

Blissful Blasphemies among Manifold Relishes of Foul Flux: Sacrilegious Traumalgia in Writing and Acting

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Remembrances encompass traumalgic otherness. A look at the links between nostalgia and trauma can be taken with a focus on an exploratory feature of otherness to be experimentally called sacrilegious traumalgia, which entails a nostalgic longing for the traumatic flux of mental and bodily deterioration and disintegration into multiple foul subunits. Traumalgia is sacrilegious, as its subjects overflow and overcome sacred classifications of cleanly, stable identity and foul otherness in flux. Drawing on a critique of modernity as a perpetuation of sacred resentful envy against otherness sanctioned through morality, the imagery of the six deadly sins besides envy applies to traumalgia. This discussion hinges on sacrilegious traumalgia in audio-video-literary narratives, that is, audiovisual acts and literary writings, from the European novels *V.M. 18* (Santacrose 2007), *Une forme de vie* (Nothomb 2011), and *Corpus Delicti* (Zeh 2009), and the international audiovisual works *Antichrist* (von Trier 2010), *Born This Way* (Gaga 2011), and *Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010), with their respective focus on lust, gluttony and sloth, and on wrath, pride and greed. This selection of audio-video-literary traumalgias in the comparative critical reflection of this study supplies a discussion on this feature of bodily otherness and cultural memory in three sections, focusing in turn on the relevant cross-disciplinary conceptual field, three novels, and three audiovisual works. Emphasis is laid on the significance of sacrilegious traumalgia in the set of concerns with collective identities and otherness haunting current trends and practices.

The six works were selected to cover the deadly sins of lust, gluttony, sloth, wrath, pride, and greed. From a Nietzschean-Foucauldian perspective, moral categories are perpetuated in modern experience, as both moral and modern ideologies rely on the masking and consecration of sacrificial, body-inhibiting envy in the deceitful guise of higher virtuous charity and the sacred advancement of wellbeing and progress, where what is abhorred as immoral is similarly stigmatised and libellously labelled as primitive, abnormal or pathological. The remaining six deadly sins are best apt to observe the subversion of moral and modern envious grudge through flux, which overthrows the hierarchy of fair mind over foul body and overcomes these dichotomous terms. These literary and audiovisual traumas are linked together in that they widen appreciation and apprehension of sacrilegious ironies at play within modern western positionings, where foul flux takes distances from stiff grudge through jokey reshuffles of cultural memory.

Both literary and audiovisual narratives of traumatic otherness converge in a counter-normative version of the sublime (Wawrzinek 2008), as they actively destabilise the sacred limits of conventional memory and identity. The counter-normative version of the sublime in grotesque narratives revolves around the aesthetic experience of distancing disgust, or foulness. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, the critique of aesthetic disgust put forward by Carolyn Korsmeyer furnishes a theory of particular relevance to the estranging power of filth in grotesque irony through the difference between sublime horror and sublate disgust. Despite their common aesthetic deployment of sensations associated with death, norms are enshrined in the heroic imagery of sublime horror and, conversely, challenged by sublate disgust (Korsmeyer 2011). While horror is sublimated in art, disgust involves a sublation of experience, where not only are subjectivity and linear memory threatened, but mind and body are perceived in their lowest character as doomed to deteriorate and disintegrate in the

flux of death and change. It is no coincidence that this aesthetic conception is akin to Nietzschean aesthetics (Korsmeyer 2011, 135). Tellingly, the concepts elaborated by Friedrich Nietzsche, an influential critic of cultural memory, are central in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque (Mazour-Matousevich 2009). Grotesque cultural memory ensconces what can be conceived of as sublatence, that is, the latent condition of both intangible remembrances and bodily substances as subject to a relentless flux of deterioration and disintegration into a myriad of dismembered limbs and foul subunits.

In opposition to essentialist simplicity and fairness, sublatence entails a multiple and monstrous foulness, whose appreciation takes ironic distance from nostalgia for linear identity against the trauma of stigmatised otherness. The irreverent, sacrilegious irony enacted by sublatent narratives is traumalgia, that is, nostalgic thrill in the traumatic flow of deterioration and foulness. Sacrilegious traumalgia takes its manifestly distancing and estranging shape particularly in and through multiple monstrosities, which shift away and displace emphasis from the monolithic monstrosity displayed in sublime horror by calling attention to the lowest and most disintegrated states of abjection and putrefaction in sublate fashions and guises, where the heroic fear of a tiger gives way to a spasmodic recoil from filthy swarms, hives, maggots, and any other dirty carriers of profanation through corruption, contamination, and contagion. As is to be discussed in relation to the conceptual field of traumalgia, this absorption in foulness is of great significance to early-twenty-first-century debates on identity and otherness with respect to west-rest relationships.

The multiple monstrosity of traumalgia is inextricably interwoven with the monolithic monstrosity of sublimity, as both stem from the elusively blurred tropes of macabre revolt, lugubrious excess and sinister ambiguity in grotesque narratives. Grotesque representations take on subversively macabre, sublatently lugubrious, and sublimely sinister forms. An illustration is the description of a war

scenery in the novel *Atonement* (McEwan 2001, 192-96), with the macabre image of sons killing their parents in an act of ultimate hubris, the lugubrious finding of a leg severed from its body in an ironic hyperbole of bodily deficiency, and the sinister description of an ominous hybrid nightscape as ambiguously quiet and threatening. Subversive hubris, sublatent hyperbole, and sublime hybridity overcome sacred boundaries of selfsameness and linear remembrance. This article will expose and describe various forms of traumalgia that exploit this aesthetics. As exposed in the following section on the concept of foul flux and described in the subsequent ones on audio-video-literary works, the vast and empowering conceptual field of sacrilegious traumalgia voices otherwise silenced appreciations and apprehensions in manifold extreme experimental exploratory experiences and perceptions from multifarious marginal perspectives.

Foul Flux and Cumbersome Grudge

As reflected also on a formal level in this exploratory exposition of foul otherness with the intent to counter a strictly scientific sterilised style that fails to account for sublatent foulness in an appropriate manner without doing violence to its multiple monstrosities, the conceptual field encapsulated within traumalgic literary and audiovisual narratives is interdisciplinary and experimental. Narratives of otherness mark an area of collective memory, and repertoires of cultural memory collect as if in an archive multifarious bodily performances, as suggested by Diana Taylor (2003). Mieke Bal (2003) argues that visual culture is not limited to any objects in particular, such as strictly defined performance art. Bodily performances permeate cultural practices, which is crucial in Judith Butler's philosophical critique of heteronormative stigma (1990). Whenever normative boundaries are challenged, the limits of memory are pushed towards forms of the sublime, including the social sublime examined in traumatic literature by Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (2007). As already introduced, although

Jennifer Wawrzinek (2008) notes that the sublime encompasses a sensation whose tendency to heroism risks perpetuating essentialist norms, a counter-normative version of sublime horror is sublate disgust, which Carolyn Korsmeyer (2011) characterises as a subversive emphasis on ineluctable bodily deterioration, or foul flux.

This narrative perspective draws attention to the critique against sacrificial essentialism, particularly in relation to embodiment and bodily sacrifice, as formulated by Friedrich Nietzsche (1887) in a critical conception of memory on which among others Michel Foucault (1969) and Gianni Vattimo (1989) extensively and self-avowedly drew for their discussions on otherness and conventional norms. Along these lines of philosophical critique, memory is hemmed in by the fear of multiplicity and by the principle of determination and identity, which seeks simplicity and stasis. Both morality and modernity consecrate collective resentment, that is, grudge against unclassifiable multiplicity and disintegration, whereas Dionysian flux and playful fun relish and revel in the foul subunits into which identity deteriorates and multiplies. Flux and grudge are two opposing principles, as flux cherishes foul otherness, while grudge seeks seamless, fair identity. With their emphasis on moral and modern sanctified norms of good and bad, state authority, and identities, respectively, Nietzsche's, Foucault's and Vattimo's philosophical critiques are appropriate reference points for current counter-normative cultural memory. Traumalgic irony provides an irreverent, sacrilegious distance from sacrificial grudge to appreciate sublate disgust and apprehend its multiplex objects, where sacred simple subjectivity shrivels and fades away. Sacrilegious traumalgia overthrows and desecrates the stigma of traumatic foulness and the nostalgic longing for integrity by embracing foul flux.

Each in its own distinctive way, the six texts to be reviewed deterritorialise and put at a distance sacred conventions about the body – to borrow the concept

of deterritorialisation used on a Nietzschean-Foucauldian tone by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972, 321) – by exposing the surreptitiously terrorist character of normative deterrents intended to demarcate the safe territory of normality. Due to the experimental interdisciplinary character of this discussion, attention is paid to theoretical insights from different fields, rather than to existing criticism of the works examined.

Disencumbering Divinely Devilish Remembrances

Protagonist and narrator of Isabella Santacroce's novel *V.M. 18* (2007) is the fatally seductive teenage girl Desdemona in a religious college where she designs lugubrious adventures of sex and humiliation to death with her two irresistibly irreverent roommates. Desdemona's memories revolve around her explosive sexual yearnings, which transcend her repressive education. The relationship established between orgasm and mystical ecstasy characterises the little seducer as a priestess of impurity and lust (Santacroce 2007, 13). Her body is a blasphemous altar to worship the pleasures abhorred as sinful by traditional morality.

The condition of childhood connotes a low social status, as the word *child* often denotes unmarried or childless adults (Gillis 1981, 1). This sense of inferiority is marked by the foreclosure of sexuality to children, which is conjured up by the Italian acronym serving as the novel's title, 'forbidden to children'. The oxymoronic character of adolescent sexuality is powerfully enhanced by the stark contrast between the novel's prohibitive title and its deliberately licentious content, with clear intertextual bonds to the outrageously obscene works written by the Marquis de Sade. The contrast between the characters' status as adolescents and their dissolute behaviour is crucial to Santacroce's hyperbolic critique of morality along the lines traced by Nietzsche.

The opposition between moralist education and devilish pleasure is central also in the memories of one of Desdemona's roommates and accomplices

(Santacroce 2007, 41-42). The narrative enclosed in this passage plays on the tension between the purity of the nursemaid's son and the impurity of the little girl, who takes pleasure in insulting the boy and is punished through anal rape. She is associated with anal sex and vicious pleasure, filth, hell, and wild instincts, while the imagery surrounding the nursemaid encompasses indolence, milk, and a carol's silent Christmas night complete with lit trees and sweet smells. Virtue is made of necessity, as anal rape meant to degrade comes to spark the girl's rebellious libido as soon as she begins to enjoy what was meant as a chastisement, thus making fun of grudge through wild lust.

Blasphemous imagery hints at the three girls' rebellion against morality in the college where they meet:

Gesù Cristo Sofferto, la cui pallida carne scolpita nell'alabastro luccicava benevolmente se a contatto con l'ombra, si contorceva toccandosi il sesso, e quando mi alzavo per genuflettere il corpo, scorgevo la parete divisoria del bagno, abbellita dal cerchio di seta dall'azzurro tremendo, nel quale salivano a volo dei serafini d'argento, gonfiarsi come un ventre di donna prossima al parto (Santacroce 2007, 103-04).

[Jesus Christ Sufferer, whose pale flesh sculpted in alabaster shined benignly if touched by shades, tossed and turned to touch his genitals, and, as I raised to kneel with all my body, I could see in the distance the bathroom's wall – embellished by a silky circle of tremendous blue, where silvery seraphs rose up in flight – swelling like the belly of a woman close to giving birth] [*all translations are mine*] (Santacroce 2007, 103-04).

The crucifix is represented as a sensual body yearning for pleasure against the wall where it hangs. As the wall looks as though it were a pregnant womb, this fantastic vision of Christ also alludes to the unaware fertility of his semen while he is merely seeking the satisfaction of his lustful senses. The novel does not limit itself to spiritualising sex. Religious symbols are also sexualised and worshipped as in a cult of the erotic body. The sacrilegious logic at play finds eloquent elaboration:

Contro l'austerità di vergognose regole imposte, s'ergeva il nostro imponente disdegno, dove *l'abuso della voluttà diveniva benevolmente sacrilego*, e dove con furia desideravamo insudiciare gli insegnamenti impartiti dalla famiglia, vile covo di codardia e di goffaggine, membro castratore e dispensatore d'insormontabili tedi, per poi dilaniare qualsiasi assennato principio incontrato all'interno del Collegio delle Fanciulle: le sue proibizioni continue, l'esigere umiltà e rispetto, quell'accanirsi nel voler glorificare la pace dei sensi come unica strada conducente alla gioia terrestre, quel volerci innocue fanciulle addobbate di fiocchi.

Principiavamo a chiarire alcuni concetti [...]: possedevamo un semplice abbozzo d'intenti, impregnati di manifesti delitti, dove Satana, vestito solo di oreficerie e di diamantine schegge, duellava con Dio Onnipotente dal capo cinto da una corona superba di carbonchi e coralli, e non v'era astio in quel loro battagliaarsi torcendo le reni, gridando per spaurire il rivale davanti, che ne imitava la foga nell'emettere versi intimanti il proseguo di quel focoso conflitto, bensì una pura esibizione di divina bellezza, un misurare le rispettive potenze senza risparmio di sforzi, offrendo lo spettacolare possesso di virilità indistruttibili e magiche, nello scintillio dei loro bardati corpi.

[...] Ero un satanico Dio, un celestiale demonio, ero la somma di due sacralità contrapposte e identiche [...]. Questo io mi sentivo: l'Eroina dell'Estasi [emphasis added] (Santacroce 2007, 107-08).

[Against the austerity of shameful authoritarian rules rose up our majestic disdain, where *the abuse of sultriness became benignly sacrilegious*, and where we furiously craved to soil the teachings dispensed by family, vile lair of cowardice and clumsiness, castrating virile member and dispenser of insurmountable boredoms, and then tear off any sensible principle encountered in the College of the Maidens: its ceaseless prohibitions, its demands of humility and respect, such obstinacy in the glorification of the peace of the senses as the one and only way leading to earthly joy, that wish to have us as dressed up maidens.

We began to clarify some concepts: we possessed a simple draft of intents, imbued with manifest crimes, where Satan, wearing only jewels and diamantine splinters, fought a duel against God Almighty with on his head a superb crown of carbuncles and corals, and there was no grudge in their entrails-twisting fight – with screams and shouts meant to scare off their respective rival, who imitated that rage in giving off sounds urging to continue such a fiery conflict – but rather a perfect display of divine beauty, a way of gauging their respective might without saving efforts, in a spectacular profusion of their magically indestructible manhood in their glowing harnessed bodies.

I was a satanic God, a heavenly demon; I was the sum of two holinesses counterpoised and identical. This I felt to be: the Heroine of Ecstasy] (Santacroce 2007, 107-08).

Family is portrayed as a shelter for envious weakness and inhibition. Its patriarchal order is echoed in the image of a phallus in erection to which the activity of envious castration is paradoxically attributed. On the one hand, patriarchy relies on the fear of castration on the part of children and women. On the other hand, the implicit counter-phallus of imagination held by children and women is systematically inhibited by the castrating deterrence enforced by envious patriarchy. Repressive education perpetuates patriarchal inhibitions through its rules intended to restrict and contain mirth by imposing meek docility.

The three rebellious maidens design a revolt against the simple binary oppositions upheld by family and college alike. Unlike the simple distinctions of good and evil passed on by repressive education, the three girls envisage a critique where both opposing principles are entwined together. This critical force is far from metaphysical, as it pervades the girls' bodies. God and Satan are depicted in an eternal fight where they symbolise the perpetual flux of production and destruction wherein experience unfurls. Rather than dwelling somewhere remote from experience, these forces are one and the same principle residing within foul, material bodies, of whose ecstasy Desdemona feels to be the heroine.

Une forme de vie (Nothomb 2010) shifts foul flux to a grotesque male body and yet another female narrator, who this time is the author herself replying to her readers' letters as experienced outside of fiction by Amélie Nothomb. Her reader and epistolary correspondent Melvin Mapple writes to her that he is an obese American soldier in Baghdad, whose body is so large that he perceives it as also encompassing, as in an amorous embrace, his imaginary Iraqi victim and lover Scheherazade. The Belgian writer is immediately fascinated and disturbed by her bizarre reader and his imaginary lover within one and the same body:

En anglais, *corpse* signifie « cadavre ». En français, ce n'est qu'une possibilité du mot « corps ». Un corps obèse est-il vivant? La seule preuve qu'il n'est pas mort, c'est qu'il grossit encore. C'est ça la logique de l'obésité (Nothomb 2010, 33-34).

[In English, *corpse* means “dead body”. In French, that is just one meaning of the word “body”. Are obese bodies alive? The only evidence that they are not dead is that they keep fattening. This is the logic of obesity] (Nothomb 2010, 33-34).

Amélie is struck by the association of obese embodiment with death, in stark contrast to the soldier's fight for survival and his imaginary visceral love, let alone his vicious gluttony. His body is so different from normality as to appear as dead matter in odd expansion, or a monstrously growing corpse.

Contrasts between obesity and warfare related to the link between overweight and female curves are articulated in a letter from Melvin (Nothomb 2010, 36-37). Besides death, obesity connotes shameful ridicule, proper grotesqueness, femininity, and cowardice. *Une forme de vie* addresses concerns surrounding aggressive masculinity and terrorist normativity. The deployment of an American self-image in Iraq raises issues on simple distinctions between the civilised west and the terrorist east, as the novel suggests that the western values of honour and male health are as terroristic with respect to obese and feminine bodies as the fundamentalist values of blind faith and divine justice with their enemy, that is, modern western civilisation.

Melvin also projects the attribute of monstrosity over normal soldiers who tolerate warfare, as opposed to the obese in the American army (Nothomb 2010, 38). As pathology, obesity gains a different meaning in the army, where bulimic eating constitutes an extreme means to non-violently and self-destructively contest the civilisational war. Non-violence, self-destruction and critique are three aspects that Melvin regards as crucial (Nothomb 2010, 46). Obesity is connected both with the intention to take a critical distance from the war and even with those

suicidal terrorist acts which are envisaged in anti-western discourses threatening western civilisation. This critical dimension of obesity becomes central in Melvin's letters.

This novel's emphasis on the relationship between health and ideology can be interpreted in relation to the anti-essentialist critique of health norms. This critique against health as a solid and objective set of facts recurs in the theories of symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, feminism, and post-colonialism. The sociologist Herbert Blumer defines symbolic interactionism as a theory of human behaviour as relative to the symbolic meanings emerged out of social interaction (Jary 1991, 509). With this approach, Erving Goffman demonstrates the symbolic character of health and illness in the interactive institutionalisation and stigmatisation of the body of the patient (Goffman 1961). As discussed in the following section on audiovisual works, the social construct of solid, strong health is also discursively instrumental to that of heteronormative masculinity and western imperialism. The obese fighter notices the self-destructive social effects of obesity (Nothomb 2010, 53). Not only is obesity disliked, this condition conjures up an immense aversion to those who indulge in its sin of gluttony. However, the bizarre reader also points out the creative potential of bulimic self-destruction, in what at first might appear as an absurd comparison with Amélie's writing (Nothomb 2010, 64). Ultimately, the critical force of obesity in the army turns on their head the values of reference which define worthy and unworthy work. In all its destructive character, war bulimia comes to encompass a critique of norms, where excessive eating becomes a creative act in its own right.

Creation and destruction are inextricably interlaced also in Amélie's perception. She is impressed by Melvin's destructive bulimia when faced with his picture (Nothomb 2010, 114). Amélie zooms in on the mouth of the obese body and establishes a connection between this weapon of self-destruction and mass-murder. Reluctantly, she proposes his picture as a piece of body art at a gallery,

where the image sparks so much interest that the gallery invites more pictures possibly in the army uniform. When Melvin confesses having made up being a soldier in the army, the Belgian writer does not fail to acknowledge his creativity:

Ce que vous m'avez montré dans vos courriers disait seulement la vérité d'une autre façon. De votre enfer, vous avez fait un autre enfer. Peu m'importent les cris d'orfraie de ceux qui affirment qu'on ne peut pas comparer l'horreur du front irakien à l'horreur d'un corps obèse [...] (Nothomb 2010, 144).

[What you showed me in your letters was just telling the truth in a different way. You made a new hell out of your own hell. I care little about the shrill screams and shouts of those stating that one may not compare the horror of the Iraq front with the horror of an obese body] (Nothomb 2010, 144).

In a dazzling meta-fictional, self-reflexive twist, the writer draws attention to the creative dimension of narrating the obese, or any other, experience in meaningful connection with social critique. Narration is enshrined as an effective tool to deconstruct norms and, thereby, create works of art.

The very title of the novel corresponds to the name given by Melvin to his epistolary collection, whose metaphorical meaning finds eloquent articulation:

Ces mots [une forme de vie] évoquent en principe l'existence élémentaire des amibes et des protozoaires. Pour la plupart des gens, il n'y a là *qu'un grouillement un peu dégoûtant*. Pour moi qui ai connu le néant, c'est déjà de la vie et j'en ai la *nostalgie*. L'échange des lettres fonctionnait comme une scissiparité: je vous envoyais une infime particule d'existence, votre lecture la doublait, votre réponse la multipliait, et ainsi de suite. [...] Je marinai *dans un jus de mots partagés*. *Il y a une jouissance que rien n'égale: l'illusion d'avoir du sens. Que cette signification naisse du mensonge n'enlève rien à cette volupté* [emphases added] (Nothomb 2010, 157).

[In principle, these words [a form of life] evoke the basic existence of amoebas and protozoa's. To most observers, there's nothing in there but for *a somewhat sickening swarming*. To me, who met nothingness, that's still some life and *nostalgia* makes me long for it. Our letter exchange

worked as a scissiparity – I would send you a tiny particle of my existence, your reading would double it, your reply would multiply it, and so on. I was soaking *in a squash of shared words. There's a glee that nothing compares to – the daydream of meaning something. That such worth is borne out of make-believe takes nothing away from this bliss*] (Nothomb 2010, 157).

Worth as belonging to belief hardly belittles blissful blessings of manifold meanings among sickening swarming signs and tokens. The reader appropriates himself of writing as a way to create meaning out of foul flux. Multiplicity stems from the experience of narration, where what looked like a singular and worthless form of existence finds a multiplication of perspectives and perceptions, and state security is sacrilegiously associated with the deadly sin of gluttony.

The dystopian setting of *Corpus Delicti* (Zeh 2009) is a deceivingly bright future where the state enforces a constitution based on scientific standards of health. As she declared in an extensive interview by her detractor Peter Voß, Juli Zeh criticises the medicalisation of society that shifts attention from the accountability of the state to the health of the citizens. Her engagement against the state's intrusion into the citizens' everyday, supposedly for their own safety, especially with respect to terrorist threats, is evident in her novel. The text stages an authoritarian ideology of scientifically legitimated normativity. The dystopian authoritarianism of health in the text reflects Foucault's analysis of the medical discourse in liberal societies. Foucault argued that '*technologie du sexe*' ('sex technology') (Foucault 1969, 155) is the liberal-bourgeois *bio-politics* of self-conservation. Foucault unveils the relativity of science upon its own language, which mechanically legitimates its supposedly transparent and true facts. Similarly, Zeh's novel deploys the rhetoric of science in a critique against medical and state authority. In yet one more variant on Germany's reworking of its not too distant dictatorial past, the novel explores the social and political construction of the body and health in grotesquely authoritarian forms of discipline. As the legal Latin title *corpus delicti* suggests, delinquency is in the (unhealthy) body.

The protagonist, Mia Holl, incarnates Antigone's tragic dilemma of the tension between critique and abidance to law, as she rebels against the dictatorial system and is trialled as a terrorist. Mia's dilemma arises when her brother commits suicide while in prison due to an error in a DNA test related to a rape and murder of which he is unjustly accused. As this event leads her to radically question the alleged infallibility of the science-based political system and the all-pervasive technological equipment, she publicly refuses to keep on doing the physical exercise demanded of all citizens for the optimal performance of their bodies. Ironically, her judges eventually decide to make a concession and not send her into exile by clinically freezing her body guilty of unforgivable sloth, which would have been her only possible escape from her nightmarish community. The protagonist is eloquently portrayed as a postmodern witch; an outcast of society, whose indulgence in sloth is perceived as a profanation of the holy natural law of scientifically gauged survival and wellbeing.

The German text represents a dystopian state based on a disturbing form of health terrorism, as evident from the extensive explanation provided by the ideologist Kramer (Zeh 2009, 36-37). The dystopian state claims to pursue the objective good of the collective, associated with health. Metaphorically, this totalitarian state poses itself as a healthy body, a perfect organism whose harmony is in constant jeopardy of disruption. The system's vulnerability is the justification for the persecution of any critics, such as Mia. Although health seems like an ideal that transcends the logic of the market and nationalist rage, the dystopian state is in fact the culmination of the health models advertised for commercial purposes in liberal societies, in conjunction with a kind of state terrorism reminiscent of nationalist policies.

Health purity is posited as the essence, whereas Mia is a hybrid citizen, presented as a witch. The etymology of the German word for witch is traced back

to the original meaning of *hedge-rider* in the novel, underscoring Mia's border-identity:

Die Zaunreiterin befindet sich auf der Grenze zwischen Zivilisation und Wildnis. Zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits, Leben und Tod, Körper und Geist. Zwischen Ja und Nein, Glaube und Atheismus. Sie weiß nicht zu welcher Seite sie gehört. Ihr Reich ist das *Dazwischen* (Zeh 2009, 144).

[The hedge-rider finds herself at the border between civilisation and the wild. Between this and that side, life and death, body and mind. Between yes and no, belief and atheism. She does not know where she belongs. Her realm is the *in-between*] (Zeh 2009, 144).

In stark contrast to the state's essentialism of health purity, Mia is a relativist hybrid, who finds value beyond the conventional dichotomy of survival and death by indulging in unnatural sloth. Her liminal and cyclical oscillation between extremes as in a flux provides a lucid reflection on identity and otherness in a post-liberal society dominated by an essentialist discourse reminiscent of nationalist ideologies and propaganda. Far from having overcome the need for an ideology, the METHOD is based on scientifically justified dogmas.

In the text, the protagonist is associated with witches and women whose body is unacceptable in a society based on the physical. Her supporter, Driss, is described in the least conventional details of her corporeality:

[H]och aufgeschossen wie ein junger Baum, mit dem sie die Abwesenheit weiblicher Rundungen teilt. Ein flaches Gesicht über dem Kragen des weißen Kittels, große Augen spiegeln das jeweilige Gegenüber. Auch ohne Sommersprossen hätte man Schwierigkeiten, einem Mädchen wie ihr die Volljährigkeit zu glauben (Zeh 2009, 20).

[Lanky as a young tree, with which she shares the absence of curves. A flat face over her white coat's collar, her big eyes mirroring what they face. Even without considering her freckles, one could hardly believe that a girl like her had reached the age of majority] (Zeh 2009, 20).

Driss' support for Mia serves an important narrative function. Although the protagonist's body does not present any features to qualify as grotesque, her rebellion transgresses the physical standards of the dystopian social landscape in which she dwells. In the eyes of the society of the authoritarian state, Mia's body *is* grotesque. In a macabre way, her body continues to function despite transgressing the discipline required to have a worthy life, which is perceived as conducive to dirt and premature rotting. Mia's body threatens contamination through Driss and other possible supporters and thus comes to constitute a metaphorical temple of hubris where the boundary between life and death is surpassed. This is suggested both in the evocation of medieval witches and in the identification with the only blatantly grotesque female body, Driss, who wholeheartedly supports Mia's revolt with the enthusiasm of a silenced voice hoping for an acknowledgement of its part in a one-sided social system.

In contrast to linear narratives of health and scientific progress, a sense of history as cyclical is conveyed towards the end of *Corpus Delicti*, when Mia is already in prison (Zeh 2009, 235). On the one hand, the METHOD claims to provide an objective foundation for the discipline of the citizens, that is, their will to survive in good health. On the other hand, Mia denounces the state as based on yet another ideological system which perpetuates the oppression associated with the traditional religious societies of medieval Europe. Progress is denounced as an ideologically sustained illusion meant to surreptitiously perpetuate moralist dogmatism. Transgression of scientific laws is a deadly sin. As with sloth against bare survival in conformation, lust and gluttony in the novels previously discussed hint at a critique against the surreptitious perpetuation of sacred imperatives in repressive education and in the army. The traumatic and foul imageries of sperm, fat, and dirt nostalgically remembered in the three texts make fun of moral and modern normative grudge and lead far from conformation to any sacred classifications.

Extreme Estrangements amid Relics of Dismembered Embodiments

The film *Antichrist*, by the Danish film director Lars von Trier, represents the overcoming of identity and the reproductive regime of Christianity and modernity. As suggested by the title, it is fitting to relate the scenes of extreme sexual pleasure in the first half of the film to a Nietzschean revaluation of values beyond good and evil. The film as a whole is a claustrophobic close-up of the satanic secrets surrounding an angelic couple who correspond to the heteronormative standards of traditional morality. The narrative of a man and a woman having sex with an apparent willingness to procreate, as sanctioned in the divine order, is turned upside down in what is presented as the woman's fragile mental health and ultimately uncontrollable, deadly wrath. She is haunted by dark dreams where she walks amidst hostile vegetation at night, which is conveyed through surreal nocturnal landscapes in the film. Her visions make her nights unbearable and her days exhausting, as her restless state starts to interfere with her relationship with her husband. The pensive moods in which she feels as if imprisoned create an ambiance of gloom and coldness, in striking contrast to the passionate and explicit sexual scenes. She deviates from the order of conventional pleasure and identity inherent in heteronormative reproductive sexuality, thus indulging in a profanation of procreation. Her self-remedy is shocking from the perspectives of both traditional morality and modern rationality. She engages in ever more violent sex with her husband, where she finally makes recourse to what is visualised as a ritual castration. In the middle of an obsessively monotonous narrative following a slow routine of passionate sex and depressive poses, she cuts her man's penis while in erection in an act of furious, nefarious wrath, which is all shown in the film in detail. Her fury makes her hit him hard and obstinately so as to dominate him completely.

The emphasis on sexual reproduction in modern medical conceptualisations of health signals the perpetuation of the social normalisation of women's bodies as essentially made for procreation. From a feminist angle, Robyn Rowland compellingly argues that reproductive technologies are not necessarily empowering for women (Rowland 1992, 285). Western medicine revolves around discourses of masculinity and power that converge in the public commitment to hygiene and cleanliness. As thoroughly assessed by Alison Bashford, public health is 'an important part of the modern projects of nation, of race and of colonisation' (Bashford 2004, 189). It comes as no surprise that the anti-heroine in an extremely experimental film channels her wrath against the anatomic organs of reproduction, or that the lugubrious heroines in the next two audiovisual works rebel against normative reproductive sexuality.

In the film, her hyperbolic course of action is blatantly opposed to her husband's advice to master her dreams, by imagining reaching a luminous lawn and melting in the green. The dichotomy between this symbolic narrative pattern of male rationality and her female wrath provides a vivid picture of the conventional separation between God's goodness and Satan's evil. What is echoed in her revolt is Lucifer's rebellion against the divine order. In conversation with her husband before her extreme act, she explains that her anxiety is mysteriously connected with her university readings about patriarchy and women's emancipation. In fact, her revolt goes beyond the distinction between man and woman, as she does not limit herself to castrating her husband, but also engages in an equally explicitly shown self-clitoridectomy. These images of seeming madness symbolise a revolt against all that which has a tendency to erection, that is, a hierarchical, vertical order, whether a penis or a clitoris. Along with the absolute hierarchy of values, she gives a decisive cut to all possibilities of conventional pleasure and linearly defined identity, as the physical parts of normalised sex are literally removed.

The film ends in an orgy of violence, where the castrated man yields to the temptation of irrational fight in an ecstasy of mutually inflicted pain. The surreal landscapes representing the darker side of normalcy reappear, this time crowded with naked bodies intersecting with each other in an endless orgy, which serves as an irresistibly grotesque background to the fight of what finally looks as two bleeding demons animated by unquenchable wrath. The text represents through these signs, thus arranged, the dimension of satanic that is critical ecstasy. This hypersexual imagery of abstinence forced by literal dismemberment is balanced by the asexual imaginary running through the music video *Born This Way* and the film *Black Swan*, whose audiovisual narratives integrate radical asexual imaginaries tending to extreme subversion. Their representations of asexual bodies are empowering and enthralling. The music video presents a utopia where Lady Gaga mothers a legendary generation of angelic monsters devoid of prejudice. Although no mention is made of asexuality, the lyrics explicitly make the point that sexual orientation is not an issue in this utopian world. Above all, the video supplies a narrative critical to sexual norms, also through powerful images of a-sexed bodies irreverently proud to be born that way.

It is no coincidence that the critic Camille Paglia defines Lady Gaga's performances as eerily asexual (Paglia 2010). Her video *Born This Way* proclaims her manifesto where 'it doesn't matter if you love him or capital H I M' (Gaga 2011). Besides overcoming the imperatives of both morality and modernity, the video's utopian vision encompasses the abolition of all prejudices related to sexuality, ethnicity, disability, and age, in a way akin to Gianni Vattimo's transparent society of proud self-expression by all means available (Vattimo 1989, 19-20). *Born This Way* also tells a story where the archetypal sexual couple is associated with death – rather than biological reproduction – and asexual dancers born out of monstrous eggs are cherished by a mythical proud mother-god, who revels in repulsive ova and placenta.

The sequences shift from scenes of a normative couple to those of unrestrained dancing and back again to the primordial couple. The archetypes of man and woman are symbolically wearing skeleton costumes, hinting at the violence inherent in social norms. The bodies of the dancers are unearthly, as the utopian race is symbolically associated with aliens from a different dimension of the universe. Finally, the mythical mother is an androgynous body giving birth with no need of sex involving any virile member, which subtly suggests an empowering dismemberment of patriarchy. The video also espouses the occult imagery attributed to Lady Gaga (Citizen 2009). Playing with a symbolism supposed to promote capitalism and commodification through satanic subliminal messages, the video *Born This Way* opens and closes with the Satanist triangle. The voice-over at the beginning suggests that the birth of good is inextricably entwined with that of evil. The imagery of asexual bodies hints at the inescapable ambiguity surrounding distinctions between male and female embodiment, along with moral and modern distinctions of worth and worthlessness. *Born This Way* draws attention to the inhibitions ensconced by sexual norms in a direct and overwhelming manner.

The film *Black Swan* by Darren Aronofsky tells the story of Nina, a brilliant classical dancer with no sexual feelings and animated only by her restless greed for unequalled success, marked by her voyeuristically displayed foot wounds. Her mother represents the moral imperative to abstain from any form of indulgence and fully commit oneself to discipline and duty, putting aside any drives to selfish enjoyment. Conversely, the director of her company embodies the modern obsession with material and sexual accomplishment, as he pushes her to have sex and express sensuality when dancing the eponymous sequence. As her rival tries to exhaust her by taking her out at night, Nina has a drug-induced trip that awakens in her frequent hallucinations. Besides having visions of extreme sexual acts never performed, she becomes increasingly paranoid. Importantly, one

beneficial effect of her rekindled imagination is the power to perform sublimely the feared sensual sequence. When dancing at her show, she is shown transformed in a sublime hybrid mixing human and animal, swan-like wild features. In the backstage, she has a vision of herself breaking a mirror and hitting her rival to death with pieces of glass. After her surprisingly supreme performance, she realises having actually inflicted those pieces of glass into her own flesh in a paradoxical surge of greed for unequalled success, as she can beat her rival's sensual moves only through secret self-inflicted wounding and dismemberment meant to asexually awaken her sensual expressiveness. As in a mystical élan of martyrdom, she dances to the end and dies having given a legendary performance.

Nina's hybrid performance represents the potential of revolt against normative sexuality to overcome all social norms in both moral and modern imperatives. The asexual imaginary is presented as endowed with the mythical power to transcend all conventional distinctions, especially by means of the embrace of disgusting wounds and bodily excretions highlighted throughout the narration. This traumalgic display of foulness is enacted through a strategic deployment of rhetorical hyperbole, that is, exaggeration. Both in the music video and in the two films, the audiovisual narratives examined endorse the extreme traumalgic imagery adopted in the literary cases discussed. Adding blood, ova, and wounds to the three novels' sperm, fat, and dirt, the two films and the music video contribute to this account of the variety of foul flux available in sacrilegious traumalgia.*

* This essay belongs to several works of experimental multiplex poetry and criticism on multiple monsters in current writing and acting, made available in multilingual consultancies and publications also in the journal *Other Modernities* and the *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, in the courses in European cinema and ideologies taught by the author at Bangor University, at events organised also by Harvard University and the University of Cambridge, at the Norwegian Institute in Rome, in the Italian city of Catanzaro, at the centres for cultural memory of Denmark and of the University of London, and in Maastricht, at the Dutch-Belgian-German borders. Special thanks go to Mads Rosendahl Thomsen for his enthusiastic and helpful feedback on an important part of this discussion.

Sacrileges Aloof

These six audio-video-literary traumalgias take ironic distance from envious grudge as moral and modern sacrificial sacraments are irreverently profaned by the blasphemous, sacrilegious associations of mystical ecstasy and lusty ejaculation, state security and gluttonous fattening, natural order and slothful rotting, angelic harmony and wrathful castration, divine creation and proud birth-giving, sensual beauty and greedy self-wounding. Religious symbols of martyrdom are blended with fantasies on sperm and orgasm in *V.M. 18*, in a dimension where God and Satan are one and the same entity. The horror of the Iraq war is compared to that of an obese body by *Une forme de vie*, which also celebrates the power of narrating fiction to bestow meaning on experience. *Corpus Delicti* ironically grants sloth more value than the pursuit of survival and wellbeing, in a society where scientific laws of nature leave no better choice than to cease resisting bodily dirt and deterioration in a witch-like revolt against the authority of sacred science.

Antichrist, *Born This Way* and *Black Swan* cherish extreme blood-riven acts of wrath against the biblical task of procreation, pride against divine creation, and greed for unequalled success pushed to ritual self-injury and suicide. These six narratives display distancing styles colliding in sacrilegious traumalgia. In an international context of grudge and stigma against foulness and contamination, traumalgia takes ironic distance from sacred cleanliness in health and other discourses. Sperm, fat, dirt, blood, eggs, and wounds make foul fun of holy grudge and lead to something other, somewhere far from moral and modern norms, in a nostalgic relishing of the flux of traumatic dismemberments and remembrances.

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