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Disgust as the aesthetic category

Summary

The dissertation is an attempt to answer the question: what role in the contemporary culture does disgust play as the independent aesthetic category. For this purpose, I make an analysis of art, mainly contemporary. There is also an analysis of cultural contexts in which disgust is placed, as well as a characteristic of an anesthetization processes in the contemporary culture, which influence those contexts.

The main thesis of the dissertation is that disgust as an aesthetic category acts as both diagnostic instrument, and “healing” instrument of some parts of the contemporary culture.

Titles which were the inspiration for this thesis are: *Powers of horror. An essay of abjection* by Julia Kristeva, *Gender in aesthetics* by Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Disgust. Theory and History* by Winnifred Menninghaus, Richard Shustermann’s works, and *Aesthetics beyond Aesthetics* by Wolfgang Iser.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters. In the first part I explain main terminological terms and issues connected with the term “disgust”. There is also an explanation of how this term is understood in different scientific disciplines like cultural studies, sociology and philosophy.

The second chapter concerns the place and the function of disgust in art in the past. For this purpose I analyze such categories as death and uncanny. In this part the following questions are made: what status the disgust had in the past? Was it an aesthetic experience or rather an aesthetic value?

The third chapter focuses on contemporary culture’s phenomena which lead to the increased interest in negative aesthetic values and devaluation of the category of beauty.

Afterwards, I analyze the matter of a personal identity, sexuality and gender issue. In this part I investigate the position and role of women in culture. This chapter shows the reason why woman’s physiology is a part of a cultural taboo.

The next part is an attempt of an analysis of the contemporary art, which uses the category of disgust. It starts with the problem of corporeality and shows why some parts of the human

body are perceived as disgusting. In this part both polish and foreign artists are analyzed. I analyze, among others, such artists as: Małgorzata Kalinowska, Magdalena Moskwa, Grzegorz Klaman, Casey Jenkins, and Tracey Emin.

It is divided into three subsections. One is devoted to understanding of the human body in terms of carnality, the second shows the perspective of liminality and liquidity of the body, and the last one is dedicated to the problem of the menstrual blood and its absence in the public discourse. In this whole chapter I try to show artist's opposition to negative perception of a human and specifically woman's body.

In the last chapter I analyze other, except from those found in contemporary art, functions of the category of disgust. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first one is devoted to the cultural phenomenon of a phantasm of a vampire, which generate the matter of disgust in a various ways. This part includes reflections about abjection, blood, monstrosity and sexuality.

The last part of the dissertation is connected with a positive role of disgust in culture. It shows how prejudicial for the human identity is the contemporary western culture as well as how the category of disgust can be perceived as the instrument for better sensual experience and an increase of human's self-knowledge. In this part I show the need for a rehabilitation of human's sensuality, which was neglected in the past.