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Trump is Gross: Taking Political Taste (and Distaste) Seriously

by Shelley Park

ABSTRACT. This paper advances the somewhat unphilosophical thesis that "Trump is gross" to draw attention to the need to take matters of taste seriously in politics. I begin by exploring the slipperiness of distinctions between aesthetics, epistemology, and ethics, subsequently suggesting that we may need to pivot toward the aesthetic to understand and respond to the historical moment we inhabit. More specifically, I suggest that, in order to understand how Donald Trump was elected President of the United States and in order to stem the damage that preceded this and will ensue from it, we need to understand the power of political taste (and distaste, including disgust) as both a force of resistance and as a force of normalization.

My 5-year-old granddaughter refers to foods, clothes, and people she does not like as "*super*gross." It is a verbiage that I have found myself adopting for talking about many things Trumpian, including the man himself. The gaudy, gold-plated everything in Trump Towers; his ill-fitting suits; his poorly executed fake tan and comb-over; his red baseball cap emblazoned with "Make America Great Again;" his creepy way of talking about women (including his own daughters); his racist vitriol about Blacks, Muslims and Mexicans; his blatant over-the-top narcissism; his uncontrolled tantrums; his ridiculous tweets; his outlandish claims; his awkward hand gestures and handshakes; the disquieting ease with which he is seduced by flattery; his embarrassing disregard for facts; his tortured use of language; his rudeness toward other world leaders; the obsequious manner in which other Republicans are treating the man they despised mere months ago; the servility of many Democrats in the face of a military–industrial coup. All of this is *gross*—indeed, *super*gross. This is not a sophisticated language; it provides no careful analysis of, or reasons for, my attitude toward the 45th U.S. President, his policies, or the people and objects that surround him. It is, moreover, a language that lacks nuance—that lumps together what are merely aesthetic infractions of good taste with seemingly much more serious failures of epistemic responsibility and ethical character. Is this not a mistake?

I answer this question with a (cautious) "no." In what follows I adopt the deliberately unrefined language of "gross" (and, for additional emphasis, "*super*gross") to draw attention, first, to the slipperiness of our distinctions between aesthetics, epistemology, and ethics and, secondly, to suggest that we may need to pivot toward the aesthetic to understand and respond to the historical moment we inhabit. More specifically, I suggest that, in order to understand how Donald Trump was elected President of the United States and in order to stem the damage that preceded this and ensues from it, we need to understand the power of political *taste* (and distaste, including disgust) as *both* a force of resistance and as a force of normalization.

BEING GROSSED OUT BY THE CANDIDATES

The American Heritage Dictionary defines gross as follows:

1. Exclusive of deductions; total: *gross profits*
2. Unmitigated in any way; utter: *gross incompetence.*
3. So obvious or conspicuous as to cause or heighten offense: *gross injustice.*
4. Brutishly coarse, as in behavior; crude: "*It is futile to expect a hungry and squalid population to be anything but violent and gross*" (Thomas H. Huxley).
5. Disgusting or offensive: *Don't you think slugs are gross? He told a gross joke.*
6. Overweight; corpulent: "*Sally is fat. She is gross. She must weigh twelve stone and more*"(Margaret Drabble).
7. On a large scale; not fine or detailed: *gross anatomical similarities; gross motor skills*
8. Broad; general: *the gross necessities of life.*

There are several things to note about these definitions. First, the five different meanings of "gross" offered are not altogether distinct. For example, we may find those who are "obvious or conspicuous" (def. 2) to be crude or ill-mannered (def. 3) due to their lack of subtlety (def. 5). Many will find those who are large (def. 5), especially but not exclusively women, to be oversize or overweight (def. 4), a bodily condition that is frequently aligned with hypervisibility (def. 2) and which elicits disgust (def. 3). Secondly, as these examples demonstrate, the typical connotation of the adjective "gross" is negative. While the first and fifth senses of the term "gross" offer potentially neutral meanings, the ways in which these definitions intersect with the others may render even those senses of "gross" less than neutral. For example, impoverished populations, concerned (objectively speaking) with the gross necessities of life, may be viewed by other more privileged segments of a society as having "unrefined" tastes and thus as being crude or even disgusting. Alternatively, workers or consumers may view the corporation whose gross profits are large as grossly unjust; in such circumstances, the gross (total) profits become gross (disgusting) profits symbolized by images of "fat cats" with bulging (gross) waistlines. Third, as these examples and those provided by the dictionary itself make clear, both explicit and implicit biases frequently creep into our characterizations of this or that as "gross."[1] What is obvious or conspicuous to one person may be difficult to see by another whose tastes have been differently shaped. Contemporary Euro–American beauty standards align female beauty with thinness; in other times and places, Sally's weight may be considered neither excessive nor gross. The hungry populations considered squalid and violent in Huxley's *Brave New World* are, from another perspective, engaged in righteous social justice struggles.

When we are compelled or repelled by something, however, we rarely reflect upon the legitimacy of our affective attitudes. This is especially true, perhaps, of repulsion. When my granddaughter proclaims cat vomit to be "supergross," she is describing it as something *obviously* repulsive, something of which I am warned to steer clear; when she uses the same term to describe the broccoli on the dining table, she offers a description of the food as

offensive and thus justifies her refusal to put it near her lips. When I go near the vomit (to clean it up) or the broccoli (to eat it), the negative properties of the offending object now adhere to me, as I become "supergross" for engaging with it.[2] In calling something "gross," we both describe and *prescribe* an attitude, an orientation, an aversion. We also offer a reason for our aversion: we are disgusted because *it* is disgusting; we are offended because *he* is offensive. In short, we are grossed out by something, someone, some event, or some circumstance that *is* gross.[3] And because it/he/she/they is gross, we *should* be grossed out.

Our culinary, fashion, sexual, artistic, and political distastes frequently follow the same pattern. Mild distastes may be compatible with accepting alternative tastes. However, the stronger our distaste the more likely we are to both rationalize and moralize our taste. Some vegetarians find the smell and taste of meat repulsive; some non-smokers are grossed out by the smell and taste of cigarettes. Neither wants to kiss (get too close to) someone who ingests the offending object. Some feminists, understanding the burqa as a deeply offensive symbol of patriarchy, wish to ban it from their nations. The evangelical Christian does not merely refrain from engaging in acts of sodomy himself; he is repulsed by the idea of anyone else engaging in such behavior and wishes to have no proximity to it (including the baking of wedding cakes). Congressional legislators who find works of art offensive may react by defunding the arts. The aptly named "divided electorate" during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election followed this pattern also. Voters did not merely "lean" in one direction or the other, "preferring" one candidate to another. Most citizens found one major party candidate *so* repulsive that they *could not* vote for that candidate, nor could they understand how anyone else could ("In their own words" 2016). Some found both major party candidates disgusting and "held their nose" while voting for the so-called "lesser of two evils" (much as we learn to hold our breath while cleaning up cat vomit). Others could not stomach voting for either candidate, choosing thus to cast their vote for a third party or failing to vote at all.

While the labels "Crooked Hillary" and "Dangerous Donald" cast aspersions on the ethical temperament of each candidate, these labels "stuck" in part because they provided a seemingly legitimate reason for rejecting a candidate *who was already reviled* (McGill 2016).[4] Clinton had a much touted "likeability problem" that had little to do with her honesty. Indeed, fact checkers ranked her as the most honest candidate—especially as compared to Trump who was deemed a "pathological liar" (Palmer 2016). If the truth were to be told—as in some social media quarters it was—Hillary was disliked because of the perception that she was an unmitigated power-grabbing bitch with a gross sense of entitlement ("it's my turn") ("Hillary Clinton" 2014; Card 2015). What her opponents reviled as a conspicuously elitist attitude was confirmed by her offensive description of Trump supporters as a "basket of deplorables" (Reilly 2016).[5] She was castigated for throwing other less elite women (e.g. those who had accused her husband of sexually inappropriate behavior) under the bus in order to protect her own proximity to power (Crowder 2015; Thomas 2015). And she was, of course, deemed physically as well as emotionally repulsive (fat, old, mean, and "nasty"). Others found her presumption that she could trump Trump by playing "the woman card" both obnoxious and audacious (Rappeport 2016).[6] Found to be gross along several different definitional axes, Hillary Clinton became reviled and ridiculed as *super*gross by those who attended Trump rallies, as well as by many of those who stayed home on election day. Such portrayals of Clinton persisted post-election. After her re-emergence onto the public scene, she was castigated for blaming others for her loss and cast as a sore loser who demonstrated "little grace and even less class" (Limbaugh 2017; Croure 2017).

Trump's "toxic favorability ratings" (Martin and Sussman 2016) were (and are) also attributable to his perceived "grossness" in each of the senses offered by the dictionary: He is unmitigated, utterly himself, he holds nothing back. He is obvious and conspicuous, as are the hotels that he builds; he likes—indeed demands—to be noticed. His behavior is coarse, his jokes are crude,

his taste is questionable, his demeanor is unrefined and disgusting (James 2016). He is corpulent in both a physical and a metaphorical sense, i.e. he is "too much"; he is an unapologetic "fat cat." He speaks in generalities, he thinks and acts in grand—indeed, grandiose—terms, leaving the details for others to sort out. Voters who were and are grossed out by Trump respond to his unmitigated narcissism, his absence of decorum, his offensive comments about women, ethnic minorities, and disabled folk, his conspicuous consumption, and his lack of delicacy or nuance. Tellingly, 45% of Clinton voters polled chose the word "disgusted" to describe their reaction to Trump's victory ("Low Marks" 2016). Voters were not merely disappointed in the outcome (as is often the case when one's preferred candidate does not win), but disgusted. Disgust is an emotion that is both stronger and more intense than disappointment. It is also an attitude more likely to affix itself to its cause than its bearer. Quite simply, Trump opponents were (are) disgusted because Trump was (is) disgusting.

In shifting responsibility for our aversion to political candidates to the candidates themselves, we claim that other citizens should *share* our aversion. The stronger our aversion, the stronger our sense that others will be, like us, *compelled* to work against—or at least vote against—that candidate. Thus, many who found Trump grossly repellent were stunned by his victory. The sense of unreality (how could THIS be?) following Trump's election was not merely a matter of feeling misled by inaccurate polls. The outcome of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election was not merely implausible to Trump opponents; it was *inconceivable*. Like a small child who cannot understand how *anyone* would eat broccoli, we could not imagine a possible world wherein any sizable portion of the populace would choose Trump. Many of us continue to have a sense of unreality about the political world we inhabit (Hemon 2017; Gabler 2017), finding it unimaginable that Trump's base, most rank-and-file Republicans on Capitol Hill and the women closest to him continue to defend and excuse behaviors that late night television hosts have characterized as "abusive," "repulsive," "repugnant," and "disgusting" (Maddow 2017; Lemon 2017; Meyers 2017). How are we to make sense of the fact that many of our fellow citizens did not and do not *share* our aversions?

BASKETS OF DEPLORABLES

If another fails to share our strongly felt aversions, we are apt to find that other deficient epistemically, morally, or aesthetically. We find them guilty of bad judgment, bad character, and/or bad taste. After the November 2016 U.S. Presidential election, media commentators and political analysts, attempting to answer the question "How did Donald Trump become President?" focused heavily on the *epistemic* failures of Trump voters with secondary attention to their moral failures.[7] Although post-election polling showed it false, some clung to the common wisdom of the campaign season that Trump's victory was attributable to support from "uneducated," working-class voters (Ross 2015; Hamilton 2016). Others contended that Trump's support was linked to a constituency of "low-information voters," namely voters "who do not know certain basic facts about government and lack what psychologists call a 'need for cognition'" (Fording and Schram 2016). Echoing concerns about the "stupidity" of the American voter voiced after the election of President George W. Bush, political scientists claimed that Trump voters were particularly susceptible to emotional appeals and other cognitive fallacies. (Fording and Schram n.d.; cf. Caplan 2007; Shenkman 2008). Many voiced concerns about the vulnerability of voters to "fake news" stories as circulated on social media (Maheshwari 2016; Meyers 2016; Wolff 2016). Claiming that Trump voters will regret their choice, some implied that the President's supporters are also the victims of false consciousness (Johnston 2016).

Denying that Trump's win was rooted in voter ignorance, other commentators pointed to the flawed *ethical* character of Trump voters. "You shouldn't assume Trump's voters are experiencing false consciousness," wrote opinion columnist, John Barrow; "in many cases, they just want bad things" (Barrow 2016). One widely held explanation for Trump's victory contends that it represents a white backlash ("whitelash") against the gains made by minoritized populations during the Obama era (Blake 2016; Ryan 2016). Others have pointed to sexism—including the internalized sexism of women who voted for him and sexism in the media—as a primary explanatory factor in Trump's win (Barbato 2016; Bordo 2017). That a *majority* of white women would vote for the man who was caught bragging about "grab[bing women] by the pussy" pointed to persistent intersections of racism, xenophobia, and misogyny within a key demographic upon which Clinton's team relied (Anderson 2016). The willingness of Trump voters to overlook Trump's pervasive stereotyping and scapegoating of people of color, immigrants, and non-Christians, his verbal and sexual assault of women, his mocking of a disabled reporter, and his belittling of POWs (among other things) strongly suggested that such voters were not just plain ignorant but *willfully* ignorant and thus, whether overt bigots or not, deserving of the label "deplorable" (Schram 2016; cf. Pohlhaus 2012; Lynch 2016).

Much to the dismay of those who hoped Trump supporters might suffer buyer's remorse, President-elect Trump's nomination of record numbers of CEOs and Wall Street insiders to his cabinet (despite his earlier pledges to "drain the swamp") did little to dislodge the support of his base. Similarly, when President Trump—who, as candidate Trump, had excoriated Clinton for jeopardizing national security through her use of a private e-mail server—established a private server for himself, those who had previously chanted "lock her up" did not question the ethics or legality of his actions. Indeed, Trump's base seems unconcerned by clear breaches of national security combined with Trump's fairly obvious conflicts of interest in his Mar-a-Lago resort and other properties following the election. As the President chatted with the Japanese Prime Minister about Korea's nuclear missile test in the midst of a restaurant, those who could afford escalating resort fees to be in proximity to such power took pictures. As the U.S. intelligence community confirmed that Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. elections, President Trump—who has a history of business dealings in Russia but refuses to disclose current financial interests—revealed classified information to a Russian Ambassador during a visit the U.S. news media were not allowed to cover. How could the Trump supporter be unconcerned about such violations of Presidential protocol? Here again, it is tempting to critique the Trump supporter as either ignorant or morally suspect: they are either idiots or moral hypocrites (or both). To stop at this conclusion, however, is to lock ourselves into one half of a self-perpetuating cycle of mutually assured disgust. As MSNBC host Chris Matthews accurately noted post-election, Trump's supporters "don't care what he says [or does] as long as he snarls at elitists while he says [or does] it" (Hardball 2016). When we—disgusted at *their* stupidity, stunned at *their* hypocrisy, and grossed out by *their* uncritical support for policies we deem disgusting—pity, belittle, ridicule, or shame the Trump supporter, *we exemplify the very "elitism" at which they sneer.*

We must quit playing the very role into which we have been cast by the opposition's narrative.

THE AESTHETIC TURN

Actor Mike Daisey (2016) suggests that our inability to understand Trump's popularity stems from a failure to understand how theatre works: "Trump's popularity doesn't erode when he lies because the people supporting him are supporting a lifelong performer. When they hear him say things that aren't true, they don't hear a trusted source betraying them any more than when Hamlet says he will die onstage we then demand our money back because the actor is alive at

curtain call and didn't actually die" (28).[8] Reminding us that a successful performance depends not on *duping* the audience but instead on *engaging* them, Daisey describes the contract between Trump and his supporters as follows:

> They are playing the role of an audience, connecting with the image of the person onstage. *The people who don't care that Trump tells the truth aren't idiots who don't understand how the world works. . . . They know he is spinning a story, and they like the performance so much they have actively decided that they do not care*. . . . He promises with each lie and boast that he will absolutely always be Donald Trump, and he delivers. . . . [I]t is through this unspoken contract of trust that Trump gains power. (28, emphasis mine)

Of course, this contract is dangerous when the principal actor is a demagogue. Nonetheless, if this theatrical rendering of our situation is plausible—and I think it is—we should take a moment to consider what, exactly, the Trump supporter "likes so much" about Trump's performance. Why do some people "consent to be moved" (Sontag 1975) by political performances that others find offensive and crude? What are the "mobilizing passions" (Paxton 2005) that consolidate Trump support?

Daisey emphasizes that "we do not have to personally trust a performer to trust the integrity of their performance" (28). I would add to this that we can like a performance—and the performer —while simultaneously being disgusted with the actions of the character they portray. We can, for example, be enthralled with Anthony Hopkins' portrayal of Hannibal Lecter while continuing to find serial murder and cannibalism both morally and aesthetically repugnant. We are not moved by the film to become cannibals. Similarly, we may be delighted with Divine's outrageous performance in John Waters' *Pink Flamingos* without ourselves developing a taste for eating shit. So what moves us? And what are we moved to do? We may be moved to not give a shit; indeed, a generation of queers were inspired by Divine (and others) to be shameless about their non-normative desires and appetites. What we loved about Divine was that she was always *divine*, even as—indeed, *precisely* as—she and Waters pushed against the boundaries of good taste.[9] In parallel fashion, Trump supporters are freed to be shameless about their appetites and aspirations by Trump's performance. What they love about Trump is that he, as Daisey notes, is always Trump—namely someone who unapologetically transgresses the boundaries of what is normatively acceptable. Trump *is* gross—indeed, *super* (hugely, bigly) gross. This fact is not lost on his supporters; it is *precisely* what mobilizes his base.

A central concern—perhaps *the* central concern—of Trump supporters is their loss of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). If one listens to Trump supporters, one hears resentment directed at "cultural elites" that has less to do with an inability to achieve the American dream than it does with a perceived derision of the dream itself (Friedersdorf 2016; Lee et al. 2016; Altman 2017). Members of so-called rural America,[10] namely those living outside of major metropolitan areas on the East and West coasts, are tired of being treated as disgusting rubes, hicks, and rednecks because they don't aspire to leave their hometowns, pursue advanced degrees, read the *New York Times*, travel internationally, or attend the theatre. What is wrong, they ask, with wanting nothing more (nor less) than to own a modest home, watch football, and go to church on Sunday, while living near family and carrying out family traditions? How did small town (and Christian) values become synonymous with being a shameful, uneducated bigot (Zito 2017)?

Trump's promises to bring jobs back to rust-belt and coal-mining communities were no doubt one factor leading to his electoral success (material capital was not irrelevant); however, the larger success of his campaign was in positioning himself as an unlikely representative of middle American values, a putative "voice of the people." Crudely put, Trump garnered support from middle America by encouraging them to tell their critics to eat shit. As Benjamin (1936) described in analyzing the "aestheticization of politics" under fascism, fascism gives the masses

"a chance to express themselves" while preserving property relations as they are.[11] Trump's "performance of everyman vernacular" (Masciotra 2016) combined with his unapologetic lack of self-censorship made the New York real estate mogul a cultural champion for "Cracker Barrel Americans" (Powers 2016). What we ("the intellectual elite") ridiculed as rambling, incoherent speeches and ungrammatical tweets were applauded by those who found his spontaneity refreshing. What we ("the liberal elite") pathologized as offensive, repugnant characterizations of women, people of color, disabled people and others was viewed by Trump voters as courageous speech. What we ("the coastal elite") viewed as crass, vulgar behavior unbecoming a President solidified Trump's "outsider status" among voters in middle America. In short, everything we found an unforgiveable gaffe (gross and repellant) was interpreted by Trump supporters as a sign of virtue.

Trump's ongoing criticism, in both word and deed, of "elitism" and its perceived close-cousin, "political correctness," had (and has) a strong affective appeal that "forged an unlikely but unshakable bond between a Manhattan billionaire who had manifestly lived a life of 'New York values' with conservative white Americans who feel under constant assault by a cultural elite that treats them with contempt" (Powers 2016). This sense of white victimhood is not new; Donald Trump did not create it nor is he the first politician to attempt to mobilize it. Sarah Palin invited ridicule for her folksy ways during the 2008 Presidential campaign and, for a while, successfully turned it into a narrative of victimization. This "politics of resentment" fueled the Tea Party movement who saw both financial and liberal elites as setting out to destroy white middle-class mores and virtues. Mike Huckabee complained that the powerful and arrogant elites also mocked God and attempted to stifle "biblical" views of marriage and homosexuality—a victim narrative that has been strengthened in the wake of the Obergefell decision (Kilgore 2015). Ted Cruz used Huckabee's *God, Guns, Grits, and Gravy* strategy during the 2016 election season, deploying *Duck Dynasty* stars to appeal to rural and working-class Americans disenfranchised by U.S. liberal elites. It was Trump, however, who used the narrative most masterfully. Refusing to apologize for even the most outlandish and inappropriate criticisms of others—from "Lil Marco" and "low-energy Jeb" to "bleeding from everywhere" Megan and "nasty" Hillary—Trump positioned himself as a politician with the courage to "tell it like it was" and stand up to the forces of political correctness.[12] And in so doing, Trump also "inoculated himself against the very allegations that many believed would be his undoing: that he was a racist and misogynist who bragged of sexually assaulting women" (Powers 2016). Worse yet, as news host Rachel Maddow has noted, President Trump's willingness to shamelessly break the "norms of decency," his willingness to behave in ways that are not merely unpresidential but gross and repulsive, calls upon us—as "decent" people—to respond (Maddow 2017). But when we do, we refuel debates about political correctness while turning our focus (and the focus of Trump's supporters) away from legislative agendas that may actively harm millions of people.

Where do we go from here? How can those who oppose Trump and his supporting cast of Republicans rewrite the script to mobilize a renewed passion for democracy? Put another way, how can the resistance become a more sympathetic character in the unfolding U.S. drama?

CULTIVATING DISGUST

There are no easy solutions to the predicament in which we find ourselves—a situation in which we face a neo-fascist regime[13] that has artfully cast racial, religious, sexual, and other minority populations *as the fascists* and the most privileged members of the population *as their victims*. If we shame the audience who applauds Trump's demagoguery for their bad judgment, bad morals, or bad taste, we feed the narrative that disables us. This is true whether or not some of the members of that audience *are* deplorable. Making a commitment to "go high" when they

"go low" will suffer the same fate. The assumption that we have, or even that we should take, "the moral high ground" suggests that we are or wish to become superior to those who are already convinced that we have a superiority complex.

We cannot wait for Trump to pivot. He will not. Nor will those who are enjoying the current torment of the left: techniques of rational persuasion will have little effect on those who are openly "ecstatic" about watching us (and the academic institutions we inhabit) "commit ritual suicide" (Schlicter 2017). In order to stay alive—the first order of business for any successful resistance—*we* are the ones who must pivot. To accept some advice from those who ridiculed us in the wake of Trump's election and Hillary's defeat, we cannot continue to gaze into the mirror and say to ourselves, "Well, you look *terrific*. No problem here. It must be that normal Americans are racist and stupid" (Schlicter 2017). As distasteful as it will be, we may need to look at ourselves through the eyes of our critics. (That is, after all, what a good actor does in order to improve her craft.) Through that opposing aesthetic lens, we may find that at least some parts of cultural liberalism are—like Trumpism—gross.[14] Are we (sometimes, often, ever) self-righteous? Paternalistic? Dangerous? Detached? Narcissistic? Uncritical? Lazy? Probably.

I am not suggesting that Trump resisters engage in self-flagellation (which is rarely useful). Nor am I suggesting that we cease direct action against policies and actions of the Trump regime (this would be a critical mistake). I am, however, suggesting that the size and the shape of the resistance matters. Continuing to grow the resistance is imperative, given the amount of work there is to do. This means that we need a big tent. We cannot afford to alienate those who may have good reason to revolt against "liberal elites." The fact that someone isn't well-versed in the languages of gender theory or decoloniality, for example, doesn't make them a bad person; nor does it mean there is nothing we can learn from them. To assume that only those who read the same books, share the same tastes, and travel in the same circles that we do can be trustworthy allies is both disgusting and unnuanced—in a word, *gross*.

At the same time, size is not *all* that matters and we would do well to avoid becoming as fixated on matters of size as Donald Trump. As others have suggested, "we need to be attentive to the ways that injunctions to coalition and unity have historically been advanced by way of subordinating, excluding, or erasing the most radical critiques and transformative practices of black and indigenous traditions, among others" (Langstaff 2017). Arguably, Clinton's loss was attributable, in part, to such failures of attentiveness.[15] To take but one example, the symbol of the pantsuit as a sign of feminist resistance (pantsuit nation) and of the white pantsuit in particular as evocative of women's rights both elided the racist history of women's suffrage and ignored the classist and culturally biased signification of the "suit" as an article of women's liberation. This was a gross (obvious, large, and disgusting) error.

Finally, I am suggesting this: Instead of questioning the taste of others, we need to question our own matters of taste. I have two examples in mind. (You may have others.) The first concerns the twin images of "patriarchy unbuttoned" and "patriarchy buttoned" developed by Rebecca Solnit (2017) in her insightful essay, "From Lying to Leering: Donald Trump's Fear of Women." Describing the nightmare-producing, PTSD-eliciting debate performance of Trump wherein he "lurched around the stage gaslighting, discrediting, constantly interrupting, . . . sexually shaming, and threatening to throw [Hillary Clinton] in prison," Solnit suggests that "Trump is patriarchy unbuttoned, paunchy, in a baggy suit, with his hair oozing and his lips flapping and his face squinching into clownish expressions of mockery and rage and self-congratulation." This she both contrasts and likens to "buttoned-up patriarchy" in the personage of "the lean, crop-haired, perpetually tense Mike Pence, who actually has experience in government." Although Solnit does not explicitly argue this, the two side-by-side images imply that working-class ("unbuttoned") sexism is more distasteful than is white-collar ("buttoned up") sexism. Paunchy bodies with oozing hair, flapping lips and clownish expressions are gross. Lean bodies with

styled hair, tight lips, and experienced postures are not. Like many women, I too find Donald Trump more offensive, disgusting, and nightmare-producing than the many political examples of "buttoned up patriarchy"—including Mike Pence—that we could cite. But I am not at all certain that my affective sensibilities are warranted. Pence's form of misogyny may be just as dangerous; if so, I *should be* just as repulsed by him. And, indeed, perhaps I would be, were it not for a set of implicit biases that cause me to align certain class markers (posture, haircuts, buttons, patience, etiquette) with morally superior conduct.

The second example, related to the first, concerns the felt distinction between the post-Trump era (neo-fascism) and the pre-Trump era (neo-liberalism). After Trump's election, many Clinton supporters felt depressed and afraid. Since the election, many left-leaning white women also felt a much greater urgency about political activism than previously. This is not to say that none of us were activists previously; but it is to say that, for many, political resistance has felt more necessary, critical, and *urgent* in both its quantity and quality since November 10, 2016. Here too, it is less than clear that this shift in affective sensibilities is warranted. As some have argued, the reading of fascism (both historically and in its most recent incarnation) as "a radical deviation from or negation of the liberal democratic social contract" fails to recognize that it is liberalism's social contract—steeped in coloniality—that sets the stage for fascism to emerge. In the U.S. context, "the mundane operations of U.S. national sovereignty have *always* comprised a state of emergency [for Black and American Indian peoples], and this officially undeclared state of emergency has been and continues to be the very ground upon which the liberal democratic state and the normative subject stand" (Langstaff 2017; see also Hartery 2016). My point is not that the present circumstance lacks urgency. It is rather that it may be a mark of privilege to feel this urgency (depression and fear) *as new*. Why didn't I feel such urgency before? More importantly, how can I train myself to continue to feel it when (if) neo-liberalism resumes?

Tastes change and we can acquire new tastes and abandon old ones. One of the challenges before us at the present moment is resisting the normalization of the new (neo-fascist) regime while simultaneously learning to be disgusted with the old one (neo-liberalism) from which it arose.[16] Both are incredibly gross. Part of our training as members of a new resistance movement must be to *cultivate our revulsion* (and the revulsion of our children and grandchildren) at the normalization of all injustice—including that in which we ourselves may be implicated.

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ENDNOTES

[1] There is a vast and growing literature on implicit (or unconscious) bias, namely the biases we hold that are not the end result of conscious reflection. See e.g. the essays collected in Brownstein and Saul (2016).

[2] My analysis here is influenced in part by Sara Ahmed's (2004) analysis of emotions as "sticky." See especially her analysis of disgust in Ch. 4.

[3] I am also influenced by Kristeva's (1982) and Butler's (1990) analyses of abjection here.

[4] "No past candidate [came] close to Clinton, and especially Trump, in terms of engendering strong dislike a little more than six months before the election." Moreover, Clinton and Trump's "strong favorability" ratings were far lower than those of any of their predecessors (Enten 2016).

[5] "You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right?" Clinton said. "The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamaphobic—you name it. And unfortunately there are people like that. And he has lifted them up."

[6] This portrait of Clinton emerges clearly on right-wing social media feeds. Close-ended survey questions do not reveal these data, as they did not provide respondents an opportunity to provide such answers ("Questionnaire Design" 2015; McGill 2016).

[7] In the early post-election days and weeks, significant attention was also paid to mistakes made by the RNC, the DNC, Clinton, the media, third-party candidates, and third-party voters, FBI Director Comey, and others. (See e.g. Krieg 2016; Montanaro 2016; Morris 2016.) I agree there were variegated threads of responsibility for the 2016 election outcome. However, my focus here is on the widespread critiques of those who actively supported Trump.

[8] I am reminded here also of musician Gil Scott-Heron's (1981) claim that "[w]e [were] starring in a B movie" after the election of Ronald Reagan. See also Havel (2011) on politics as theatre.

[9] Contra Kant (1951, §48), disgust may produce aesthetic satisfaction.

[10] Arguably, the urban/rural divide is more an imagined geography than an actual geographical division.

[11] While beyond the narrower scope of this paper, some have persuasively argued that fascism is as much an aesthetic as it is an ideology. See e.g. Schmid 2005; Sontag 1975.

[12] Even after several women testified that Trump had, in fact, assaulted them, Trump was able to position himself as the victim of a "liberal media" who were punishing him for leaving the "special club" of establishment insiders. Claiming the allegations were malicious and hurtful lies spread by a liberal elite, Trump stated that he was willing to take these vicious "slings and arrows" for his loyal supporters (Collinson 2016).

[13] Paxton (2005) defines fascism as "a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion" (218).

[14] "The pustule of cultural liberalism must be popped . . . and it's going to be messy" (Schlichter 2017).

[15] To say that her loss was attributable, in part, to such failures does not mean that such failures belong exclusively to her.

[16] The almost immediate nostalgic yearning for the Obama years after Trump's election erases the complicity of Obama, Clinton, and others in furthering the formation of the neoliberal surveillance state that set the stage for the policies and practices of the current regime (e.g. Wall Street bailouts, approval of multiple pipeline projects, the privatization of prisons, deportations of undocumented immigrants, IMF restructuring programs, drone strikes, etc.). We cannot "Make America Great Again" by going back several decades *or* a single decade.