial cases, however, repugnance is the emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason’s power fully to articulate it. [...] we intuit and feel, immediately and without argument, the violation of things that we rightfully hold dear. Repugnance, here as elsewhere, revolts against the excesses of human willfulness, warning us not to transgress what is unspeakably profound’ (Kass 557, 1997). When we think of a film like Pasolini’s *Salò* the bodily disgust seems to be amplified by the moral repugnance evoked by the heinous acts of the Fascist sadists, and vice versa. For a psychological study showing that bodily disgust can make moral judgments more severe, see Schnall et al. 2008.

³ In a previous essay I have focused on the phenomenological *experience* as well as the main *functions* of cinematic disgust. The current step toward a *poetics* of disgust is meant as a companion piece (cf. Hanich 2009).

be involved.⁴ And, indeed, on the face of it filmmakers simply have to choose a disgusting object, put it in front of a camera and film it in close-up; the result will most likely elicit some degree of disgust. But even with an emotion as readily evoked as disgust, the matter is not that simple. Just because it can be achieved easily does not mean that more nuanced methods of presentation are inexistent or indeed less effective – in the movie theatre disgust comes in an astounding variety of forms, and solicits a range of spectatorial responses. As a cinematic emotion disgust is an effect of the viewer's aesthetic involvement with the movie.⁵ But the movie is, of course, the result of a process of construction (or *active making*, as the Greek word *poiesis* indicates). Filmmakers are required to make decisions in order to evoke disgust. This is precisely where poetics comes into play. As David Bordwell defines: 'To a large extent, poetics is a systematic inquiry into the presuppositions of artistic traditions. It's a practice-based theory of art. We want to know the filmmakers' secrets, especially those they don't know they know' (Bordwell 2007, 22).

This essay presents five categorical distinctions indicating choices filmmakers often implicitly make when disgust comes into play.⁶ (1) Temporality: Does the filmmaker confront us with the disgusting object *suddenly* or *anticipatorily*? (2) Presence: Does the director allow us to *perceive* or *imagine* the source of disgust? (3) Character engagement: Are we affected via *empathy* or *sympathy*?⁷ (4) Synaesthetic audiovision: What other *senses* – apart from seeing and hearing – does the scene address? (5) Affective co-occurrence: What other *emotions* come into play during the disgusting scene? Although this essay is meant as a descriptive rather than prescriptive poetics, differences in terms of craftsmanship and even artful finesse unavoidably exist – sometimes I won't be able to conceal my preferences. To another group of readers the middle-level question I am going to answer might not only be strange but utterly futile. What use should there be in

⁴ See, for instance, the following summary of Carole Talon-Hugon's book *Gout et Degout. L'art peut-il tout montrer?* (2003): 'She concludes that disgust is a primary, involuntary emotion and that it is therefore basically impossible to plead for its admission into art' (Diaconu 2010, 105).

⁵ I use the term 'aesthetic' not in an evaluative sense here, nor will I employ it in a historical way (as in Classical or Kantian aesthetics), but rather as a qualifier of the word 'involvement': the viewer needs to partake in an *aesthetic experience*, i.e. watch the film in a non-pragmatic, non-functional, *aisthetic* way.

⁶ Again, Bordwell is pertinent here: 'We can't discover plausible answers to questions about films' construction without carefully devising analytical concepts appropriate to these questions' (Bordwell 2007, 20).

⁷ Advanced by authors like Alex Neill (1996), Amy Coplan (2004) or Berys Gaut (2010) and others, the distinction between empathy and sympathy has found widespread acceptance in film studies, even if the usage in common language as well as in psychology differs. For a critique, see Plantinga (2009).

analytically dissecting varieties of cinematic disgust? My answer is twofold. On the one hand, the categorical distinctions enable a more fine-grained discussion about one specific cinematic emotion. This includes the introduction of several terms like ‘sudden disgust’ and ‘anticipatory disgust.’ As Carl Plantinga puts it: ‘our emotional lives are complex and nuanced, and [...] our language for speaking of the emotions can be elaborated on and improved’ (Plantinga 2009, 96). On the other hand, underscoring the variety of disgust in *specific* makes it easier to acknowledge the complexity of the topic of cinematic emotions *more generally*. Hence disgust also serves as an interesting test case for a broader theorizing of cinematic emotions. Precisely because we think it is such a primitive or basic emotion, we tend to overlook its intricacy at the movies. And this obviously goes *a fortiori* for less basic emotions as well.

Most notably recent film scholarship in the wake of Gilles Deleuze too quickly brushes aside cinematic emotions as bounded, habitual and clichéd in order to celebrate uncommon, unexpected, dislocating affects.⁸ In her book *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance*, subtitled *Powers of Affection*, Elena del Río argues ‘the cinema has, in no small measure, contributed to the rigidification of the language and experience of emotion by relying on repeatable formulas’ (del Río 2008, 179). I would agree with Del Río in preferring the ‘multiplication’ and the creative ‘invention’ of new aesthetic affects to the formulaic repetition of the emotional standard trade in mainstream films (del Río 2008, 179). Yet what these ‘repeatable formulas’ look like and how they work has yet to be examined comprehensively. While many viewers have a broad *implicit* knowledge and can readily recognize the stereotypicality of certain affective strategies, there is still a lot we have to make *explicit* once we chart the vast territory of standard cinematic emotions. In turn, Deleuzians might profit from the study of what is stereotypical: the more they know about the common and predictable, the easier and more convincingly they can point out the uncommon and inventive.

The little film-critic we hide inside ourselves might hope for more nuanced, innovative ways to evoke affective states at the movies. But this grants film-scholars no license to overlook the standard fare. In fact, once we start to investigate the repeatable formulas of mainstream cinema more closely, the more intricate they will turn out to be. With regard to the study of melodrama Linda Williams, for instance, has lamented ‘the failure to

⁸ Elena del Río defines: ‘Affect precedes, sets the conditions for, and outlasts a particular human expression of emotion. While emotion refers to habitual, culturally coded, and localized affects (such as a character’s sadness or happiness), affect proper coincides with the actor and the film’s openness to often anomalous, unexpected, and always expansive expressions of emotions’ (del Río 2008, 10).

acknowledge the complex tension between different emotions' and the way overly simple concepts have 'impeded the serious study of how complexly we can be "moved"' (Williams 1998, 49). If this goes for comparatively well-researched and positively connoted affective states like sadness and being-moved, how much truer must it be for an understudied and despised emotion like disgust?⁹

Temporality: Sudden and Anticipatory Disgust

There are, of course, numerous ways in which we might categorize cinematic disgust. Just consider the basic question of what to show: one could discriminate between *objects* and *acts*. The director might choose from a plethora of objects: faeces, a piece of rotten meat, a putrefying animal corpse or a slimy monster. Yet he or she can also present a man poking his nose, a woman vomiting or a dog defecating. While this first categorical distinction might not yield overly dramatic insights, there are other, more pertinent categories through which to develop our understanding of disgust. My first crucial distinction between types of cinematic disgust implies the question of temporality. I will differentiate between two types. On the one hand, there is *sudden disgust*. In its abrupt confrontation with the revolting object or act a sudden-disgust scene interrupts the (more or less) forward-driven temporal flow of the moving images with a sudden caesura and thus underscores the viewer's experience of the present moment – a pointed, piercing moment of disgust. On the other hand, there is *anticipatory disgust*. This is produced when, for various reasons, the viewer expects to confront a disgusting object or act anytime soon. As a consequence, he or she 'leans forward' in time and scans the imminent temporal horizon. Similar to fearful moments of suspense, the viewer tenses up in anticipation of the upcoming experience, hypothesizes about the outcome and predicts what will happen.

Let us look at sudden disgust first. Again, two types are prevalent. The first type implies a co-occurrence of disgust and shock. It derives from an abrupt perceptual confrontation with a disgusting object or act that appears in the here and now with a startling burst. In this case disgust and shock (as a startling type of fear) *co-exist*. We are simultaneously shocked *and* disgusted. To be sure, we would be shocked without the disgusting object, but disgust adds its own emotional flavour to the overall experience. Think of two standard dread and shock scenes in *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979). In the first scene three crewmembers of the space ship Nostromo (played by Sigourney Weaver, Yaphet Kotto and Harry Dean Stanton) gradually approach a small door that might harbour a threat. Here the shock to the

⁹ Even in psychology disgust seems to be understudied; some have even called it a 'forgotten emotion' (cf. Olantunji and Sawchuk 2005, 933).

crewmembers (and us) derives from a shrieking cat jumping out of the dark. In the second scene the astronaut Kane (played by John Hurt) inspects a strange alien cocoon on a foreign planet. In this case the shock comes from an alien hurling itself against the astronaut's helmet. Although the shock works quite similarly in both cases, the second scene adds the disgustingness of the slimy, oddly shaped creature. We feel shocked and disgusted at the same time. (Of course, the scene also differs insofar as the cat turns out to be harmless, whereas the alien is dangerous; but this is not the point here.)

Yet the bursting shock-disgust combination is not the only kind of sudden disgust. There are other moments of disgust that also come about suddenly and are therefore strongly rooted in the present. But these scenes are not shocking; they are merely *surprising* in a disgusting way. We have to distinguish these: while moments of shock are always and necessarily startling, surprise does not need to be so. It derives from an appraisal of something novel and unexpected, but lacks the strong bodily phenomenology of shock. The sudden disgust of negative surprise derives from a discrepancy between the *expectation* of a certain gestalt and its *actual*, novel form. A scene from Dario Argento's *Jenifer* (2005) might help to illustrate this point. Initially the Italian director takes great care to hide the eponymous character's face; he shows only her alluring body and long blond hair. At one point, however, Jenifer turns her face toward the camera and exposes her radically deformed, extremely ugly face. The discrepancy between our expectation of a beautiful face harmonizing with the rest of her body and her actual face is negatively surprising. Again, the viewer's temporal experience of this sudden revelation points to the here and now, even if it is not combined with a startling moment of shock that makes us jump.¹⁰

Ultimately the more interesting and complex type is anticipatory disgust. In a time-based art like film directors can powerfully toy with the viewer's expectations of future disgust confrontations. Here I am less referring to the vague extra-textual disgust expectations that come with a genre label like "splatter horror" or "gross-out comedy." I am talking about the concrete expectations that derive from narrative hints planted prior to the disgusting scene. We might think of a verbal cue like the written words "the worst toilet in Scotland" the audience can read before Renton (Ewan McGregor) in *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996) enters what will turn out

¹⁰ Or think of the famous pea-soup scene in *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973). When Regan (Linda Blair) stares angrily at Father Karras (Jason Miller) and suddenly starts to vomit green slime, we can hardly call our emotional experience a co-occurrence of disgust and shock. It is merely a combination of disgust and surprise: our expectation of her behaviour and its actual manifestation differ astonishingly. For a whole range of vomit scenes that function similarly in terms of disgust and surprise, see the "Maggie Blackamoor and Judy Pike" episodes in the British TV series *Little Britain* (Matt Lucas/David Walliams, 2003-2005).

to be an utterly revolting restroom: before he opens the door, the insert forces us anticipate. But the expectation can also come from narrative pre-information established visually. Still blindfolded and extremely thirsty after a recent eye-surgery, John Anderton (Tom Cruise) in *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) stumbles toward a refrigerator in the surgeon's somewhat dilapidated apartment. The camera briefly reveals what Anderton cannot see: parts of the food and one of the bottles of milk inside the refrigerator are mouldy. This asymmetry of knowledge immediately triggers the viewer's pre-reflective expectation: Most probably we will see and hear the character eat from the mouldy food which, in turn, will cause a strong disgust response due to empathic participation. Moreover, the choice between the two bottles of milk evokes the suspenseful question whether Anderton will take the fresh or the mouldy one. Since the viewer strongly anticipates the negative option, his or her temporal experience leans toward the immediate future.

While anticipatory disgust is future-directed, the expectation influences the experience at the present moment. In his book *Sweet Anticipation* David Huron usefully distinguishes between two pre-outcome responses that expectations usually evoke prior to the actual event: the *imagination* response and the *tension* response (Huron 2006, 7-12). During the imagination response we imaginarily anticipate what is most likely going to happen. The upcoming event therefore tinges the pre-outcome phase and the future has, as it were, a backward effect upon the present. In other words, when we strongly anticipate being disgusted, we are *already* disgusted to a certain degree. As Huron notes: "it is not the case that we simply think about future outcomes; when imagining these outcomes, we typically are also capable of feeling a muted version of the pertinent emotion. We don't simply *think* about future possibilities; we *feel* future possibilities" (Huron 2006, 8, original emphasis). This certainly goes for the example from *Minority Report*. Partly affected by the brief glimpses of the disgusting food and milk and partly affected by his or her *expectation* of the strong disgust response, the viewer is already slightly revolted. It is therefore adequate to consider anticipatory disgust not just as a preparatory moment *before* the actual disgust confrontation, but a specific type of disgust in and of itself. That's why I choose the label 'anticipatory disgust.'

The expectation of a disgusting outcome also involves a certain bodily and cognitive preparation for the confrontation. Huron chooses the felicitous term "tension" to describe this pre-outcome response. In moments of anticipatory disgust the viewer tenses up mentally – through increased attention and vigilance – and somatically – through changes in bodily feeling – when expecting the outcome. This is especially true for cases that promise an *intensive* experience due to a particularly disgusting object or event

(magnitude). The “the worst toilet in Scotland” insert functions as a warning sign indicating a comparatively high magnitude. Tension will also become pertinent when the outcome is not definite regarding its *when* and *how* (uncertainty).

In comparison to cases of sudden disgust, scenes of anticipatory disgust momentarily suspend the clash with the revolting object or act. Due to the temporal delay of the strongly expected confrontation, the viewer responds with an attitude highly typical for disgust in general: ambivalence. It is a commonplace in theories of disgust to underscore not only its repellent side, but also an element of curiosity, attraction, fascination and even somatic pleasure.¹¹ On the one hand, the viewer has to take into account a potentially overwhelming negative experience. On the other hand, the confrontation promises something fascinating (even if it is fascinatingly disgusting). Hence in anticipatory disgust the viewer is caught in an ambivalent double bind. He or she is cautious or even apprehensive of the upcoming confrontation – and drawn to it out of sheer attraction and the curiosity about whether the prediction will turn out to be true.

In this regard it might be worthwhile to mention that expectation also involves what Huron calls the *prediction* response. It belongs to the post-outcome responses and comprises the evaluation of the initial expectation: ‘When the stimulus is expected, the emotional response is positively valenced; when the stimulus is unexpected, the emotional response is negatively valenced’ (Huron 2006, 13). Hence there might be a certain pleasure in having predicted the right outcome, even if it is a negative one: ‘It is as though brains know not to shoot the messenger: accurate expectations are to be valued (and rewarded) even when the news is not good’ (Huron 2006, 13). This might partly explain the satisfaction that comes when anticipatory disgust turns into full-blown disgust and thus confirms our initial expectation. In turn, a certain disappointment can result when the disgust confrontation does *not* take place. We feel a certain lack of closure, since the ending of the scene does not confirm our expectation and we realize that our prediction was wrong.

Since a positive prediction yields satisfaction, we are now able to explain more convincingly why the anticipation of disgust can also involve a *desire* to confront the disgusting object or act head-on. Apart from the

¹¹ In his study on disgust Winfried Menninghaus defines it as ‘(1) the violent repulsion vis-à-vis (2) a physical presence or some other phenomenon in our presence, (3) which at the same time, in various degrees, can also exert a subconscious attraction or even an open fascination’ (Menninghaus 2003, 6). The ambivalent character of (cinematic) disgust is also underscored by Brigitte Peucker: ‘when we visually ingest disgusting substances – substances that remind us of our own materiality – we experience at once disgust, displeasure, and fascination as we seek also to take in the implication of that materiality’ (Peucker 2007, 189).

strange attraction to disgusting objects mentioned above, we also want to be sure about our expectations. Once a scene of anticipatory disgust is established, the viewer starts to hypothesize about the actual outcome: Will the Scottish toilet live up to its dismal reputation? Will Anderton indeed make the wrong choice? And will I get the reward of a correct prediction? Gifted directors can play with the viewer's desire by deliberately delaying the final confrontation and by cleverly disclosing the object step by disgusting step. I would not be surprised if all this reminds the reader of another well-known aesthetic term. Although it is employed mainly in reference to moments of apprehension, I am tempted to call anticipatory disgust a type of *suspense*.

Presence: Perceiving or Imagining the Disgusting Object

In passing the preceding section has introduced an important point. The source of disgust does not have to be *actually* present in an audiovisual way for the viewer to feel revolted. In anticipatory disgust the intentional object or act is still temporally absent, but already casts its shadow backwards on the present moment. Hence the viewer's strong expectation somehow makes the disgusting object or act *temporally absent-present*. Similarly, the disgusting object or act does not have to be fully present in spatial terms. It can remain partly or even completely absent from the shot as long as some form of evocation makes it, as it were, *spatially absent-present* by way of the viewer's imagination. As Lessing once put it, "it is not only actual stench, but the very idea of it, that awakens disgust" (Lessing 1853, 183).

Hence the disgusting object can either be *fully present* audiovisually in the scene. In this case we might ask: Does the audience confront the disgusting object or act first and foremost directly via audiovisual *perception*? Or can the disgusting object be *completely absent* audiovisually from the shot and come into play only through evocation. This raises the following question: does the viewer come into contact with the disgusting object or act predominantly in a more indirect way via *imagination*? Although all disgust scenes must be located somewhere on this continuum, the filmmaker can tend toward perception or toward imagination. Following this heuristic distinction we might claim that the simplest and most obvious case would be the full and direct audiovisual presentation of a disgusting object or act. In *Salò* (1975) Pier Paolo Pasolini shows a silver-bowl filled with a huge amount of warm human faeces. In *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) Darren Aronofsky integrates the close-up of an open, unclean, putrid arm wound of a heroin addict (Jared Leto). In both cases, the object of disgust is clearly perceptible within the frame. But apart from the fact that such scenes practically never stand for themselves, we should remember that the viewer will not perceive them with his or her senses of seeing and hearing alone. As

we will see below, the direct audiovisual confrontation synaesthetically brings the other senses into play as well. For instance, in the Pasolini example I might *see* the heap of excrements but simultaneously *imagine* its smell. Hence in practice the viewer's imagination will invariably play a role even in disgust scenes that seemingly rely on perception alone. The question is, of course, how and to what degree does the film address the viewer's imagination?

A key strategy of involving the viewer's (visual) imagination is the dialectical play of hiding and showing. Through a series of visual omissions as well as visual and acoustic suggestions, the viewer compensates the visual *blank* through a visualizing act of imagination. During this process the viewer's field of consciousness is temporarily restructured. The film reception based predominantly on the perception of 'material' moving-images and sounds is enriched by vivid 'immaterial' visual imaginations. One could talk about an experience of mental superimposition: perception and imagination are layered on top of each other so both simultaneously become a conscious part of our film experience. Now, as mentioned above, imagination is necessarily involved in scenes of disgust. However, the terms 'visual imagination' and 'mental visualization' describe a specific kind of film experience, in which the act of imagining becomes more conspicuous and more conscious. In other words, imagining moves from the periphery to the centre of the field of consciousness. Of course, the viewer does not visualize randomly and fill out everything omitted. This would be an endless and senseless activity. Visual imaginations at the movies are a form of *bounded imagination*. Or, to put it differently, visual imaginations are an implicit part of the scene's aesthetic structure. Asked by visual and auditory suggestions the viewer fills the omissions with mental visualizations.

For instance, in his gross-out comedy *Animal House* (1978), John Landis uses a timeworn, but potent strategy to evoke visual imaginations one could call 'cut-away.' The cut-away describes a principle of montage that *suggests* by showing a current event, *omits* by abruptly and prematurely finishing the scene through cutting away and *suggests* again through an evocative acoustic signal. The mental visualization compensating the visual lack is briefly superimposed, as it were, upon the subsequent shot like an 'afterimage' in the viewer's mind. In *Animal House* an annoying dean (John Vernon) summons five male students in his office to inform them about the consequences of their unruly behaviour. They are not only expelled from school, but he will also inform their draft boards that they are eligible for the military service in Vietnam. Kent Dorfman (Stephen Furst), apparently afraid, feels nauseous and starts to swallow heavily. The principal misinterprets his swallowing as an attempt to say something. He urges him "Well, out with it!", upon which the student starts to retch. After a short

glimpse at the surprised principle, there is a cut to the next room. While we can *see* a secretary reading a magazine, we *hear* the sound of splashing vomit. Due to the cut-away the student's throwing up is visually absent (a blank, in the sense of Wolfgang Iser's reception aesthetics). But at the same time the splashing sound is so strongly present aurally, that the viewer cannot but fill the blank in an act of mental visualization. Would it be inappropriate to call this kind of acoustic suggestion *non-verbal ekphrasis*? W.J.T. Mitchell, for one, has pointed out the iconic character of 'sound images' such as thundering or other studio sound effects. He calls them a nonverbal form of ekphrasis because they 'provoke visual images by metonymy, or customary contiguity' (Mitchell 1994, 153).

While identifying the aural suggestion of *Animal House* as non-verbal ekphrasis might sound like a stretch, many scenes of disgust can indeed be subsumed under the rhetorical term 'ekphrasis' (evocative description) as well as intensified by the classical principle of 'energeia' (vividness). In cases of cinematic ekphrasis – i.e. verbal descriptions of something not visually or aurally present in the shot – the object or act is even more absent than before. While in previous examples the visually offscreen object (or act) was at least present acoustically, it is now a purely verbal description that has to present the absent object or act. There is, of course, nothing magical about it. We know from experiences with the theatre or literary texts that words are able to evoke visual, aural, haptic, olfactory and gustatory imaginations of disgusting objects (or acts). In Wittgenstein's phrase: 'Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination' (Wittgenstein 2001, 4). My remarks simply underscore the difference between an evocation through *sound* and an evocation through *words*.

But how can a filmmaker present an absent object or event in a particularly vivid way through cinematic ekphrasis? Several simple rules of thumb come to mind. a) Provide a colourful and comparatively detailed but not overburdening account. b) Include a pointed emphasis of important aspects. c) Use a transparent language that refers to the object or act and does not foreground its own rhetorical grandeur. d) An extraordinary, even bizarre content will also help to set off vivid imaginations. e) The verbal description of the absent object must not stand in opposition to other attention-grabbing stimuli. In Gestalt theoretical terms, the viewer's visual imagination, evoked through cinematic ekphrasis, must be the figure standing out clearly from a comparatively neutral ground. A potent illustration for these rules of thumb can be found in the omnibus film *Deutschland 09* (2009), a collaborative effort of 13 German *auteurs*. The documentary episode by Romuald Karmakar called "Ramses" is hard to exceed in terms of ekphrastic disgust. The eponymous figure, an Egyptian brothel owner in Berlin, tells us about the unusual preferences of his clients.

One suitor asks a prostitute to defecate on his face and in order to eat the faeces; another one wants to take a prostitute's used tampon in his mouth, and so on.

This episode relies on detailed descriptions of something that happened in the *past*, something absent in terms of time. Using an expression from drama theory we might call Ramses' ekphrastic description a *messenger's report*. However, there are examples in which the ekphrastic evocation refers to something that exists right *now*, but is absent in terms of space due to its place offscreen. Drama theory uses the term *teichoscopy*.¹² Consider this example of teichoscopy from David Fincher's *Seven* (1995). Detectives Somerset (Morgan Freeman) and Mills (Brad Pitt) enter a dark and dirty crime scene. Bugs and insects crawl over the floor and a food-covered kitchen table. From Mills' face and his groaning sounds we can deduce that a disgusting smell of dust and filth, of death and decay lies in the air. In the middle of the room there is a grossly fat man sitting, his dead hands and feet bound with barbed wire, the dead flesh of his neck covered with revolting purple veins, his dead face pressed into a plate of spaghetti. Mills finds a bucket under the victim's table. He bows down, looks into it with his flashlight and recoils heavily with a distorted, extremely repulsed face, screaming: 'Oh, god! Fucking vomit!' He holds his arm over his nose and then blows his nostrils, as if to get rid of the smell. In this scene we never see the content of the bucket. Apart from the revolting (and highly dreadful) atmosphere that creates a vague anticipatory disgust in itself, it is first of all the forceful teichoscopic exclamation that sets off the viewer's disgust. Bringing into play our embodied knowledge, the short ekphrasis 'Fucking vomit!' evokes vivid sensuous imaginations of this particular object of disgust.

In comparison to the act of reading moments of cinematic ekphrasis, these do not rely on the viewer's processing of words alone. The messenger's report or teichoscopy is always accompanied by the viewer's aural perception of the narrating voice and its intonation. And often the character's visible facial expression and gesture play a crucial role as well. Hence in *Seven* the viewer does not only respond to the short teichoscopic description of what's inside the bucket under the dead man's table, but also to the way Mills

¹² For a comparable discussion of the nexus between imagination and *fear*, see the chapter "Intimidating Imaginations. A Phenomenology of Suggested Horror" in (Hanich 2010). I use the terms 'messenger's report' and 'teichoscopy' in order to highlight their connection to drama theory and hence the *transmedial* character of suggestive descriptive verbal reports on stage, in films but also in literature and other media. However, I am aware that the import of these terms into film studies demands a liberal usage. For instance, a filmic teichoscopy is usually not a synchronous description of a view over a wall, but refers to something in offscreen space.

forcefully and disgustedly exclaims the word “vomit.” Plus, the scene would be half as effective, if it were not combined with Mills’ (potentially universal) revulsion response. We therefore have to look at the way characters come into play as well.

Character Engagement: Disgust-Empathy and Disgust-Sympathy

No doubt, characters are not necessarily part of a disgusting filmic moment. At the beginning of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) we can see glimpses of putrefying body parts and slimy skulls, but no character. In Dario Argento’s *Phenomena* (1985) there is a tracking shot towards a rotten head covered with squirming maggots, but no living human being present.¹³ Yet in the majority of cases disgust scenes *do* contain a character confronted with a repulsive object or act. In those cases another significant distinction suggests itself: does the scene make us feel *with* the character due to disgust-*empathy*; or does it urge us to feel *for* the figure because of disgust-*sympathy*?¹⁴ In other words, does the filmmaker put us in a position of knowing (roughly) as much as the character; or is there a strong surplus of knowledge on our part that forces us to evaluate the scene differently than the unknowing figure?

In the case of disgust-empathy there is a high degree of congruence between the character and the viewer: both are disgusted. When in *Léolo* (Jean-Claude Lauzon, 1992) a young woman (Giuditta Del Vecchio) is urged to bite the yellow, dry and stinking toenails of an old man (Julien Guimar), she reveals signs of disgust that correspond to the viewer’s current emotion. Disgust-empathy has a lot to do with what Berys Gaut calls ‘epistemic identification’: ‘If our knowledge of what is fictional in the film corresponds to a high degree with that of a particular character, there is a tendency to identify affectively and to empathize with that character, even if we are not antecedently disposed to do so’ (Gaut 2010, 266). To be sure, the disgust experience will rarely be identical, because the character often responds to a disgusting object existing on the *same* ontological level and is potentially present to *all* the senses, whereas the viewer reacts to something present beyond the ontological boundary of the screen and merely exists audiovisually (even if the other senses are synaesthetically implicated as well,

¹³ Even these two examples contain “characters” insofar as in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* we hear someone digging and breathing and in *Phenomena* the tracking shot can be interpreted as the POV shot of a fly approaching the skull.

¹⁴ I follow Carl Plantinga in defining empathy and sympathy not as bona fide emotions but as capacities or dispositions to respond to another’s experience (Plantinga 2009, 98).

as we shall see below).¹⁵ What is more, even the audiovisual access to the disgusting object or act will be different in most cases, because character and viewer seldom share the same perspective. While it is certainly conceivable that the film offers a perceptual point-of-view shot throughout, in reality it will most certainly switch to a different shot distance (for instance, a close-up) and, more importantly, incorporate a reaction shot of the character. The importance of the latter cannot be overestimated in terms of empathy.¹⁶ It is hard to resist empathizing with the typical aversive disgust reaction with its well-defined facial expression: furrowing of the eyebrows, closure of the eyes, pupil constriction, wrinkling of the nose, upper lip retraction, upward movement of the lower lip and chin, drawing the corners of the mouth down and back (Olatunji and Sawchuk 2005, 936). The motor mimicry evoked by a retching character is particularly effective – as in the toilet scene in *Trainspotting*, the “Yellow Snow Cone” scene in *Jacksass: The Movie* (Jeff Tremaine, 2002) or some of the faeces scenes in *Salò*. Hence, in contrast to the character, the viewer has a more varied intentional object: he or she reacts both to a disgusting object or act *and* a character’s disgust response. Furthermore, the viewer’s disgust response will often be mixed with other emotions and affects. For instance, the *Léolo* example could simultaneously evoke anger at the old man and erotic arousal due to the young woman being in the nude while biting the toenails. (The co-occurrence or fusion of disgust with other emotions will be discussed more thoroughly below.) Nevertheless, audience and character have a similar experience, since both share similar information and are similarly disgusted.

However, movies are rife with scenes in which the opposite is true. Viewer and character do not experience congruent emotions at all, because the viewer, unlike the oblivious character, feels disgusted due to some additional information the filmmaker has granted. This epistemic surplus makes the viewer feel disgust-sympathy *for* the character, often regardless of a justified antipathy. One (sub-)genre in which this form of dramatic irony abounds is the gross-out comedy. In a previous essay on disgust I have

¹⁵ For to the cross-modal character of perception consider, for instance, the philosopher Martin Seel. He notes about the ‘interlacing of the senses’ in all perception, be it in a hidden or an explicit manner: ‘One sense does what it can by virtue of its distinction from and support by the other senses. They are coordinated forces of the spatial and temporal orientation of the body without whose cooperation it could not attain any stability – beginning with its sense of balance’ (Seel 2004, 30).

¹⁶ As Berys Gaut argues: ‘on the whole the reaction shot is more important than the point-of-view shot in mobilizing affective and empathic identification’ (Gaut 2010, 266). For an argument that the neural response to facial expressions of disgust in others is closely related to the appraisal of distasteful stimuli and that the intensity of brain activation correlates with the intensity of perceived facial expressions of disgust, see (Phillips et al. 1997).

mentioned the case of *Van Wilder* (Walt Becker, 2002).¹⁷ Here I want to draw attention to the German film *Ballermann 6* (Gernot Roll, 1997). Annoyed and humiliated by an extremely arrogant and snobbish restaurant guest (Christoph M. Ohrt), two dumb-and-dumber protagonists (Tom Gerhardt, Himi Sözer) set out to take revenge. In the restaurant kitchen they prepare a special kind of “paella diavolo” with dish liquid, glue, Tabasco, castor oil, dandruff, dirt from their toenails and snot. While the scene is disgusting in and of itself, it also starts to evoke anticipatory disgust because of the potential disgust-sympathy we might have to endure at the end of the scene (of course, an anticipation of *schadenfreude* also plays a role in this peculiar emotion mix). And indeed: when the revenge dish is served and the character starts to eat, it is hard not to feel repulsed. Despite the fact that he initially enjoys the food and despite the strong antipathy we might feel toward this obnoxious character, we also feel disgust for him, the simultaneous *schadenfreude* notwithstanding. Because we know more than the character, we feel disgust in his stead.¹⁸

Interestingly, a fascinating friction can arise when the character *knowingly* touches, smells or even eats a highly disgusting object – and *enjoys* it. Here our access road to sympathy is blocked, because no surplus of knowledge exists and pitying a character that enjoys something would be strange. Hence a conflict arises between the viewer’s empathic feeling with the character’s *enjoyment* and the viewer’s personal reaction to the *object of disgust*. Take Michael Haneke’s *La pianiste* (2001) in which protagonist Erika Kohut (Isabelle Huppert) enters a sex shop and heads straight for a private porn booth. While watching a fellatio scene, she rummages through a garbage can next to the monitor and grabs a sperm-filled tissue left by one of her predecessors. At first she holds it with her gloved fingers spread, as if trying to distance herself from the disgusting object. However, once she takes several deep smells at the tissue, her face looks more and more pleased and aroused. Not only does Kohut act ambiguously here, displaying a contradiction in terms of her haptic and olfactory disgust, but the viewer, too, is torn between empathy and personal disgust. While I found the scene

¹⁷ See footnote 2.

¹⁸ The principle of *feeling in someone’s stead* also extends to animals and cartoon characters. Think of the scene in Todd Solondz’ *Happiness* (1998) in which a young boy (Rufus Read) masturbates on a balcony and ejaculates on the balustrade. When a dog eagerly licks the boy’s sperm, the viewer’s disgust derives partly from feeling for the animal. Similarly, the viewer might feel (slightly) disgusted when watching the early Disney Mickey Mouse short *Pioneer Days* (1930), in which a number of animated cartoon characters are heavily moved to tears by the story of an old goat. As five of the cartoon animals share a handkerchief in which they heavily blow their noses, the viewer feels revolted in their stead.

rather repulsive, I have heard several people reporting no sense of disgust at all. In their case empathy with the relishing protagonist prevailed.

Synaesthetic Audiovision: Disgust and the Intimate Senses

Erika Kohut *smells* the sperm-filled tissue just as detective Mills smells the bucket full of vomit. John Anderton *tastes* the mouldy milk just as the obnoxious restaurant guest tastes the disgusting paella. Father Karras in *The Exorcist touches* the green slime thrown up on his face by Regan just as Kane is touched by the slimy alien. From the preceding discussion it follows that the disgusting objects cannot be closed off securely behind the invisible wall separating the ontological spheres of theatrical here and filmic there: Through empathy and sympathy with the characters the disgusting object's gustatory, olfactory and haptic qualities 'permeate' the screen, as it were, and 'enter' the theatre. In other words, the disgusting objects are accessible to us not only via our 'distance senses' – the 'intimate senses' are somehow and to varying degrees addressed as well. Translated through and in cooperation with the senses of seeing and hearing, we can also have a partially fulfilled haptic, olfactory or gustatory experience. This is true even for cases without characters, such as the scenes from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Phenomena* mentioned above. While character engagement can facilitate and strengthen the involvement of the other senses, empathy and sympathy are not necessary.

In the last decade phenomenological film theory has emphasized that the film experience does not rest exclusively on the dominant senses of seeing and hearing: 'We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium,' Vivian Sobchack writes (Sobchack 2004, 63). Following Maurice Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the lived-body as a permanent *sensorium commune* that synthesizes the empirically discrete (but not isolated!) senses, Sobchack claims our bodies always see and hear in cooperation and exchange with the other senses (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 272-273; Sobchack 2004 69-72). No doubt, the cinema does not *fully* bring forth the other senses. Cinema can only approach these experiences asymptotically.¹⁹ Each sense provides a specific access to the world – they are transposable into each other's domain only within certain limits (Sobchack 2004, 72). Hence I cannot actually smell the bucket full of vomit. The tactile quality of the slimy alien remains vague. And I won't be able to taste the 'paella diavolo' directly. At the same time it would contradict our phenomenological experience to say that we simply see and hear these objects. The multisensory quality of the film's disgusting object might be modified and restrained in comparison to

¹⁹ This formulation comes from Marks 2000, 131.

the real thing. Yet I still have a partial sensory experience of disgusting touch, smell and taste.²⁰

Until recently a focus on touch or, more broadly, tactility has dominated the film phenomenological debate.²¹ But scenes of cinematic disgust most certainly bring into play the senses of smell and taste as well. In order to categorize the variety of disgusting scenes at the movies we might therefore ask what ‘intimate’ or ‘proximal sense’ the filmmaker addresses *predominantly*. Is it first and foremost the sense of smell, the sense of taste or the sense of touch? Scientists and theorists have long wondered which sense is the most significant for the emotion of disgust. Psychologist Paul Rozin, who made extensive inquiries into the field, favours taste (Rozin et al. 2000). Phenomenologist Aurel Kolnai, who wrote an early major study, gives preference to the sense of smell, with touch coming in second (Kolnai 2004). Although disagreement about the actual hierarchy remains, it is obvious that the filmmaker’s focus on either smell, taste or touch has ramifications for the viewer’s disgust experience.

At the beginning of this section I have mentioned various examples of how movies stress one of the three ‘intimate senses.’ Let me add some further illustrations. In a thoroughly disgusting scene of his film *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989) Peter Greenaway primarily evokes an olfactory experience. When the police open the doors of a delivery truck, a load of rotten fish can be glimpsed inside. As the camera withdraws, it reveals a group of police officers standing around recoiling, covering their faces with tissues, coughing and retching. Meanwhile the sense of taste comes to the fore quite strongly in another scene from *Ballermann 6*. Upon arriving on the island of Mallorca, the two foolish protagonists try to grab a bucket from a cleaning lady, assuming that it contains sangria. The perplexed woman tries to prevent them from drinking the waste water – in vain. The two men spit out indefinable pieces, produce facial expressions of heavy disgust and comment on the strangeness of the taste. Finally, in Werner

²⁰ As Sobchack writes: ‘even if the intentional objects of my experience at the movies [...] are grasped in a sensual distribution that would be differently structured were I outside the theatre, I nonetheless do have a *real* sensual experience that is not reducible either to the satisfaction of merely two of my senses or to sensual analogies and metaphors constructed only ‘after the fact’ through the cognitive operations of conscious thought’ (Sobchack 2004, 76).

²¹ See, for instance, Marks 2000 and 2002 as well as Barker 2009. Jennifer Barker has a wide understanding of cinematic tactility, which for her is ‘a general attitude toward the cinema that the human body enacts in particular ways: *haptically*, at the tender surface of the body; *kinaesthetically* and *muscularly*, in the middle dimension of muscles, tendons, and bones that reach toward and through cinematic space; and *viscerally*, in the murky recesses of the body, where heart, lungs, pulsing fluids, and firing synapses receive, respond to, and reenact rhythms of cinema’ (Barker 2009, 3, my emphasis).

Herzog's *Rescue Dawn* (2006) it is the haptic sense that predominates. One day a group of ragged US POWs, on the run somewhere in the rainy jungle of Laos, find themselves covered with leeches. When they begin to pull the creatures from their naked, wet and dirty bodies, it is hard not to empathize and feel the sticky and slick tactility of the revolting animals. In this case, the documentary quality of Herzog's scene generates the belief that what we see might have actually occurred in front of the camera – which further adds to the viewer's haptic disgust.²²

I would be at odds with current phenomenological film theory if I claimed these scenes address the sense of touch or taste or smell *alone*. My goal is simply to point out that we can categorize them according to the sense they involve *predominantly*.²³ Such distinctions do not imply idle pigeonholing. In fact, they might even improve film analysis. In terms of tactility Jennifer Barker argues that 'careful attention to the tactile surfaces and textures involved in the film experience might illuminate complexities and significance that might be overlooked by a focus on visual, aural, or narrative aspects' (Barker 2009, 25). Just to give a rather basic example of how this perspective might help to analyze the work of one specific *auteur*: In *Seven* David Fincher works primarily with olfactory disgust, whereas in *Alien 3* (1992) he relies mostly on haptic disgust.

Affective Co-Occurrence: Disgust and Other Emotions

In the final section I will address a somewhat surprising aspect that future research might want to explore more thoroughly. Typically, scenes of cinematic disgust are not *just* disgusting – they are often something else as well. Throughout the essay I have mentioned examples in which disgust came hand in hand with a second emotion or affect. For instance, in the first scene from *Ballermann 6* disgust arrived together with *schadenfreude*. The second example from *Alien* combined disgust and shock. Philosophers and psychologists call this phenomenon 'mixed feelings.' In a wider sense the term 'mixed feelings' refers to the experience of two (or more) emotions in general; in a narrower sense it implies the experience of two (or more) emotions of different valence.²⁴ I tend to talk about *affective co-occurrence* in order to avoid a premature stance on whether the emotions are blended or merely co-exist. Affective co-occurrence is a thorny issue. And although the

²² This is also true for a repulsive scene in Ulrich Seidl's stunning documentary *Tierische Liebe* (1995) about Viennese dog lovers in which a man extensively French-kisses his German shepherd

²³ Moreover in many cases it might prove impossible to point out one predominant sense.

²⁴ I will use the term in the first sense.

topic has a long tradition in philosophical aesthetics, little scientific research on ‘mixed feelings’ exists.²⁵

How can we fruitfully relate this finding to a poetics of cinematic disgust? Following David Bordwell’s key question of analytical poetics – ‘What are the principles according to which films are constructed and through which they achieve particular effects?’ – we might begin by registering the wide variety of emotions filmmakers can combine with disgust (Bordwell 2007, 23). So far I have mentioned shock and *schadenfreude*. Closely related to shock is horror.²⁶ Noël Carroll, for one, argues that ‘art-horror’ – a combination of fear and disgust – typically occurs in horror films: it is the appropriate emotional response to the threatening and impure monster.²⁷ As an example one could cite the confrontation with the monster in *Alien: Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997). The alien not only looks and acts dangerously, but also drools repulsive slime. To be sure, monstrous serial killers like Mike Myers, Hannibal Lecter or Norman Bates are far from disgusting. In turn, creatures can be repulsive without evoking fear (think of the eponymous character in David Lynch’s *The Elephant Man* [1980]). But many filmmakers decide to create their monsters so they evoke both fear and disgust.

Another negative emotion that sometimes comes with disgust is anger (or related emotions like rage, disdain or contempt). Just consider the case of an antagonistic and sadistic figure humiliating a likeable character – as in the outrageous faeces scenes in Paul Verhoeven’s *Black Book* (2006) or Pasolini’s *Salò*. In *Black Book* a prison warden tears the clothes from protagonist Rachel Stein (Carice van Houten) and beats her naked body with a club. Then another ward goes on to cover her with huge amounts of faeces while a crowd of by-standers cheers and laughs (the scene might also evoke anger at the director responsible for such a questionable representation of female humiliation).

Certainly, disgust is also accompanied by more positively valenced emotions. Above I have pointed out the case of *schadenfreude*. But more innocent responses such as hilarity and amusement come to mind as well. Earlier I have mentioned the disgusting body humour of gross-out comedies

²⁵ In a recent psychological article on the co-occurrence of disgust and amusement (in which they use a film clip from *Pink Flamingos* [John Waters, 1973] as experimental stimulus) the authors note: ‘there exists hardly any scientific evidence about the prevalence of mixed feelings’ (Scott H. Hemenover and Ulrich Schimmack 2007, 1103).

²⁶ Both are types of cinematic fear. For a distinction between five types of fear at the movies (direct horror, suggested horror, shock, dread and terror), see Hanich 2010.

²⁷ ‘If the monster were only evaluated as potentially threatening, the emotion would be fear; if only potentially impure, the emotion would be disgust. Art-horror requires evaluation both in terms of threat and disgust,’ he writes (Carroll 1990, 28).

like *Animal House* or *Ballermann 6*. The fart humour in *Dumb and Dumber* (Farrelly Brothers, 1994), the sperm humour in *There's Something About Mary* (Farrelly Brothers, 1998) and the sweat-and-hair humour in *Along Came Polly* (John Hamburg, 2004) are other cases in point. Similarly, the splatter-horror genre, with its grotesque destructions of bodies and exaggerated fountains of blood and guts, rarely rings a serious tone. Its disgusting scenes are often ridiculous or flat-out funny. This is certainly true for such classics of the (sub)genre as *Re-Animator* (Stuart Gordon, 1985), *The Evil Dead II* (Sam Raimi, 1987), *Army of Darkness* (Sam Raimi, 1992) or *Braindead* (Peter Jackson, 1992). A special case of differently valenced emotions is the co-occurrence of the fiction-based emotion of disgust and artefact-based emotions like admiration or astonishment.²⁸ While the narrative level might evoke disgust, its artful presentation can simultaneously elicit admiration. A good example would be a creature that is both disgusting and extremely well crafted such as the Gollum in *Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson, 2001).

Apart from inventorying the emotions that accompany disgust, the question of affective co-occurrence yields other categorical insights. Firstly, one could raise the issue of *pleasure/displeasure* (or valence, as psychologists call it) of the emotions involved. Either both emotions are negative and thus located on the displeasure end of the valence axis (like disgust and horror or shock); or the second emotion is positive and hence we deal with two emotions of different valence (such as disgust and amusement or A-emotion admiration). Secondly, there is the question of the *temporal distribution* of the emotions involved. The emotions can occur simultaneously, but they can also alternate so rapidly that it is hard to tell them apart. Once again, the question of temporality plays an important role. Thirdly, there is the question of blending or co-existence. Are the emotions fused into a single gestalt that yields a completely new quality? In this case the two emotions lose most of their characteristics. Or do the emotions co-exist and therefore preserve their qualities?

In this context we might also ask for the *function* of disgust in terms of affective co-occurrence. In 18th century aesthetics it was common to assume that disgust works as an *amplifier for other emotions*.²⁹ Lessing, for instance,

²⁸ The distinction between F(ictional)-emotions and A(rtefact)-emotions comes from Tan (1996, 36).

²⁹ Thanks to Winfried Menninghaus for bringing this aspect to my attention. The psychological study by Schnall et al. mentioned above gives empirical evidence that disgust can, at the very least, increase the severity of *moral judgments*. The authors admit that the participants who followed their gut feelings when making moral condemnations were 'tricked' by extraneous physical disgust (Schnall et al. 2008, 14). This is an interesting finding insofar as it underscores our intuition that films can manipulate viewers' moral judgments by evoking bodily disgust.

wrote: ‘painting requires the disgusting not for its own sake, but, as poetry, to strengthen thereby the ridiculous and the horrible’ (Lessing 1853, 183). In this scenario the strong emotion of disgust is the handmaiden for other strong emotions: it co-exists next to the ridiculous or the horrible and amplifies their effect. But disgust might also serve as a negative means to a positive end: a burden the viewer has to shoulder on the way to a different goal. Or it is part of the pleasure itself. In the former case we have two *opposing* tendencies: we experience pleasure *despite* disgust. In the latter case we have two *commingled* tendencies: pleasure *depends on* and *comes with* disgust. Gary Iseminger suggests a helpful terminological distinction (Iseminger 1983). In the first case he speaks of a *co-existentialist* account: both emotions exist separately, but the pleasure-yielding, positive feeling *overcomes* the negative one – we pay the price of disgust in order to experience, for instance, feelings of joy or relief. For the second case Iseminger coined the term *integrationist* account: the seemingly negative emotion is the prerequisite for pleasure – we enjoy because disgust is part of the experience.

Noel Carroll’s argument for the pleasure of horror can count as an example for a co-existentialist account. He claims that apart from the negative response of art-horror (i.e., the combination of fear and disgust), the monster of the horror film also evokes a positive response, namely interest. (Carroll also uses the terms ‘curiosity’ and ‘fascination’). Precisely because it is an impossible being and thus does not fit into the standing cultural categories, the monster creates a desire to know more about it; as an unknowable being it necessitates curiosity. Carroll evaluates the two reactions differently. While art-horror is unpleasant and negative, interest (and the satisfaction thereof during the narrative) is pleasant and positive. Art-horror is ‘the price to be paid’ for the pleasure of satisfied interest (Carroll 1990, 184). Another 18th century German philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, might be cited as a proponent of an integrationist account. Mendelssohn argued that ‘vermischte Empfindungen’ (mixed sentiments, i.e. combinations of positive and negative affects) penetrate deeper and last longer than purely positive responses. Just like too much candy, the purely pleasant will soon end in satiation and, if no change occurs, eventually turn into disgust (Mendelssohn 2009, 252). Although Mendelssohn mainly mentions the horrible as a negative ‘ingredient,’ in his scenario the prior mixing of disgust would help to deepen and prolong the mixed, but pleasant experience and thus help to avert premature satiation: added-disgust prevents satiation-disgust.

Has all been said and done on our way toward a poetics of cinematic disgust? Certainly not. However, one thing has hopefully come across: filmmakers can choose from a variety of options when attempting to elicit

disgust. Trying to evoke a repulsive experience they must weigh numerous decisions. Hence at the risk of sounding redundant let me repeat that the case of cinematic disgust is not as simple as it might seem. In fact, we might even attest to its unforeseen complexity. This unorthodox finding, in turn, complements an insight recent studies on affective responses at the movies have yielded more generally: the more we know about cinematic emotions, the more we have to conclude that we still know very little.

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