TRIPARTITE NIGHTMARES AND FEMINIST DREAMS:

Glorifying the Grotesque

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Bakhtin and Belief: An Introduction to the Grotesque

In the same way blood runs within our veins, shame and terror over what it means to be human courses through us at the behest of white supremacist, capitalist, ableist patriarchy. By disenfranchising us from our understandings of ourselves and others, systems of oppression work to subordinate individuals, capitalizing on insecurities. The concept of the *grotesque* reared its head during the French Enlightenment, attempting to shock and caricaturize the vulgar to socially codify norms of morality and decency. Come the twentieth century, the grotesque was popularized by Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1965), in which he argued that negative phenomenon should not be satirized to reject it, but rather to reclaim its power, and maybe with it, turn the social tides of purity culture (Sara Cohen Shabat 2013). Previous understandings of the grotesque tend to stay within the realm of the physical body, as seen through Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Nikolai Gogol's "The Nose". We follow Bakhtin's line of thought in which we argue that privileging only the body as a site of the grotesque is antithetical to our comprehension of feminism. Countering academia's urge to follow Descartes' notions of the mind/body split, the feminist reclamation of the grotesque must incorporate a crip feminist understanding of the bodymind: the body cannot be separated from the mind which cannot be separated from the soul which cannot be separated from the world. Constantly in flux, growing, changing, the grotesque is "impossible to represent… with a binary system or any logic of the same" (Cohen Shabat 2013, 65). If our norms of the acceptable are constructions

We have chosen to structure our paper in the form of conversation in order to underscore one of adrienne maree brown's Principles of Emergent Strategy: "There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it" (adrienne maree brown 2017, 41). The dialogic nature of this paper mirrors the collaborative and intersectional approaches to feminist reclamation. When engaged in active communication, our smaller individual responses work to create larger moments of collective understanding, mirroring the logics of feminist fractals (brown 2017). The second part of this project then moves into the realm of knowledge mobilization, taking our written conversation and transforming it into a material zine. Zines have a rich history as alternative, counter-cultural, and independent forms of knowledge sharing. Rising in popularity with the creation of 1970s punk fanzines and 1990s feminist and queer zines (Melanie Ramdarshan Bold 2017), they are designed to be passed on from one reader to another. These material artifacts are mediums of hope, as they "offer a model for how individuals might form relationships" and find community within its pages (Alison Piepmeier 2008, 235). Feminist scholars have long advocated for the necessity of zines as a field of study within academic spaces; the mobility and materiality of zines rightfully challenge traditional learning structures, expanding the process of research-creation. The relationship between our paper and our zine reinforces this process by redefining what is considered valuable study under the realm of academia. Throughout this project, we focus on topics such as menstruation, sexuality, beauty standards, drag, butch-femme dynamics, the queer and disabled villain, stand-up comedy, physical and digital protest, and organized religion. Our mission is to explore what facets of identity and community have been *grotesque-ified* and whether reclamation of the grotesque is even possible. What have feminists done to reclaim the grotesque and what needs to continue being done?

Amaya: Blood for the Taking and Transforming

If patriarchy had its way, those of marginalized genders would be fragmented from their bodily processes. In particular, menstruation is painted as something of the grotesque.vv adrienne

maree brown explores this demonization of periods within *Pleasure Activism*: "Many... have desires programmed by the "period = unclean" narrative that only seems to serve a male supremacist worldview" (adrienne maree brown 2019, 137). Alongside brown, Christine Shio Lim's explanation of "desirability politics" proves useful for understanding social constructions of menstruation (Christine Shio Lim 2019). She defines desirability politics as how "whom we desire—sexually, romantically, and socially—inherently carries political import and is informed by systems of oppression" (Lim 2019, 2012). From patriarchal religious beliefs framing menstruation as a curse to societal blaming of periods for female emotions to secretive communication and codewords, bleeding (unless you're a cisgender man) has been rendered taboo. I would like to take a pause to problematize popular culture discussions of periods, as they tend to center an experience that is dominated by cis women. Menstruation cannot be made synonymous with womanhood as it alienates trans women and men, nonbinary and gender diverse folks, as well as cis women who do not menstruate. Feminist discussions of menstruation are only one step on the road towards dismantling sexism. With rising conversations surrounding period poverty and reproductive justice, blood, guts, and gore are increasingly being utilized by feminists as a means to embody a reclamation of what is considered grotesque.

Most notably, there has been a shift to metaphorizing menstruation as a part of female sexuality through the trope of vampirism. I'd like to begin by noting that female vampirism motifs in the western canon can be traced back to Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 Gothic novella, *Carmilla*. His motivations were of a more malicious misogyny, attempting to construct a narrative that would warn against overt female sexuality, particularly that of queer women; young, virginal Laura is corrupted by an overly sexual lesbian vampire named Carmilla. While authorial intent is important, what is more crucial is the hermeneutic process of meaning-making that readers engage in. With editors such as Carmen Maria Machado, there is a deliberate reworking by feminists, as they subvert the initial homophobic and misogynistic intentions of these stories, engaging in a resistive rereading rooted in queer theory. For instance, the choice to have Carmilla enter Laura's life during a full moon marks a moment initiating Laura's symptoms of blood loss (Sheridan Le Fanu 2020, 23): denotatively shown as Carmilla sucking her blood yet, could be read as reaching menarche. This choice taps into the widely held cultural belief that menstruation cycles align with that of the moon. With this loss of blood, Laura and Carmilla begin to fall deeply in love with one another as Carmilla declares, "if your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours" (Le Fanu 2020, 46). To bleed is seen as a grotesque and destructive curse, removing the knowledge that it is a very human bodily process— one that has the potential to be shared and communicated for intimacy and connection. Very akin to brown's position that "because the norm is so anti blood... it can be healing and normalizing to experience a lover on Team Bloody Fetish" (brown 2019, 136), don't you think? Patriarchal desirability politics breed fear and discomfort with bodies—a gendered somatophobia. Engaging with the feminist imagery of blood and gore allow us to question why we have been led to view our bodily processes in a negative light. When we begin to redefine menstruation not as something grotesque but rather as something beautiful in its connectivity, we begin to open doors for better understanding ourselves and others.

Jacqueline: Patriarchal Standards of Beauty, Sashay Away

Building from conversations regarding the vilification of menstruation, I would like to examine what analyzing desirability politics means in connection with the beauty industry. Just as bodily norms are shaped by the attitudes of the time, beauty standards are in flux with ever-changing beauty trends. The industry itself leverages these current trends to profit from insecurity and provide a "remedy" for the socially constructed grotesque. Lindy West articulates this point perfectly:

> *Marketing is power and beauty culture is power and men's control of the narrative is power and a lot of people are making a lot of money teaching us that we live in an unshakable natural hierarchy that bestows peace only upon those who achieve a narrow, subjective (and heavily monetized) version of perfection that just happens to look like white Barbie except less career oriented. (Lindy West 2021, 69)*

There are many ways in which this natural hierarchy of beauty can be disrupted—drag, for example, is just one of them. Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival "celebrate[s] temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (Yiorgos Zafiriou 2020, 2). By turning the "established order" of gender binaries upside down, drag can be read as an embodied performance of the carnivalesque which exposes gender as a subjective, social construct (Zafiriou 2020). "The dissolution of [male and female] boundaries in drag is what makes [it] taboo in in nature" and what makes it a disruptive force of dissent (Zafiriou 2020, 32). Beyond destabilizing gender binaries, drag also redefines the roles of performer and audience member; the spectacle of drag, made popular by shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race*, calls into question the spectacle of gender performativity itself—both on and off stage—by allowing non-drag artists to recognize cisheteronormativity as a performance. While cis, straight, white men have dominant control over the beauty industry through the monetization of makeup, clothing, and entertainment, drag artists are reclaiming these material elements as means of queer joy and celebration.

Before we venture further into the realm of reclamation, I would like to preface that while acts of reclamation themselves might be well intentioned, depending on who is doing the reclaiming, they also have the power to reinscribe harm. For example, the movie *Poor Things* (2023), directed by Yorgos Lanthimos, and based on the novel by Alasdair Gray, has been labelled as a feminist masterpiece that subverts the male gaze through a powerful story of sexual liberation. That's right—a movie directed by a man, based on a book written by a man, is a masterpiece of feminist agency. In reality, *Poor Things* reinscribes the same harmful narratives that it appears to be trying to work against. While I have not seen the movie myself, perhaps you can provide greater clarity on how it might be misconstrued as feminist? What I want to make clear is that while individualism can cause immense harm, forgetting about the individual altogether is just as dangerous, since it enables creators to claim stories that don't belong to them. As such, we must critique and question who is allowed to do the reclaiming. To avoid reinforcing dominant ideologies in the media, those impacted by the grotesque must retain creative agency and ownership of their stories. Otherwise, reclamation runs the risk of repackaging and reinscribing the same harmful narratives perpetuated by the grotesque.

Amaya: A Woman Made in His Image? No Thank You

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to talk about the complications of Lanthimos' *Poor Things*. When it first came out, the film gained its spot as "*Barbie* for weird people". A story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* may provide a backdrop for this comparison. Pygmalion, a sculptor who detests women, begins to sculpt a marble woman in his own image, and names her Galatea. Falling in love, he begs Aphrodite to grant Galatea animacy. Aphrodite turns the statue into a living woman and the two lovers live happily ever after. Beautiful romance? I think not. Both *Poor Things* and *Barbie* revolve around representations of the feminine ideal, naïve to complexities of the world around them. At least in *Barbie*'s Pygmalion, there is a clearer emphasis on the storytelling of women and girls through doll play. Its creation narrative becomes rooted in the relationships between women. *Poor Things* does not even attempt to disrupt the problematic notions of male-dominated creation narratives. In a surrealist steampunk world, the mad scientist, Dr. Godwin Baxter (Willem Dafoe), takes a pregnant woman (Emma Stone), who has taken her own life, and replaces her brain with that of her unborn child. In short, viewers watch as a man takes a woman's agency and brings her back to life because he deems her autonomous action grotesque. The woman (now named Bella) has her entire reality constructed by Godwin, who she refers to as "God". As Bella begins to mature, she decides to explore the world. She discovers sex, poverty, oppression, and does a stint as a sex worker as a "social experiment" (a framing that only she, as a woman unaware of her privilege, is capable of). When she returns to Godwin's house as a "self-actualized woman", she forgives him for her creation. Bella never rises above her creator, still calling him "God", and at the end she even

takes his place performing horrid experiments on others and staying within the confines of the house. *Barbie* may have its faults, but at least our protagonist chooses to become human; she moves beyond her intended purpose and chooses a new life for herself. While Lanthimos believes he is reclaiming the grotesque through surgical gore, sex work as a choice, and dubious consent, this is not his story to tell. Female characters that are supposed to be read as feminist cannot be created by a man (both Godwin and Lanthimos/McNamara), go on a "journey of self-discovery", only to return to the conditions they attempted to escape in the first place. If "96% of film directors are men" and "76% of writers across all platforms are men" (Lindy West 2021, 74), how can we expect to see accurate and non-offensive portrayals of feminist ideals on screen?

Moving into drag as reclamation due to gender binary blurring, I would like to talk a little bit about how a reclamation of the grotesque (in this case, a muddling of binaries) can be seen through a preservationist lens. We ought to consider Sara Ahmed's conversation about the closing of a door as a means of survival: "A closed door [can] be a complaint, a way of refusing what the institutions demands from you, a way of refusing to disappear" (Sara Ahmed 2022). Bodies that do not fit cisheteronormativity are made to experience disproportionate levels of precarity, especially as we witness an outburst of anti-trans legislation. Safety becomes priority for many gender non-conforming people. As such, gender presentation is a way of covertly refusing to adhere to traditional gender norms while still maintain levels of safety. We can see this through how butches might navigate spaces. Butch is most often understood as a category of lesbian gender identity constituted through the deployment and manipulation of masculine gender codes and symbols (Gayle Rubin 1992, 472). A seminal text in butch-femme culture is Leslie Feinberg's semi-autobiographical novel *Stone Butch Blues*. Especially in the 1940s-50s, many butch lesbians would further blur the lines between gender identity and presentation, often presenting as men to keep themselves and their femme partners safe. When Jess Goldberg, the protagonist of *Stone Butch Blues* asks her femme (Theresa), "What if I don't take the hormones and pass?", Theresa candidly says, "Then you'll probably be killed on the street or take your own life out of madness, I don't know" (Leslie Feinberg 2014, 165). Jess's identity as a "he-she" (Feinberg 2014, 2) still rings true today with so many butch lesbians being transmasculine, reaching out for gender affirming healthcare, or even borrowing from drag king makeup as a way of making themselves safe against a world that attempts to label them as grotesque. Maybe, it is through complaints that reclamation becomes an epithet of survival.

Jacqueline: Snapping for Space

Your mention of Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* provides a clear path to discussing how queer bodies are problematized and harmed by the grotesque. As we witness Jess and other butches experience police violence, we are made aware of the ways in which the grotesque enforces heteronormativity; by deviating from heteronormativity, queer and transgender bodies are in danger. To unpack this harm, I'd like to turn towards Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* in which sexual orientation manifests in physical spaces; she writes, "if orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces" (Sara Ahmed 2006, 543). Space, within heterosexual culture, is oriented towards straightness. As such, queer bodies—which deviate from this straightness—are "made socially present as a deviant" (Ahmed 2006, 554). We can plot the orientation of spaces towards straightness through the gendering of physical space, such as clothing stores, bathrooms, and changerooms. This orientation can also be more nuanced; it can manifest through language by refusing to use gender neutral pronouns, or it can appear as the assumption that two girls holding hands are close friends rather than a romantic couple. In this sense, orientation towards straightness superimposes straightness onto 2SLGBTQ+ people by refusing to acknowledge queerness entirely. Ahmed describes heteronormativity as a "straightening device which [reroutes] the slant of queer desire" (Ahmed 2006, 562). This rerouting, rooted in social constructions of queer as grotesque, is violent and deadly. In *Stone Butch Blues*, the street itself becomes a place where straightness must be performed, in this case by rerouting the butch self to pass as a man.

A failure to perform straightness may lead to being "killed on the street" (Feinberg 2014, 165). Through this lens, hate crimes can be understood as violent rerouting and punishment for snapping away from heterosexuality. On her blog, Ahmed defines snaps as "what can happen when you are unwilling to meet the conditions for being with others" and queer snaps as "moment[s] you realize what you do not have to be" (Sara Ahmed 2016). This is why queer spaces are so important; while not all queer spaces are necessarily safe spaces, they are environments in which queer people can find community and collectively snap against heteronormativity. Although the grotesque works to reorient the slant of the queerness into a straight line, building out queer communities and existing as queer realigns the very order of space itself.

Amaya: "These Gays! They're Trying to Murder [Cisheteropatriarchy]!"

Your dissection of the street as a space of performance is particularly interesting and I'd like to parse out that metaphor some more. Public protest is painted as grotesque in its disruption, as many argue that "you get things by asking nicely, being loud will just annoy people". Unacknowledged privilege stops people from understanding that the disruption of protest is the driving factor of change. To make yourself heard through protest is to take up space, turning attention away from institutions and towards systemic oppressions. As Shannon Mattern mentions in her chapter "Sidewalks of Concrete and Code":

> *The streets were... where the oppressed practiced small acts of resistance or engaged in political demonstrations to demand equality. The sidewalks were sites of contestation and media for resistance." (Shannon Mattern 2022, 42)*

Public demonstrations force people to contend with realities they have the privilege of not experiencing. We turn to the efficacy of die-ins and public hunger strikes, as the streets become flooded with reminders of lived experiences. In white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, concepts of death, disruption, chaos, hunger, and sickness are deemed as grotesque and therefore ignored. We can see this through societal treatment of our houseless population to the western ability to "shut off the TV" when news of state violence becomes too bleak for them to handle. What public protest does is bring these realities back into the spotlight, and with this, taking up space on the street in a world that doesn't want you to be visible becomes a method of reclaiming the grotesque.

When discussing visibility of marginalized people, however, it becomes crucial to think through these portrayals of visibility. In an attempt to reroute queer bodies, dominant ideologies equate queerness to villainy. This dehumanization fuels heteronormative constructs of straightness as good and queerness as evil. Mainstream media benefits from this characterization: they profit off of the queer villain. By making viewers scared of queer and trans folks, the media continues to feed into the societal fear of the grotesque.

While the construction of the queer villain is problematic, I think there is also room to say that a lack of the queer villain might also create issues. This is the line of argumentation that writers, such as Carmen Maria Machado, delineate. Machado states:

> *We deserve to have our wrongdoing represented as much as our heroism, because when we refuse wrongdoing as a possibility for a group of people, we refuse their humanity. That is to say, queers—real-life ones—do not deserve representation, protection, and rights because they are morally pure or upright as a people. They deserve those things because they are human beings, and that is enough. (Carmen Maria Machado 2019)*

We tend to ignore our own multifacetedness and instead believe that, to gain social respect and rights as marginalized peoples, we must sanitize ourselves to earn respectability. I suppose it comes back to who is doing the reclaiming. In the hands of those with dominant identities, the queer villain perpetuates hegemonic power dynamics. In the hands of queer folks, especially queer people of colour, the queer villain, anti-hero, or anti-villain has the power to remind us that queer wrongdoing exists and is something that needs to be discussed: that queer domestic abuse is

prevalent, that queer violence does happen, that trauma, left unaddressed, can harden any heart. It is through characters such as Jobu Tupaki, Tom Ripley, the queer women of *Yellowjackets*, and more, that queer viewers are able to reclaim their own complexity and therefore their own grotesqueness.

Jacqueline: It's Alive! Disabled Representation on Screen and on Paper

The media is a malleable tool that can both reinforce and subvert notions of the grotesque. Just as queer bodies have been villainized on screen, so have disabled bodies. The disabled villain trope is a product of ableist society, rooted in the idea that disabled bodies are intrinsically immoral and somehow less valuable than abled bodies. In Biblical contexts, ableness is synonymous with goodness, and disability is viewed as punishment for sin; for example, forsaking God often resulted to sickness and disease. Looking at a more modern example, in the *Star Wars* franchise, Darth Vader's psychological descent into evil is marked by his physical transformation as a "cyborg"; immediately after turning to the dark side, he faces Obi-Wan in battle and suffers from third degree burns. From this point forward, Vader requires a suit to survive, which can be likened to a kind of life support as represented through the mechanical sound of his breathing and voice. As more machine than man, Vader's character dehumanizes disabled peoples by framing disability as villainy. That being said, when looking specifically at the construction of character tropes, it's important to question whether the writer is creating a queer/disabled villain, or if they are villainizing queer/disabled people. As you mentioned, Jobu Tupaki, Tom Ripley, and *Yellowjackets* are excellent examples of characters whose villainy is wholly separate from their queerness. While Darth Vader's character development is rooted in ableist perceptions of disability, his disability is not the root cause of his villainy. In fact, many disabled people have actually reclaimed Darth Vader as a powerful and fearless disabled character. Conversations around tropes and representation are therefore incredibly nuanced, and require a broader evaluation of context, plot, characteristics, and character.

While tropes can surely perpetuate harm, they can also be used to reveal and reassess what is grotesque. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a critical work in the literary canon of disability fiction. The story itself follows Doctor Victor Frankenstein, who sets out to reanimate a dead body. However, when assembled, Victor's "beauty of [his] dream vanished and breathless horror and disgust" took over instead (Mary Shelley 1818, 36). Frightened by his yellow skin, white sockets, shriveled complexion, and straight black lips, Victor decides to abandon his creation. The Creation's physical appearance, understood by readers as a physical disability, forces him to lead a life of isolation. Whenever the creature attempts to engage with others, they either reject or try to take his life, believing him to be monstrous and grotesque. The Creation's isolation reflects the reality of many disabled peoples, who struggle to connect with non-disabled individuals and might feel the need to distance themselves out of self-preservation. The only bond that the creature forms throughout the novel is with an older, blind man—another disabled person. While short-lived, this connection symbolizes the importance of disabled communities. *Frankenstein* is considered a work of disability fiction not just because of the Creation's lived experience, but because Shelley forces readers to confront what is truly grotesque; ableist society, represented through Victor Frankenstein himself, is the real monster of both Shelley's gothic tale and of our own world.

Amaya: Disabled Considerations of Cyborg Feminism

Your point about the nuances related to disability and villainy is incredibly crucial, and I really enjoyed reading your analysis of the Creation and Darth Vader. We've had many conversations about how feminism has been co-opted and viewed through a white lens, leading to the loss of its original intent. bell hooks outlines this through the idea that "feminist politics is losing momentum because feminist movement has lost clear definitions" (hooks 2000, 6).

As you stated, part of white supremacy is the perpetuation of dis/ableism. I have been thinking a lot about Donna Haraway's concept of Cyborg Feminism, particularly its pitfalls. She attempts to theorize experiences of womanhood through the image of a cyborg. According to Haraway, the cyborg's hybrid nature defies notions of overarching western Enlightenment discourses by confusing and dismantling ostensibly "stable" socio-cultural boundaries, including race, sex, class, and nation; she states, "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (Donna Haraway 1999, 66). By attempting to create a creature that blurs the lines of all these boundaries and identities, Haraway uses a being that is both the biologic and the technologic (similar to Darth Vader). While on the surface, the cyborg might seem like it would lend itself as a useful tool to crip feminism, many disabled thinkers argue that cyborg feminism is "markedly absent in any kind of critical engagement with disability, any analysis of the material realities of disabled people's interactions with technology" (Alison Kafer 2013, 105). As Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha observes, "In mainstream literature [and film], disabled people are inspirations, tragedies, monsters, hermits, cautionary tales, plagues, warnings" (Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha 2022, 199). Within this quotation lies the issues with Haraway's concept; through attempting to offer a feminist epistemology, Haraway, a white, upper-class, able-bodied woman, creates a concept that ignores the heterogenous experiences of disabled life. Haraway's critique of dualistic understandings of human and machine and culture invertedly reifies these binaries. Disabled individuals, particularly those who use assistive technologies or prosthetics, imply that the "human" has been made mixed or impure with machine; this creates binaries of the natural/unnatural. Through the creation of the disabled villain and legislative moves that imply accessibility is a burden, disabled people are indoctrinated with shame regarding their lives. It is crucial that when we have discussions surrounding the grotesque, we make active efforts to include and centre those who have been sidelined, namely disabled people. When we begin to deconstruct social definitions of disability, we ensure that empathy and understanding underscores our praxis, two things that white supremacist capitalist patriarchy attempts to strip us of.

Jacqueline: Standing Up Against Systems of Oppression

Part of reclaiming the grotesque involves reclaiming feelings of shame, assessing both why we feel it and how we can use it to fight against systems of oppression. I'd like to open up our conversation of shame to the realm of stand-up comedy. Historically, stand-up has been used to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and uphold notions of the grotesque. While I'm writing in the past tense, this "humour" is unfortunately still popular within stand-up. At the beginning of 2024, Matt Rife, an emerging comic who gained popularity on TikTok, received backlash for his latest Netflix special where he made offensive jokes directed at victims of domestic violence. In response to the backlash, Rife urged those offended by his routine to purchase "special needs helmets". However, the masquerading of hates speech as jokes is becoming less prevalent as more marginalized comedians enter the world of comedy. The stand-up stage is slowly being reclaimed as a site of dissent, where humour is intended to draw attention towards social issues and dismantle systems of harm. This reimagining of the stand-up stage builds community for individuals that have historically been targeted in comedic spaces. The YouTube comment section of disabled stand-up comic, Josh Blue, is full of love and support: "this cured my heart after a rough couple of weeks", "love seeing someone who is secure in their disability", "you made me smile and laugh and forget about my own crap, even just for a little while" (Dry Bar Comedy 2020).

Despite the growing sense of community within standup culture, there is still pressure to conform to a mass audience that wants to hear these kinds of ableist, sexist, racist jokes. This pressure is often realized in the form of self-deprecating humour. Citing comedian Hannah Gadsby, "[when] self-deprecation…comes from somebody who already exists within the margins it's not humility, it's humiliation" (Jenny Hollander 2018). In this sense, self-deprecating humour—in which disabled peoples are made to be the punchline—limits disabled folks to talking about disability in a way that is tolerable for ableist society. Tolerance but a "master's tool" (Audrey Lorde 2007, 112) that perpetuates the grotesque, as violence is hidden just beneath

the surface; this violence echoes in the hearts and bodies of those who are merely tolerated, and manifests psychologically though feelings of shame. This is not to say that disability cannot be joked about. In fact, this approach to "inclusivity" would only work to further isolate and dehumanize disabled peoples. There is a fundamental distinction between laughing at and laughing with someone. When making jokes about his younger sister with cerebral palsy, comedian Daniel Sloss says that "if you're laughing at the disabled person, congratulations, you're a pile of shit. But if you're laughing with them, what a joy" (Likeville 2020). I'd like to acknowledge that Daniel Sloss is a white, cis, straight, abled man—but this highlights that it is possible to joke about disability from outside the community without perpetuating notions of disability as grotesque. Just like the reclamation of slurs, the reclamation of jokes is heavily context dependent. While there are still many comics that perpetuate harm, as more and more marginalized individuals begin to reclaim the stage, stand-up comedy has the potential to turn into *stand-up* comedy: a form of dissent through storytelling and humor that stands up against harmful stereotypes and systems of oppression.

Amaya: The Possibilities of Liberation Theology

To your point on tolerance as a "master's tool", it would be remiss not to discuss the legacy of organized religion both as an oppressive and liberatory force. Religion, and its place in a feminist future, can be a sticky thing to dissect. In *All About Love*, bell hooks says, "fundamentalist thinkers use religion to justify supporting imperialism, militarism, sexism, racism, homophobia. They deny the unifying message of love that is at the heart of every major religious tradition" (bell hooks 2018, 73). When we look at religion, we primarily see the ways in which it has been weaponized to perpetuate harm and violence through colonization; all we must do is look at the treatment of Indigenous peoples in the residential school system. Perhaps redefining what it means to live a spiritual life outside of organized religion, would allow us to reclaim and integrate spirituality into feminist ethic.

Religions of the Global South, such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and more, have been deemed backwards and grotesque because of white supremacy. However, with the increasingly publicized Palestinian liberation movement, more people seem to be participating in Muslim communities. On my own social media, there have been TikToks of white non-Muslim people celebrating Ramadan to pay respects to those being killed by Israel in occupied Palestine. When we turn to institutionalized religion, it is often out of a desire for community. Patricia Hill Collins argues for a recognition of knowledge heterogeneity within hierarchical power relations: "Suppressing the knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to rule because the seeming absence of dissent suggests that subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization" (Patricia Hill Collins 2022, 3). Where institutional religion loses sight of true spirituality is the way these religions are practiced within hierarchies that perpetuate the shame and tolerance you were discussing earlier. These institutions also tend to use "conquer and divide" tactics, in which they attempt to diminish or shadow the knowledge that can be found in differing religions, forsaking other religions by labelling them as blasphemous or terroristic. "Our histories never unfold in isolation. We cannot truly tell what we consider to be our own histories without knowing the other stories" (Angela Davis 2016, 135). In a value pluralist society, white supremacist capitalist patriarchy wins by instilling individualistic ideals of superiority over others in practices that are and should be rooted in love and community. The recent spotlight on Islam in the wake of the Palestinian genocide is an apt representation of the reclamation and reconsideration of religions that have been deemed as grotesque. Through witnessing the community support that Muslim folks are providing each other in times of grief, and the strength of Palestinian solidarity and activism, we are beginning to see an uptick in people critically engaging with Islam. Whether it be through attending memorial prayers at local Mosques, learning Arabic to accurately and respectfully engage in protest chants, or reading the Quran, there is a reclamation of religion in the public consciousness. When the "grotesque" is normalized, we demystify and redefine what the grotesque is.

Continuing our conversation on methods of grotesque-ification, I'd like to highlight soul loss and spirit murdering. Through systems such as the military-industrial complex and the education system, white supremacist capitalist patriarchy ushers in a deep dehumanization, both of the self and others. This concept of soul loss is birthed from Indigenous knowledge systems, as Ojibwe ethics argues that "just as the Windigo's bite is infectious... self-destruction drags along many more victims" (Robin Wall Kimmerer 2013, 306). The military-industrial complex creates soldiers who will revel in violence by demonstrating their own soul loss, divorcing their soulbodymind into disparate parts; this fragmentation allows for them to neutralize guilt and justify actions. The spirit is murdered through hierarchies of power and domination. But maybe a reclamation of spirituality is exactly what is needed to dissent from this. As posited by bell hooks, "all around the world liberation theology offers the exploited and oppressed a vision of spiritual freedom that is linked to struggles to end domination" (hooks 2018, 74). To say that feminism requires the equity of all community-based ontologies, but in the same breath, paint it as something wholly secular is disingenuous. Through a reclamation and reframing of how truly community-based spiritual practices can act as dissent against an individualistic society, we would begin to reclaim our own soulbodyminds and work towards radical healing and liberation.

Jacqueline: Intersectionality and Transnationality as Frameworks for Moving Forward

Thank you for highlighting how religious institutions use divide and conquer ideologies to label others as terroristic. Institutions themselves, especially government institutions like the military, are skilled at weaponizing the grotesque to advance their own agendas. We can see this play out in real time through Israel's attempts at pinkwashing. Israel uses 2SLGBTQ+ acceptance and pride within the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) to justify colonial acts of violence, and frame Islam as backwards and uncivilized. This reinforces the white saviour complex, distorting Israel's genocide as a means of rescuing Palestinians from themselves. Pinkwashing is typically executed through news cycles and social media; on Israel's Twitter page, you can find photos of gay marriage proposals between IOF soldiers, and soldiers holding pride flags beside tanks and bombed cities. By seemingly positioning themselves against homophobia, the IOF creates an image of Palestinians as terrorists and of themselves as liberators—framing the very existence of Palestinian people as grotesque. Building on your point of soul loss in the military, queer soldiers use their queer identity as a means of legitimizing harm and interpreting their "fight" against Gaza as a fight against homophobia, with little attention paid to queer Palestinians.

Queering the Map is an online website that redirects attention back towards invisibilized queer people across the globe, by allowing users to attach anonymous messages to a specific geographical location. While anonymous, Queering the Map is a tool for community building and dissent; it serves as a reminder that there are queer people everywhere, in every nook and cranny of the world, including Palestine. Sites like these demonstrate how social media is integral in creating spaces of community and care—even if that community is faceless and nameless. Davis writes that "the greatest challenge facing us as we attempt to forge international solidarities and connections across national borders is an understanding of what feminists often call intersectionality. Not so much intersectionality of identities, but intersectionality of struggles" (Davis 2016, 144). Looking back on our many discussions, we've covered a lot of ground in this paper. The grotesque, which is constantly in flux with social norms and beliefs, is rooted in almost every aspect of our lives. It is apparent in literature, film, religion, news coverage, all the way to how we take up space in the world. The grotesque is interconnected, and as such, the fight to redefine the grotesque is an interconnected struggle. We cannot talk about streets as places of dissent without talking about the destruction of Palestine's streets; we cannot talk about reclaiming space without talking about Israel's ongoing genocide to eliminate the existence of Palestinian peoples— all of these struggles intersect. So, while the grotesque may aim to alienate and erase, when we resist and reclaim the grotesque, we build communities; communities that are international,

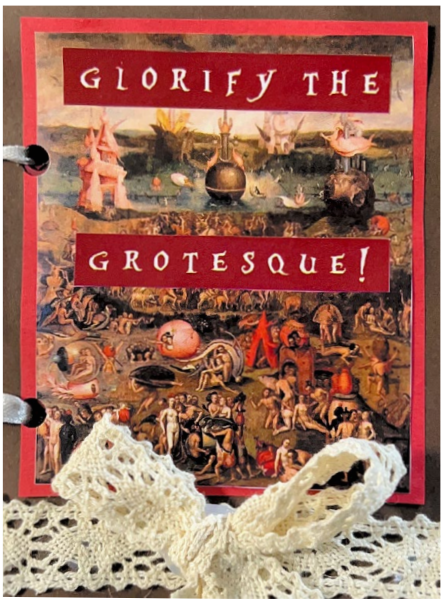
intersectional, and interdependent; communities that have the power to imagine, action, and nourish meaningful change.

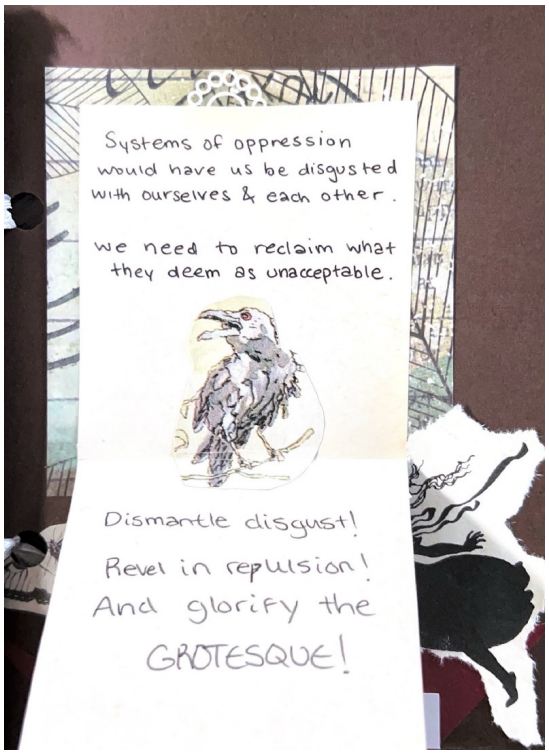
The Dreamscape of Reclamation Work: What's Next?

Blood, sexuality, queerness, trans and disabled bodies, community groups, public spaces, and even our basest emotions have been policed and weaponized by systems of oppression. Through reclaiming these facets of being, we work to build a feminist ontology that highlights how social constructionism can be used to abolish and transform our comfortability with ourselves and community. With more space, we would have liked to further dissect what reclamation for the collective means under individualistic institutions (government, military, religion); in particular, Jacqueline would have wanted to discuss cults and communes as a form of longing for the collective and as a means of engaging in socially grotesque behaviours. Amaya would have liked to discuss more examples of false grotesque reclamation, such as cultural appropriation and minimalism discourse which co-opts and markets the grotesque under tripartite understandings of consumerism and materialism. Throughout this discussion, we have also concluded that some aspects of the grotesque cannot be reclaimed within our current systems. For instance, Leonard Cassuto's concept of the *racial grotesque* addresses the way racist political caricatures are used as a method of dehumanization to establish social death for Black and Indigenous peoples (Leonard Cassuto 1997). Due to these roots, it is difficult to see how these representations, and ones like it, could be reclaimed without reinscribing the same harm. As our political, social, and physical landscape continues to change, how do we move forward with defining the grotesque? How do we navigate what we are able to reclaim and what we ought to reject? The waters of moral valence are murky, but it is through discursive interactions that we are able to transform the grotesque nightmares of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy into feminist dreams of reclamation and redefinition.

Glorify the Grotesque: A Feminist Zine

As mentioned, the second part of this project involved creating a physical artifact to convey the themes and topics explored within the co-written paper to a larger audience. The following images are snapshots of said zine, designed to visually communicate feminist reclamations of the grotesque.





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