

The Social Fabric of Disgust: Contributions from a Sociology of Sensibilities

Las Tramas Sociales del Asco. Aportes desde una Sociología de las Sensibilidades

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Abstract: Disgust is an emotion that operates through the embodied imposition of sensory images that describe the object of repulsion/rejection in a given time-space. Through the narrative review of specific bibliography, this article aims to systematize a set of theoretical perspectives that enable outlining a view on disgust as a sensible index of social processes. To reach that objective, the logic of contamination and hierarchization from which disgust operates is discussed, the notion of “projective disgust” is revisited for addressing social relations with alterity that take place in capitalism, and some theoretical-analytical openings about the social structures of “the disgusting” elaborated from a Sociology of Sensibilities are proposed.

Key words: disgust, politics of sensibilities, projective disgust, alterity, social structure.

Resumen: El asco es una emoción que opera a través de la imposición encarnada de imágenes sensoriales que describen aquello que es objeto de repulsión/rechazo en un tiempo-espacio dado. A partir de la revisión narrativa de bibliografía específica, este artículo se propone sistematizar un conjunto de perspectivas teóricas que posibilita delinear una mirada sobre el asco como índice sensible de procesos sociales. Atendiendo a dicho propósito, se discuten las lógicas de contaminación y jerarquización desde las que opera el asco, se retoma la noción de “asco proyectivo” para el abordaje de las relaciones sociales con la alteridad que tienen lugar en el capitalismo, y se proponen algunas aperturas teórico-analíticas acerca de las estructuras sociales de lo asqueroso, elaboradas desde una sociología de las sensibilidades.

Palabras clave: asco, políticas de las sensibilidades, asco proyectivo, alteridad, estructura social.

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Introduction

Disgust manifests in daily life in ways that are as natural and evident as they are unnoticed and unexamined. While it is one of the most visceral emotions, often triggering physical reactions to objects, subjects, or situations that elicit rejection, it also plays a significant role in shaping many everyday routines. Cleaning the body to mask animal odors, brushing teeth to conceal the foulness caused by germs and bacteria in the mouth, seeking private spaces to defecate or urinate, and keeping food refrigerated and in good condition for consumption are just some examples that illustrate how disgust acts as a powerful force shaping daily routines and practices of intimacy. At the same time, it is also an emotion that influences social relationships, not only by establishing standards and acceptable forms of contact between individuals and groups but also by defining the thresholds of social tolerance that are activated in the face of the “stranger.”

Defined in its equivalence to repugnance, repulsion, and aversion (RAE, 2024),¹ disgust is an emotion that arises from the proximity of bodies or objects that are, *a priori*, attributed with a “harmful” or “offensive” effect. Consequently, it triggers specific reactions of rejection or repulsion (Miller, 1998; Nussbaum, 2006). Experiencing a nauseating smell on the street, noticing a lack of hygiene in a restaurant kitchen, touching a wet and sticky texture, witnessing someone vomiting, or sharing a seat on public transport with a person who has bad breath are everyday scenarios interwoven with disgust.

This article is proposed as a situated sociological approach to the social structures of disgust. Considering disgust as an emotion that operates through the embodied imposition of sensory images depicting what is subject to repulsion or rejection, the analysis is based on the premise that it serves as a powerful moral and social classifier upon

1 In this article, the terms “disgust” and “repugnance” are used interchangeably. This choice is not only justified by their frequent equivalence in everyday usage but also by the fact that the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE, 2024) defines them as synonyms. Moreover, this decision reflects an acceptance, from the perspective of a sociology of sensibilities, that both terms point to relations of exclusion, repulsion, and rejection directed toward the “disgusting” or “repugnant” entity and its social effects (Ahmed, 2015). They also denote emotional responses to objects or subjects possessing certain characteristics whose normative evaluation elicits rejection or distancing (Nussbaum, 2014).

which much of daily interaction is built. In connection with the logics of contamination and hierarchization (Rozin *et al.*, 2008a, 2008b), disgust is socially constructed through opposition and exclusion, corresponding to all that is “out of place,” whether due to its anomalous, ambiguous, or excessive nature. It is precisely this condition of being outside (social time-spaces) while simultaneously manifesting in the deepest layers of the body and emotion that positions disgust as a key element in the politics of contemporary sensibilities.

Theoretically, these policies are understood as “the set of cognitive-affective social practices aimed at the production, management, and reproduction of horizons of action, disposition, and cognition” (Scribano, 2017: 244). They are social processes that not only shape individuals’ preferences and values but also establish the parameters for managing the time-space framework in which everyday interactions take place. This operation, unnoticed and naturalized as a seemingly unique and personal way of feeling and perceiving the world, (re)produces structures and relations of domination through everyday practices and emotions (anger, hope, happiness, distress, shame, disgust, fatigue, etc.). From a sociological perspective, the study of sensibilities allows for an examination of how power structures shape practices and feelings, fostering the reproduction of social order, while also illuminating interstitial spaces and experiences of change that, beyond resignation, emerge as forms of “resistance” to the prevailing order. It is precisely in this everyday, unnoticed, and socially regulated operation —how individuals feel and how they act in response to those feelings— that the social power of sensibilities and their analytical potential reside.

Within the framework of a research line on habitability dynamics and the configuration of sensibilities in contemporary cities, the question of alterity (in terms of class, ethnicity/race, and gender) has raised a series of theoretical challenges. Among these, the problematization of disgust, along with other associated emotions, has emerged as a dimension warranting in-depth examination (Cervio, 2022a, 2022b, and 2021). In general terms, alterity refers to the ways in which societies are constructed, perceived, and felt through the differences and distances that shape individuals and the social relationships in which they participate. The configuration of the other as *non-identical to oneself* is a central aspect in the establishment of *I/you* and *we/they*

relationships, where the other is, precisely, *that which I am not*. Within this framework, alterity is part of the experience of encounter, of the creative and collective possibilities inherent in all forms of community. However, it is also a foundational relationship upon which multiple forms of social inequality are built —constructing the other as a threat, a failure, or an offense.

The theoretical and empirical investigation of segregationist dynamics that shape and permeate experiences of inhabiting spaces in contexts of poverty and urban precariousness in Argentina over recent decades has led to the conclusion that *differentiation, inequality, and social distancing* among subjects who recognize one another as “strangers” foster a concrete spatialization of alterity (Cervio, 2022a, 2022b, 2021; Cervio & Vergara, 2017). Furthermore, this process stimulates distrust, fear, and insecurity as emotions that reinforce the multiple walls, boundaries, and borders —both material and symbolic— that characterize the segregated city (Scribano & Cervio, 2018; Cervio, 2019a, 2019b). From this perspective, the figure of the *other* —whether poor, undocumented, immigrant, Black, homeless, or Indigenous— functions as a social mechanism that reaffirms what has been designated as “beyond” or “outside,” reinforcing the demarcation between the “inside” and “outside” of the social sphere.

However, the *other* does not exist *per se*. It is the result of a variety of practices, discourses, and power relations aimed at constructing an *ontology of strangeness* that naturalizes social differences and inequalities under the guise of fear, suspicion, and danger (Mbembe, 2018; Ahmed, 2000). It is within the interstices of this diagnosis and problematization that the question of disgust becomes meaningful, as an emotion that —problematically often— serves as both a mediator and a constitutive element of (real or socio-imaginary) interactions with *others in the city*, who are rendered strange, dangerous, and threatening.

In line with the aforementioned terms, and with the aim of deepening the theoretical and political relevance of disgust as an emotion that permeates and shapes a significant part of contemporary urban experiences and sensibilities, this study seeks to conduct a theoretical-conceptual review of the topic from the perspective of a sociology of sensibilities. To achieve this objective —and at the risk of breaching

decorum²— the following argumentative strategy has been developed. First, based on a narrative review of relevant literature, a set of theoretical perspectives is systematized to outline an understanding of disgust as a sensitive index of social processes. Second, considering the corporeal-affective and cognitive nature of emotions, the analysis delves into the dynamics of rejection and repulsion that form the basis of disgust, focusing on contamination and hierarchization as productive logics of the socially constructed notion of the “disgusting.” Third, recognizing that the disgusting is (also) a moral judgment that materializes as embodied emotion within the dynamics of stigmatization and stereotyping imposed by capitalism as part of its operative logics, the study revisits Nussbaum’s notion of “projective disgust” (2006, 2010, 2019). The study concludes by presenting theoretical-analytical insights into the social structures of the disgusting, developed from a sociology of sensibilities.

Disgust: Theoretical Approaches

To begin with, disgust is an emotion associated with fear, offense, and even the sense of inferiority ascribed to an object, person, or situation (Miller, 1998; Nussbaum, 2006; Salles, 2010). In a well-known passage from *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*³ ([1872] 1967), Darwin recounts —firsthand— his encounter with a native of Tierra del Fuego as an opportunity to reflect on disgust. In his words:

(...) when a native touched with his finger a piece of cold preserved meat that I was about to eat, he showed the deepest disgust at its softness. For my part, I experienced the same feeling upon seeing a naked savage put his hands on my food, even though they did not seem dirty to me” (Darwin, 1967: 10–11).

2 Miller (1993) reflects on the risks involved in studying disgust. In this regard, she begins her work by questioning the role of the social gaze —particularly the academic gaze— toward researchers who analyze this emotion. Given that the essence of disgust lies in the rejection of what provokes repulsion, the author states that “contact with the disgusting renders one disgusting. Studying disgust means risking contamination” (Miller, 1993: 711; our translation).

3 Disgust is one of the 32 emotions studied by the English naturalist. Focusing on food-related disgust (disgust in the sense of revulsion from eating or tasting), Darwin describes it as a reactive emotion triggered by sensory offense (taste, smell) caused by the presence of an object or subject. Additionally, he compiles a list of bodily expressions directly associated with disgust, such as furrowing of the brows and nose, mouth movements, guttural sounds, and so on.

In this scene, disgust —linked to colonial inferiority and animality— plays a central role. Indeed, the *native, non-white body* finds soft, cold flesh repulsive, while the white European body is repelled by the presence of a “naked savage” touching its food, even in the absence of any evidence of uncleanness. In other words, the settler finds it repugnant that the colonized individual contaminates (with their presence, their finger, their body) the food they will ingest. Disgust arises from the proximity of the stranger—or, more precisely, from the contaminating threat posed by the presence of the other body, regardless of any actual evidence of “contamination” that this other might bear or carry.

This brief account reveals at least two interrelated aspects of disgust. First, alterity (“savage,” “indigenous”) is performatively constructed as repugnant only when it approaches the subject and exposes its potential threat —in this case, the possibility of contaminating Darwin’s food. Second, disgust tends to be directed at objects or subjects deemed low or inferior to the extent that this very quality —being “beneath me,” “less than me”— ultimately becomes, for the disgusted subject, an inherent property of the object or subject that elicits repugnance. Both aspects demonstrate that, beyond its undeniable carnal and sensory nature, disgust is a moral and historical emotion well suited to the investigation of social phenomena.

Beyond the notions of proximity and hierarchy derived from the previous scene, Darwin defines disgust as “any sensation that offends the sense of taste” (Darwin, 1967: 10). The *offense* to the senses caused by *disgust* is related by the English scientist to the possibility that the proximity or contact of a strange object/person/event “breaks” with the customs of the person experiencing disgust. In fact, according to the RAE (2024), in its second definition, to offend is “*to go against what is commonly considered good, correct, or pleasant. To offend the sense of smell, good taste, or common sense.*” Although Darwin focuses mainly on the connections between disgust and food, it is interesting to note that this emotion appears as a sensitive (embodied) reaction to the presence of something or someone that is assessed as dangerous or threatening, and whose proximity can destabilize (that is, offend, contaminate, infect, or make ill) the known and expected order of things.

From a sociological perspective that integrates emotions, social processes, and power configurations, Elias (2016) argues that disgust

—along with fear and shame— plays a central role in the civilizing process. Broadly speaking, this process entails the transformation of social structures and their refraction in behavioral norms and sensibilities. Far from being the result of a chaotic interplay of chance and arbitrary movements, and even without being the product of rational planning, this historical change follows a specific trajectory. The sustained increase in reciprocal relationships among individuals generates interdependencies, giving rise to “an order that is stronger and more coercive than the will and reason of the isolated individuals who constitute it” (Elias, 2016: 536).

This civilizing process, which entails concrete transformations in social frameworks, is activated by and through specific changes in behaviors and emotions. On an individual level, external social constraints give way to self-restraints, which function as mechanisms of regulation and self-control over conduct in accordance with socially accepted and expected norms. Thus, restraining aggression, controlling instincts, and even experiencing disgust toward “socially inappropriate” behaviors constitute embodied sensory transformations experienced by individuals as a result of the new order of interdependencies in which they live and interact.

In this context, repugnance emerges as a specific indicator of social development, as the increase in techniques, devices, and practices of hygiene and decorum, alongside a simultaneous decrease in the social tolerance for dirt and bodily products, advances the civilizing process. Indeed, for this author, disgust constitutes the solidaristic counterpart of shame and is directly linked to the fear of transgressing social prohibitions. In this regard, disgust “occurs when something external to the individual affects their danger zones (...) [it is] an excitation of disgust or fear that arises when another person breaks or threatens to break the scale of prohibitions of society, represented by the superego” (Elias, 2016: 597). Thus, both repugnance and disgust are emotional states that are shaped by the fear provoked by the transgressive actions of others, not one’s own.

From an anthropological perspective, Douglas addresses purity, cleanliness, and their opposites. In this context, what is considered dirty or susceptible to pollution is “matter out of place” (Douglas, 2007: 53). Although she does not formulate a theory specifically about the emotion of disgust, her work allows us to infer reflections on the repugnance generated by impurity and dirt. For this author, dirt

always implies disorder—that is, an offense to the known order of things. As such, it is a form of “heresy” or “dissent” that confronts and challenges the system of symbolic categories that structures a society. Dirt is “anomalous,” “ambiguous”; in other words, it is the realm of “the out of place,” which dismisses the universal and timeless nature of purity as a criterion for ordering and classifying matter.

In this regard, Douglas’s proposal focuses on conceptualising dirt as one of the possible reverses of social order, as it represents a contravention of the prevailing classificatory schemes or —if preferred— a social form “that includes all the elements rejected by ordered systems” (Douglas, 2007, p. 54). Within this framework, the notion of contamination is central, as it relates to the danger posed by coming into contact with the impure —that is, with what is “inappropriate” and “residual,” which has the potential to contradict the accepted and acceptable ways of classifying, conceiving, and understanding the world. In this dynamic, any form of “offence against order” establishes the distinction between purity and impurity and activates emotional mechanisms associated with disgust.

Rozin *et al.* (2008a) analyse disgust, first noting the relative lack of interest this emotion received in the field of psychology until the early 1990s. Indeed, aside from Darwin’s (1967) classic contribution and Angyal’s (1941) seminal work, the authors point out that it was not until Ekman (1992) —who classified it as a basic emotion alongside fear, sadness, anger, joy, and surprise— that disgust began to attract academic interest.

In general terms, disgust is both a human trait and a marker of humanity, as it establishes a clear boundary between humans and the animal world (Rozin *et al.*, 1999; Miller, 1998). In this vein, various authors assign a central role to this emotion in the process of humanisation, arguing that disgust serves to “disguise” the animal nature of human beings and, in doing so, protects the body by rejecting elements that could degrade, debase, or sicken it (Rozin *et al.*, 2008b; Miller, 1998).

From this perspective, disgust can be understood as a liminal emotion that, in corporeal-affective terms, materialises the human desire to conceal and expel any trace that recalls its animal origins. The *primary objects of disgust* are those derived from animals and animal by-products, particularly substances that are or may be close to decomposition and death (Angyal, 1941; Rozin *et al.*, 2008b; Rozin &

Fallon, 1987). Along these lines, both organic waste (faeces, mucus, urine, vomit, pus, earwax, blood, etc.) and corpses are fundamental objects of repulsion, as any “contaminating” contact with them carries the threat of reducing the subject to an animal-like state and confronting them with their own mortality. (Miller, 1998)⁴

While disgust is originally linked to the subject’s conflicted relationship with their animal nature, not all characteristics shared with non-human animals evoke disgust. Indeed, since agility, dexterity, or animal strength are not repellent, it is clear that this emotion is rooted in those aspects of animality that remind the subject of their own vulnerability⁵. In this sense, the tendency to transcend bodily finitude by concealing death and inevitable decomposition shapes matrix of anthropic denial which disgust is founded— an emotion imbued with fear but also deeply marked by an obsessive drive to escape death and any form of vulnerability associated with the human condition as an animal (Nussbaum, 2006, 2019). Within this context, disgust can be understood as a liminal emotion that serves to safeguard the boundary between the human and the animal, offering the subject *an image of themselves that does not truly correspond to their nature*.

Contamination and Hierarchisation: The Cognitive Structures of Disgust

Embedded in a kind of phantasmagorical dimension that defines the subject through what they are not, disgust rejects the repugnant object through the simultaneous operation of two productive logics: contamination and hierarchisation.

Disgust extends its field of operation far beyond mere distaste or an unpleasant flavour. Descriptively, it is an emotion that entails the rejection of something, or someone perceived as dangerous due to its

4 According to Angyal (1941), disgust arises from direct contact with objects onto which the fear of defilement is projected. These objects are typically human and animal waste (excrement, corpses, bodily fluids), which are considered contaminating not because they are inherently harmful but because they are perceived as inferior. For Angyal, disgust is also linked to the “abnormal.” It is not merely a natural reflex triggered automatically; rather, it carries significant cognitive and social connotations.

5 It is no coincidence that tears are the only bodily secretion that, in general, do not evoke disgust: “presumably because they are considered uniquely human and therefore do not remind us of what we share with animals” (Nussbaum, 2006: 109).

potential to *spread, infect, or contaminate* through proximity, contact, or ingestion. This emotion may be accompanied (though not necessarily) by physical reactions such as vomiting, nausea, coughing, shivering, or goosebumps, among others. In this sense, disgust can be understood as a reaction of rejection towards objects, subjects, or situations whose *proximity* is assessed as a *risk or threat* to the body, as well as to the known and expected order of things in the world in which the subject lives and coexists (Ahmed, 2015; Nussbaum, 2006; Miller, 1998).

Disgust generates sensory images that describe and are projected onto that which is repulsive: perceiving odors that induce gagging, touching something slimy and wet, tasting a gelatinous and sticky texture —these are a few examples in this regard. In this dynamic, the entirety of the object is subsumed by its defining repulsive aspects and the resulting sensations. The sensory images provided by the senses, particularly those related to proximity or contact (taste, smell, touch), are essential to the operation of disgust (Miller, 1998).

Although disgust is one of the *most embodied emotions*, paradoxically, it activates a set of meanings and implications that —beyond the body, its orifices, and secretions— refract the order of the moral, social, and cultural within a specific time-space coordinate (Ahmed, 2015; Bericat Alastuey, 2005; Figari, 2009; Pinedo, 2020; Fernández Poncela, 2024). In this sense, it is understood that disgust has a cognitive content that is not solely dependent on sensory characteristics, but also on a series of definitions, beliefs, and evaluations regarding “what it is” and “where it has been” in relation to the repugnant object (Ahmed, 2015; Salles, 2010).

As with all emotions, disgust involves the interplay of bodily-cognitive mechanisms and dispositions that shape what individuals feel in a given context, offering valuable insight into their embodied and affective experiences of the social (Scribano, 2021; Ahmed, 2015; Hochschild, 2019). In this regard, Miller (1998) argues that repulsion toward certain objects has an evolutionary origin and is commonly observed across most societies (such as with bodily waste, decomposing food, and corpses). However, due to its cognitive content, disgust also extends to other objects and subjects through the operation of a powerful and productive notion: contamination.

In general, objects that are capable of contaminating, infecting, degrading, or harming the body are rejected and become repulsive, regardless of their specific nature. From this, it follows that

contamination is a notion linked to the proximity of the object/subject, which —due to this closeness and the possibility of contact— becomes “repugnant” (Douglas, 2007). However, while disgust is one of the most visceral emotions —literally connected to the intestines, with nausea⁶ as one example— it does not operate directly: “It is mediated by ideas that are already implicated in the impressions we form of others and in the way those impressions emerge as bodies” (Ahmed, 2015: 135). Once again, disgust appears as an emotion felt in the body, but as a result of a history of impressions that the subject socially inherits. That is, the individual learns to feel disgust toward certain objects/subjects in a specific time-space context; in turn, these sensations —linked to the ideas of contamination and hierarchisation—materialise in concrete practices of repugnance and rejection that assign faces, textures, smells, colours, etc., to particular bodies and objects.

From a perspective that subscribes to the cognitive content of disgust, Rozin *et al.* (1999) describe a sequence that permeates and shapes this emotion. While they assert that it originates from a group of objects perceived as contaminating because they are associated with animal vulnerability, each society develops a series of mechanisms that extend this emotion to a diverse range of objects, subjects, and situations. A characteristic feature of this projection is “psychological contamination,” which can be understood through the operation of two laws of “sympathetic magic”:⁷

6 It is interesting to note that the RAE (2024) defines nausea, in its second meaning, as: “repugnance or aversion caused by something.” That is, in addition to being a physiological response (gagging, the urge to vomit, stomach discomfort, etc.), nausea is the bodily and emotional manifestation of the rejection produced by a thing, person, or situation. In any case, it is a paradigmatic example of the material/corporeal nature of emotions (Scribano, 2021).

7 The principles of “sympathetic magic” that these authors draw upon to understand the logic of contamination in relation to disgust and its cognitive content are derived from the eponymous principles developed by anthropologist James George Frazer in his book *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, published in 1890. From his perspective, for primitive groups, the world operates according to two “magical” principles, namely: “(...) first, that like produces like, or that effects resemble their causes, and second, that things which have once been in contact continue to act upon each other at a distance, even after all physical contact has been severed. The first principle can be called the law of similarity, and the second the law of contact or contagion” (Frazer, 2006: 35).

1. *Law of Contagion*: Governed by the principle “once in contact, always in contact,” this law states that elements that have once been in contact continue to act upon each other forever, making it nearly impossible to separate them (along with their mutual influences). For example, a person might justify their rejection of a juice that has been in contact with a cockroach; however, that aversion does not disappear when informed that the cockroach has been sterilized (Rozin *et al.*, 2008a). Conversely, as Nussbaum (2006) points out, this law also has a positive aspect: such is the case with the desire to possess or at least touch objects that once belonged to famous individuals or loved ones, because “what has once been in contact will always be in contact”.⁸
2. Applied to the study of disgust, this law suggests that objects possess an immaterial essence or quality that is “magically” transferred through contact. In this sense, what is interesting is not the actual presence of contaminants that justify the emotion, but rather the history of contact that the object has had with the “contaminant”. This characteristic, for the purposes of this work, allows for theoretical connections to be drawn between disgust and morality.⁹
3. *Law of Similarity*: Guided by the principle “things similar in surface, resemble each other in a deeper sense,” this law indicates that an object has the ability to transfer its properties to another simply by imitating its form. For example, participants in a study rejected eating chocolate shaped like dog feces when given the choice between these and other pieces of chocolate with a conventional shape, even though the composition of both was exactly the same. A similar situation occurred when some people

8 In a similar direction, although from an anthropological perspective, Douglas (2007) refers to the contaminating logic that occurs through contact with the “impure.” A paradigmatic example that the author analyzes is the contamination rules of the Havik Brahmins in India.

9 For example, in a study conducted by Nemeroff and Rozin (1994), it was found that for several participants, the aversion to a sweater worn by Hitler could not be eliminated by any means. Subsequently, several of these people expressed that their rejection of a sweater worn by a person with hepatitis could be reversed through washing or sterilization. These examples illustrate that an important characteristic of contagion, in parallel with disgust, is the shift from the physical to the moral order.

refused to drink their favourite beverage mixed with an unused comb (Rozin *et al.*, 2008b). These examples show that if two or more things or situations appear similar, the actual contamination occurring on one of them “magically” affects the other. Connected to disgust, the law of similarity likely explains why certain objects and events are perceived and labelled as repulsive, even if, despite their repulsive appearance, evidence confirms they are not actually contaminating. “What is crucial is the association made between the object and the offensive substance, even when the object itself is not repulsive” (Salles, 2010: 33). In other words, revisiting the heuristic value of disgust as a sensitive index for interpreting social processes, this law refers to the “unfounded leap” people tend to make between real contaminants (which would cognitively justify the emotion) and certain things, events, and people to which “magically” repulsive qualities are attached.

Articulating the productions of disgust that originate from the confluence of the two “sympathetic magic” laws described, it turns out that the social configuration of what is disgusting depends on the *areas of contact* and the *appearances* historically constructed around an object, situation, or social group. Returning to Darwin’s (1967) account, it is not only about the native touching the English scientist’s food, but fundamentally about it being done by a “naked savage.” In other words, a “prior” repulsive object whose proximity not only defines the disgust felt by the European here and now (law of contagion), but simultaneously confirms the native as a threat who, shaped by colonial prejudice that produces stereotypes linked to the animal, savage, and dirty (law of similarity), depersonalizes and homogenizes the colonized-other body, attributing to it repulsive and contaminating qualities (Mbembe, 2016; Cervio, 2021 and 2022a; Pantti, 2016).

Anything or person that has been in contact with something or someone evaluated as “repulsive” *becomes repulsive to the subject*.¹⁰ This metonymic shift of disgust can have, as shown, two modulations: a) someone or something that has been directly in contact with the disgusting object (excrement, fungi, mucus) can be deemed disgusting; b) someone or something that resembles a disgusting object (sticky textures, damp surfaces, etc.) is judged as disgusting. However, regardless of the direction this shift takes:

10 In line with Thomas’s theorem (1928), which states: “If individuals define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”

Disgust binds objects together at the very moment it ascribes to them a negative sentiment, as though they were inherently nauseating. The sliding between disgust and other emotions is crucial to this binding: the subject may experience hatred toward the object, as well as fear, precisely as an affect relative to how the negative sentiment has been “introduced” (Ahmed, 2015: 141).

Once “anointed” as repugnant, the subject recoils and expels the object from their environment in order to avoid potential contaminations, infections, or various forms of degradation. However, what is sociologically interesting about the experience of disgust is that, despite this expulsion, the logic of rejection becomes the “truth” the subject constructs about that object and others they may recognize as similar in the future. This is the dangerously productive aspect of disgust.

The convergence of both laws of “sympathetic magic” also allows for a sociological perspective in which an object, subject, or situation becomes “disgusting” once it is classified as such within a socially configured process of hierarchization. This process evaluates not only the *what* (the nature of the object) but also the *inter-objectual* dimension (the history of contacts and proximities). In other words, the formation of so-called “repugnant objects” is not only driven by the concept of contamination (through contagion and resemblance) but also by a compelling process of social hierarchization that, in multiple directions and intensities, links disgust to power.¹¹

Indeed, the connections between disgust and power become evident when one considers, at the very least, the differentiation and hierarchization of bodies and spaces that repugnance produces (Ahmed, 2015). Reflections on disgust as a meaningful index for

11 The connections between disgust and power become particularly significant within the framework of bodily and emotional regulations in capitalist societies, where a “political economy of morality” operates by articulating practices and sensibilities that reflect the processes of acceptance, naturalization, and *in-corporation* of the asymmetries and inequalities on which the social order is founded (Scribano, 2013). This economy, which influences the organization of daily life, the sedimentation of common sense, and the establishment of relationships with otherness, among other processes, is intertwined with the politics of sensibilities, prescribing and shaping the ways in which individuals feel and perceive the world (Scribano, 2021). Understood through the lens of hierarchization, contamination, and rejection of the (de)valued object/subject as repugnant (Nussbaum, 2006; Ahmed, 2015), disgust constitutes a crucial emotional modulation for the reproduction of capitalist relations of domination, as it functions by imposing a radical distancing from that which is perceived as foreign, strange, or threatening.

interpreting the social cannot overlook a critical consideration of the direction taken by social relations structured around this emotion. In other words, it is essential to attend not only to the objects of disgust but also to their intersubjective orientations.

The ideas of contamination and contagion are not limited to the body; sinful acts and the lowest positions in the social hierarchy also produce stench. Those of low social status do not smell pleasant to those in elevated positions, who moreover perceive that the social and political order is threatened by the contaminating power of lower ranks. There is no doubt that disgust paints the world in a particular way— one that is unmistakably misanthropic and melancholic (Miller, 1998: 43).

The preceding quotation highlights that social relations founded on repugnance are directed not only toward objects that threaten to offend, degrade, or contaminate the self but also toward those deemed inferior. For example, in certain cultures, the “lower” regions of the body are associated with sexuality, waste, and animal nature —elements that, through disgust and other emotions such as shame, individuals tend to conceal and expel from their social, bodily, and emotional universe.¹² Thus, feeling disgust toward something or someone entails constructing a sense of superiority over the objects or subjects that trigger it. In other words, disgust is the bodily and emotional reaction to a prior evaluative judgment that positions a thing, person, or situation as inferior or whose contact or proximity is perceived as degrading. From this perspective, disgust also operates within a moral register that must be considered to fully grasp its complexity.

Projective Disgust: Otherness, Differences, and Conflicts

In recent years, social science reflections on disgust have been enriched by the emergence of various studies that reconsider this emotion as a

12 Freud argues that the sense of smell is the quintessential animal sense; however, with cultural development, visual stimuli came to dominate over olfactory ones. As a result of “the estrangement of human beings from the earth, the adoption of an upright posture in walking made the previously concealed genitals visible and in need of protection, thereby giving rise to shame” (Freud, 1989: 97). Within this framework, Freud links the history of repugnance, in evolutionary terms, to upright walking and, consequently, to the problematic yet simultaneously alluring relationship humans have with the scent of their own genitals —an attraction that must be repressed in the interest of cultural development.

key nexus for understanding exclusionary policies and segregationist processes of different kinds within contemporary societies. Drawing on the theoretical and conceptual contributions discussed in this article, as well as the situated and contextualized perspectives of key scholars in this field of inquiry, recent research has examined disgust as a fundamentally *dehumanizing* mechanism. In social contexts marked by forced displacement, armed conflicts, migration, and poverty, among other factors, disgust emerges as a corporeal-affective and political response to othered bodies. Thus, considering the intertwined logics of contamination and hierarchization that regulate the rejection of the repugnant, various studies have shown how this emotion stratifies populations, distinguishes between “polluted” and “pure” bodies, and, in doing so, underpins concrete governmental and segregationist policies that shape corporealities through the social imperatives of exclusion, surplus, and exception (Fernández de la Reguera, 2022; Villa Gómez *et al.*, 2019; Rara, 2019; Jesús, 2023; Høy-Petersen, 2021; Moreno Figueroa, 2024; Mondoñedo, 2020; Imafidon, 2020; Kuri Pineda, 2023).

Additionally, recent research has gained prominence by linking disgust with fear, hatred, anger, and envy in the formation of social groups and discourses (Fernández Poncela, 2024; Paris Albert, 2020). Likewise, studies addressing repugnance toward transgender individuals highlight how these dissident/heretical bodies are perceived through a lens of hypersexuality and hypercorporeality, which tends to be rejected through a moral logic that condemns any form of excess associated with the body, pleasure, and enjoyment (Miller *et al.*, 2020; Vanaman & Chapman, 2020; Nussbaum, 2019).

Similarly, social inquiries into the intersubjective nature of disgust explore how this emotion shapes structures of meaning surrounding the identities and experiences of women and sexual minorities (Joensuu, 2020; Morcillo & Varela, 2021; Saresma & Tulonen, 2023; Vera Gajardo, 2022). Other studies examine the social impact of disgust during the COVID-19 pandemic, a context in which the spread of the virus not only provoked fear and repugnance toward sick or potentially infected bodies but also generated a range of media discourses that differentially influenced social behaviors throughout the health and social crisis (Fernández Poncela, 2023; Rodríguez-Blanco & Abbruzzese, 2021; Marín Posada & Saldarriaga Vélez, 2022; Cano *et al.*, 2021).

Establishing disgust as a central analytical axis or as an emergent theme in research, the aforementioned studies¹³ —while not exhaustive— demonstrate that formations of repugnance must be analyzed and interpreted in a contextualized manner, taking into account the social, political, economic, and cultural mechanisms and meanings that drive this emotion toward specific social groups. It is precisely this problematic modulation of disgust that this section seeks to explore further. Disgust generates hierarchies and evaluates without hesitation. Grounded in moral judgments, it constructs objects and subjects of repugnance. Like contempt, it perceives its object as something base, perverse, or inferior —something capable of corrupting or degrading by mere proximity¹⁴. In this sense, the productive aspect of disgust can

13 With the aim of reviewing recently published theoretical and empirical studies on the topic, this article is based on a narrative literature review (Byrne, 2016; Baumeister & Leary, 1997) conducted through the consultation of academic databases and digital repositories containing works in Spanish, Portuguese, and English (Redalyc, Dialnet, SciELO, Conicet-Digital, DOAJ, JSTOR, and Sage). However, given the growing significance of disgust in contemporary social science research in both the Global North and Global South—particularly in relation to issues such as racism, classism, sexism, transphobia, poverty, migration, and disability, among others—this article highlights the importance of conducting a systematic review of the specific literature. Such a review would aim to identify the theoretical contributions and analytical challenges that disgust in general, and projective and moral disgust in particular, have raised in social studies over the past decade, as well as the theoretical and methodological gaps that remain in this field of inquiry. Due to space constraints, this review will be addressed in a future study.

14 This definition provides an opportunity to outline, at least briefly, the distinction between disgust and two emotions with which it is frequently associated in the specialized literature: fear and contempt. More specifically, disgust can be understood as a socio-sensitive manifestation of the fear elicited by the proximity of an object, subject, or substance perceived as contaminating or offensive (Miller, 1998; Angyal, 1941). This fear not only encompasses but also transcends the notion of danger posed by the object or subject, ultimately reflecting a fundamental human fear of death and the potential decomposition of the body (Rozin *et al.*, 2008a, 2008b). From a socio-political perspective, and considering its cognitive dimension, the fear of death and animality is projected onto groups or individuals, triggering complex processes of exclusion and segregation rooted in the fear of being “contaminated” by symbolically impure bodies. This line of thought informs the concept of “projective disgust,” which is further developed below in relation to the various contemporary modes and registers through which fear operates to divide, segregate, and naturalize social inequalities (Nussbaum, 2019, 2006).

be observed in the *levels and hierarchies* of objects and individuals it establishes within a given socio-temporal framework. According to Nussbaum (2006), beyond the realm of objects, disgust operates within the sphere of people and events, creating projective formations that underpin dangerous processes of exclusion and social segregation (Pinedo, 2020; Peredo Cárdenas, 2022).

Indeed, according to this author, certain objects, due to their characteristics, become “natural objects of repugnance,” eliciting more or less ubiquitous and stable forms of revulsion. Alongside these, there are other objects, events, or groups that, for historical, cultural, economic, bodily, sexual-affective, or political reasons, are deemed “disgusting,” as they are attributed certain traits of contamination or impurity that serve as justifications for their hierarchization, rejection, and exclusion (Nussbaum, 2008, 2014, 2019). Throughout history, *projective disgust* has been an extraordinarily powerful tool of exclusion, insofar as “(...) certain repugnant properties —viscosity, foul odor, stickiness, decomposition, rot— have been monotonously and repeatedly associated with, indeed projected onto, specific groups, in reference to whom privileged groups seek to define their superior human status” (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 130).

Projective disgust operates in the social world as a means of establishing distance from bodies perceived as vile or impure. This distancing allows the “disgusted” subject to elevate themselves above their own animality and, at least symbolically, escape their own mortality: “Projective disgust is precisely ‘projective’ because it distances the properties that elicit disgust from the self that finds them repugnant

Disgust and contempt, in turn, are “hierarchizing” emotions, as they arise when something or someone is perceived as inferior and therefore capable of contaminating or degrading (Miller, 1998). While both emotions operate through a hierarchical classification rooted in a judgment of superiority over the object, subject, or situation that elicits them, they function in distinct ways. Disgust is visceral, articulating its judgments through sensations, images, bodily secretions, and similar means, whereas contempt classifies and hierarchizes with a subtlety that also serves to devalue and create distance from individuals, objects, or situations deemed “contemptible.” Thus, both disgust and contempt degrade, exclude, and repel those perceived as divergent from dominant sensibility frameworks. However, these processes are mediated by emotional expressions that vary in their degree of subtlety. In other words, whether expressed through nausea, goosebumps, a condescending glance, or various forms of ridicule, these emotions enact the devaluation and degradation of others, marking —whether explicitly or subtly— the boundary between “us” and “them” (Miller, 1998; Sabido Ramos, 2012).

and assigns them to other people, projecting them onto them, saying ‘they are filthy and beastly’” (Nussbaum, 2019, p. 137).

Constructing certain groups as *bearers of repugnance* is one of the possible ways in which a “constitutive outside” is delineated—one that reinforces the identity conditions and power structures maintained by those occupying hegemonic positions in a given society. Additionally, the formation of *a repugnant group* entails the establishment of material and symbolic barriers that hinder, or even render impossible, any form of contact or interaction, as that group is expelled to a liminal or borderline space between the human and the merely animal (Nussbaum, 2006; Hasan *et al.*, 2018).¹⁵

At the same time, every society positions certain groups at the top of its social hierarchy, defining them through a perceived superiority that extends to all ontological domains—including their thresholds of disgust tolerance. As a result, the proximity of “repugnant” groups or individuals tends to be felt as an offense or a transgression of the self’s territoriality (Goffman, 1979). By transposition, this transgression is perceived as a *necessary consequence* of what the group or individual is presumed to possess as repugnant (Ahmed, 2015). In summary, the disgusting qualities violently attributed to a group or individual tend to be socially perceived as an intrusion that disrupts bodily space, offending the sensitivity of the disgusted subject. Consequently, the disgust produced in this encounter becomes displaced onto the subject, transforming—much like a form of condemnation—into a “defining,” “stable,” and “natural” trait of the person.

As has been stated, disgust can be an active trait rather than merely a reactive one of the object, as it can also arise as a derivation of ideas or beliefs that precede or directly disregard sensory triggers. The repulsion felt and projected onto homeless individuals in large cities is a good example. This repulsion, sometimes accompanied by various expressions of violence and conflict¹⁶, operates as an *a priori* that

15 In addition to the Jewish people, women, and homosexuals, Nussbaum illustrates projective disgust in various works through the case of the “untouchables” (Dalits) within India’s caste system. Regarded as quasi-animals, they are assigned the tasks of cleaning the latrines of the upper castes and handling corpses (Nussbaum, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2019).

16 According to the Unified Register of Violence 2023, compiled by the Popular Assembly for the Rights of People in Street Situations, between August 2022 and August 2023, 233 instances of violence were recorded in various cities across Argentina

qualifies the individual through the same logic of exposure in which they live as part of the unequal distribution of access to the city (Di Iorio and Farías, 2020; Bufarini, 2020).

In fact, living on the streets *exposes* individuals to the risks associated with lacking the minimal material conditions necessary for a proper life. It means being *excluded* from the guarantees provided by social protections as rights. It leaves individuals *unprotected* within a society that has privatized risks, increasingly holding individuals responsible for managing themselves (Cervio *et al.*, 2020). In this dynamic, the disgust projected onto people living on the streets can be theoretically understood as part of the ideational and cognitive content of the aforementioned emotion, which, by performing “the disgusting” as a “natural” characteristic of those who live their daily lives in the urban outdoors, operates as an emotional disposition. This disposition becomes so ingrained that it manifests as a bodily-affective reaction, shaping all interactions with these “others” indefinitely, beyond time and place. This example illustrates how disgust is both a feeling and an idea that qualifies proximity to a particular object, as it is the *impression* the object leaves on the subject. As Ahmed (2015: 137) argues: “We need to account for the way in which the object of disgust leaves an impression on us, as if the object contains the ‘truth’ of our response to it”.

In terms of the production of certain varieties of disgust, a characteristic, a judgment, or a disposition of the object can be as effective as a sensation. Thus, being exposed, helpless, and excluded from the certainties conferred by “having a roof over one’s head” forms a triad causing expulsion that condemns those who are “out of place” to occupy the position of that which disrupts order —that is, that which

(Sapey *et al.*, 2023). Of these, 85 were categorized as “social violence,” which is defined as: “physical attacks in public spaces between pedestrians, resulting in serious injuries or fatalities. This includes actions carried out by individuals who are not in street situations due to stigmatization and social rejection processes, as well as violence among peers, though to a much lesser extent” (Sapey *et al.*, 2023: 4). Within the framework of these violent acts, in June 2024, a case in the Belgrano neighborhood of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires made headlines, where four young individuals were arrested for allegedly shooting at homeless people with an air rifle. A similar incident occurred in Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires Province, three months later. *CFR*. See: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/742765-la-diversion-de-los-nene-bien-de-belgrano-dispararle-a-perso> // <https://www.lacapitalmdp.com/evolucionan-favorablemente-las-dos-personas-en-situacion-de-calle-baleadas/>

transgresses the boundaries and rules of systems structured according to established criteria (Douglas, 2007). Now, regardless of the nature of its catalyst (whether ideational and/or sensory), the argument here is that disgust constitutes a social relationship founded on distance, rejection, and expulsion.

In connection with the above, the projective disgust that underlies various practices of discrimination, violence, and the stereotyping of social groups marks a border enclave between the human and the vilely animal, delineated as part of an identity construction in opposition to a potentially threatening and dangerous otherness. This differentiation, which Nussbaum (2006) associates with a form of “primitive shame” arising from the subject’s own animal condition and inevitable mortality, is projected onto other human beings who, socially defined as *non-self / non-us*, absorb the terms of that original shame, which is metonymically displaced into a concrete emotion of disgust. In other words: “*They* are the animals, not us. *They* are dirty and foul-smelling; *we* are pure and clean. And they are beneath us; we are their rulers. This confused way of thinking is widespread in human societies as a means of creating distance between us and our problematic animality” (Nussbaum, 2019: 136; italics in the original).

In this sense, disgust is one of the possible effects of *perceptible proximity*, which permeates bodies in interaction (Simmel, 2014). When confronted with the closeness of an Other whose presence is perceived as intensely unpleasant —due to social, economic, moral, political, and cultural arguments that have been normalized as common sense, making them a substantive part of the content of social relations with class, racial-ethnic, gender, or religious otherness— disgust serves to protect and guide the subject in expelling from themselves and their environment what is perceived as dangerous or threatening (Milles, 1998; Salles, 2010; Bericat Alastuey, 2005; Sabido Ramos, 2012). Now, if inter-corporeal/objectual contact is understood as the fundamental basis for the emergence of disgust, then not only does the body become imbued with repugnance, but that repugnance also transfers onto the object, becoming an inherent, stable, and even essential trait of it. Only the aforementioned perceptible proximity between the subject and the object/subject of disgust can render the latter as something “harmful,” “vile,” and “offensive,” and therefore, as something that must be repelled.

Overall, the repugnant is assessed as a dangerous intrusion that disrupts and offends the bodily, affective, ethical, and moral space of the subject experiencing disgust. Through transposition, the disgust that arises in this proximate encounter is extrapolated onto the object/subject of disgust, fantasized as a defining trait of the latter. When transposed to the social sphere, these projective formations erect boundaries, borders, and walls that contribute to the naturalization of social inequalities in the name of an ideal of asepsis that offensively contrasts with the supposedly repugnant qualities ascribed to certain bodies, faces, and individual and collective histories. Cleanliness and purity are woven into a framework of domination that hierarchizes, classifies, and positions individuals and social groups according to patterns of interaction that expel anything that recalls the fragility, vileness, and finitude of the human condition. In this process, disgust is an emotion that viscerally reinforces the social regulations imprinted on bodies, becoming a powerful mechanism of control over differences and, fundamentally, over any possibility of contact with otherness.

Conclusions

Like any emotion, disgust is always directed towards an object. Initially, the repugnant operates in sensory and intersubjective terms as an “inherent” quality of bodies/objects that are “out of place” (Douglas, 2007) and are therefore perceived as a threat or danger to the natural order of bodies, social relations, and the world. However, there is nothing in those bodies or objects that makes them inherently “disgusting.” Feeling disgusted is a way of qualifying what the subject experiences when confronted with something laden with the weight of the harmful and offensive. Hence, from the perspective of a sociology of sensibilities, disgust can be understood as a bodily, affective, and social response to the sensory proximity of difference, which is rendered dangerous or potentially threatening.

Each society attributes emotions to objects, subjects, and situations. Through this operation, it produces an emotional organization of the world that can only be understood from a situated perspective, considering the temporal, spatial, and cultural context in which it occurs. In this regard, a human group, a city, or a commodity can provoke anxiety,

fear, joy, disgust, or indifference. From this attributional logic, the aforementioned objects become “captured” in a sort of emotional ecology from which they seem unable to easily detach themselves (Scribano, 2021). In this dynamic, certain thing (and not others) become the cause of anxiety, fear, joy, disgust, or indifference. However, “feelings are not something that simply resides in subjects and moves from them to objects; feelings are the way in which objects create impressions in shared spaces of life” (Ahmed, 2019: 40). Adopting this perspective, in connection with the discussion in this article, disgust is an emotion that originates in the proximity or sensitive contact with an object (or subject) to which a socially attributed quality of “offensive,” “vile,” or “harmful” has been assigned. In this sense, disgust is the affective-bodily response that the presence of such an object imprints on the body/emotion that feels “disgusted.”

The foundations upon which a given society qualifies an object, subject, or situation as “disgusting” can be the subject of sociological, historical, biological, medical, political, anthropological, psychological, economic, or philosophical inquiry. As discussed in these pages, it is important to note that disgust originates as part of a process of assignment, through which a certain object is deemed inherently offensive to the senses (Miller, 1998; Rozin, 2008a and 2008b). Such attribution operates as an *a priori* that becomes independent of the object’s inherent nature to be offensive in real terms, that is, for the object to be inevitably “repugnant” beyond time and space. Now, disgust produces and reaffirms criteria of *estrangement* through a concrete process of hierarchization. As analyzed, this emotion judges as “inferior” or “degraded” that which possesses certain characteristics or attributes normatively valued as “out of place.” By fostering the “*feeling of hierarchies*” through the evidence of the anomalous or ambiguous (Douglas, 2007) —that is, that which disrupts, subverts, or contradicts the classification and ordering schemes of the world that are known and naturalized— repugnance warns against the danger of contamination and, from there, places a barrier between the self and the disgusting object/subject in the form of revulsion, repulsion, or exclusion. It is in these interstices that disgust —along with other related emotions such as fear, insecurity, contempt, and distrust, among others— contributes to the incorporation and stabilization of the criteria of *distinction* between the zones of familiarity and estrangement upon which social life is organized (Ahmed, 2015; Nussbaum, 2019;

Miller, 1998; Scribano and Cervio, 2018; Cervio, 2019a and 2019b; Sabido Ramos, 2012).

As shown, repugnance is *always woven through and around an object*. In line with the performative dynamics of disgust (Ahmed, 2015), it can be stated that naming something as disgusting not only creates “disgusting objects” but also, in the same act, produces a distancing of the subject from the thing designated as vile or harmful. In other words, the *dictum* of disgust not only produces the objects it names but also places a “prudential” distance between the subject and that which is rejected as disgusting. In this sense, *feeling disgusted* is being affected by that which has been *rejected*; an aspect that highlights the productive nature of emotions on the surface of bodies, as well as their centrality in defining social actions.

If disgust is the *trace* an object leaves on a subject, and from there enables a set of actions rooted in distance, rejection, and the expulsion of that which is qualified as disgusting, it is possible to understand how this emotion produces and, at the same time, results from boundaries of various natures. Since disgust generally arises when the boundary between the external world and the self is crossed through the senses of proximity (taste, touch, and smell), the logic of contact becomes the antecedent of this bodily-affective response, as it signals that something external (a smell, a texture, a taste, a face, a body, etc.) has invaded the subject’s intimacy, offending their own sensitivity. In this movement of crossing and contact, boundaries between the “self” and the “other” are raised, erected to protect the self from anything that threatens to “degrade” it to its animal condition and confront it with the vulnerability of death (Miller, 1998; Rozin *et al.*, 2008a and 2008b; Nussbaum, 2006 and 2014).

Now then, the pivotal aspect that disgust offers in these terms, and which is relevant to the investigation of the social structures of the repugnant in contemporary societies, is that what elicits repulsion is not the object/subject itself, but rather the certainty of the boundary/edge/limit that is inevitably at play between that object/subject and the self.

For example, the smell of sewers, which can be so intense as to induce nausea, assumes the value of repugnance by operating as a substitute for everything that is broken, overflowing, malfunctioning, and accumulating a city’s dirt and waste. If the repugnant threatens to undermine the established order of the world, then the object of

disgust emerges as a replacement for the very boundaries between the desired/undesired, accepted/rejected, clean/dirty, etc., upon which the social order is structured. Moreover, this liminal object plays a central role in protecting the (disgusted) self in its endless endeavor to construct an image of itself as what it “is not” (Nussbaum, 2006). In this sense, disgust materializes the force that distances or separates the subject from other objects or people. The specific contents of this distancing/separation vary over time and across societies; however, the theoretical review conducted indicates that the repugnant is generally associated with the anomalous, ambiguous, and excessive—that is, with that which a social order rejects as irregular, aberrant, defective, indeterminate, uncertain, confusing, disproportionate, and/or exaggerated.

Based on the theoretical articulations woven throughout this article, a sociology of sensibilities can identify at least three problematic nodes that, in their connections with structural social processes, make it possible to observe the productive nature of disgust in terms of subjects and social relations. These nodes, proposed as part of a research agenda on sensibilities and alterity developed from the Global South, can be summarized as follows:

- *Dehumanizing Degradation*: Disgust entails a process of inferiority and subjective degradation rooted in a moral evaluation. Positioned within the realm of the non-human, the *other* is burdened with an accumulation of faults and deficiencies (ethical, aesthetic, moral, economic, etc.) that weigh upon them as a recursive and relatively stable accusation. Subjected to a priori disqualification, the condemnation inherent in disgust becomes both a medium and a substance of a power relationship between the disgusted subject and the groups targeted by such a projective formation (Nussbaum, 2006). This process of inferiority harbors a primal shame that, originating in the rejection of the animal condition and its associated fears, is displaced onto those who occupy the “non-place” of the social order in a given time-space. In this way, they become foul-smelling, dirty, ugly, sticky, and ultimately repugnant bodies. The animalization, foulness, impurity, and devaluation of these *others*, who accumulate within themselves the *distinction* imposed by disgust, constitute specific modulations of a politics of sensibilities inextricably linked to relations of domination.

- *Incorporation of Hierarchies*: Disgust operates through the imposition of hierarchies laden with axiological content. Tied to the fear elicited by the proximity of a contaminating object/subject, it generates hierarchical distinctions between polluted, degrading, and offensive bodies and their opposites, within a given temporal, spatial, and cultural framework. When projected onto individuals or groups in the social sphere, disgust arises from *the impression left* on the disgusted subject by a face, smell, body, history, or prejudice. This impression detaches from the object itself, becoming a bodily-affective response triggered by the imminent presence of those classified as “repugnant.” Thus, disgust does not reside in the object but rather in the history of contact and the traces left on the subject by any form of proximity to that object (Ahmed, 2015). Embedded within this affective economy that regulates relations with alterity, disgust —alongside fear, distrust, hatred, shame, insecurity, etc.— materializes *social hierarchies through the body and emotions*, evaluating both the nature of the object and its history of harmful, vile, or degrading contact. The everyday production of disgust and its manifestations in common sense constitute key dimensions for sociologically examining the moral economy’s mandates, which underpin and naturalize social inequalities (Scribano, 2013).
- *Exclusive Distancing*: Disgust erects walls, borders, and barriers that shield individuals from the contamination and danger associated with certain bodies, substances, and situations deemed vile, impure, or offensive (Douglas, 2007; Miller, 1998). The distinction between the “self” and the “other” as objects of disgust is linked to the imperative of designating and characterizing everything that may be potentially offensive, dangerous, or harmful to the subject and to the construction of their self-image as non-animal, non-mortal, and non-vulnerable. Through this act of designation, each society constructs *boundary objects* intended to safeguard individuals from the potential transformations (bodily, social, affective, cognitive, moral, etc.) that contact with the disgusting —understood as different, distant, and alien— may entail. From a projective perspective, the segregationist dynamics produced by disgust —rooted in prejudices and stereotypes projected onto otherness

(in terms of class, ethnicity-race, gender, etc.)— contribute to *fixing* the content of exclusion over time and obscuring the social, historical, political, and economic conditions that shape the current configuration of subjectivities and social relations marked by an irredeemable distancing.

A sociological examination of the articulations presented by these three problematic nodes reveals that disgust holds a socially and politically strategic position for investigating the emotive structures that permeate and shape social relations with otherness in contemporary societies. This inquiry, grounded in a performative understanding of this emotion, highlights that everything a society deems repugnant has a social history behind it —one that has been sedimented through the force of repetition in social relations with what is perceived as “diverse” and “different.” Moreover, such an inquiry also necessitates a sociological examination of the future productions of the “repugnant,” that is, those borderline objects that society has begun to generate through its unequal and exclusionary structures in the course of the 21st century, but which *have not yet become* part of the contemporary semantics of disgust.

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