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# Performing toilets: putting matter into place

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**PERFORMING TOILETS: PUTTING MATTER INTO PLACE**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

By

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## **Abstract**

In this study, I place toilets and toilet practices center stage. Each chapter begins with and is compelled by a performance event in which a toilet plays a central role, such as the display of toilets in museum settings, a festival celebrating the building of public toilet blocks, and a Big Squat event, in which people gather en masse to squat collectively for one minute in recognition of the millions that lack access to toilets. By means of performance, the toilet is transferred from the backstage to center stage. Out of place, the toilet defamiliarizes and refunctions the body's techniques, proprieties, and ceremonies of the body. I explore the body at the level of its practices and move from "body to self to society" (Frank 47), thus understanding the body as a bearer of social patterns and structures. By focusing on the performance of toilets, I associate the toilet with the artistic and generative possibilities of culture-making, aiming to refunction the toilet as an object that encourages productive communication rather than a taboo object that silences and represses interaction. Broadly, I am interested in how performing toilets might serve to counter disabling disciplinary norms, encourage collective action, and bring about generative change for people who desire it.



## Chapter One

### Performing Toilets

Early in the fall of 2007, I received a phone call from my sister. Deviating from her usual upbeat demeanor, she was distressed and frustrated as she complained of health issues that had plagued her for the past couple of months. Despite our close relationship, it was with some hesitancy that my sister told me that she had not had a bowel movement in several weeks. She was extremely uncomfortable, physically and in having to explain her situation to others. After our phone call, as a concerned sister, I set about researching colon cleanses, bowel detoxification processes, and other remedies for my sister's impacted colon. As someone obsessed with the human body, how it holds and leaks knowledge, how we label it, look at it, dress it, move it, medicate it, and attempt to control it, I was amazed to learn of the amount of people suffering from irregular bowel movements and related health matters. In light of my sister's experience, I wondered to what extent people are reluctant to talk about such concerns or how it is they talk about them.

Shortly after learning of my sister's illness and by utter coincidence, I received a book in the mail from my mother, *The History of Farting*, by Dr. Benjamin Bart. The book is a collection of rhymes the author found in a cedar chest that his grandmother had left to him on her passing. Knowing of my proclivity for family stories and lowbrow humor, my mom sent the book to me as a joke. As I browsed through the 160 pages of poems, jingles, and limericks about flatulence, it occurred to me that perhaps people do talk about lower body functions more and in more diverse ways than my cursory research had led me to believe. After all, as Dr. Bart recalls:

#### Everyone Farts

Everyone farts, admit it or not. Kings fart, queens fart, we all fart. Edward Lear, the 19<sup>th</sup> century English landscape painter, wrote affectionately of a favourite farting Duchess who gave enormous dinner parties attended by the cream of society. One night

she let out a ripper and quick as a flash she turned her gaze to her stoic butler, standing, as always, behind her.

“Hawkins!” she cried. “Hawkins, stop that!”

“Certainly, your Grace,” he replied with unhurried dignity. “Which way did it go?” (Bart 8)

Compelled by my sister’s experience and the silly yet complex politics of the fart jokes, I decided to stage a show about lower body processes, about peeing and pooing and all that. The result was *Crap Happens*, which I directed in the fall of 2008, in the HopKins Black Box theatre, an experimental performance lab associated with the Performance Studies area in the Department of Communication Studies at Louisiana State University. By means of a collaborative process, the cast and I investigated how our culture talks about lower body functions, studying (with all good humor) the movement of excretion through our discursive as well as corporeal systems. In search of materials we might use in the show, we discovered numerous possibilities in the way of personal anecdotes, popular culture materials, such as children’s stories and songs, TV shows and movies, photographs and other artwork, and scholarly materials, such as medical and environmental journals. In the latter case, the wide-ranging significance of our topic was highlighted when we learned that some 1.2 billion people lack safe water supply, 2.4 billion people live without secure sanitation, and at least five million people die yearly from water related diseases, including 2.2 million children under the age of five (Environment News Service para. 14). In light of such statistics, we proceeded to ask what our performance and performance in general has to offer the discussion of waste and its related issues of sanitation and water rights. Equally important is how defecation speaks to and is spoken of through discourses of class, race, and gender, body types and modes, health and fitness, art and science, purity and filth, shame and celebration – and again our concern in *Crap Happens* and my concern in this project is how performance contributes to these conversations and resulting practices.

In this study, I focus on a particular object of defecation, the toilet, and ask how it performs or how people make it perform, and why. Each chapter begins with and is compelled by a performance event in which a toilet plays a central role, such as the display of toilets in museum settings (in Chapters Two and Four), a festival celebrating the building of public toilet blocks (in Chapter Three), and a Big Squat event (in Chapter Five), in which people gather together to squat for a minute in recognition of the toilets to which they and others may or may not have access. By focusing on the performance of toilets, I associate the toilet with the artistic and generative possibilities of culture-making, aiming to refunction the toilet as an object that encourages productive communication rather than a taboo object that silences and represses interaction. Broadly, I am interested in how performing toilets might serve to counter disabling disciplinary norms, encourage collective action, and bring about generative change for people who desire it.

As each chapter highlights a unique instance of a performing toilet, no one theory or method prevails in my analyses. As my ideas formulate, I draw on those perspectives and practices that seem most useful to articulating my thoughts and revealing hidden or as yet unquestioned aspects of the particular instance. You might say I develop heuristic vocabularies, discovering and cobbling together helpful discourses and thereby creating a unique event of my own, a performance of toilets in print that highlights certain aspects while eliding others. In the spirit of this project, I also understand my method as an act of composting. To compost, one must collect and mix together diverse materials in an effort to encourage decomposition, the aim being to generate a rich base for future growth. In a similar manner, it is my goal to place in conversation discourses and practices that, while they may contradict each other, articulate my understanding of the particular instance, making for novel discoveries and rich understandings.

That being said, there are prevailing perspectives that inform my work throughout the study in implicit or explicit ways, and below I elaborate on these key ideas, drawn largely from the fields of performance studies, sociology, and anthropology. Following the overview of informing perspectives, I summarize the different performing toilets I address in each chapter, and then close the introduction with a discussion of significance.

The body plays an integral role in performance theory and practice, as it is experienced and understood as the place where performance occurs by means of bodies doing things. The body then is studied as a site of both experiential and cognitive knowledge, a potent site where behaviors and the values associated with them are inscribed by historical circumstances (by social and cultural mores), and, in turn, upheld or countered by the agent and agency of the body. In *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Richard Schechner explains, “Performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories” (Schechner, *Performance Studies* 22). Further, whether “of art, rituals or ordinary life,” performances “are made of ‘twice behaved behaviors,’ ‘restored behaviors,’ performed actions that people train to do, that they practice and rehearse” (Schechner, *Performance Studies* 22). Schechner’s definition of performance acknowledges that performance is dependent on the past (it is a doing of something done), while also understanding that the restoring of behavior “is always subject to revision” (Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* 36). It will never be exactly the same, and it may be quite different because the restoring act is performed by a unique body in a situated place and time responding to his or her particular circumstances. In these terms, I aim to situate people’s use of toilets and the actions they perform around them historically, in the specific time and place of the event, asking what cultural norms or conventions they appear to restore, how, and why – e.g., to sustain or deviate from the recall or remembering.

In *How Societies Remember*, sociologist Paul Connerton attempts to convince sociologists to view and treat the body as something other than an abstraction. He argues bodies “keep the past...in their continuing ability to perform certain skilled actions” (Connerton 72). Connerton separates said actions into the categories of inscribing and incorporating practices. He offers the alphabet as an example of an inscribing practice, which we are taught overtly and learn consciously. Incorporating practices, on the other hand, are or have become unconscious, and hence we often feel they are innate and natural to us. Connerton offers culturally-informed gestures as an example of incorporating practices. Although Connerton distinguishes between inscribing and incorporating practices, he recognizes that they operate in tandem often, the inscription becoming incorporated as the action becomes routine through repeated practice. In the enactment of bathroom practices, it is evident how an overtly learned action, such as going to the potty, is repeated so often that the “potty-training” is internalized and ceases to be a conscious activity. Many bathroom practices operate in this way: they are overtly taught or inscribed, but become so habituated due to repetition that they become incorporated body memory, perceived as innate rather than constructed.

To further understand the role of the body in maintaining social memory, Connerton offers techniques, proprieties, and ceremonies of the body. Techniques of the body consist of skilled actions acquired through repetition that illustrate one’s cultural associations and thereby aid in the restoring and sustaining of social and cultural memories. Proprieties are the “moral values” with which we “imbue” techniques, as is the case with etiquette norms (Connerton 83). Failure to perform a particular technique of etiquette can result in social censure, and hence people internalize and self-monitor their enactment of proprieties. During toilet training, for example, children are taught when and where defecation is appropriate. They are rewarded and

mollycoddled when they relieve themselves in the correct place, thus learning that defecation is good but only when it is controlled. It is during toilet training that a child first learns that desires of the body are often in opposition to the norms of society. In order to fit in, they learn to self-monitor their bathroom behavior. Of course, there are circumstances where, due to economic means or health reasons, people cannot or chose not to abide by bathroom etiquette, and as a result, the etiquette operates to “impose a well-regulated social distance between classes of people who are distinguishable by publicly observable standards of refined behavior” (Connerton 84). An example from history further demonstrates Connerton’s point. When the Industrial Revolution altered the base of class structure from heredity to economics, the elite found they had to differentiate themselves in ways other than material goods and property, as both were becoming more available to more people. They turned to exacting etiquette, developing discursive and corporeal practices that functioned to differentiate between the bourgeois and proletariat bodies. One such practice was the denial on the part of the bourgeois that they defecated while, of course, the proletariat did defecate and were smelly as a result. The actual cause of the smell was economic in fact, as the proletariat could not afford in-home toilets and had to use the much over-used public privies. In an effort to uphold the myth further, the wealthy made waste removal a job of the lower class, which operated to *counter* the myth in so far as the wealthy exposed to those charged with waste removal that they indeed defecated like everyone else. As Dr. Bart recalls, “Everyone farts.”

Ceremonies of the body display status further through social rituals that engage in the “rigorous observance of titles, ranks and symbols” (Connerton 84). According to Connerton, ceremonies of the body function to maintain conventions, social classifications, and habituated memory. Connerton’s concept of techniques, proprieties, and ceremonies of the body sustain

and specify Schechner's understanding that through performance bodies restore behavior and thereby pass on social memory. While Connerton's focus on how the past is embedded in bodily practices is extremely important to me, I also am interested in how bodies adapt and transform practices in order to bring about productive changes in their lives and surroundings.

From the very start, my thinking on this project has been informed by Mary Douglas and her studies of what constitutes dirt and the role of ritual in transforming symbolic meaning. In *Purity and Danger*, Douglas argues, "rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience" through the use of "symbolic patterns," which are "worked out and publicly displayed" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 3). Douglas insists that pollution rules, such as those for the disposal of bodily waste, impose order on inherently untidy experiences, although the rules for order are not necessarily rigid or stagnant. Douglas explains, "There is every reason to believe [im/purity rules] are sensitive to change. The same impulse to impose order which brings them into existence can be supposed to be continually modifying or enriching them" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 5). The symbolic meaning of the toilet, for example, shifts constantly as people interact with it in light of their changing circumstances, experiencing it as banal one day and extraordinary the next, as a site of cleanliness and then filth, reassurance and also threat.

Central to Douglas' study of pollution is her understanding of the body as "a symbol of society" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 142), which locates the body as a site for ordering social hierarchies. She explains, "The body is a model which can stand in for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 142). Douglas' view of the body provides ways "to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in the small on the human body" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 142). The body then can be viewed as a microcosm of macro structures and counter

structures, and studying the body's behavior in relation to toilets can highlight broader social patterns regarding norms of purity and impurity, as well as other symbolic networks.

Whereas Douglas focuses on the symbolic meanings of the body, Arthur Frank studies social systems by beginning with the body at the level of its practices. In "For A Sociology of the Body: An Analytical Review," Frank applies a bottom-up approach, "beginning with how the body is a problem for itself, which is an action problem rather than a system problem, proceeding from a phenomenological orientation rather than a functional one" (Frank 47). Frank's view recognizes how different body styles and modes can function as resources rather than restraints that bodies use to solve action problems. In this sense, *somebody* produces symbols through restoring (performing) a body style or mode; *doing* something and thereby creating meanings. Drawing on Frank, I examine bathroom performances as material sequences of action performed by bodies and try to assess what the bodies and/in action do.

Frank provides a body typology that articulates four body styles prevalent in literature on the body. The body types are disciplined, mirroring or consuming, dominating (and dominated), and communicative bodies. In most of the cases I undertake in this study, a body style of discipline is apparent, as bodies enact regimes of cleanliness in an effort to transcend the threat of filth, which then implicates dynamics of power. Indeed, Frank's understanding of disciplined bodies is informed by Michel Foucault and his theory of panoptic discipline. As Foucault writes, "Our society is one...of surveillance" and "the individual is carefully fabricated in [the social order] according to whole technique of forces and bodies" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 217). Following Foucault, Frank theorizes a disciplined body that understands itself as lacking some sort of ideal or truth that is of currency to her society, such as order or purity or individuality. To answer the lack, the body internalizes the ideal (becomes subject to and of it)



and proceeds to develop and enact a regime in an attempt to realize the ideal, however unobtainable and transcendent it might be. The performance of the regime demonstrates the individual's self-surveillance and maintenance in light of the ideal and hence her collusion with the broader disciplinary apparatus.

Understanding how the body is disciplined through bathroom practices and how the practices are implicated in and are producers of power is important, as is recognizing body styles and modes that adjust and counter disciplinary norms (which is not to say the disciplined body style does not hold its own generative possibilities of adaptation and transformation. It does, as the disciplinary techniques required of most artistic practices show us.) For Frank, an ideal body style is what he calls the communicative body. This body understands that it produces and fulfills its desires by embracing its own contingences and those of others. The communicative body is a dyadic or multiple body style, locating possibility in and constantly creating itself through its unpredictable material interactions with others, as compared to disciplinary acts of ordering corporeality in order to dissociate from it. A particular version of Frank's communicative type that I often draw on in my analyses is the carnivalesque grotesque body, as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin and, in turn, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White. The grotesque body highlights and celebrates the low domains of corporeality and discourse, insisting on the constancy of ever-shifting and unpredictable corporeal bodies in the constitution of our social systems, thereby attempting to level hierarchical norms that marginalize the same. Similarly, the toilet and my study of it places the material body – in all its corporeal and discursive plentitude – center stage, calling attention to and finding possibility in its contingent and unpredictable excesses.

Below I summarize the chapters to follow, implying how the aforementioned perspectives are used to analyze the particular performances of toilets I undertake. The summaries also anticipate other theoretical and practical tools I use to study how toilets perform.

In Chapter Two, “Pots and Purity: Performing the Domestic Goddess in the Nineteenth Century,” I visit a display of commodes and chamber pots exhibited at the Louisiana State University Rural Life Museum. In the museum, a row of commodes sits next to items of domesticity, urging me to consider the relationship between women and toilets, and the significance of this relationship in the nineteenth century U.S. home. As urbanization and industrialization increased during the nineteenth century, social relations began to shift. People were no longer doing business with familiar friends, but with strangers who were looking to climb the social ladder. The new social relations brought about an increased awareness of the performance of social character, an idea that was met with uneasiness. A character of particular importance was the Domestic Goddess, who was considered particularly adept at masking aspects of herself and her home that would upset the “genteel performance” she and others enacted. For the Domestic Goddess, a crucial part of performing domesticity was distinguishing between the front- and backstage regions of the home and keeping those backstage aspects (such as cleaning the commode) in place, that is, backstage.

In “Toiletry Time: Defecation, Temporal Strategies and the Dilemmas of Modernity,” David Inglis and Mary Holmes confirm the task that befell the Domestic Goddess. They explain that, as a result of industrialization and changing factors of class, defecation practices became increasingly monitored or, as Connerton might have it, imbued with disciplinary proprieties and regulations. One result was that those who wanted to appear of a higher class and more civilized than others would strategize ways to make their bathroom practices invisible, effecting a shift

from “*faecal visibility*” to “*faecal invisibility*” (Inglis and Holmes 226; emphasis in original). Associated with purity and charged with upholding Christian values in the home, the Domestic Goddess attempted to follow through on the noted shift. Or did she?

Drawing on *The American Women’s Home*, in which Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe detail how to build, maintain, and clean an earth-closet (a commode that uses dirt rather than water), I challenge tidy notions of domesticity and the Domestic Goddess. By foregrounding women’s interactions with the toilet in the nineteenth century home, I offer a corporeal history that questions what constitutes domesticity and its display, recognizes the importance of performance to the domestic sphere, and acknowledges the blur between private and public boundaries.

In Chapter Three, “Indian Toilet Festivals: Performing Community, Citizenship, and Sanitation Activism,” I describe and analyze Indian toilet festivals, which are performance events the urban poor create(d) to address water and sanitation problems in the informal settlements of Mumbai and Pune, India. Tending to the “particularities of history,” I connect Mumbai’s and Pune’s water and sanitation issues to India’s colonial legacy and detail the two cities’ existing sanitation problems, noting the low toilet-to-person ratio in informal settlements (Bharucha, *Theatre and the World* 240). I pay close attention to what toilets or the lack of toilets ask of bodies, particularly women’s bodies, as they are responsible for providing their families with water and maintaining sanitary conditions.

There are health risks and social consequences to living in unsanitary conditions and without access to a toilet. Recurring images of the urban poor defecating in public influence how the urban poor are viewed and treated by the upper caste or class. To claim the right to defecate in private, and thus make claims to other basic human rights including citizenship, the

urban poor mobilized to create the Alliance, an organization responsible for the large scale construction of toilet blocks in India. In this chapter, I describe the tactics the urban poor have developed to negotiate for land and materials as well as design and construct community latrines. After the completion of a toilet block, communities stage a toilet festival to celebrate months of community input and commitment to the project, financial investment, planning, and labor. State officials are invited to the festival, presenting the urban poor with the opportunity to hobnob with politicians and other influential folk. Drawing on Augusto Boal's Image Theatre, I view Indian toilet festivals as the performing and celebrating of an ideal image, a realized-ideal, arguing that the festivals bring people together to view, reflect on, and celebrate something they needed and found a way to realize: a toilet. I aim to understand how the urban poor use performance to assume public roles and interact with government officials to articulate concerns and brainstorm solutions to sanitation problems. Toilet festivals offer an example of how a ceremony can celebrate a community and act as a catalyst for engaging people further in the activity of collective problem solving. I also challenge what constitutes activism by calling attention to the many backstage activities necessary to making a toilet festival a success. Toilet festivals and the activities that precede them urge us to consider how toilets are made and who they serve. Toilets insist on making the invisible visible and the once visible invisible, and in these ways, they address the politics of class, gender, and ethnicity and the performance of democratic citizenship.

In Chapter Four, "The *Cloaca* Carnival," I turn my attention to the museum exhibit of *Cloaca* (a toilet of sorts) to understand how artful presentations of toilets can evoke change through the rehearsal of counter ideas and behaviors. In 2000, the Belgian neo-conceptual artist, Wim Delvoye, unveiled *The Cloaca Original*, the first of seven defecating machines, at the

Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp. After eight years of collaborating with academics in fields as diverse as gastroenterology, computer technology, and plumbing, Delvoye succeeded in creating a mechanism that replicates the human digestive system. *Cloaca* is fed two meals a day, and visitors are invited to watch and smell the process of digestion and elimination. Visitors also can purchase *Cloaca* feces in a vacuum-sealed bag along with a certificate describing what the machine ate. To make sense of Delvoye's defecating machines, I situate *Cloaca* within Delvoye's corpus of work and then analyze various critical responses to *Cloaca* with regards to what they reveal about art, science, technology, excrement, and the relationship between bodies and machines. Drawing on carnivalesque and monster theories, I understand *Cloaca* as a carnivalesque mode of presentation that challenges audiences with an alternative experience and understanding of what might constitute art, the body, and how we experience and express it.

In Chapter Five, "World Toilet Day: Squatting for Global Sanitation Activism," I describe and analyze the events of World Toilet Day, specifically a Big Squat performance held on the Parade Grounds of Louisiana State University on November 19, 2010. The World Toilet Organization (WTO), the brains behind the Big Squat, is a non-profit organization committed to improving sanitation conditions for people globally through advocacy, inventive technology, and education. The Big Squat is an event that occurs on World Toilet Day and is one method WTO uses to initiate dialogue about toilets and sanitation. Both serious and silly, the Big Squat involves people gathering en masse to squat collectively for one minute. Exploring the connection between performance, politics, and humor, this chapter draws on M. Lane Bruner's research on carnivalesque protest, paying close attention to how traits of humor help us unmask a humorless state. Using parody for comedic effect, the Big Squat transforms "going to the toilet" into a public and social act that fosters reflexivity and empathy. Despite its playfulness, the

event can prompt feelings of embarrassment or shame in some participants. In the chapter, I explore how shame can promote learning and inter-subjectivity. The Big Squat demonstrates how the public performance of defecation can be and is used as a tool for personal reflexivity and growth, dialogue, and potentially social change.

By placing toilets and toilet practices center stage and recognizing them as productive performances, I attempt to understand the material, corporeal, and cultural significance of toilets and surrounding activities. Studying the toilet provides a rich site for examining the relationship between people and objects. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains, “Material objects (as well as accompanying texts) serve as a kind of choreography for...performance because they provide partial direction of our thinking and acting” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 5). To study toilets is to consider how toilets shape how we think and act, and to recognize how we tell stories about toilets and are storied by them. Judith Hamera grants agency to objects, claiming they act on us as much as we act on them. She argues:

The object, liked the performed story, is the membrane across which performer/artists and audiences encounter and imagine one another....[The object] is a display that binds communicative competence, history, affect, action and thought together.... Thus, the object in the situation speaks; it is, simultaneously, a story and an event. It animates relations of exchange even as it is, itself, animated in the process. (Hamera 58)

My study contributes to our understanding of material culture and how it performs by focusing on an object (Hamera’s story and event) that in many cases is taboo, animating as it does the lower body regions and relations of exchange. However, unlike many carnivalesque grotesque objects, the toilet is an object we use everyday, many times a day, suggesting that we interact with the dynamic possibilities of the carnivalesque grotesque more often than not. I wonder then what we might gain (and also lose) if we listened to that story, attend to that event, more often.

The interdependent relationship between toilets and bodies encourages me to consider what toilets ask of a body, and further, what is at stake for the body in its experience and understanding of itself. Drawing on Frank's body-up approach, I examine bathroom practices as concrete sequences of bodily actions that grant bodies agency to engage or deflect the problems and possibilities they confront. My study serves as a model for researching, as Frank would have it, from the "body to self to society" in order to "show how social systems are built up from the task of bodies" (Frank 47-48).

Frequently my study shows people strategizing ways to hide the toilet, to not perform it, and in this way, my study contributes to scholarship on the politics of in/visibility. Summarizing Arjun Appadurai's research on toilet festivals and grassroots sanitation campaigns, Gay Hawkins writes:

Shitting in public, living your life in perpetual visibility, Appadurai argues, actually renders the slum dweller *invisible* to the state. In claiming the right to privacy, slum dwellers participate in a politics of recognition. To have privacy is to exist in the eyes of the state and this is the starting point for making claims for basic public services. (Hawkins, "Shit in Public" 8; emphasis in original)

Privacy is a political object at stake in toilet events and practices, affecting people's perceived worth and sense of selfhood. In *Culture and Waste*, Hawkins summarizes the relationship between waste and subjectivity, writing:

Expelling and discarding is more than biological necessity – it is fundamental to the ordering of the self. Waste management in all its various forms and historical mutations is deeply implicated in the practice of subjectivity. It is bound up with a whole host of habits and practices through which we cultivate particular sensibilities and sensual relations with the world. Styles of...elimination are part of the "arts of existence." (Hawkins, *Culture and Waste* xi-xii)

Our habits, including our defactory habits, affect our lives. To change these habits, to alter them according to "distinctive aesthetic and ethical criteria," is to change ourselves, for better or worse, as the case may be (Hawkins, *Culture and Waste* xiv).

In this project, I demonstrate how styles of elimination are integral to the “arts of existence” by tending to the performance of material culture and bodily practices as they relate to toilets. In doing so, I contribute to conversations in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and performance studies regarding how both mundane and inventive performances by objects and (in interaction with) bodies can uphold or upset social structures and norms. By studying performing toilets from the body up, I hope to offer a rich and diverse understanding of them and to contribute to broader discussions of material culture, the body and its politics, and performance and social change.



## Chapter Two

### **Pots and Purity: Performing the Domestic Goddess in the Nineteenth Century**

It is ironic that the Louisiana State University (LSU) Rural Life Museum is lodged in the center of the city of Baton Rouge.<sup>1</sup> A long, narrow stretch of gravel road eases eager visitors away from concrete buildings and streets to an illusion of the open fields of rural Louisiana. The gravel road feels long, the wide open spaces unfamiliar, and I feel lost without traffic signals or road signs. At last, a cluster of small buildings emerges, welcoming my arrival. I park, enter a newly renovated visitor's center, pay a small admission, and pick up a brochure. The visitor's guide reiterates what I learned on the museum's website: I am about to peruse the "most extensive collection of Material Culture from 18th and 19th century of rural Louisiana" ("Facts about the LSU Rural Life Museum"). Eager to learn about the everyday life of those who lived before me, I begin my self-guided tour.

My first stop is the Exhibit Barn, which is a building made of sheet metal attached to the visitor's center. Upon entering the barn, I am struck immediately by the slight increase in temperature and the barn's distinct scent. My lungs fill with the smells of faded ink on yellowed pages, decomposing cotton, and aged wood. The main area of the Exhibit Barn is nearly as big as my high school gymnasium. Much of the space is occupied with hearses and carriages with smaller objects lining the walls. It feels like my garage when I was growing up: cluttered, dusty, and mysterious. There are piles of objects to discover, walk over, brush off, and thread through your fingers. A closer look reveals a system of loose arrangement. Headings such as "Slavery," "Cotton," "Textiles," and "Bathing" help orient visitors. I walk past an icebox, an ice shaver, a

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<sup>1</sup> In an article about the LSU Rural Life Museum, Ruth Bowman writes, "Situated, as it is, in wealthy south Baton Rouge at the intersection of I-10 and the commercial sprawl of Essen Lane, the property is prime real estate, aching, some say, to be developed. The land is protected, however, under the strict covenants of the Burden Research Foundation" (Bowman, "Diverging Paths in Performance Genealogies" 177).

metal container with the words “pudding mold” printed on its side, a wooden box stamped “Fragile 4 dozen eggs,” multiple incubators, a light for testing eggs, an instrument for scraping hogs, a buttermilk feeder that claims it “will not contaminate hogs,” several milk churns, kettles, cowbells, and a butter canister. The relaxed organization of the Exhibit Barn expresses an attitude of creative disrespect as it refuses to order its excesses fully, invites interaction and play, and overwhelms the senses.

Near a section in the Exhibit Barn labeled “Bathing” and tucked inconspicuously between clothes irons, pleating irons, a small stove in which to heat said irons, rolling pins, a “device to pull clothes from hot water,” and vacuums, stands a row of chamber pots and commodes. The old toilets sit erect and sturdy, yet worn. If toilets were not an obsession of mine, I might have overlooked them. Careful design and simple details allow them to pass as a cabinet or table: the impropriety of the toilet naturalized, to the point of invisibility, as a quaint piece of furniture. Borrowed from the French, the word *commode* means convenient and is related to the Latin word *commodus* which means “proper” or “appropriate” (“Commode”). Indeed, a commode was both convenient and proper to those wealthy enough to own one in the nineteenth century. Used in the comfort of the home, the commode saved the owner from the inconvenience of going outdoors to use the outhouse. However commodes are intended for urination only as they do not contain water. Although people could, and sometimes people did, defecate in a commode for convenience sake, when people left excrement in the commode it was considered improper if not also a little bit smelly, particularly for the person faced with the *inconvenience* of cleaning it out.

There are a number of examples of how toilets are naturalized to the point of invisibility, that is, they trick the eye as regards to their function as toilets, appearing to function as something else first. One commode in the LSU Rural Life Museum bears a striking similarity to

a wooden rocking-chair, although its legs are not designed to rock. The back of the chair is decorated with beautiful flower carvings. On the seat of the chair sits a portable wooden seat comparable to a modern day toilet seat. In the center of the seat is a hole for a chamber pot, a bowl-shaped container used for urinating and, as needed, defecating. Another commode looks like a wooden box. Investigating the mysterious container, I lift the top of the box and discover a hole covered with a lid. A placard reads, “Commode. Used on a Pullman car. Circa. 1870” (*Commode*). I remove the lid, and like the rocking-chair commode, a chamber pot sits inside. Another commode resembles a footstool, short with four legs and a green cloth-covered lid. Next to the footstool commode sits a small blue-striped porcelain chamber pot. The pot is attractive, and I imagine planting flowers in it and displaying it on my balcony for others to enjoy. Near the commodes is a cabinet labeled “Privies” that also reads, “The articles in this case were excavated from outhouses (old ‘privies’) in the New Orleans French Quarter and other areas of Louisiana. Occasionally things of value were thrown away in such places” (*Privies*). I peer through the cloudy glass of the display case at the blue and white painted china, medicine bottles, cups, plates, scissors, two ceramic angels, a lamp, and a toothbrush. Behind the commodes are pieces of wood measuring approximately 5 feet long by 2½ feet wide with two circles cut out. “Outhouse seats” is written on the wall in marker next to the slats of wood (*Outhouse Seats*). The six commodes in the “Bathing” section of the museum range from simple boxes to ornately decorated chairs. Disguised as other household objects, the toilets blend in with the items of domesticity surrounding them.

A display of chamber pots set amidst other relics of eighteenth and nineteenth century rural life is not all that surprising. After all, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett claims, “the museum effect” takes place as “ordinary things become special when placed in museum settings” and

exotic items gain familiarity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 410). Along with their clever design, the placement of the chamber pots next to domestic items under the heading “Bathing” provides “a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer,” offering “explanations” and “historical background” while also urging the visitor to “make comparisons [and] pose questions” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 390). In a museum overflowing with the mundane, the chamber pot’s vulgarity is tempered. The purpose of the LSU Rural Life Museum, as stated on their website, is to present “articles, exhibits and information to those interested in the lifestyles and life-ways of the rural people of Louisiana” (“Discover and Learn > History Online”). The museum then acknowledges the part ordinary people, their homes, and objects play in creating and shaping histories. The recognition of ordinary people’s role in making history challenges the classic understanding of museums as preserving “high art” and other rare artifacts, thereby upholding class distinctions (Bennett 28). The Exhibit Barn elevates the status of everyday ordinary objects to the extraordinary. By placing toilets next to looms, caskets, and rolling pins, existing hierarchies *within* the category of “everyday rural life” are blurred. The commode exhibit urges that toilets are as noteworthy as nineteenth century crosses or carriages.

Unlike Duchamp’s *Fountain*, the commodes at the Rural Life Museum perform subtle defiance. Marcel Duchamp, a French Dadaist in the early to mid 1900’s, is best known for his readymades, which were mass-produced objects advanced as and often elevated to the status of art. In 1917, Duchamp submitted *Fountain* to the Society of Independent Artists for The Big Show in New York City. *Fountain* featured a urinal signed “R. Mutt,” and after much debate among the selection committee, the piece was rejected for display. *Fountain* made headlines and created conflict because it explicitly challenged the ideology of the fine art museum. Duchamp’s readymade countered and questioned what constitutes art and its display.

In the LSU Rural Life Museum, the commodes appear “proper.” In other words, they seem to fit in with the objects that surround them. I can easily imagine the commode in the nineteenth century middle-class home. Each of the designs allowed for multiple uses and easy portability. And yet, I wonder how people interacted with it? Did they treat it like a toilet? Or more like the furniture it mimics? Did visitors comment on the lovely design of the host’s commode? Or were discussions of toilets as disguised as the objects themselves? How did women interact with the commode? What did they do? What did they *have* to do?

I sit on the rocking-chair commode hesitantly and glance around to see if anyone notices me. After I succumb to the idea that I could get caught on the pot, I settle in to find the commode oddly cozy and reflect on the items that surround me. Nowadays, with access to sprays that dewrinkle clothing and vacuums with enhanced cyclone technology, I find it difficult to imagine the labor involved in heating the iron in the ironing stove or lugging around an all metal vacuum. Inspired by the placement of the toilets in the Exhibit Barn next to items of domesticity, I experience a longing to return the toilet to the home and recognize the significant part it plays there.

In this chapter, I trouble tidy versions of domesticity, evaluating what happens when bathroom practices, bodily wastes, and smelly commodes are recognized as significant performances within the domestic sphere. In doing so, I consider who deals with commodes, integrating information and ideas that typically are treated separately, and thereby offering new insights on the relationship between women, toilets, and domesticity. I begin by reviewing the social situation of the middle-classes in the U.S. in the early to mid part of the nineteenth century, highlighting how changing circumstances encouraged people to accept performance as integral to the social character, rituals, and relations they enacted. A character of particular

importance was the Domestic Goddess, who was particularly adept at masking aspects of herself and home that would upset the “genteel performance” she and others enacted. She offered a disciplined performance of etiquette that appeared not to be a performance at all (Halttunen 93). The commode and the Goddess’ management of it (an irony in itself) were hidden aspects of domesticity. By recognizing them, I support studies that ground the Domestic Goddess in material reality and counter studies that would uphold the separation of private and public spheres, as well as the sacred and profane during this period.

### **Social Performance in Nineteenth Century U.S.**

In the U.S. and other western countries, the nineteenth century is viewed typically as a period of massive development and growth, when diverse technological inventions fueled the industrial revolution, connecting isolated communities through railroads and electric communication systems. Once agrarian societies became urban as people moved to the cities to reap the rewards (and suffer the limitations) of the changed and changing economy. As Karen Halttunen reports in her seminal study, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*, people were “on the move both socially and geographically,” and yet as industrialization and urbanization intensified, so did people’s anxiety about changing social relations (Halttunen xv).

This anxiety arose from perceived differences between rural and urban life. In the country, everyone had been acquainted with everyone else and behavioral codes were familiar to the point of being naturalized. The city lacked such familiarity. People found they were dealing with strangers, confronting and enacting different kinds of behavior; behavior that was experienced as unfamiliar and not “natural”; in other words, as pretend or a performance. The situation was exacerbated by Jacksonian *laissez-faire* economics, which encouraged a public

identity and social behavior characterized by enlightened self-interest, aggressive individualism, and competitive materialism (Bowman, “Domestic(ating) Excess” 116). A common perception and suspicion, then, was that people would do anything to improve their lot in life, including masking their true agenda in order to gain an advantage over others. This was the case with the infamous confidence man of the period who practiced empty forms of false etiquette to dupe strangers into believing he could be trusted (Halttunen 1-32). While early in the nineteenth century, such pretense was viewed as immoral and hypocritical, even threatening to the building of a new unified nation, by mid century, people were far more accepting “of the theatricality of social relationships” (Halttunen 157). As Halttunen observes, by 1850, middle-class U.S. citizens “were beginning to accept the necessity and legitimacy of social forms they had once condemned as social hypocrisy and to accept a new view of character as a theatrical part to be played by respectable men and women” (Halttunen 167).

This “genteel performance,” as Halttunen terms it, was marked by contradiction in that the expected “polite conduct” required deliberate study and “flawless self-discipline” so as to also appear “easy, natural, [and] sincere” (Halttunen 93). Halttunen proceeds to explain:

The genteel performance was made possible by the hundreds of specific rules laid out in the etiquette manuals of antebellum America, rules which may be divided into three areas: the laws of polite social geography, the laws of tact, and the laws of acquaintanceship. These laws made possible the genteel performance by serving two major functions: they constructed the necessary theatrical framework for the performance, and at the same time they legislated the ways in which the theatricality of the performance was to be politely denied. (Halttunen 101)

Although denying performance upheld the cache of sincerity (which, of course, was part of the performance), it also articulated class distinctions in that genteel (non)performance was understood as something different from the explicit performance of con men and painted women occurring on the streets and in the theatres of money-grubbing urban life. The Domestic

Goddess protected this difference, as she appeared to not perform her role on the stage of her domestic home.

### **A Haven in a Heartless World**

In response to the perceived pretense required to compete in the profane public sphere, the domestic sphere was constructed as a private site where sacred (Christian) values could be upheld. Broadly speaking, domesticity ranges from an attitude and feeling of love for the home and family to the material practices of housekeeping. The term Domestic Goddess was one of many terms used to describe white middle-class women in the nineteenth century who kept house. The term distinguished the Domestic Goddess from immigrant, black, and lower class women who also kept house, but needed or were enslaved to work outside their homes in order to do so. Domestic Goddess, then, articulates differences in class, race, ethnicity, and perceived morality. Whereas enslaved or wage-earning woman were associated with the corruption of the public sphere in which they worked, the Domestic Goddess was associated with the private sphere of domesticity and further charged to protect it. Her role to protect the domestic sphere came to serve as “a counter-balance, a purgative and perhaps even an apologia to the ‘profane’ business of making money in the public sphere” (Bowman, “Domestic(ating) Excess” 117).

In their introduction to *Making the American Home*, Marilyn Motz and Pat Browne argue that throughout the nineteenth century, “both popular fiction and didactic literature glorified the role of women in altering the household environment, raising the task to the status of an almost holy endeavor” (Motz and Browne 1). One such account appeared in an 1860 issue of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, the author exclaiming, ““The perfection of womanhood...is the wife and mother, the center of the family, that magnet that draws man to the domestic altar, that makes him a civilized being....The wife is truly the light of the home”” (quoted in Wayne 1). The compliment



reveals a number of ideas that contributed to the construction of the Domestic Goddess and the ideology of domesticity.

First, because “by definition the domestic sphere was closed off, hermetically sealed from the poisonous air of the world outside” (Halttunen 59), the homemaker was considered sealed off too – in discursive less so material terms – and imprinted with counter traits to those of the public sphere. Second, as bearers of counter traits, women were understood as virtuous, moral, and capable of redeeming men corrupted by their pursuits in the public sphere. Ginzberg argues that as women became closely associated with Christian virtues over the course of the nineteenth century, religion “in some sense” became feminized (Ginzberg 12). At the very least, we might say women were left to protect religion as men pursued commercial and other non-religious interests. The woman was, as Sarah Hale put it, ““God’s [and man’s] appointed agent of morality”” (quoted in Ginzberg 14). This moral appointment rubbed off on the homemaker’s practical duties, as managing the home and raising the children were viewed as a spiritual calling and act (Palczewski 383).

Third, contributing to the construction of the Domestic Goddess was the prevailing view of women generally. While morally sound, they were considered emotionally unstable and “physically unfit to vote or compete for work” (Poovey 8). Mary Poovey continues:

female nature, which was governed by maternal instinct, was supposedly noncompetitive, nonaggressive, and self-sacrificing – that is, internally consistent and not alienated; male nature, the counterpart, was competitive, aggressive, and acquisitive. This apparently fixed difference was then taken to anchor not only the kind of labor men and women performed, but also the opposition between the public sphere, where alienation was visible and inescapable, and the home, where there seemed to be no alienation at all. (Poovey 77)

In other words, it was understood that, unlike men, women associated their identity with their labor (the one *subject* to the other), specifically their “emotional labor” as “motivated (and

guaranteed) by maternal instinct” (Poovey 10). As a result, while women were emotionally spontaneous and responsive to others, they also were ruled by their emotions, their lack of control revealed in “outward physical manifestations of the hearts contents” (Halttunen 57). In contrast to the perceived rationality and self-control of men, women’s lack thereof deemed them ill fit for the demands of the public sphere, which was at odds with the natural sincerity and emotionality required by the private sphere (Halttunen 58). Thought to be incapable of disguise (i.e., performance) because of her inability to mask her emotions, the Domestic Goddess was constructed as a trustworthy moral guide in an otherwise untrustworthy world.

Of course, it was all a performance. This is not to say it was fake or dishonest, but rather to recognize, as Halttunen claims, that performance was central to the apparatus upholding social roles, rituals, and relations, whether at home or on the street. As I discuss below, a crucial part of performing domesticity was distinguishing between the front- and backstage regions of the home and keeping those backstage aspects (such as commodes) in place, that is, backstage. Ignoring commodes and one’s handling of them (keeping them backstage if nothing else) is commonplace in much of the literature of the period as well as in current scholarship. Contemporary scholarship often upholds the idea of the Domestic Goddess, so as to argue against it, thereby saving nineteenth century women from themselves and the culture that made them thus. In other words, scholars often treat women of the period as if they actually were Domestic Goddesses.

## Front Stage and Backstage with the Domestic Goddess

In her summary of Erving Goffman's study of the theatricality of everyday life, Halttunen applies his ideas of front- and backstage regions to the nineteenth century home and the performances that occurred there. She explains:

In societies built on the promise of social mobility, high demands for control over bodily and facial expressiveness made necessary a division of living space into front regions and back regions. In the front regions, firm social discipline holds in place a mask of manner and expressive control is maintained. In the back regions, the mask can be lowered and expressive control relaxed. In theatrical terms, the front regions are where the performance is given, where the social actor is onstage or "in character." The back regions are where the performance is prepared, repaired, and relaxed, where the social actor is offstage or "out of character. (Halttunen 104)

For Halttunen, the nineteenth century middle-class parlor was a front stage region. It was indeed a front room in the house where:

...friends, acquaintances, and carefully screened strangers met formally "in society." Geographically, it lay between the urban street where strangers freely mingled and the back regions of the house where only family members were permitted to enter uninvited. Within the cult of domesticity, the parlor provided the woman of the house with the "cultural podium" from which she was to exert her moral influences over American society. (Halttunen 59)

The parlor provided a key "stage setting for the genteel performance" the hostess and her visitors enacted. The laws of geography, tact, and acquaintanceship were at work therein, simultaneously supporting and denying the theatricality of the performance (Halttunen 101).

Twigg confirms Halttunen's view of the parlor, writing, "in the semi-public performances of the parlor one could perfect his or her public image through...performance, thus assigning a directly performative function for this space" (Twigg 15).

Halttunen details the performances that occurred in the parlor, highlighting the "difficult" role of the hostess who "was responsible not only for her own person, but for the setting of the collective genteel performance" (Halttunen 105). Preparing the set involved arranging the

parlor's furniture so as to encourage social interaction, brightening the scene with flowers and plants, and displaying books, photographs, or works of art to encourage conversation among guests. Halttunen claims, "The polite Victorian hostess was not simply an actress in the genteel performance; she was also the stage manager, who exercised great responsibility for the performances of everyone who entered her parlor" (Halttunen 105). A primary responsibility was to keep the domestic apparatus that allowed for the front stage performance from intruding upon it, one manual advising that "'the internal machinery of the household, like that portion of the theatre '*behind the scenes*,' should...be studiously kept out of view'" (quoted in Halttunen 105; emphasis in original).

Of course, guests acted in collusion with the illusionary exigency of genteel performance, aiming to display "proper self-control without betraying any stage effect" (Halttunen 105). For instance, if adjustments to one's appearance were necessary, one made them in a dressing room, a backstage region of the home, before entering the parlor. Once on stage, gestures, postures, and facial expressions were regulated, without appearing to be so. "The true lady or gentleman walked with quiet dignity but not primness, gestured precisely but not woodenly, wore a smile just below the surface but did not smirk" (Halttunen 101). Abiding by the most important law of tact, guests never entered the backstage regions of the home unless invited, thereby avoiding the possibility of stumbling "upon a friend who was momentarily 'out of character'" (Halttunen 108), or a servant who was "offstage" washing the dishes or, god forbid, cleaning a commode. Because many domestic activities were considered impolite, potentially vulgar, people were to avoid all references to them in the conversations that occurred front stage. In these ways:

Everything happened as if by magic: guests entered the parlor composed, combed, and free from the dust of the street; their hostess received them without a care in the world for the complex domestic arrangements of her household...But the most important law of polite social geography was that no one shatter the magic of the genteel performance by

acknowledging the existence of the back regions that alone made the performance possible. (Hattunen106-107)

In *Domesticity and Dirt*, Phyllis Palmer reminds us of the range of activities that commonly occur in the backstage regions of a home. Although she addresses housewives and servants of the early to mid twentieth century, her summary is applicable to nineteenth century homemakers, and perhaps even more so, as many were without the benefits of plumbing and electricity. Further, it is important to acknowledge that although many middle- to upper class women in the nineteenth century had servants, many did not, or they hired servants on a temporary basis. According to Palmer, the woman of the house:

...took care of those things that society found most unappealing, embarrassing, and tainted: the visible needs and evidences of fallible bodies. Housewives, or their domestic alter egos, prepared the food to sustain bodies (transforming other living things into dead forms for people to ingest) and cleaned up the detritus left from meals: boiling babies' diapers, toilet-training children, removing bed pans for the sick, clearing away evidence of human excrement. They washed clothes and bedclothes soiled by sweat, odors, hair, and dead skin thrown off by bodies. And they straightened up and ordered the objects in homes and removed all intrusions – soot, sand, mud, polluted air, dust, grease, body odors – that were disapproved. (Palmer 145-146)

In light of Hattunen's study, Palmer's summary helps us recognize the amount, variety, and importance of backstage responsibilities the Domestic Goddess was expected to not only tend to but make invisible, the latter expectation (of invisibility) making the tasks more difficult and the tasks challenging traits often associated with the Domestic Goddess, such as a lack of physical fitness.

Although Palmer addresses both practical and theoretic aspects of domestic labor, she spends little time discussing the toilet, an omission common throughout accounts of nineteenth century homes and the domestic labor required for their upkeep. In her 2008 study of *The Bourgeois Interior*, Julia Brown sidesteps commodes entirely. Similarly, Marilyn Motz and Pat Browne avoid the toilet in *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic*

*Material Culture, 1840-1940*, which was published in 1988. Charles Rice, a theorist of architecture ignores the commode in his 2007 study of *The Emergence of the Interior*, in which he associates said emergence with nineteenth century domesticity. Published in 1982, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* by Susan Strasser includes a section on water issues and domestic labor. Strasser claims that “carrying slops – including the contents of chamber pots – was the most disagreeable of household chores” (Strasser 88), but does not detail the use or cleaning of the pots beyond the noted mention. Strasser does provide an interesting summary of municipal plumbing, explaining how sewage disposal lagged behind water provision through the early twentieth century.

The absence of toilets in accounts of the nineteenth century home is due likely to perceived connections between social status, virtue, and the restraint of bodily processes. In other words, toilets were not and are not a polite thing to talk about. As Halttunen confirms in her summary of Norbert Elias’ study of manners:

Early in the civilizing process, for example, conduct codes included injunctions against urinating in public and passing wind, but as the “shame threshold” for such activities gradually rose, these social failings were no longer mentioned. By the nineteenth century, it was considered hopelessly uncivilized or vulgar to refer at all to such lapses in bodily repression. (Halttunen 97-98)

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud confirms that material and discursive regulations of defecation practices were necessary because defecation violated the idea of a civilized body. More broadly, David Inglis and Mary Holmes explain that the “attitude towards bodily wastes was a product of the anxiety that civilized humanity felt at lapsing back into the state of the primeval swamp, from which it had only recently and with the greatest of difficulty extricated itself” (Inglis and Homes 224). Even if it was “hopelessly uncivilized” to talk about bodily processes in the nineteenth century, there is no question the nineteenth century body went to the

bathroom, a fact recalled by the chamber pots and commodes collected and on display at the LSU Rural Life Museum.

Another reason for the toilet's absence in nineteenth and twentieth century studies is that the toilet reminds us of our corporeal fallibility. Toilets and the bodily wastes they hold counter abstractions of the body because of their frank and often unpredictable materiality. As Inglis and Holmes offer, "the organic nature of feces and the body's production of them symbolize...not only the epitome of 'filth', but also the fact that the body [is] itself organic, and thus subject to processes of decline and death" (Inglis and Homes 228). Toilets and toilet practices are dangerous because they remind us of what we can never control: the defecation, decay, and death of the body.

### **The American Woman's Home**

*On the other hand*, in a very popular handbook of the mid nineteenth century, toilets (commodes, privies, and earth-closets) as well as bodily waste and hygiene are discussed, often at length and without apology. First published in 1869, *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science* by Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe presented a revised and expanded version of Catherine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, which was first published in 1841, and reprinted annually for nearly 15 years. Described as "a bible of domestic topics" (Van Why n.p.), *The American Woman's Home* served as the nineteenth century's most comprehensive manual for "ideal American domesticity" (Jacobson 105).<sup>2</sup> Inspiration for the book was prompted by the authors' belief that women suffered daily difficulties because they were not trained, as men were, for their daily duties (Beecher and Stowe 1). As such, the manual provided women with training for the particularities of domestic duties,

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<sup>2</sup> While the book was available and affordable to most women, the home the book detailed was not. As such, Kristen Jacobson describes the text as a domestic manual and a wish list that represents an ideal domesticity (Jacobson 106).

including but not limited to cooking, housekeeping, childrearing, entertaining, and etiquette.

Today, historians and scholars use *The American Woman's Home* as a resource to understand the role of the nineteenth century woman in the home and society.

Pertinent to my study is Beecher and Stowe's advice regarding bodily waste, how privies operate, locations in the home for commodes and how often to empty them, different styles and prices of commodes, how to compost waste for manure, and how to build and maintain an earth-closet. Below I summarize the advice Beecher and Stowe provide, aiming to suggest that, coupled with the handbook's popularity, the public discussion of the noted topics by two genteel women calls into question the extent to which these and other domestic practices were kept hidden (backstage as it were). The view and inscription of these activities as "tainted" and the Domestic Goddess as so concerned about her genteel performance that she would not dare mention these topics in public may tell us more about ourselves and our limited view of the nineteenth century than about the time and its people. In so saying, I do not intend to question the accuracy of Halttunen's account, as much as balance it with another kind of domestic performance where what seems peripheral is actually central (cf., Stallybrass and White 5-23).

During the time that *The American Woman's Home* was in publication, the flush toilet was a recent invention. Many homes did not have piping due to the expense, and those who could afford plumbing found that early household plumbing systems required frequent repair. For this reason, Beecher and Stowe advise women to adopt the earth-closet system to manage family waste. The earth-closet is similar to that of a water closet (a portable piece of furniture with a removable container for waste), except that water is replaced with dry earth, which covers excreta and results in a reduction of offensive odors. An additional benefit to earth-closets is an



increase in soil quality, as the whole is collected for manure later.<sup>3</sup> The principles upon which the earth-closet is based are simple, and, coupled with Beecher and Stowe's advice, the earth-closet is built and maintained with ease.

For the woman concerned with how the earth-closet will fit in with her home's décor, Beecher and Stowe assure her that that they are available in a variety of attractive patterns and materials at prices accommodating a range of budgets. The earth-closet's outstanding ability to conceal noxious smells make it so that it can be used anywhere in the home, although, if possible, it is best placed in a privy close to the house or in a closet upstairs (Beecher and Stowe 329). To convert an ordinary privy into an earth-closet, Beecher and Stowe explain, an apparatus to release stored earth is placed near the back of the seat with the reservoir for the earth placed above. Two methods are used to release the stored earth: the pull-up method in which a handle is pulled to release the earth that then covers the excrement, or the self-acting method, which produces the same affect but rather than pulling a handle the user lifts the seat of the privy. If the closet is placed over a watertight cesspool or pit, it will require emptying only every three to six months. A commode also may be converted into an earth-closet by simply replacing water with earth. Although easier to convert, the commode method does demand more upkeep, as it requires more frequent emptying.

To ensure the full benefits of the earth-closet, Beecher and Stowe recommend filling the apparatus with perfectly dry and sifted earth. The authors estimate that, if used by six persons daily, the earth-closet will require 100 pounds of earth a week. To dry and sift dirt, they suggest

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<sup>3</sup> Proponents of composting human waste, Beecher and Stowe argue that what is truly wasteful is the amount of human manure that goes unused, flushed down the drain, if you will. Drawing on the work of George. E. Waring, Jr., the director of The Earth-Closet Company, Beecher and Stowe explain that earth-closets encourage people to “save their raw material, instead of wasting it, and aided by nature's wonderful laws, will weave over and over again the fabric by which we live and prosper” (Waring quoted in Beecher and Stowe 325).

one fit a drawer under the kitchen range and fill it with earth each morning, allowing the heat of the range to dry it out. Providing specific details, they advise:

The drawer should reach to within two inches of the bottom bar of the grate. A frame with a handle, covered with fine wire-netting, forming a kind of shovel, should be placed on this drawer the finer ashes will fall through, mixing with the earth, whilst the cinders will remain on the top, to be, from time to time, thrown on the fire. (Beecher and Stowe 330-331)

Although to the modern day toilet user Beecher and Stowe's instructions seem like an incredible amount of work, the authors assure their readers that the earth-closet system is "as easy as that of coals...[and] the use of it will conduce largely to the economy of families, the health of neighborhoods, and the increasing fertility and prosperity of the country round about" (Beecher and Stowe 333).

Despite its relative ease, Beecher and Stowe still describe cleaning toilets as the "most disagreeable item in domestic labor," but acknowledge the importance of managing bodily waste so as to "prevent the disagreeable and unhealthy effluvium which is almost inevitable in all family residences" (Beecher and Stowe 322). During times of health, the earth-closet provided effective management of bodily waste. However, during times of sickness, Beecher and Stowe instruct that all effluvium be checked immediately, the authors attending to the prevailing theory of disease at the time. Termed the miasma theory, the idea was that bad smelling air caused disease, not what we now call germs.

As it was women's responsibility to care for and clean up after the indisposed, Beecher and Stowe provide the nineteenth century woman with a discussion on the causes of and advice for how to tend to constipation and diarrhea. The authors are particularly critical of corsets, a popular undergarment for women at the time, which they believed had ill effects on women's digestive health. Referencing the corset, they write:

The lower intestines are the greatest sufferers from this dreadful abuse of nature. Having the weight of all the unsupported organs above pressing them into unnatural and distorted positions, the passage of the food is interrupted, and inflammations, indurations, and constipation, are the frequent result. Dreadful ulcers and cancers may be traced in some instances to this cause. (Beecher and Stowe 126)

Beecher and Stowe believe wearing a corset is “foolish” and describe the rising popularity of the corsets as “just cause for universal alarm” (Beecher and Stowe 126). As a solution, they recommend that “intelligent and moral” mothers work with their daughters to make dresses without corsets or tights belts an accepted fashion (Beecher and Stowe 126). Should one suffer from irritated bowels, Beecher and Stowe offer the following advice:

In case of constipation, this preparation of food is useful: One table-spoonful of unbolted flour wet with cold water. Add one pint of hot water, and boil twenty minutes. Add when taken up, one pint of milk. If the stomach seems delicate and irritable, strain out the bran, but in most cases, retain it. In case of diarrhea, walk with the child in arms a great deal in the open air, and give it rice-water to drink. (Beecher and Stowe 217)

The sisters encourage natural remedies to cure irritated bowels and suggest avoiding medicine if possible. In their chapter on the care of infants, Beecher and Stowe touch briefly on how to calm an infant’s upset stomach, and with regards to the management of young children, they recommend that mothers allow children to eat meals in small intervals so as to aid and ease the digestive processes.

### **Making Toilets Visible**

Beecher and Stowe make toilets visible by speaking openly and candidly about the management of family waste as well as digestive problems and their solutions. They put the toilet front stage, thereby challenging the idea that the domestic site is a hermetically sealed off space, they reframe domestic tasks as rational, and reveal performance as an important aspect of the private sphere.

By recognizing the importance of toilets, Beecher and Stowe expose the fragility of the

public and private divide. As Jacobson contends, *The American Woman's Home* connected the public and private by making everyday acts of household management, such as cleaning the commode, “the key to establishing and maintaining national identity” (Jacobson 107). For example, Beecher and Stowe list the health of the neighborhood and the fertility of the nation’s crops as benefits to adopting the earth-closet system (Beecher and Stowe 333). They narrow the public and private divide by insisting that the daily business of the domestic sphere should and does participate in and contribute to national goals.

Long before the popularity of the feminist slogan, “the personal is political,” Beecher and Stowe made domestic issues, such as family waste management, a topic for public discussion. Although in several ways bodily waste has always connected the private and the public (e.g., prior to plumbing systems, refuse was dumped near the home, literally uniting domestic and public space), it was intolerable odors along with health concerns that led the way to private waste disposal becoming a public concern with regard to municipal plumbing. Beecher and Stowe recognize the importance of indoor plumbing, including toilets and bathtubs, declaring them ideal fixtures in middle-class homes and urging people to view sewage disposal as a municipal concern. By placing the toilet front stage, Beecher and Stowe challenge notions of the hermetically sealed domestic space, demonstrating how the private and the public are intimately linked.

Beecher and Stowe also make bodily processes palatable to the public through their use of scientific-technical language. Their use of language systematizes the management of bodily waste while remaining friendly and accessible. They insist on the women’s voice as rational, practical, in control, and capable, thus countering the normative construct of women in the domestic sphere as irrational and driven by their emotions. The scientific-technical language in

*The American Woman's Home* works to transform domesticity into a science so as to highlight and legitimate the complexity involved in the management of the home, and in doing so, it validates the authors' argument that women ought to receive training for their domestic duties. The difficulty of household chores combined with the scientific approach to domesticity presents women as emotionally fit to work and suggests that women are not only adept at managing the home, they are likely to perform proficiently in the commercial workplace as well.

By speaking openly about earth-closets and sick bodies, Beecher and Stowe reveal performance as an important part of the private sphere. Of course, performance has always been integral to the apparatus upholding social roles and rituals, whether at home or on the street. However, when backstage processes are foregrounded, everything in the front stage no longer “happen[s] as if by magic” (Halttunen 106-107). By disclosing the intricate workings of an earth-closet, Beecher and Stowe expose the great lengths to which women must go in order to uphold the ideal of the Domestic Goddess. It is difficult to imagine one can remain unsoiled and ladylike while sifting and drying dirt, composting manure, and washing up after an ill child. The focus on backstage processes makes it evident that a woman is not born a Domestic Goddess, rather she has to learn how to mask aspects of herself and home in order to play that genteel role. A full view and enactment of domesticity highlight the part everyday people and practices play in making and performing history, and support the integral part performance plays in the domestic sphere and how it is remembered.

Despite the many ways Beecher and Stowe upset the separation of public and private, front- and backstage spaces, it is worth noting how they uphold the domestic as a sacred space and give rise to an ironic tension in their use of tidy scientific language to describe untidy bodies. Although Beecher and Stowe counter notions of the Domestic Goddess as transcending

corporeality, they rely on sacred Christian values to legitimate their text. In the introduction to *The American Woman's Home*, the authors claim “the principles and teachings of Jesus Christ [are] the true basis of woman's rights and duties” and maintain that the housewife has “great social and moral power” (Beecher and Stowe 1). Rather than countering or rejecting constructions of the Domestic Goddess as a sacred calling, *The American Woman's Home* “binds domestic science to comprehensive biblical...instruction” (Jacobson 110). A criticism of this approach is that elevating domestic tasks so that they are akin to doing Christ's work may serve to entrench women's position in the home further, thus contradicting a scientific approach to domesticity that presents women as emotionally fit to work outside the home.

Conceptualizing domesticity as a science implies domesticity is rational and systematic, which is a tricky argument to make when foregrounding messy bodily processes. Although the authors are attentive to issues concerning household plumbing and digestive health, they do not address toilet-training. This omission is peculiar given Dr. Sydney Spiesel's claim that during the nineteenth century it was common for toilet-training to begin before children could walk (Spiesel para. 3). Toilet-training was a cumbersome task that dictated and consumed much of the homemaker's time. Inglis and Holmes discuss how toilet-training affected domestic routines. They write:

The chronological control of an infant's defecation is one aspect of a whole set of cadences that women seek to impose on the household in which they work....Toilet-training...may however prove to be a fraught process, precisely because its object, the infant's defecatory capacities, can often obstinately refuse to occur within the chronological demands that the housewife/mother would like to impose on them. (Inglis and Holmes 237)

According to Inglis and Holmes, by caring for infants and children, women are constrained temporally, spatially, and physically by the children's bathroom requirements. One can speculate that Beecher and Stowe omitted toilet-training from their domestic manual because it is

at odds with their goal to transform domesticity into a science. Toilet-training disrupts the notion of the home as systematic with “regular patterns of doing” (Douglas, “The Idea of Home” 287), revealing the home as a space ripe with chaotic occurrences that are not always controlled by the mother. An infant defecates just as guests arrive, interrupting the Domestic Goddess’ duty to encourage conversation among her guests. She politely excuses herself to tend to the child, but the baby’s cry and stink escape the backstage area just as easily as noxious smells escape the privy and enter the parlor. Toilet-training exposes the fragility of front- and backstage boundaries as well as the difficulty of foregrounding messy bodily processes while embracing domesticity as a science.

### **Toward a Corporeal History**

At the LSU Rural Life Museum, I remove the lid of the chamber pot, bend down looking deep into the chamber, and draw in a deep breath. The toilet becomes a precarious site because of its association with bodily orifices and excesses. The toilet yawns wide to collect our body’s leftovers. Urination and defecation must seep through bodily orifices into the stool’s opening. Our unbounded body drips into a porcelain cavity awaiting the ritual baptism we call a flush. The restroom is where we put our matter back into place, a “licensed affair in every sense” (Stallybrass and White 13). The toilet represents the transitional space between order and disorder. Bodily waste must be transferred from one proper place (the body) to the next (the toilet). There is comfort in ordering our excess, commanding our physical filth to disappear. But transitions are risky. Bodily odors escape and transgress boundaries. A drop of urine sits defiantly on the toilet seat. We hover above the toilet watching what we expected to disappear down, slowly rise up.

The evacuating body is a polluting body. Kathleen Brown explains, “[the evacuating body] left traces of itself everywhere, and anything with which it came in contact – people, clothing, even the air of the chamber – needed to be cleansed” (Kathleen Brown 8). The toilet reminds us that, like all bodies, the Domestic Goddess was an evacuating body and highlights the discrepancies between the perceived purity of the Domestic Goddess and the impurity of her body and chores. The concealment of the toilet and practices surrounding it, such as usage and maintenance, uphold the genteel performance occurring in the front stage regions of the home, such as the parlor. Front stage performances of domesticity minimize reminders of the body’s corporeality and focus instead on immaterial bodies, maintaining demarcations between private and public, purity and filth, women and men. Backstage performances of domesticity, however, remind us that domesticity has a corporeal history, one that disrupts and blurs the very boundaries the front stage performances attempt to conserve.

This chapter demonstrates how the ideology of domesticity is undermined by historicity, that is, the understanding that material bodies in time and place affect and are affected by their particular circumstances, thereby making history. A corporeal history counters and questions what constitutes domesticity and its display. It highlights how women’s bodies were and are engaged in the labor of caring for other bodies, thereby tending to material waste and bodily excesses, and it calls attention to the many ways in which women’s bodies are disciplined in order to perform in front stage places. By acknowledging front stage and backstage performances and the bodily discipline required to make these performances go, domesticity is revealed as complex and with fluid boundaries between the public and private and the sacred and profane during the nineteenth century.



## Chapter Three

### Indian Toilet Festivals: Performing Community, Citizenship, and Sanitation Activism

“A toilet block is under construction at present,” Khatrabain Londhe, a woman living in the slums of Mumbai explains to researchers Meera Bapat and Indu Agarwal (quoted in Bapat and Agarwal 74). Londhe continues, “until now, we have used open land for defecating – men go on one side and women on the other. People passing by can see women squatting. The day before yesterday, an old woman went out to defecate at seven in the evening and a man came from behind and grabbed her” (quoted in Bapat and Agarwal 74). Currently in India, issues of waste and sanitation are paramount. About 665 million people in India, roughly half the population, lack access to latrines. The *Environment News Service* reports that globally some 1.2 billion people lack safe water supply, 2.4 billion people live without secure sanitation, and at least 5 million people die yearly from water-related diseases, including 2.2 million children under the age of five (Environment New Service para. 14).

In attempting to address water and sanitation issues, people living in the slums of Mumbai and Pune have created a series of events known as toilet festivals. I first came across the idea of toilet festivals when reading anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s essay, “Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics,” in which Appadurai explores how grassroots organizations can work to reconstitute citizenship in cities. Appadurai introduces the toilet festivals of Mumbai as an example of how the urban poor can “leverage expert knowledge” to enable “the deepening of democracy among the poor themselves” (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 40). He describes toilet festivals as embracing a “carnavalesque spirit” to enact “the politics of shit” (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 38). Although Appadurai offers little description of the actual festivals, he claims toilet festivals transform the humiliating act of

defecating in public into a collective celebration of technological innovation by exhibiting functioning public toilets designed by the poor. After months of community input, financial investment, and commitment, the urban poor gather to celebrate the completion of a toilet block. Typically members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local politicians, and government officials also attend the festivals. Appadurai explains:

State officials also are invited, to cut the ceremonial ribbon and give speeches in which they associate themselves with these grassroots exercises, thus simultaneously gaining points for hobnobbing with “the people” while giving poor families in the locality some legitimacy in the eyes of their neighbors, civic authorities, and themselves. (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 38)

The festivals offer communities members with the opportunity to interact with politicians and government officials. They afford community members the chance to teach politicians and other members of the community about water and sanitation issues as well as how the toilets are designed, constructed, and maintained. The toilet festivals allow people to discuss the current latrine block designs and to brainstorm alterations and improvements for future blocks, thus advancing innovations in toilet design and technologies.

Critical theorist Gay Hawkins also mentions Indian toilet festivals in *The Ethics of Waste: How we Relate to Rubbish*. In the chapter, “Shit,” Hawkins investigates how “the problematization of shit in public is implicated in the ‘privatization’ of shit” (Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste* 47). According to Hawkins, Indian toilet festivals link public health and waste management issues to issues of privacy, private and public distinctions, and the making of modern subjectivity. Hawkins does not describe the festivals themselves, save they are a “bawdy mode of public address” involving “the spirit of transgression” (Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste* 66).

The most detailed description of Indian toilet festivals appeared in a report issued by The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers (SPARC), a NGO located in Mumbai. According to the report, toilet festivals differ slightly based on the location, but most include a tour through a series of sites where new toilets have been built. For example, recently the Pune Municipal Commissioner, Mr. Ratnakar Gaikwad, led a tour accompanied by community members, local politicians, and members of the Alliance, a leading group in constructing latrine blocks in India.<sup>4</sup> During the tour Gaikwad presented the toilets in detail, walked the group in and through stalls, explained how the toilets are built, pointed out the careful attention given to design, clarified how water is provided, and how the structures are maintained and cleaned. After the tour, the celebration continued with a speech by Gaikwad on *Sandas*, a non-euphemistic word for toilet. In his speech, the commissioner drew an analogy between toilets and temples to argue that like temples, toilets are places of health, prosperity, safety, and sacredness, and therefore are a respectable part of the public sphere (“Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers” para. 50). Responding to the event, the SPARC report states:

[*Sandas*] was a word now transformed, it was a word now taken out of the domain of filth, of indignity, of exploitation, of ill-health and darkness. It was a word now that belonged with words like temple, like technology, like change, like community, like progress, like ownership, like pride. (“Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers” para. 50)

Along with tours and speeches, the festivals allow people from different areas and social classes to gather together in order to socialize and share ideas. By means of the festivals, the urban poor claim their space in politics, asking public officials to recognize and legitimate their needs and capabilities. The toilet festivals demonstrate the urban poor assuming public roles and interacting with officials to articulate concerns and brainstorm solutions. The SPARC report describes toilet festivals as the “beginning of a wider process of public sphere participation, of

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<sup>4</sup> Poona, now called Pune, is in the state of Maharashtra, east of Mumbai.

changes in the governance and of a radical increase in the dignity and self-recognition of the poorest of the poor” (“Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers” para. 55). In toilet festivals, the urban poor demonstrate their ability to take action and improve their communities, altering the way the poor are understood by the ruling class.

In *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*, Rustom Bharucha calls for intracultural approaches to understanding culture, which examine the interaction of local cultures within the boundaries of a particular state. Bharucha urges scholars to attend to, rather than transcend, the “particularities of history” in material context, relationships, and locale (Bharucha, *Theatre and the World* 240). In this way, scholars will begin to redress the consequences of globalization, such as the homogenization of indigenous cultures especially “in ‘third world’ countries like India whose governments appear to be increasingly distanced from the realities of local communities and cultures” (Bharucha, “Somebody’s Other” 200). Bharucha claims intracultural approaches allow for a “source of reaffirming cultural self-sufficiency and self-respect” (Bharucha, “Somebody’s Other” 200). In this chapter, I answer Bharucha’s call, focusing on sanitation issues in two Indian cities in the state of Maharashtra: Mumbai and Pune. I chose to focus on these cities because of the severity of the water and sanitation problems. In the face of these issues, the urban poor have responded in particularly creative and resourceful ways.

This chapter highlights the challenges of resource management and analyzes how aesthetic performance serves as a fruitful way to communicate health issues, create community, and imagine alternative ways of living. Sensitive to Bharucha’s concerns regarding the dehistoricizing of Indian culture, I begin the chapter by discussing how India’s current water and sanitation issues are the product of India’s colonial legacy. Next, I examine the relationship

between women, water, and sanitation issues and explain how dirt functions as a symbol and a fact in slum areas. Finally, I return to Indian toilet festivals as a form of sanitation activism. Drawing on Augusto Boal's Image Theatre, I consider Indian toilet festivals as the making and celebration of an ideal image, arguing that the festivals bring people together to view, reflect on, and celebrate something they needed and found a way to realize: a toilet. I analyze how the toilet tours invert multiple hierarchies and offer opportunities for negotiations of power. Additionally, I consider what constitutes social change and activism, and the ways the urban poor engage in tactical performance. Overall, I view toilets as objects that evoke performances and move beyond the toilet as artifact to a nuanced understanding of how the toilet serves the people who make and interact with them. These performances produce not just skills and pleasures, but subjectivities and worldviews.

### **Sanitation in Mumbai and Pune**

Mumbai, formerly Bombay, is the capital of the state of Maharashtra and the largest city in India with a population exceeding 16 million (Swaminathan 81).<sup>5</sup> An island city located on the western coast of India, Mumbai connects to the mainland through a series of bridges. Mumbai serves as the center for over half of India's foreign trade (Wagh 41), thereby contributing to its status as the city with the highest per capita income in India (Kamdar 28). The city's impressive economic statistics combined with the circulation of images of India's elite and middle-class through cinema, television, and the internet contribute to Mumbai's reputation as a "modern city" (McFarlane, "Sanitation in Mumbai's Informal Settlements" 90).

Despite being a wealthy Indian city, Mumbai has an increasing number of people living in informal settlements (often referred to as the slums), along with anxieties over congestion and

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<sup>5</sup> Bombay was renamed Mumbai in 1995, and the renaming has been part of a volatile debate regarding the identity of the city, nationalism, and ethnicity.

pollution. McFarlane reports that 54% of Mumbai's population occupies a mere 8% of the land (McFarlane, "Sanitation in Mumbai's Informal Settlements" 90, 94). In addition to minimal living space, informal settlements lack toilets, water supply, garbage collection, and electricity. With no system for the disposal of excretion or other pollutants, those living in informal settlements are exposed to significant health and environmental dangers.

Pune, formerly called Poona, is located approximately 125 miles east of Mumbai and suffers from similar issues regarding water and sanitation conditions. Pune is a fast-growing city and a major industrial center with a population of just under three million (Hobson 54). As in Mumbai, half of Pune's population lives in informal settlements and "forty-one of the 400 informal settlements in Pune surveyed by Shelter Associates have no toilet facilities whatsoever" (Hobson 54).

According to political scientist Susan E. Chaplin, access to sanitation and water supplies has been a problem in urban areas in India since the end of the twentieth century and is related to India's colonial legacy. Beginning in sixteenth century, European imperialist nations established trading posts in India and later took advantage of various internal conflicts in order to establish colonies. By 1856, most of India had come under the control of the British East India Company, and for the next one hundred years, Indians frequently revolted against British control. Under British rule, during the Industrial Revolution, rural workers throughout India migrated to the cities, increasing urban populations and taxing available housing. The increasing number of factories added to environmental pollution, and with few sewers, factories and migrant workers used rivers for sewers, thus contaminating the local water supplies. Rapid industrialization, urbanization, and economic growth in Great Britain led to a period of political and administrative inaction in dealing with similar urban deterioration in India (Chaplin 147).

In 1835, the Municipal Reform Act created representative local government based on property ownership, resulting in a middle-class electorate (Chaplin 147). Chaplin argues that because many middle-class citizens have had access to water and sanitation, there has long been a lack of interest in sanitation reform by the Indian government. “Instead, public health and environmental policies have frequently become exercises in crisis intervention instead of being tools for effective long-term planning and implementation” (Chaplin 146). Rather than implement a comprehensive national sewage plan, middle-class citizens insulated themselves from threats of epidemic disease through advances in medicine and science. Likewise, when urban conditions deteriorated, they moved to newly constructed suburbs. Chaplin explains, “the outcome, to date, is that the middle-class has yet to show any real interest in, or responsibility for, pressuring governments to improve environmental conditions” (Chaplin 150).<sup>6</sup>

The increasing number of people living in informal settlements in Mumbai and Pune is due in part to a sharp rise in real estate prices during the 1990’s (Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing” 438). With a scarcity of housing, people discover new ways of creating a home. Appadurai distinguishes between “pavement dwellers” and those who live in *jopad-pattis* or *chawls*. Pavement dwellers “live on pavements – or, more exactly, on particular spots, stretches and areas that are neither building nor street” (Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing” 636). *Jopad-pattis* are complexes of shacks with few amenities whereas *chawls* are old tenement housing that was built originally for mill workers in Bombay (Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing” 637). Appadurai reports:

50 percent of Mumbai’s 12 million citizens live in slums or other degraded forms of housing. Another 10 percent are estimated to be pavement dwellers. This amounts to

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<sup>6</sup> McFarlane argues middle-class groups “interpret the sanitizing of urban space through a logic of demolition rather than one of improvement of informal settlements. They often campaign to ‘rid the city of encroachers and polluters and, as it were, to give the city back to its proper citizens’” (McFarlane, “Sanitation in Mumbai’s Informal Settlements” 92).

more than 5 million people living in degraded (and degrading) forms of housing. Yet, according to one recent estimate, slum dwellers occupy only about 8 percent of the city's land. (Appadurai, "Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing" 646)

The housing crisis is related directly to Mumbai's and Pune's water and sanitation emergency. Informal settlements lack access to basic services such as piped water supplies, public latrines, and open drains (Bapat and Agarwal 72). If the settlements have toilet facilities, they are old, dirty, and unusable. The conditions arise, in part, from a toilet-to-person ratio as low as 1: 2,500 (Hobson 54). With such high usage, it is nearly impossible to keep toilet facilities clean or in working condition. Further, rarely are toilet facilities in informal settlements connected to municipal sewer systems. As a result, most toilets in informal settlements use the aqua-privy tank system where solids are collected in the tank under the toilets. High toilet usage leaves little time for solids to decompose. This results in cracked sullage lines and clogged pipes and tanks, which in turn leads to leaky, overflowing, and eventually unusable toilets, and pollution to areas surrounding the toilet system (Hobson 54).

### **Women, Water, and Sanitation**

The unsanitary conditions in Mumbai and Pune are compounded by a lack of water. Bapat and Agarwal report residents of Mumbai receive approximately 158 liters of water per day per person, and those in Pune, 200 liters (Bapat and Agarwal 71).<sup>7</sup> To put this amount into perspective, an automatic washer uses between 150 and 200 liters per cycle ("Water Conservation"). In Pune, the 200 liters of water are used for drinking, physical hygiene, household cleaning, and cooking. In other words, a little must go a long way.

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<sup>7</sup> 158 liters is equivalent to 41.74 U.S. gallons. Using a water consumption calculator, I learned I consume approximately 120 gallons (nearly 466 liters) of water daily by showering and brushing my teeth, washing clothes and dishes, and seeing to other household matters ("Water Consumption Calculator").



The lack of water is not due to an insufficient amount available to the city, but to an unequal distribution of water, with poor areas receiving less than wealthy areas. A 2006 report from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) explains:

There is more than enough water in the world for domestic purposes, for agriculture and for industry. The problem is that some people – notably the poor – are systematically excluded from access by their poverty, by their limited legal rights or by public policies that limit access to the infrastructures that provide water for life and for livelihoods. In short, scarcity is manufactured through political processes and institutions that disadvantage the poor. When it comes to clean water, the pattern in many countries is that the poor get less, pay more and bear the brunt of the human development costs associated with scarcity. (United Nations Development Program 3)

The disparity in water distribution affects the health and overall well-being of the urban poor.

In the slums of Mumbai and Pune, women play a crucial role in the provision of household water and sanitation and carry a double burden of disadvantage as they are the ones who sacrifice their time and their education to collect water (United Nations Development Program 2). Because water is a necessary resource, a great deal of time is spent collecting it.

Bapat and Agarwal describe:

It is typically women who collect water from a public standpipe, often queuing for long periods in the process and having to get up very early or go late at night to get the water. It is typically women who have to carry heavy water containers over long distances and on slippery slopes. It is typically women who have to make do with often inadequate water supplies to clean the home, prepare the food, wash the utensils, do the laundry and bathe the children. It is also women who have to scrounge, buy or beg for water, particularly when their usual sources run dry. There are no compelling international statistics, comparable to health statistics, documenting the labour burdens related to inadequate water provision. It is difficult for those who have never had to rely on public or other peoples' taps to appreciate how humiliating, tiring, stressful, and inconvenient this can be. (Bapat and Agarwal 71)

The amount of time spent completing the noted duties is a major source of time poverty, meaning that women who collect water have less time to do work that provides income. Women living in informal settlements spend up to four hours a day walking, waiting in queues, and carrying water. Jayashree Gautam Waghmare, a woman living in an informal settlement in

Pune, says, ““I used to drop my children at school and then go to fetch water around one o’clock in the afternoon. I used to finish filling water by five in the evening”” (quoted in Bapat and Agarwal 77). Research by the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) calculates that “reducing water collection to one hour a day would enable women to earn an additional \$100 a year depending on the enterprise – a very large implied income loss for households in an area of high poverty” (United Nations Development Program 48). Time poverty contributes to income poverty and reduces the time available for childcare, productive work, or rest. The amount of time spent collecting water limits women’s choice and independence. The UNDP explains:

Excessive time demands for essential labour...pose no-win choice dilemmas. Should a woman care for a sick child or spend two hours collecting water? Should girls be kept home from school to collect water, freeing time for mothers to grow food or generate income? Or should they be sent to school to gain the skills and assets to escape poverty? (United Nations Development Program 87)

The burden of providing water for their families not only taxes women physically, it is associated with emotional distress, insecurity, anxiety, and depression (Wutich 436). Amber Wutich contends that although men are aware when the household runs out of water, they experience less emotional distress than women because they do not have to deal with the daily issues of water needs, acquisition, and use.

### **Dirt Is a Fact and a Symbol**

The 2008 film, *Slumdog Millionaire*, chronicles the life of Jamal Malika, a Mumbai boy growing up in the slums. The film was wildly popular, grossing \$365,257,315 worldwide and winning eight Oscars (“Slumdog Millionaire”). In a particularly memorable scene, Jamal is shown cornered in a latrine by his friends staging a prank on him. The film cuts to a shot of a helicopter transporting a Bollywood star who Jamal is desperate to meet. The film cuts back to

Jamal standing on the toilet, which is a raised platform with a hole, staring down into the feces-filled pit. Jamal plugs his nose and leaps in. After a moment, he surfaces fully covered in shit.

Recurring images of the urban poor covered in filth or defecating in public, both of which appear in *Slumdog Millionaire*, wrongly substantiate caste (class) hierarchy. In *Castes of the Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Nicholas B. Dirks argues, “caste has become a central symbol for India, indexing it as fundamentally different from other places as well as expressing its essence” (Dirks 3). Linked to Hindu religious thought, caste is a system of social rank and often considered a form of social inequality.<sup>8</sup> People considered part of India’s lower caste system, usually referred to as untouchables, Harijans, or Dalits, are an example of an entire population of people inscribed as pollutants by Hindu religious thought.<sup>9</sup> According to Hindu beliefs, people are born as untouchables as punishment for sins committed in a previous life. Perceived as sinners, untouchables pose a threat to higher caste persons, as contact with the lower caste is considered contaminating (Subramaniam 23). In India, the caste system is used often to justify divisions of labor, to deny citizenship and other basic human rights to lower caste members, and to physically and geographically segregate lower caste members from the upper caste. Articulating the division of labor based on the caste system, V.S. Naipaul describes, “four men washing down the steps of this unpalatable Bombay hotel. The first pours water from a bucket, the second scratches the tiles with a twig broom, the third uses a rag to slop the dirty water down the steps into another bucket, which is held by the fourth” (Naipaul n.p.). Untouchables are expected to do jobs considered dirty and impure and consequently are perceived as contaminated by their work. For example, many untouchables are manual

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<sup>8</sup> Although the caste system is aligned with the Hindu faith typically, systems like it are practiced by people of other religions, such as Christianity and Islam.

<sup>9</sup> The term *Dalit* refers to the lowest caste Indian women (Subramaniam 1).

scavengers, a job that entails the illegal yet still practiced task of cleaning human excrement from roads and dry latrines.<sup>10</sup> The concept of “untouchability” was abolished in India's Constitution in 1947, meaning that the dominant castes cannot legally force untouchables to do dirty work only. Yet, government estimates suggest that there are about one million manual scavengers in India, of which 95% are women (Sadangi 225).

The urban poor living in informal settlements is made up primarily of lower caste members. Appadurai refers to the urban poor as “*citizens without a city*” because they often are unable to document their claims to housing, which results in “a general invisibility in urban life, making it impossible for them to claim any rights to such things as rationed foods, municipal health and education facilities, police protection, and voting rights” (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 26-27; emphasis in original). Residential segregation based on caste substantiates the upper caste inclination to view the lower caste as refuse or pollution.<sup>11</sup> Robert R. Higgins theorizes that when people are routinely identified as pollutants and reside in polluted spaces, both of which are common for untouchables, “pollution is” viewed as “‘in its place,’ and therefore is not as noticeable as an anomaly or as an aberrant thing” (Higgins 70). SPARC goes so far as to accuse the wealthy of treating the urban poor like toilets despite the urban poor’s (ironic) lack of access to toilets:

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<sup>10</sup> Sjaak Van Der Geest also considers the effects of “dirty work” while doing ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana. There, she learned of the night-soil collector, who is responsible for dumping the community’s latrine buckets and, as VanDer Geest writes, is “forced to work in the night because [his] labour [is] too offensive for the people of the day” (Van Der Geest 205). However, due to the social import of his job, the collector is able to charge high rates and make a respectable profit, thereby recasting dirty work as not only socially important but of economic value.

<sup>11</sup> In reference to water and sanitation problems in African countries, D. Soyini Madison writes, “We know that dirt is to be got rid of, but we tend to forget that dirt will dwell where water is inaccessible. Nor do we remember that when sanitation systems are impaired or nonexistent, dirt embraces disease. The Other bodies, the loathsome bodies – ... the body that smells of refuse... the bodies grotesquely ‘out of place’ – are the bodies that wrenching poverty will breed in its abominable lack. Disgust encircles these bodies with visceral loathing and fear – fear of nearness and the threat of contamination, loathing for the failure of these bodies to keep themselves out of sight” (Madison 153-154).

The poor themselves have been treated as a blemish. As a source of odors, of film, of darkness, indeed in some sense of evil itself... Their problems are treated generally as social embarrassments, their proximity is not desired, their needs are taken rarely into account... In the cities the poor are seen as the sources of the problem of the middle class. They are seen as bringing dirt, disorder, crime, stench and filth into the lives of the middle classes of the city. The poor are treated not merely as non-citizens but anti-citizens. (“Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers” para. 69)

As “anti-citizens,” it is difficult for the urban poor to leverage the right to privacy, including the right to defecate in private. The performance of shitting in public further inscribes the lower castes as untouchable. Summarizing Appadurai’s research on grassroots sanitation campaigns, Gay Hawkins reports:

Shitting in public, living your life in perpetual visibility, Appadurai argues, actually renders the slum dweller *invisible* to the state. In claiming the right to privacy, slum dwellers participate in a politics of recognition. To have privacy is to exist in the eyes of the state and this is the starting point for making claims for basic public services. (Hawkins, “Shit in Public” 8; emphasis in original)

Phaedra Pezzullo explains that the recurring view of specific polluting practices, such as defecating in public, “enables the categorization of entire populations... as potentially contaminating to the larger social body” (Pezzullo 68). For the urban poor, to leverage their right to defecate in private is to make claims to basic human rights and citizenship.

### **The Alliance**

A UNICEF report claims past approaches to sanitation management “viewed sanitation as a private household good rather than a social responsibility, often assuming communities were unwilling or unable to invest in sanitation” (United Nations Children’s Fund 7). In current approaches, NGOs emphasize the construction of public rather than private latrines, shifting the problem from that of the poor individual or family to that of the social infrastructure and environment, thereby charging communities to address their sanitation situation collectively. Several NGOs facilitate communities in the design, construction, and management of toilet

blocks in India. The National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF), the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers (SPARC), and Mahila Milan (“women together”) combine to form the group Alliance, which advocates for slum dwellers’ right to water and access to clean toilets.

Developed in 1975, the NSDF organizes protests, lobbies, and develops resettlement programs for slum dwellers. As of 2002, NSDF operated in 52 Indian cities with over 750,000 members (Burra, Patel, and Kerr 11). In 1984, SPARC developed from people’s dissatisfaction with educational and health projects conducted by particular NGOs. According to SPARC, certain NGOs were insensitive to the perspectives and needs of the poor. Mahila Milan, a predominately women’s organization, initiated in 1986, works very closely with NSDF. Mahila Milan’s efforts center on “local and self-organized saving schemes among the very poor” (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 21). These three organizations combine to form the Alliance, which is responsible for the large scale construction of sanitation blocks.

The prior experiences of the three groups in issues of housing, health, and financial self-reliance make latrine block construction a suitable project for the Alliance. According to Sheela Patel, the aims of the Alliance are to bring communities together, test new pro-poor policies, expand livelihood options, increase organizational membership, strengthen relationships with municipal authorities, and change attitudes and policies at national levels (Patel 125). The Alliance focuses on community latrines rather than toilets in individual households because space is limited in informal settlements, and thus, it is not always possible to install individual toilets. Community latrines require less space and encourage several households to use one latrine. The Alliance “believes that the existing strategies used by the poor are the most effective starting point for improvements” (Patel, Bolnick, and Mitlin 5). Appadurai informs:

Instead of relying on the model of an outside organizer who teaches local communities how to hold the state to its normative obligations to the poor, the Alliance is committed to

methods of organization, mobilization, teaching, and learning that build on what poor persons already know and understand. (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 28)

The Alliance also mobilizes community exchanges where one community shares with another tactics for urban development. SPARC describes the exchange process as “build[ing] upon the logic of ‘doing is knowing’” that offers both communities an opportunity “to look at their needs and how they might be better met” (Patel, Bolnick, and Mitlin 7). The Alliance’s “by and for the people” approach has been successful, and currently their toilet blocks serve hundreds of thousands of people in India (McFarlane, “Geographical Imaginations and Spaces of Political Engagement” 893).

Preparations for a toilet festival and the festival itself require a complex interplay of time and space, involving the use of tactics and strategies.<sup>12</sup> When trying to convince landowners of the necessity of toilet blocks, the urban poor use tactical performance. For example, the Alliance encourages landowners to allow latrine construction by arguing that the lack of toilets puts not only the health of the urban poor, but the entire population’s health at risk because the shit of the poor gets into the water of others. The urban poor contrive their own contamination so as to leverage access to the land. By embracing their own shit-producing bodies, the urban poor mobilize the repulsion the middle and upper classes hold toward the lower body in general and their bodies in particular. Their “contaminated” bodies serve as a communicative resource to enact powerful forms of advocacy and dissent. Such a tactic “testifies to how some activists...have challenged and changed the meanings of the world not through good reasons but through vulnerable bodies, not through rational arguments but through bodies at risk” (DeLuca

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<sup>12</sup> In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau distinguishes between “tactics” and “strategies” (de Certeau 38). According to de Certeau, those in positions of power use strategies to “articulat[e] an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed” (de Certeau 38). Strategies “privilege spatial relationships” and use the politics of space to gain power and communicate resistance (de Certeau 38). Those in less powerful positions draw upon tactics, which involve “a clever *utilization of time*” to gain validity and challenge the status quo (de Certeau 38-39; emphasis in original).

quoted in Pezzullo 129). This performance of the Alliance highlights the body as central to understanding the discursive and material conditions of informal settlements and provides an example of how the urban poor engage in the labor of political action.

Another tactic the Alliance uses is to stage toilet festivals as a celebration of community achievements rather than a protest against governmental and social injustices. Toilet festivals and tours offer the urban poor an opportunity to share with the larger public the fruits of their communal labors. In doing so, the urban poor not only present what they have learned, they represent themselves and their culture(s), their material conditions and power relations. The toilet festivals are political and provide productive and utopian modes for the urban poor to re-imagine and re-constitute their lives.

The Alliance's success has not come easily, and the organization has experienced many trials and errors in building toilet blocks. It has faced problems in obtaining permission to build toilet blocks, perfecting latrine design, motivating people to use toilets, and maintaining sanitation after construction. Obtaining permission to construct toilet blocks is difficult due to disputes concerning land and property rights. The urban poor often settle on other people's property, including land belonging to national institutions such as the Railways and Airport Authorities and the Port Trusts (Burra, Patel, and Kerr 14). Although the land is not being used otherwise, the state's recognition and legitimization of the "informal settlements in their illegal occupation of land would threaten the structure of legally held property" (McFarlane, "Sanitation in Mumbai's Informal Settlements" 91). Thus, it is imperative for the Alliance to obtain permission from landowners prior to constructing toilet blocks, as doing otherwise is illegal, and landowners have been known to tear down the illegal blocks.



Persuading landowners to allow the building of latrines on their land is difficult due to stereotypes attached to the urban poor. Landowners view the poor as “freeloaders” who irrationally moved from their villages to gain wealth in the already overcrowded city (Burra, Patel, and Kerr 14). To convince landowners of the necessity of toilet blocks, the Alliance explicates the public health risks created by slum dwellers defecating in the open. By connecting the unavailability of toilets for the urban poor to the health of middle and upper class citizens, the Alliance argues the lack of toilets is no longer an issue that affects slum dwellers only. The Alliance also attempts to convince authorities to extend sanitation services to the poor, arguing that an official may gain benefits “ranging from ethnic ties and availability of low-cost labour to the readiness of, in Mumbai’s case, the city’s largest voting population to support particular political candidates” (McFarlane, “Sanitation in Mumbai’s Informal Settlements” 91). However, even when authorities permit the building of toilet blocks, they often refuse to provide water connections. To address this problem, the Alliance now designs latrine blocks with large internal water tanks and experiments with designs that require little water (Burra, Patel, and Kerr 17).

In “Tools and Methods for Empowerment Developed by Slum and Pavement Dwellers’ Federations in India,” Sheela Patel outlines four “notes on the art of gentle negotiation” used to urge government staff “to stop seeing poor communities as problems and start seeing them as contributors to good solutions for city-wide problems” (Patel 128). The first piece of advice, “start small and keep pressing,” reminds slum dwellers that change is gradual, and that over time, they will “gain the confidence, persistence and visibility to press for the next level” (Patel 128). Patel believes that officials will see the changes made in and by the community, and “when they see things change,” they “might become support[ive]” (Patel 128.)

The second step is to “paint beautiful pictures” (Patel 128). Patel advises, “Sometimes, grassroots activism involves a great deal of scolding and finger-pointing: ‘Isn’t this awful!’ ‘Isn’t that shameful!’...A better approach is to kindle their imaginations by describing possibilities in ways that make clear how they can contribute” (Patel 128-129).

The third rule of gentle negotiation is to “know more than they do” (Patel 129). Patel recommends that the urban poor enter negotiations well prepared. She urges community organizations to “have data on all households in the settlement, with toilet construction or upgrading or new house costs worked out and tested, with knowledge of city infrastructure grids, and with examples of community-state partnerships in other cities” (Patel 129).

The fourth piece of advice is to “cut an attractive deal” by showing “local governments that entering into an unconventional toilet-building partnership...is realistic, even attractive proposition for solving big problems that confound municipalities” (Burra, Patel, and Kerr 26-27). In other words, partnerships between community organizations and local governments should appeal to government officials because such partnerships will save the city money by reducing construction and maintenance costs.

Another challenge the Alliance faces when constructing latrine blocks is creating a design that meets the needs of all community members. Early toilet block designs did not have separate entrances for men and women, men and women’s toilets faced each other, and children were expected to use the same facilities as adults. Due to lack of privacy, insufficient facilities, and harassment, women and children often avoided using the latrine blocks. Newer models offer separate entrances for men and women and include stalls for increased privacy. They also provide a place where women can wash their menstrual towels. Typically, poor women cannot afford commercial sanitary napkins or pads and use pieces of material or a towel instead. Latrine

designs that fail to incorporate a place for women to wash and dry menstrual towels result in the women having to reuse the soiled item, thereby risking illness and infection (“Incorporating Issues of Gender into Design of Latrine” 4). SPARC and Nirman, an NGO focused on slum housing issues, report toilets designed for use by the elderly and disabled. Other design innovations include better lighting and ventilation, storage, doors that swing both ways to aid the process of entering with buckets of water, back-to-back toilets, and pour-flush toilets that require minimal amounts of water. Making such innovations and improvements has taken time, and the Alliance hopes “each new toilet that is built is better than the last one” (Burra, Patel, and Kerr 27).

After community latrines are designed, a team works together to locate places to construct toilet blocks and then engages the community, especially women, to participate in the process. SPARC reports that the first three to five toilets are the most difficult to construct and take the longest time. Although mistakes are made, the Alliance considers the mistakes an important part of the process. Patel explains:

Learning for any individual generally means having to do something more than once and making mistakes before finally getting it right. This is also true of poor communities, but...to government officials mistrustful of community involvement in urban improvement, mistakes only confirm entrenched attitudes toward the poor as being ignorant or lazy...Poor communities are unable to experiment because they have no margin within their limited resources to absorb mistakes. This is one of the crises of poverty, and this is why these toilet projects make room for, and even encourage, mistakes. (Patel 126)

Throughout the process of building, decisions are reflected on, analyzed, and discussed so as to make improvements on the projects that follow. The process encourages the urban poor to develop skills, gain confidence, and share resources, which testifies to:

a logic of patience, of cumulative victories and long-term asset building, that is wired into every aspect of the activities of the Alliance. The Alliance maintains that the

mobilization of the knowledge of the poor into methods driven by the poor and for the poor is a slow and risk-laden process. (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 29)

Despite being slow and risky, the process often results in success. A leading builder of latrines in Pune, Savita Sonawane recalls, ““In the beginning, we did not know what a drawing or a plinth was. We did not understand what a foundation was or how to do the plastering. But as we went along, we learnt more and more and now we can build toilets with our eyes closed”” (quoted in Burr, Patel, and Kerr 20). Over time the same participants also learn how to deal with government officials, developing skills in “the gentle art of negotiation.”

Even after latrine blocks are built, some community members require encouragement to use them. Many of those who are accustomed to defecating in the open find using toilets inconvenient and dirty. According to Burra, Patel, and Kerr, “If you have squatted along an open drain all your life, it is hard to imagine toilets being clean places” (Burra, Patel, and Kerr 25). Another issue that keeps people from using the bathrooms is their location. The latrine block may not be located near people’s homes, and they must travel far and often wait in long lines to use the toilets. Jayashree Gautam Waghmare describes:

“There were public toilets, but they were some distance away – about half an hour walk. They used to be so dirty that we did not feel like using them. And there were such long queues! Instead of using those filthy toilets, we used to go on the tracks after ten at night or early in the morning at four or five o’clock.” (quoted in Bapat and Agarwal 77)

Even when community blocks are available, each toilet must serve at least fifty people (some sources claim that 500-1000 people might share a single toilet), making upkeep difficult (Bapat and Agarwal 79). Sangita Chavan, a woman living in the slum settlements in Pune claims, ““The toilets in our settlement are awful because they are not cleaned regularly. They are so dirty that when we squat inside, larvae crawl up our legs”” (quoted in Bapat and Agarwal 85). Community organizations hire people to clean the toilet blocks, but finding and collecting funds to pay for

the maintenance is challenging. Bapat and Agarwal interviewed slum dwellers who claimed the person hired to maintain the toilets often was unreliable, and even if dependable, he or she may not have access to the water necessary to clean the toilets and open the drains.<sup>13</sup>

### **Toilet Festivals as Image Theatre**

From the mid 1950's through his death in 2009, Augusto Boal directed theatre, theorized performance, and worked as a political activist. His work is recognized internationally, has inspired many, and is practiced in academic and nonacademic settings. In 1956, as the director of the Arena Theatre in São Paulo, Boal began to do work that led to the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). TO is a system of performance techniques that recognize theatre as political and engage participants in it so that they can rehearse for and activate social change. Games of the Oppressed, Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Newspaper Theatre, Invisible Theatre, Legislative Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, and Aesthetic Education of the Oppressed constitute the system of techniques “meant to be practiced *by, about* and *for* the oppressed, to help them fight against their oppressions and to transform the society that engenders those oppressions” (Boal, “Techniques” para. 1). At base, Boal’s method provides participants with tools that help them take action and solve problems. According to Boal, anyone can act, theatrically or in everyday life, although many are taught not to act or find it difficult or dangerous to do so. Boal’s objective, then, is to change passive spectators into not only actors – “subjects” and “transformers of the dramatic action” – but also spect-actors able to reflect on and learn from what they have done (Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* 122).

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<sup>13</sup> A related study concerns sanitation issues in the Republic of Benin, West Africa, where there is a water crisis and people have little access to latrines. Interviewees reported that improved safety, health, and social status are the benefits of having latrines. Prestige and pride served as the main motivators for adopting latrines, as it aligned the users with the urban elite and helped them avoid social embarrassment. They explained that latrines made them feel “good,” “settled,” and “complete” (Jenkins and Curtis 2449).

Although all TO techniques are useful in igniting social change, in my analysis of the Indian toilet festivals, I concentrate on Image Theatre. Boal developed Image Theatre in Peru, in 1973, as part of a national literacy campaign. The idea was to create a method of communication not reliant on spoken or written language, so as not to privilege “more verbally articulate people,” and so that people speaking different languages would be able to dialogue (Jackson xxiii). In Image Theatre, participants learn to sculpt the bodies of each other so as to create images that re/present a feeling, experience, oppression, or their view of a particular issue. Then, in various ways, the participants “dynamise” the images so as to learn something about what they have created as individuals, but more often as a collective.

One process of dynamisation consists of three stages. In the first stage, participants create images in response to a theme of oppression, which they show individually and then together, as a group of images. In this way, they “see what everybody thinks,” creating “‘a social’ vision that reveals how the particular theme influences or affects this particular community” (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* 177-178). In the second stage, the participants aim to link and inter-relate the images, creating “an organized, organic, social vision” that Boal also claims is “single, global, all-embracing” (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* 179). In the third stage, the participants explore the causes of the oppression by replacing figures of the oppressed with those of the oppressor. Boal suggests, “what is important is not to see how *one oppressed person* see *one oppressor*, but to find out how *the oppressed* see *the oppressors*” (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* 180-181; emphasis in original). Through the process of dynamisation, then, the spect-actors gain a broader view of their initial image, placing it in social context and conversation with other images.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Boal describes several different techniques of dynamisation in *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (174-202); and in *The Rainbow of Desire* (77-80).

Another process of dynamisation is called the “image of transition” (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* 185). The activity begins with the group developing a “real image” of an oppression they all face, after which they develop an “*ideal model*, in which the oppression will have been eliminated” (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* 185; emphasis in original). Then, the participants are asked to transition slowly from the real to the ideal image, placing them in juxtaposition with each other. As the participants move slowly from one position to the next, they are encouraged to identify and discover “liberation possibilities” (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* 186). The purpose of the dynamisation is to generate ways to transform the oppressive image into an ideal one.

In terms of Image Theatre, we might understand that an important aspect of Indian toilet festivals is the making and celebration of an ideal image. The festivals bring people together to view, reflect on, and celebrate something they needed and found a way to realize: a toilet. As the centerpiece of the festival, this ideal image resonates with additional positive consequences. For one, the toilet is treated as “a vital, central, respectable part of [the urban poor’s] public lives” (“Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers” para.77). Rather than hidden from view, the toilet is a visible “asset” that “the public should be proud of” (“Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers” para. 77). Pride in the toilet extends to pride in the community who found a way to build the needed toilets, thereby supporting their identity as a community able to work as a collective in productive ways (Burra, Patel, and Kerr 30).

A community toilet also demonstrates the ability of the urban poor to take action against political injustice and counters hegemonic notions of expertise, insisting that everyday life instills expertise in the bodies of those who built and use the toilets. At toilet festivals, the urban poor are the experts, as they not only have critical information about water and sanitation issues,

they have practical knowledge about the design, construction, and maintenance of toilets. As the urban poor express their knowledge and experience to others attending the festival, they challenge stereotypical inscriptions of the urban poor as ignorant and lazy. The realized-ideal image shows they are intelligent and motivated actors who have addressed a community problem and thereby effected social change.

By means of the toilet festival, then, the urban poor become a visible part of the public sphere, countering barriers of class and caste by performing “their competencies in public” (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 38). Appadurai explains:

Technical and cultural capital are generated collaboratively by [toilet festivals], creating leverage for further guerrilla exercises in capturing civic space and areas of the public sphere hitherto denied them. At work here is a politics of visibility that inverts the harmful default condition of civic invisibility that characterizes the urban poor. (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 38)

Further, the mere access to toilets helps the urban poor claim visibility, as recognition and prestige relies on “establishing distance from the basest of human products” (Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste* 56). As defecating in public renders slum dwellers invisible to the state, claiming the right to and using latrines renders them visible – as bodies that matter – and extends their claims to other basic public services.

Like the process of dynamisation, which transitions slowly from the real to ideal image, the urban poor recognize that change occurs slowly. For example, in Sheela Patel’s notes on the art of gentle negotiation, the urban poor are encouraged to proceed with patience and with what Appadurai describes as “a politics of accommodation, negotiation, and long-term pressure” (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 29). According to Patel, a politics of patience allows change to occur gradually and offers the urban poor time to develop and gain confidence in their skills.



Patel also encourages the urban poor to re/present community latrines as an ideal that benefits many people, supporting their inclination to invite politicians, businesspeople, and NGOs to participate in the festivals and thereby profit from them.

Toilet festivals as ideal images suggest that high profile performances motivate social change. Scholars who study social change often analyze high profile events and activities, aiming to understand their poetics, politics, and consequences. In his work on environmental activism, Kevin DeLuca concentrates on image events, which are protests that draw media attention, generate publicity, and help transform how people see the world. DeLuca claims that environmental movements “rely almost solely on image events to create social movements” (DeLuca 17). M. Lane Bruner focuses on image events that are carnivalesque in mode, the comic protests serving to indicate “windows of opportunity” in the prevailing political system (Bruner 143). Just as DeLuca and Bruner demonstrate the importance of high profile performances as catalysts or indicators of social change, viewing toilet festivals as realized-ideals expands our understanding of what constitutes social change and how it might be realized.

Another example of high profile events that aim to challenge the status quo are toxic tours, which are “noncommercial expeditions into areas that are polluted by toxins” (Pezzullo 5). Working to educate people about the dangers of industrial contamination, “toxic tours are motivated by community members’ collective desire to survive and resist toxic pollution through active participation in public life” (Pezzullo 6). According to Phaedra Pezzullo, the tours invite participants “*to be present* and, perhaps more importantly, *to feel present*” (Pezzullo 9; emphasis in original). Pezzullo argues that being present is a “mode of advocacy” that shapes “perceptions, bodies, and lives with respect to the people and places hosting the experience” (Pezzullo 9). She continues, “Through the rhetorical performance of a toxic tour, for example,

people, places, processes, and things may seem more tangible to us and, thus, we may be more persuaded to identify with or believe in their existence, their significance, and their consequence” (Pezzullo 9-10). Similarly, toilet festivals express a community’s desire to survive and resist urban poverty by making a change in their material conditions and by inviting others to witness, recognize, and participate in their efforts.

Led by slum dwellers or municipal commissioners, toilet festival tours move community members and government officials through a series of sites where new toilets have been built. Tour participants are provided with information on how the toilets were built, how water is provided, and how the structures are maintained and cleaned. Tourists also are encouraged to examine the toilets in detail, walking in and through stalls. As a high profile event, toilet festivals create opportunities for a wide range of people to interact with each other and encourage outsiders, particularly government officials, to *feel present* and identify with the experiences and lives of those living in the slums.

However, as with Image Theatre, toilet tours juxtapose real imagery and action with the ideal, potentially giving rise to a limitation or risk in the performance. Because of where the toilets are located, government officials and other visitors see the realities of living in informal settlements, recognizing (if temporarily) the difficult conditions in which people live. So, while the festivals might highlight an ideal actualized by the collective efforts of the urban poor, the very locale of that ideal may reinforce stereotypes of the urban poor as inferior (unclean, uneducated, unemployable). Conquergood draws on Tzvetan Todorov to remind us, ““The first, spontaneous reaction with regard to the stranger is to imagine him as inferior, since he is different from us”” (Todorov quoted in Conquergood 196). In other words, *feeling* with the poor in the present performance does not guarantee ongoing change, as the feeling may support errant

views of the poor and upstage the positive improvements they have made as well as the systematic oppressions they continue to suffer. This sense of superiority in the face of perceived inferiority is exacerbated at the end of the day when officials return to their homes, satisfied with the good work they have done and empathy they have experienced, urged to forget the conditions of the poor in the naturalized flush of their own toilet.

It is evident then that the Indian toilet festivals do not solve all the problems of the urban poor or even those associated with waste and sanitation. What they do achieve though is what a lot of good performance does; namely, they reveal the tense relationship between the “what is” realities of life and “what if” possibilities imagined in and explored through performance. In an effort to understand the tension between the indicative “what is” and subjunctive “what if,” it is useful to return to the third phase of the real-ideal exercise in Boal’s Image Theatre, specifically to the “image of transition.” In this phase, the participants experiment with different images and actions in an attempt to transit from the images of the real to those of the ideal. Thereby, they discover “liberation possibilities” (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* 186); that is, they discover how difficult it is to solve problems as a collective, and it is in light of this discovery that they develop skills necessary to enact social change.

Revisiting Patel’s notes on the art of gentle negotiation from the perspective of the image of transition, we learn that change occurs gradually, requires patience, and is a low profile, backstage activity. T. V. Reed agrees when he observes that performances, such as protests, boycotts, and strikes are “the products of usually rather undramatic, mundane daily acts of preparation” (Reed xv). Such acts set into a motion a “growing set of influences” that build a “repertoire of ideas, tactics, strategies, cultural forms, and styles” that people draw on to make

the high profile event (Reed xix). Similarly, Dwight Conquergood highlights the significance of backstage processes when preparing health theatre for the Hmong. He writes,

The critical/political component of popular theatre enacts itself in the process of developing the performances as much as, if not more than, in the final presentation to an audience. The backstage processes of researching and developing culturally appropriate materials along with the participatory involvement of the people are experiential/processual dimensions as significant as any explicit “message” communicated in the skit or scenario. (Conquergood 181)

In the case of the urban poor, the everyday practices necessary to build a community latrine are not only integral to making the final product, but allow people to learn skills and discover abilities they never knew they had, such as negotiating for land and materials, forming business relationships, learning construction techniques, and adapting toilet designs to new locales. It is not just the toilet festivals that activate social change then, it is also the processes and labors that go into creating the toilet blocks.

By linking the communicative practices of the urban poor to Boal’s Image Theatre, what constitutes activism is challenged to include the undramatic everyday actions that contribute to social change. Through front stage and backstage performances, the urban poor assume public roles and interact with government officials to articulate concerns and brainstorm solutions to sanitation problems in the slum areas of Mumbai and Pune. The festivals invert certain hierarchies and allow power to be negotiated while the processes leading up to the event help the urban poor develop skills and abilities they will use beyond the festival. Toilet festivals offer insight into how aesthetic performance can provide people with effective tactics for managing resources, communicating health issues, creating community, and imagining alternative ways of living. Furthermore, toilet festivals move beyond toilets as artifacts to a nuanced understanding of how they serve the people who make and interact with them. In these ways, toilets are linked intimately to socioeconomic status, aesthetics, and the performance of democratic citizenship.

## Chapter Four

### The *Cloaca* Carnival

**“[Cloaca is] more than an art piece. It is performance, and it is sculpture and installation.”**

(Wim Delvoye quoted in Ayerza para. 82)

Looking more like an assembly line than a human body, *Cloaca* sits in a large, aseptically clean room in the Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst (Museum of Contemporary Art) in Antwerp, Belgium. The expansive mechanism fills the otherwise empty gallery, measuring 38 feet in length and 5 feet 7 inches in width. At one end of the machine, a ladder climbs nearly 9 feet to a large steel bowl. A pipe extends from the bottom of the bowl and connects it to the first of six glass vats. The glass vats are spaced at an equal distance from one another and sit at eye-level with my 5 foot 3 inch frame. The height allows me to examine closely the varying amounts of yellowish substance in each container. Tubes and wires enter and exit the laboratory vats. Wires are connected to tubes that are connected to vats that are connected to wires. The tangled wiring reminds me of the back of my television set, the laboratory glassware causes flashbacks to science experiments in ninth-grade, and there are other pieces of hardware for which I imagine only plumbers know the proper terminology. At the end of the exhibit, at hip height, stands a round stainless steel table. Behind the table sits a metal box that scrapes a sludgy brown substance into a cylinder tube that resembles an instrument my mother used for cake decorating. Unlike the frosting my mother’s tool dispensed, this device dishes out feces, which fall onto the table below.

Twice a day, a blue light flickers on, indicating it is feeding time. Wim Delvoye, *Cloaca*’s creator, walks up five steps to a steel platform. He leans over, picks up a white linen napkin enclosing silverware, and then, very precisely, begins cutting food catered by a local

restaurant. Seared monkfish and fine herbs sautéed in butter and beer are layered with baby vegetables and shrimp and then cut into small, bite-sized pieces (Grimes para. 1). Each bite is placed in *Cloaca's* mouth, which looks like a steel bowl with a drain at the bottom. The opening leads to a blending mechanism that, when mixed with water, acids, bacteria, and enzyme liquids, chews the food. There are two chewers, one for large and one for small pieces of food, and they fill the museum space with sounds of hums and vibrations. Once chewed, the food enters *Cloaca's* stomach, which like the rest of *Cloaca's* organs is a glass vat. The laboratory glassware is filled with a pale yellow substance Delvoye refers to as ““soup”” (Delvoye quoted in Ayerza para. 28-30). This stomach soup contains many of the same elements as the human stomach, such as stomach salts, hydrochloric acids, and nitrogen gas, all of which are controlled and monitored by a computer. There are six glass vats in all, connected by tubes, pipes, pumps, and other electrical components. The stomach attaches to the small intestines, which is a peristaltic pump, and then to the large intestines complete with living bacteria necessary for digestion. The mixture of food and soup is transferred into a container called the separator that transforms the liquid into a solid by removing all liquids. The remainder is (like) excrement, and it falls into a hole where another mechanism pushes it through a long steel tube. Feces plop onto a round steel table for visitors to view and smell.

And so it goes, day after day, food, mouth, stomach, intestines, anus, feces, plop.

In 2000, the Belgian neo-conceptual artist Wim Delvoye unveiled *The Cloaca Original*, the first of his seven defecating machines, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp (Criqui 1).<sup>15</sup> After eight years of collaborating with academics in fields as diverse as gastroenterology, computer technology, and plumbing, Delvoye succeeded in creating a

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<sup>15</sup> In addition to appearing in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp, Delvoye's machines have appeared in The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, Brussel's Casino de Luxembourg, the Migros Museum in Zurich, and Kunsthalle Wien, an institution in Vienna for temporary exhibitions.

mechanism that replicates the human digestive system and is controlled by a computer that Delvoye manipulates remotely via the internet. Delvoye's defecating machines include *The Cloaca Original*, *Cloaca - New & Improved*, *Cloaca Turbo*, *Cloaca Quattro*, *Cloaca N° 5*, *Super Cloaca*, and *Personal Cloaca*. The models vary in size and more advanced versions digest at quicker rates. Built from laboratory glassware, electric pumps, plastic tubing, and computer monitors, *Cloaca* chews, swallows, digests, and eliminates using biological, chemical, and bacterial enzymes to mimic the human gastrointestinal system. *Cloaca* is fed a variety of foods and, like humans, is capable of experiencing digestive problems, such as diarrhea, constipation, and vomiting. *Cloaca* is fed two meals a day, and visitors are invited to watch and smell the digestion and elimination process. They also can purchase *Cloaca* feces in a vacuum-sealed bag along with a certificate describing what the machine ate. Additional products are available from Cloaca, Ltd., a corporation that markets *Cloaca* tee-shirts, action figures, feces, and toilet paper. In these ways, *Cloaca* is a work of art and science, a technological invention, and a business venture.

In this chapter, I proceed with a description of Delvoye's corpus of work, paying close attention to how *Cloaca* corresponds with his other artwork. Next, I examine the various interpretations of *Cloaca* regarding what they reveal about technology, art, excrement, and the relationship between humans and machines. I argue *Cloaca* is a carnivalesque experience and mode of understanding, in Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, encouraging the rehearsal of counter ideas and behaviors. Connecting the carnivalesque with the monster, I argue that the various and divergent responses to *Cloaca* are not surprising, as multiplicity evokes and is evoked by the monstrous or what we deem to be monstrous.

## Pissing in the Wind: The Artwork of Wim Delvoye

Wim Delvoye was born in 1965, in Wervik, a small town in West Flanders, Belgium. Growing up, he visited museums and art exhibits regularly with his parents and eventually attended a local art school in Ghent, Belgium. In an interview with *Border Crossings*, Delvoye explains, “Unlike most artists I admire, I am a product of an art school. I went to art school, I learned to paint....I know how to draw. I also know how to draw in an academic way” (Delvoye quoted in Enright para. 29). However the academy’s emphasis on the “reductivist paradigms of 20th-century art” frustrated Delvoye who “sought to create an art that appeals to the people” by creating art “rich in the folklore and kitsch” that Delvoye saw as condemned by the academy (Delvoye quoted in Amy para. 7).

Often described as a neo-conceptual artist, Delvoye creates pieces that feature a theory, concept, or idea. Sol LeWitt, a prominent conceptual artist in the U.S. during the 1960’s, writes, “When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art” (LeWitt para. 2). Conceptual art gained popularity in the 1950’s and 1960’s and emerged as a reaction against formalism, or the conception and evaluation of the art object based on elements of form only. Benjamin Buchloh explains:

Because the proposal inherent in Conceptual Art was to replace the object of spatial and perceptual experience by linguistic definition alone (the work as analytic proposition), it thus constituted the most consequential assault on the status of that object: its visuality, its commodity status, and its form of distribution. (Buchloh 107)

Delvoye’s work reflects on the commodification of art, considers the role (or the death) of the artist as creator, and attempts to subvert the museum as the locus and arbiter of successful art.

Early in his career, Delvoye painted over wallpaper and carpets by coloring in the existing patterns. Many of Delvoye’s projects incorporate utilitarian objects that he decorates,



thereby integrating fine and folk art. Delvoye is compelled in particular by Gothic arts and crafts and frequently implements one of the four primary crafts of the Gothic period: frescos, panel paintings, manuscript illumination, and stained glass. In 1990, Delvoye created *Mosaic*, a symmetrical display of printed and glazed tiles featuring photographs of Delvoye's excrement in highly ornamental patterns. *Marble Floors*, an exhibit similar to *Mosaic*, presents photographs of precision cut salami and ham arranged in geometric patterns based on Italian Baroque and Islamic motifs. In 2001, Delvoye collaborated with a radiologist to create *Gothic Works*. For this exhibition, Delvoye and several of his friends painted themselves with small amounts of barium and performed explicit sexual acts in medical X-ray clinics. Delvoye used the X-ray scans to fill gothic window frames. As evident in *Gothic Works*, *Marble Floors*, and *Mosaic*, Delvoye often pairs unlikely entities, creating surprising and refreshing juxtapositions that challenge the elitism of art and the art object. Other pieces by Delvoye feature soccer goals made from stained glass, concrete mixers made from intricately carved mahogany, and butane gas containers covered in Delft inspired decorations.

*Art Farm*, one of Delvoye's most notable exhibits uses parody to challenge the commodification and elitism of art. Starting in 1992, Delvoye, a practicing vegetarian, began to tattoo pigskins received from slaughterhouses in the U.S. In 1997, he switched to live pigs, a process that required him to sedate, shave, and apply Vaseline to the pigs prior to tattooing them. *Art Farm* pigs are tattooed with various icons, such as skulls and crossbones, Harley Davidson logos, religious symbols, Disney Princesses, and Louis Vuitton insignia. Interested in the idea that "the pig would literally grow in value," both in physical and economic terms, Delvoye started a pig farm to raise and care for his tattooed pigs (Delvoye quoted in Laster para. 2). Due to restrictions in the U.S. regarding animal welfare, Delvoye moved his *Art Farm* to China where

regulations are less strict. Although Delvoye prefers to exhibit live pigs, many museums are unable to accommodate live animals and so he exhibits the remains of dead ones. When one of his pigs passes, Delvoye either stuffs the pig's body or preserves the skin, hanging it on a wall or stretching it over a canvas. Delvoye's live pigs, stuffed pigs, and pigs' skins are available for purchase, and while collectors have purchased live pigs, no one has opted to take one home (Laster para. 11). With *Art Farm*, then, Delvoye places fine and folk art, human and animal body decor, the museum, farm, and industry in intimate conversation, thereby extending the limits of our experience and understanding of art and the other noted categories.

*Cloaca* is not Delvoye's first piece of scatological artwork. Delvoye first broached the scatological theme in 1992, with *Mosaic*. That same year, he created *Rose des Vents I*, which in French means compass or points of a compass. The sculpture consists of "four angelic male figures" standing atop a pedestal with "their backs to each other, bending over slightly, pressing their hands like binoculars to their eyes; the public is invited to gaze at the stars through a tube connecting their eyes with their arse" (Roelstraete 56). Asking visitors to gain "compass" and "direction" by peering through a guy's arse is funny, of course. It also prompts themes of voyeurism and eroticism, and levels the upper regions of the body with the lower, thereby questioning the presumed superiority of head, mind, intellect, and sight (as distinct from the other senses). Three years later, Delvoye revealed *Rose des Vents II*, which features an angel pissing in the wind. Like so much of Delvoye's work, the piece is ironic in that the seemingly ineffectual act of "pissing in the wind" is not ineffectual at all. Rather, a light-hearted battle between high and low cultural expressions is staged, the profane piss arcing back in the wind to defile the sacred angel. The final exhibit in the *Rose des Vents* series was released in 1995, and shows four figures gazing at each other's anuses. One year prior to the first *Cloaca* exhibit,

Delvoye created *Anal Kisses*, which displays kiss prints on hotel stationary, the romantic imagery made by putting lipstick on an anus and the anus imprinting the stationary with a kiss. Like the *Rose des Vents* series, *Anal Kisses* links the mouth and the anus, with an affectionate nod toward the anus, or so argues Dieter Roelstraete who argues the anus, unlike the head, does not differentiate between gender, race, age, or class. In line with Delvoye's other works, *Anal Kisses* embraces lowbrow cultural expression and challenges the limited perspective of the highbrow art world.

Many of Delvoye's art projects, including *Cloaca*, reflect influences of mass production by explicitly referencing commercial goods. The *Cloaca* logo, for example, appears on Delvoye's website, on items sold by Cloaca, Ltd., and in numerous documents about *Cloaca*. The logo itself cites visual elements from other logos, such as Mr. Clean, Ford, and Coca-Cola. It shows Mr. Clean folding his arms over the word *Cloaca*, which is scrolled in cursive and encased in a blue and white oval, the latter nearly identical to the Ford logo save for the cartoonish intestines hanging down from it. Delvoye chose the name *Cloaca* because it “use[s] the same letters as Coca-Cola” and sounds like the name of a car popular at the time, the Renault Laguna. (Delvoye quoted in Ayerza para. 96). Just as a car manufacturer develops new car models, Delvoye develops multiple models of *Cloaca*, each model aiming to become more efficient at replicating the digestive system.

By citing consumer brands, *Cloaca* parodies the relationship between art and consumerism. In an interview with Robert Enright, Delvoye declares, “[Art] is rarely art before it becomes a commodity” (Delvoye quoted in Enright para. 6). Delvoye's comment, like his artwork, calls attention to how art is a mass-produced product sold for profit (via books, card, calendars, and what not) despite the long tradition of claims separating art from the commercial

world. Stefan Beyst is of the latter camp when he argues that Delvoye is an entrepreneur more than an artist because he markets his work to a broad audience, and “he no longer creates with his own hands – at the handicraft level – but has his works executed by a whole bunch of specialists” (Beyst para. 10) – just as did Rabelais or Rodin, we might remind Beyst.

### **Divergent Views of *Cloaca***

Although most critics are willing to accept *Cloaca* as art, they vary widely on how it functions as art. Some critics interpret *Cloaca* as a statement that art is shit. Art critic Ben Lewis claims Delvoye’s “silly art...satirizes the art world, with its inflated prices and daft intellectual cul-de-sacs. *Cloaca* makes the ultimate criticism of modern art – that most of it is crap; that the art world has finally disappeared up its own backside” (Lewis para. 3). Similarly, Carol Lu, an independent curator and art writer based in Beijing, argues that *Cloaca* parodies the commercialization of art, which is on the increase as a result of the dotcom boom. Lu writes, “During an era when everything could potentially carry a price tag as an art object, *Cloaca* and its wide acceptance and popularity were a parody of the art system itself and what was considered valuable at the time. It mocked the very structure that supported its presentation and operation” (Lu para. 4).

Whereas Lewis and Lu interpret *Cloaca* as commentary on the state of art, other critics question the meaning of shit as represented and produced by *Cloaca*. Delvoye is not the first artist to incorporate shit into his artwork. However, as the Adjunct Curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, Gerardo Mosquera, points out, rarely is actual shit exhibited in a museum. When it is displayed, it is “most often aseptically framed, hidden from our noses” (Mosquera 83). However, *Cloaca* produces shit we can smell, that smells like shit, and, according to both Mosquera and artist-critic Adrian Dannatt, *Cloaca*’s ability to do so is

extraordinary. For Dannatt, *Cloaca* produces ““real fake shit valuable for its inauthenticity”” (Dannatt quoted in Mosquera 83). That is, *Cloaca*’s feces are valuable precisely because they are not real. Rather, they are human-made machine-made imitations that then testify to man’s ability to control nature or natural processes through technological innovation. Such achievements are not realized by the production and display of real shit, which any (healthy) person can do whenever “nature calls.” As Mosquera points out:

The creation of this machine as a work of art constitutes an epitome of our civilization. Its meaning comes from combining art, science and technology (the supreme spaces of intellectual sophistication) in order to artificially produce what is semantically considered their opposite: the least legitimated product of the human body (the dark side of human perfection). (Mosquera 84)

The “dark side of human perfection” that Mosquera mentions is pursued further by additional critics compelled by the *Cloaca* enigma.

Whether we understand the shit to be real or fake, *Cloaca* confronts the taboo of shit and other bodily functions. Dan Cameron, then a Senior Curator of New York’s New Museum, writes, “by replicating one of our most crucial biological functions, Delvoye forces viewers both to consider our social discomfort with such functions and to question the elaborate cultural mechanisms that we have constructed to keep them from view” (Cameron, “Wim Delvoye” para. 4). In the spirit of Brechtian alienation (to critique capital alienation in modernity), Delvoye creates an elaborate mechanism to critique our use of similar mechanisms (discursive as well as material) to conceal corporeal functions. Thereby, Delvoye calls attention to the corporeal body and our fears and phobias regarding it. By valuing the corporeal in his work, Delvoye enacts a “commitment to the problem of the real” (Cameron, “The Thick of It” 23).

Dieter Roelstraete echoes Cameron’s view when he situates Delvoye’s work as part of a movement that seeks the ““return of the real’ – of art and theory that seek to be grounded in

actual bodies and social sites,” as compared to transcending them through art (Roelstraete 50). Roelstraete calls on art critic Hal Foster to specify the “return of the real” as the return of the most challenged and repressed qualities of human experience, which are typically bodily in nature. Roelstraete explains most artwork that embraces the corporeal explores transgressive forms of abject sexuality whereas Delvoye’s work marks “the complete (and successful) separation of scatological behavior on the one hand, and sexual perversion on the other” at a time that is the “most oversexed of eras” (Roelstraete 54). In Roelstraete view, *Cloaca*’s separation of shit from sex suggests that shit is shit and nothing more or less.

Another aspect of *Cloaca* that has generated a lot of conversation among art critics is its use of technology. Returning to Cameron, he observes that despite our discomfort learning technology, we embrace it because it makes life easier for us, it is practical and useful. *Cloaca* is unsettling then because although a technological spectacle, it is useless, and its “uselessness is the only reason for its existence, which leads to the question of whether or not the technology employed is being wasted” (Cameron, “The Thick of It” 25). Cameron observes that if *Cloaca* produced usable kidneys, for instance, its value would not be questioned, whereas its production of shit is queried by critics because of social taboos regarding the corporeal body and its “waste.” The “uselessness” of *Cloaca* then challenges what we deem useful regarding the body, technologies, consumable products, and also art. As Mosquera articulates, “Art is a haven where almost everything is possible and accepted. What is useful about art is precisely its uselessness, its impracticality,” because it boldly questions what we view and enact as useful and practical (Mosquera 83).

*Cloaca* also troubles conventional categories by merging the mechanical and human. In an interview with Josefina Ayerza, Delvoye claims *Cloaca* is a “live thing” because it contains

live bacteria and other organisms (Delvoye quoted in Ayerza para. 2). By advancing *Cloaca* as living, Delvoye challenges prevailing notions regarding what it means to be alive. In agreement, Cameron observes that “*Cloaca* confronts the contemporary state of confusion regarding when or where human life begins and ends” (Cameron, “The Thick of It” 29). Martijntje Smits adds to the conversation by pointing out that the development of life-like machines provokes both fascination and fear. On the one hand, it confirms we can manipulate if not also control nature. On the other hand, by doing so, we violate what many view as natural laws, thereby potentially releasing “unforeseeable powers and dangers” (Smits 492). In broad terms, then, *Cloaca* enacts the age-old battle between science and religion as played out through art.

The various views of the relationship between *Cloaca*, the body, and technology find further elaboration in Michel Foucault’s concept of bio-power or the “diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault, “The History of Sexuality” 140). For Foucault, bio-power is propagated in and through various institutions – such as the family, educational systems, hospitals, and law enforcement – using discourse and practice to recruit bodies to adopt and make said techniques their own; to be subject of and to them. In U.S. culture, our typical view and enactment of personal hygiene offers a good example of bio-power in operation. Starting broadly, Joshua Gunn tracks the “the emergence of modern society” with “the arrival of waste management, a critical technology that began, predictably, with decrees from the State, but which, gradually over time, became an abstract, disembodied means of social control” (Gunn 84). That is, the visible management of waste by the State – thereby deeming it a worthy practice in promoting health – is taken up and internalized by individuals who survey and monitor their own practices of personal hygiene as well as those of

others. Clearly, the processes of panoptic surveillance play a key role in the performance and maintenance of disciplinary technologies of bio-power.

*Cloaca* enacts bio-power by displaying the gastrointestinal processes of the body in a disciplined way that prompts at least ocular collusion on the part of the viewers. With its sleek, stainless steel design, assembly-line action, and use of advanced technologies, *Cloaca* adopts a modernist attitude and aesthetic (Rutsky 9). As Rutsky explains, modern art is “subject...to a standardization and rationalization similar to that of the Fordist factory,” and “at the level of use,” it is “conceptualized in practical or functional terms...stripping it of superfluous ornamental and ritual value” (Rutsky 10). Just as an assembly-line divides complex tasks into singular simple ones that can be performed and monitored easily, *Cloaca* parses out each stage of the gastrointestinal process, assigning each part of the machine a repetitive job it performs in full view of museum visitors. Computers further regulate and standardize the process. As a machine, a body machine, that divides and externalizes each part of the gastrointestinal system, *Cloaca* upholds a modernist-positivist-bio-power ideology that the human body is an object that can be known, controlled, and perfected. Further, by putting the system on display, *Cloaca* involves the audience in it, encouraging them to participate in the surveillance of bodily processes, thus implicating them in the governance of hygiene. *Cloaca* exemplifies how “the individual is carefully fabricated in [the social order], according to a whole technique of forces and bodies” (Foucault, “Discipline and Punish” 217).

On the other hand, while *Cloaca* might appear to be a highly regulated minimalist body machine, it also is a machine that produces feces in a museum. As Cameron and Mosquera observe, it is a machine about waste and unnecessary excess. It is a useless machine, which, due to the museum context, it highlights in a parodic-ironic way. While most art, modern or



otherwise, might be said to be useless, not all art reflexively comments on (its) uselessness. *Cloaca* does reflect on its uselessness by means of what it produces, where. *Cloaca* is also less predictable than we might imagine. While it feeds and excretes twice a day at the same times each day, the *Cloaca* body is constantly in flux as bacteria reproduces and acids churn to transform its food into excrement. Also like the human body, the type of food *Cloaca* eats affects the consistency and smell of its feces, and the machine can suffer from illnesses, such as diarrhea and constipation. In these ways, *Cloaca* appears to have a quite fickle constitution, revealing a body that is unfinished, unpredictable, and not entirely controllable.

### **Carnival Laughter and the Grotesque Body of *Cloaca***

In *Rabelais and His World*, Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin traces the carnival from the Dionysian festivities of the Greeks and the Saturnalia of the Romans to the High Middle Ages. Licensed by authorities, folk carnivals provided a temporary relief from everyday labors and a break from conventional rules and restrictions. The carnivals included large feasts, lots of alcohol, fornication, bawdy humor, and mockeries of figures of all kinds, but especially figures of authority. According to Bakhtin, the carnival “embraces all the people,” and “during carnival there is a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men and of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life” (Bakhtin 7, 15). The carnival then is a shared public event where people perform actions that temporarily level distinctions of category, particularly those of class. The town fool is crowned, the lord is mocked, and pigs are paraded as humans. The carnival is “a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings....it is...a ‘world inside out’” (Bakhtin 11).

For Bakhtin, the carnival's potential for transformation is the result of carnival laughter, which provides audiences with a new perspective from which to evaluate their social world.

Bakhtin claims:

Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man. It is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter. (Bakhtin 66)

Bakhtin takes laughter seriously, understanding it as a way to make sense of the world. Bakhtin explains that during the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, laughter was disciplined if not censored by religious, feudal, and state institutions. However, as Bakhtin tracks, laughter “made its unofficial but almost legal nest under the shelter of almost every feast, therefore, every feast in addition to its official, ecclesiastical part, had yet another folk carnival part whose organizing principles were laughter and the material bodily lower stratum” (Bakhtin 82).

Bakhtin describes carnival laughter as universal, liberating, and related to people's unofficial truth. First, carnival laughter was universal, directed at all aspects of life and all types and classes of people. Bakhtin explains, “[Laughter] was directed at the whole world, at history, at all societies, at ideology” (Bakhtin 84). Second, because carnival laughter was restricted, it came to represent liberation and freedom. Bakhtin states:

Throughout the year there were small scattered islands of time, strictly limited by the dates of feasts, when the world was permitted to emerge from the official routine but exclusively under the camouflage of laughter. Barriers were raised, provided there was nothing but laughter. (Bakhtin 90)

A third trait of carnival laughter was its ability to reveal a new “social consciousness of all people” (Bakhtin 92). According to Bakhtin, carnival laughter could overcome fear and “open men's eyes on that which is new” (Bakhtin 94). He explains, “It was understood that fear never

lurks behind laughter...and that hypocrisy and lies never laugh but wear a serious mask.

Laughter created no dogmas and could not become authoritarian; it did not convey fear but a feeling of strength” (Bakhtin 95). Festival humor inspired and liberated people, as it leveled hierarchies and provided individuals with new perspectives of the world.

An important aspect of carnival and carnival laughter is the grotesque body, which revels in the bodily practices and discourses of the lower body stratum, such as eating, drinking, fornication, and defecation. Bakhtin writes:

Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world...the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essences as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body. (Bakhtin 26)

The grotesque body celebrates excess and blurs and extends boundaries. By reveling in bodily practices, the grotesque body levels hierarchies as it encourages an awareness of similarity among humans. The grotesque body insists we are all similar by pointing out that everyone has a body that eats, excretes, eventually dies, and decays – ever unfinished, ever creating processes that are celebrated. Bakhtin explains that during the Middle Ages, excrement, for example, held a different symbolic significance than it does today. Rather than view excrement as waste, people viewed it as an “essential element in the life of the body and of the earth in the struggle against death” (Bakhtin 224). For those living in the Middle Ages, excrement was productive. In fact, the ingestion of animal intestines was a common ritual during feasts. Bakhtin observes, “there are no intestines without dung” and by ingesting dung via ingesting the intestines “the limits between the devouring and the devoured body are erased; the contents of the animal

intestine contribute to the fecal matter in the human bowels. Animal and human organs are interwoven into one indissoluble grotesque whole” (Bakhtin 223). By embracing the grotesque body, the carnival levels hierarchies, in this case the hierarchy between human and animal.

In their analysis and application of Bakhtin’s concepts of carnival, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White agree with the commonly held view of carnival; namely that, as a particular event, carnival frequently upholds the social hierarchy it temporarily topples. However, they also point out that over time carnival can prove to “act as a *catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle*” (Stallybrass and White 14; emphasis in original). Their observation is based on their understanding of carnival as a “*mode of understanding*” embedded in certain practices and discourses that over time gain in social energy and relevancy to effect changes. (Stallybrass and White 6; emphasis in original). In their study, the authors also apply the carnival mode of understanding as an analytic, finding and articulating cultural categories, symbolic meanings, and social relations that are carnival-like. Below, I apply carnival as a mode of understanding to argue that *Cloaca* embraces the carnival mode itself, resulting in a performance that produces ideas and practices that counter norms regarding what constitutes art, bodies, and how people experience museums.

Like carnival, *Cloaca* embraces excess. In size, *Cloaca* is huge, standing nearly 9 feet tall and ranging 38 feet in length. To build the monster required an immense amount of time and money, intelligence, skill, and labor on the part of many people, the pay-off being a “useless” machine that shits. So much pissing in the wind; in short, excessive. Further, the amount of references (as well as food) the machine gobbles up and excretes is gargantuan, ranging from the citation of prior scatological pieces, such as Duchamp’s *Fountain*, Manzoni’s *Merda d’Artista*, and Delvoye’s own works, to the citation of commercial products, such as Mr. Clean, Coca-Cola,

Laguna, and Ford, to, in design and materials, the citation of factories, kitchens, and bathrooms. The countless citations create an atmosphere of abundance and provide viewers multiple points of entry into the piece, encouraging them to participate in constructing meaning precisely because there are so many meanings possible. In this way, *Cloaca* enacts the “double aspect of the world and human life” (Bakhtin 6).

*Cloaca* also reveals and revels in the excessive double body by juxtaposing multiple and often incongruent images, the one un/crowning the other. As Mosquera, Cameron, and Roelstraete observe, in *Cloaca*, machine and body inter-penetrate each other. While the slick machine in the aseptically clean gallery boasts of the scientific and technological prowess of rational man, its very product – “the least legitimated product of the human body,” as Mosquera points out (Mosquera 84) – mocks the boast. The low body poos on the high, thereby knocking the machine down to its raucous level. *Cloaca*’s upper crust cuisine meets a similar fate, transformed as it is into low body feces, which is packaged and sold to the museum masses. These among other incongruities testify to *Cloaca*’s embrace of the carnival mode, exciting a critical frame by which to understand art, science and technology, and diverse bodies and their products.

Just as carnival turns social structures upside down, *Cloaca* challenges museum norms. Unlike a painting or a sculpture, *Cloaca* is “a live thing” that must be tended to (Ayerza para. 2). To insure its life, specifically the life of its intestinal bacteria, the electricity in the museum must remain on at all times. Further, the machine must be fed twice a day, and depending on what it is fed, the color and quantity of the soup in the vats change along with the consistency and smell of the feces. As a result, *Cloaca* upsets the museum visitor’s typical relationship to art, highlighting the ever-changing reality of art in explicit ways and appealing to our olfactory and acoustic as

well as ocular senses. As a humorous side note, in an interview with Ayerza, Delvoye recalls that visitors vary in their response to the smell of the feces. While some people find the aroma unbearable, others are disappointed it isn't more fragrant (Ayerza para. 34).

Like carnival laughter teamed with the grotesque body, *Cloaca* liberates shit from fear. Typically, people are taught to fear feces because if mismanaged it can threaten their health. *Cloaca's* logo, an image of Mr. Clean with cartoon-like intestines, challenges the common perception that shit is dangerous in at least two ways. First, Mr. Clean is a symbol of cleanliness, as he and his product promise to protect people from germs and other polluting substances. In this instance, Mr. Clean liberates shit from fear by reminding us that we have developed products to address the threat feces pose. Second, *Cloaca's* Mr. Clean is a self-parody, mocking our paranoia regarding shit and more broadly dirt. With his bulging biceps that strain against his bright white tee-shirt, Mr. Clean appears Super Serious about Fighting Dirt while his cartoon-like intestines expose the fiction of the fear he represents. *Cloaca's* logo pokes fun at official discourses that advance puritanical views and practices of not only hygiene but, within the context of the museum, art too.

The ingredient list that accompanies a package of *Cloaca* feces is another way the fear of feces is transformed into celebration or at least it is repurposed as bodily production rather than bodily waste. Each package of *Cloaca* feces is sold with an ingredient list that notes all the food items *Cloaca* was fed to create the particular feces. Names of bacteria and other gastrointestinal terms are not listed. Rather, the entries are familiar foods people eat with pleasure. As a result, *Cloaca's* feces are associated with pleasure rather than pollution; with fulfilling desire rather than signaling lack; with a bodily creation fashioned from mixing ingredients rather than bodily waste.

*Cloaca* represents a grotesque body by placing emphasis on the lower body stratum, celebrating excess, and highlighting similarities among all humans. Mary Russo describes the grotesque body in opposition to the classical body, observing:

The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek; it is identified with the “high” or official culture of the Renaissance and later, with the rationalism, individualism, and normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie. The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official “low” culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation. (Russo 8)

As a grotesque body, *Cloaca* emphasizes the lower body stratum and orifices over the upper regions. The mouth and the anus, for example, are areas on the machine that invite audience interaction. Visitors are encouraged to participate in *Cloaca*'s feedings by placing food in its mouth. On the other end, *Cloaca*'s feces sit openly on a table, tempting visitors to take a close look or take in a deep breath. *Cloaca* is fun and irreverent, as it not only accentuates bodily openings and secretions, it celebrates them. It is pleasurable to witness others take their first whiff of *Cloaca* ca-ca and see their faces scrunch up with disgust and delight. It is exciting to watch *Cloaca* soup change from pale yellow to deep brown, to see the sludge push through a tube to form a turd, to identify pieces of corn in the poo, and to commemorate the performance by purchasing a package of *Cloaca* feces. While uppercase-A Art is uncrowned by this final marketing move, the travesty elevates shit to something of value, associating it with art, science, and technology as well as a product one can purchase.

*Cloaca* also performs a leveling function by highlighting the similarities rather than the differences between humans. Shit is the great social leveler in that everyone regardless of class, race, or gender shits.<sup>16</sup> It is democratic in the way death is democratic, based solidly in the

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<sup>16</sup> In *Toilets Around the World*, Morna E. Gregory and Sian James remind us that the “toilet transcends all race, religion, age and social class. From the most impoverished to the highest royalty, each and every one of us bows to the basics of bodily function” (Gregory and James 6).

corporeal reality we all share. No surprise, it was for this reason that the nineteenth century bourgeois invented the flushing toilet, aiming to distance themselves from corporeality and its waste and thereby distinguish themselves from the feces-producing proletariat.

*Cloaca* also performs a leveling function by “(con)fusing” the animate and inanimate (Toffoletti 2); or, as Donna Haraway would have it, integrating living organism and machine to produce a hybrid, namely, the cyborg (Haraway 149). In her seminal research on the cyborg, Haraway describes it as partial, ironic, intimate, perverse, “oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence” (Haraway 151). She claims cyborgs blur the public and private, rework the relationship between nature and culture, and question when and where human life begins and ends (Haraway 151). As with posthumanism, the cyborg challenges the sanctity of the human as a self-contained being and thus levels the relationship between humans, animals, machines, and other inanimate objects, much like the carnival.<sup>17</sup> In a similar vein and in the mode of the carnival, *Cloaca* complicates what constitutes a living being and thus asks visitors to consider the relationship between humans and technologies (Pepperell 177). Perhaps the most significant link between the cyborg body and *Cloaca* is the way both violate boundaries due to their fluidity and openness to diverse interpretations, much like Bakhtin’s description of the grotesque body. By embracing the carnival mode, *Cloaca* performs a leveling function and counters norms regarding what constitutes human life, art, bodies, and how people experience museums.

### **Performing the Carnavalesque Monster**

In carnival, it is common for people to wear masks that, for example, combine the features of a human and an animal, the created monster crossing normative boundaries between

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<sup>17</sup> Pepperell defines posthuman as a time when “humans are no longer the most important things in the universe,” where “all technological progress of human society is geared towards the transformation of the human species as we know it,” and where “complex machines are an emerging form of life” (Pepperell 177).



the pair and transforming the terror of monsters “into something gay and comic” (Bakhtin 39). Such comic monsters are carnivalesque, re/articulating cultural categories, symbolic meanings, and social relations. In this section, I define monster and draw on Martijntje Smits’s monster theory to better understand how people cope with monsters, such as the comic carnival monster that is *Cloaca*.

Monster theory seeks to understand phenomena that violate boundaries and evoke multiple interpretations. Smits’s monster theory derives from Mary Douglas’ ideas concerning purity and danger. Douglas argues that ideas of pollution emerge in a culture when phenomena do not fit into established categories of association and meaning. We understand “dirt,” for instance, as “matter out of place,” an ever-evolving concept that is contextual (Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 44). For example, it is appropriate for excrement to be in a toilet bowl (matter in place), whereas it is not appropriate for it to be on a table or on one’s face (matter out of place). Unlike dirt, the monster fits into two seemingly incongruous places simultaneously.

In *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology*, Douglas uses the concept of monster as a metaphor to describe the status of the pig in the ancient Israelite classification system. Israelites justified their view of the pig as impure because it dug in the soil with its nose. However, Douglas posits that the pig’s taboo status emerged as a result of it upsetting the intricate Hebrew taxonomy for animals, which distinguishes between cloven hoofed animals and ruminants (i.e., animals that, due to their four compartment stomach, chew food, regurgitate the semi-digested food or cud, and then chew it again. Cows, goats, and sheep are examples of ruminants). The pig of course is an animal that is both cloven hoofed and a ruminant, thus troubling the taxonomy by fitting into two categories. Referring to Douglas’ work on monster theory, Smits explains, “A special case of confusion appears when a phenomenon fits simultaneously into two categories

considered to be mutually exclusive. Thus a situation arises in which the phenomenon cannot be transformed into ‘matter in place’; the discomfort will necessarily persist” (Smits 494). Smits uses the term monster to distinguish ambiguous phenomena from matter out of place or dirt.

Unlike matter out of place that primarily gives rise to fear, the monster’s ambiguity can be experienced as fear or fascination. In her essay, Smits applies the concept of the monster to help understand the mixed and often contradictory reactions to the invention of plastic. When invented, plastic was considered a miracle and embraced, but as time progressed plastic lost its appeal and was considered a pollutant to be avoided. By viewing plastic as a monstrous invention that does not fit into cultural schemes, “the different reactions can then be understood as ‘natural’ reactions toward ambiguity” (Smits 498). Using Smits’s logic, reactions to *Cloaca* are “natural” reactions toward ambiguity too. Although we might be cautious of theory that posits natural as innate, the various and divergent responses to *Cloaca* can be explained by its ambiguous constitution. By creating a biological substance identical to human feces, *Cloaca* troubles categorical distinctions between man and machine, nature and technology. While our ability to reproduce feces via a machine might be viewed as triumph of man over nature, the replication also threatens man’s difference from machines, suggesting that all of man can be reproduced – i.e., man is no more than a machine, a “Man Machine” as Julien La Mettrie theorized as early as 1747 (Wood 12). In this sense, *Cloaca* feces are both natural and unnatural, miraculous and threatening. Similar (lack of) distinctions apply to arguments regarding whether *Cloaca* is art.

Smits extends her theory of monster ambiguity to four styles of “monster treatment,” or methods people use to cope with monsters. The four styles are monster exorcism, monster adaptation, monster embracing, and monster assimilation. First, monster exorcists view cultural

categories as inflexible and attempt to expel the monster. According to Smits, exorcism is futile, as monsters can never be eradicated fully. With regards to *Cloaca*, monster exorcists refuse to acknowledge the piece as art and deny *Cloaca* any scientific, technological, or cultural value because there is no concrete product save fake shit.

Monster adaptation “aims at transforming the monster into a phenomenon that will better fit into existing categories” (Smits 499). Smits offers biodegradable plastics as an example of monster adaptation. The ambivalent status of plastic was due, in part, to the inability of plastic to decompose, thereby never fully degrading into a waste-like substance. The development of biodegradable plastics addressed the problem, fully transforming plastics to waste. According to William Grimes, when *Cloaca* appeared at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, several attending chefs who had prepared food for the machine “shook their heads in sorrow” when Delvoye described food and eating as “futile” (Grimes para. 5). In an interview with Grimes, Chef Peter Hoffman counters suggestions that *Cloaca* is pointless by claiming it encourages people to think about diet and culture. Hoffman expresses his desire to experiment with *Cloaca*'s digestive system by feeding it a variety of foods and assessing its caloric needs, should it have any. He also suggests that trying to poison *Cloaca* with bad food might make for an interesting experiment. In this example, Hoffman engages “monster adaptation” as he attempts to transform *Cloaca* into a scientific experiment, thereby assigning it a practical purpose that revises it to fit within existing categories of usefulness.

The third monster style fully embraces monsters and “projects all kinds of utopian prospects onto new technology” (Smits 501). Unlike monster adaptation that seeks to alter the monster so as to assimilate it into established categories, the embraced monster is viewed as perfect in its current form. The monster does not need to be changed; rather the cultural

categories that constrain it need to be changed. To explain monster embracing, Smits describes how death was redefined in order to make organ transplantation (i.e., the monster in this case) socially acceptable. In prior definitions of death, death was determined when the heart and breath stopped. As transplanted hearts do not cease beating, some considered it unethical, murder even, to transplant the heart and other organs. In response, the medical profession in the U.S. and Europe redefined death as an end of brain activity, thereby making it socially acceptable to transplant organs. As with many of Delvoye's art projects, *Cloaca* challenges what constitutes art and many critics, such as Mosquera and Cameron, adjust their understanding of art so as to include rather than exclude or change *Cloaca*. By embracing the monster, we approach its various constituents with a new attitude, finding excrement, in this case, to be potentially useful, philosophical, or even artful.

The final approach to the monster, monster assimilation, views both the monster and “the cultural categories by which it is judged” as flexible and amenable (Smits 501). It “is open to considering anomalies and monsters as a creative challenge to reconcile new technology and existing categories by adapting both” (Smits 501). Delvoye engages in monster assimilation when he expresses a desire to adjust both *Cloaca* and the cultural categories relevant to it. While he enjoys *Cloaca* in its current form and does not want to alter it to make it more useful, he does not view the machine as perfect. Rather, he feels a shortcoming of the machine is that it is “not as sophisticated as the body” (Delvoye quoted in Ayerza para. 42). However, like many of those who write about *Cloaca*, Delvoye does embrace *Cloaca*'s ability to upset cultural norms via its ambiguities and contradictions.

As with Jeffrey Cohen's definition of monster, *Cloaca* “unsettles what has been constructed to be received as natural” (Cohen ix). It troubles cultural categories and, like

carnival, levels hierarchies so as to provide people with new perspectives, offering a site of rehearsal for counter visions and behaviors. As a carnival mode of understanding, embedded in *Cloaca* are new practices and discourses that over time gain social energy to effect change. *Cloaca* blurs distinctions between art, science, and technology, mixes high and low cultural expressions, complicates the relationship between art and commodity, artist and entrepreneur, spectator and participant, and intermingles fascination with fear. By embracing a carnivalesque mode of representation, *Cloaca* creates a polysemic site of symbolic struggle that offers audiences new modes of interrelating, interacting, and interpreting the social world.

## **Chapter Five**

### **World Toilet Day: Squatting for Global Sanitation Activism**

The Louisiana State University (LSU) Parade Grounds consist of several acres of grass lodged between busy Highland Road and the LSU Student Union, administrative buildings, and the War Memorial Campanile. Once used for military drills, the LSU Parade Grounds are frequented now by tailgaters, students seeking a midday catnap, hacky sack aficionados, and the occasional group of political protesters.

On Friday, November 19, 2010, the campus was quiet as a cluster of 75 to 100 students gathered on the Parade Grounds. From a distance, the students' purpose for gathering appeared unclear. Some students socialized with one another while others tinkered with their cells phones. Then, as the Campanile played a tune signaling noontime, everyone in the group squatted simultaneously, each person hovering over their own invisible toilet. The cluster of students remained in a crouching position for approximately one minute, and then – as suddenly as they had stooped – the group stood up and slowly dispersed.

I first came across the idea of a Big Squat in the spring of 2010, while perusing the World Toilet Organization's website. Concerned with the global sanitation crisis and amused by the concept, I decided to plan my own Big Squat event as a way to explore the connection between performance, politics, and humor. In addition to being intrigued by the Big Squat's playful dissent, I also was interested in how shame and embarrassment function in the performance of social protest. In this chapter, I describe the mission of the World Toilet Organization and its various programs, detail the preparation for and the execution of the LSU Big Squat, and analyze the event drawing on concepts of humor, parody, and shame.



Figure 1. LSU Students Squat for World Toilet Day (Photo by James Dick).

### **The World Toilet Organization**

The World Toilet Organization (WTO) is a global non-profit organization with the mission of raising awareness about and improving toilet and sanitation conditions across the world. Jack Sim, a Singapore businessman who ventured into non-profit work so as to benefit humanitarian efforts, founded the organization in 2001. According to the WTO website, Sim took an interest in toilets because he felt sanitation was a neglected problem. Sim describes sanitation as ““a poor cousin to water in terms of visibility and financing”” (Sim quoted in World Toilet Organization, “WTO eNewsletter”). Focusing on toilets instead of water, the WTO takes a marketing approach to sanitation activism that aims to “make toilets sexy” (World Toilet Organization, “Vision and Approach”). The WTO believes that health reasons are not enough to

motivate poor people to invest in toilets. Rather, the “WTO aims to emotionally connect with the poor by branding toilets as a status symbol and an object of desire” (World Toilet Organization, “Vision and Approach”). With 235 members in 58 countries, the WTO educates members on sanitation issues, develops creative methods to gain media attention, lobbies to influence government officials to promote sanitation initiatives and public health policies, and directly interacts with the poor to alter attitudes toward toilets and sanitation.

The WTO initiates dialogue about toilets and sanitation through a series of World Toilet Summits, the World Toilet Expo and Forum, and the World Toilet College. To date, the WTO has held nine World Toilet Summits and two World Toilet Expo and Forums in ten different cities around the world (World Toilet Organization, “Who We Are”). Summits occur annually bringing together plumbing professionals, researchers in green toilet design, and members of the World Health Organization and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) to address toilet and sanitation technologies, development, funding, design, maintenance, research, and methods for creating media coverage (World Toilet Organization, “Who We Are”). The 2010 summit took place in Philadelphia, making it the first WTO Summit in the U.S. Prior to meeting, the WTO advertised the summit to large corporations as way to invest in and profit from developing countries while working toward solutions to the sanitation crisis (World Toilet Organization, “Information” para. 2).

The World Toilet Expo and Forum showcases cutting-edge sanitation solutions for both the urban and rural sanitation industries. In 2006, the Expo in Bangkok attracted 9,800 visitors for the three day event (World Toilet Organization, “World Toilet Summit”). While providing entrepreneurs with networking opportunities, the expo promoted sanitation as a key method of



improving public health and displayed creative toilet technologies, such as remote-control flushing. In these ways, the theme of the expo, “Happy Toilet, Healthy Life,” was realized.

In addition to the World Toilet Summit and the World Toilet Expo and Forum, WTO founded the world's first World Toilet College (WTC) in 2005, to provide people with training in toilet design and maintenance as well as disaster and emergency sanitation. The college offers six programs with course topics ranging from sustainable sanitation to restroom design. Students learn practical skills, such as latrine slab construction, and gain theoretical understandings of sanitation and water projects (World Toilet Organization, “World Toilet College”). Recognized by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency in June 2010, the WTC continues to professionalize the sanitation and restroom industry.

World Toilet Day is another approach WTO uses to start dialogue and challenge the toilet’s status as taboo. In 2001, WTO declared November 19 to be World Toilet Day. This special day is intended to celebrate toilets, an object many people use multiple times a day and yet take for granted. World Toilet Day raises awareness of the 2.6 billion people who lack access to toilets and sanitation (World Toilet Organization, “Why is World Toilet Day Necessary?”). WTO offers people multiple ways to participate in World Toilet Day. For example, participants can donate their Facebook profile picture to the cause by adding a bubble to their profile picture that reads, “Happy World Toilet Day!” WTO encourages people to blog or tweet about World Toilet Day, to put up posters with statistics that underscore the seriousness of global sanitation issues, or plan an event on World Toilet Day. WTO’s World Toilet Day website provides links on how to organize office, school, community, or online events as well as international celebrations, such as the Big Squat. Each link provides event planners with materials, resources, and creative activities to use on World Toilet Day.

The Big Squat, one of the WTO's most publicized events, invites people to gather at noon on World Toilet Day and squat for one minute. WTO describes the event as a "movement for the toilet-less" and "drives home the point 'where would you go?' and how people without toilets are forced to go in public places" (World Toilet Organization, "The Big Squat"). The event is celebrated internationally, having taken place in Ghana, Singapore, Mumbai, Libya, Hong Kong, and Montreal, to name but a few of the many places where a Big Squat has been staged. Combined with other WTO events, the Big Squat compliments the organization's goal to promote human dignity through sustainable sanitation.

### **The Big Squat at LSU**

By combining everyday life, ritual, and play aspects of performance, I hoped the Big Squat at LSU would raise awareness of the global sanitation crisis among the LSU, Baton Rouge, and Southeast Louisiana communities. For most Louisianans, access to toilets and clean water is not an immediate concern. Still, the lack of clean water and toilets is familiar to the post-hurricane experience in Louisiana. The Big Squat asks participants to embody their commitment to global sanitation activism and to imagine what it is like to squat in public. It engages participants in self-conscious awareness of the performative aspects of bathroom practices, and in doing so, it encourages participants and onlookers to reconsider the toilet as pivotal object for pointed political commentary.

In late September 2010, I began to publicize World Toilet Day and the LSU Big Squat performance using the materials provided on the WTO website. I downloaded all eight available posters and, with the help of undergraduate students, posted them in a variety of locations on LSU's campus, including bathroom stalls. Each of the posters contains a statistic regarding the negative effects of poor sanitation and a corresponding image. For example, one poster reads,

“Diarrhea remains the second leading cause of death among children under five annually. 1.5 million children die every year. That is more than HIV/AIDS, malaria, and measles combined” (World Toilet Organization, “World Toilet Day”). The statement is accompanied by an image of a child without pants walking down a public street carrying a pair of soiled underwear. Each poster concludes by asking, “Still think toilets are nothing special? Spread the word. Spread the solution. Stop the spread of disease” (World Toilet Organization, “World Toilet Day”). In addition to putting up posters across campus, I requested that faculty in the Department of Communication Studies and the Department of Geography and Anthropology announce the event in their classrooms and distribute the posters to interested students. The event also was publicized through the Axis TV System in the Student Union, which announces campus events on several widescreen televisions.

In order to attract participants outside of the LSU community, I sent out a press release informing local newspapers, radio, and television stations about the happening. Additionally, I created a Facebook Event inviting others to join the LSU Big Squat or to create their own Big Squat event. By creating a Facebook event, I was able to contact hundreds of my Facebook friends, invite them to participate, and provide them with an electronic method to RSVP to the event. I also created a page on my website, [www.daniellemcgeough.com/world-toilet-day.html](http://www.daniellemcgeough.com/world-toilet-day.html), to promote World Toilet Day and document the event.

Along with the LSU Big Squat, I created the Digital Squat to provide those who could not attend the LSU event with an alternative method of participation. Through the Facebook event and on my website, I invited people to take photographs of themselves or their friends squatting, email the photographs to an account I created for the event, and then, with their

permission, I would upload the photographs to my website. I also encouraged people to email me stories about their World Toilet Day.



Figure 2. LSU Big Squat Lecture (Photo by James Dick).

On November 19, 2010, a sizable crowd of about 120 students gathered in a lecture hall to hear my talk on World Toilet Day and the global sanitation crisis. Drawing on information provided by WTO, I delivered a fifteen minute speech highlighting how many people are affected by poor sanitation or lack access to latrines, the effects of poor sanitation on people's physical and mental health, and how World Toilet Day and events like the Big Squat work to redress these problems. At the end of the lecture, I invited those that attended the speech to join me on the LSU Parade Grounds for the Big Squat.

Nearly 100 faculty and students chose to accompany me in squatting. We waited until noon and then squatted for one minute. Participants giggled, texted, and took pictures of other squatters with their phones. Some looked around uncomfortably, perhaps checking to make sure no one they knew was watching. Others appeared to delight in the public display of a taboo gesture. After about 30 seconds, some people's leg muscles began to tire, and they asked me how much time remained. Passersby looked at the large group with curiosity and a few stopped to ask questions. I hoped the lecture had supplied participants with informed answers. A news crew was present along with several journalists from newspapers. Reporters mingled with squatters asking them questions about the event. At the end of one minute, the group stood and cheered in celebration, "Happy Toilet Day!" After the squat, several participants stopped to tell me how much they enjoyed the event, a couple of individuals asked questions about material presented in the lecture, and one student wanted to make sure his name would not appear in the newspaper, after all, he was doing this for extra credit only. People stretched their legs, talked with one another, and slowly dispersed.

### **Humor and Parody in the Big Squat**

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin asks, "Where could the Renaissance find support in the struggle against the official culture of the Middle Ages?" Answering his own question, Bakhtin replies, "Such support could be offered only by the culture of folk humor" (Bakhtin 374). For Bakhtin, humor is an integral aspect of the carnival that "liberates human consciousness" by permitting new perspectives to "emerge from ideological routine" (Bakhtin 374).



Figure 3. Laughter at the Big Squat (Photo by Ruth L. Bowman).

Laughter's ability to prompt audiences to evaluate their social world from a new perspective has encouraged contemporary scholars to explore the importance of humor to a healthy, democratic citizenry. M. Lane Bruner addresses the role of humor in sustaining a democratic public culture by distinguishing between humorous and humorless states. According to Bruner, a humorous state seeks parodic or double-voiced entertainment, encourages a critical citizenry and even dissent, and is occupied by citizens capable of irony and tolerant of ambiguity. When there is "humor in a state," there is a lack of fear, and political corruption is minimal or absent (Bruner 137). Humorless states, on the other hand, "are populated by strict 'conservatives' who have certainty and discourage dissent, have anemic and passive public spheres, have bland and diverting forms of public entertainments, and are led by individuals who repress critical citizenship" (Bruner 137). According to Bruner, carnivalesque forms of protest

serve as a check and balance against oppressive political cultures by revealing social limits and possibilities.

Bruner reminds us that it is through transgression that social limits are revealed (Bruner 140). During my preparations for the Big Squat, I had several experiences that suggested I was approaching the limits for “appropriate” campus behavior. Shortly after displaying posters on campus, I received an email from the Event Manager at the LSU Student Union informing me that posters are “not to be taped in bathroom stalls,” but they would be “more than happy” to display my posters in the “appropriate location” (Event Manager). The Event Manager also suggested I seek official approval to hold an event on the LSU Parade Grounds, a space I perceived as a public area. Thoroughly amused and only slightly inconvenienced, I responded with a polite email apologizing for displaying posters in an “inappropriate” area along with an attached document to reserve the LSU Parade Grounds. Much to my delight, the Event Manager replied with a story about how she discovered the “inappropriately” displayed posters while “squatting” herself, acknowledging the irony of her charge that the posters were “inappropriately” displayed. Despite noting the irony and absurdity of the rule, the Event Manager still removed and relocated the posters to their “proper” place on a bulletin board. The recognition of irony proved insufficient to warrant flexibility to the rules.

Later that day I received a phone call from another employee at the Student Union inquiring about the Big Squat event. Using euphemisms and rather indirectly, he asked me if anyone would be defecating on the school’s lawn, a question intended to remind me to “not press [my] ‘fun’ too far” (Bruner 141). I assured the Union representative that, as currently planned, no one would be defecating on the lawn as part of the event. However, I did point out that the university allows people to tailgate and subsequently urinate on the school lawn every home

football game. Although the issue of tailgating urination went unanswered, I did receive confirmation of approval shortly thereafter to use the LSU Parade Grounds for the Big Squat event.

The university did not discourage me from hosting a Big Squat, *per se*, but university officials did make it clear that I must go through proper channels and abide by certain rules if I wanted permission to hold the event on LSU's campus, thereby making the Big Squat a "licensed affair in every sense" (Stallybrass and White 13). Despite being a "sanctioned transgression," the Big Squat revealed social limits and inverted normal order. The request to perform bathroom-like gestures in a public place, even when accompanied with an explanation for the event and its importance, disrupts social codes dictating that certain bodily practices be kept private. My odd request tested social limits enough that it was cause for alarm. Ironically, in an effort to double-check my intentions and maintain social order, the Union representative violated social rules too, that is, by talking with me about defecation.

Unlike Bruner's examples of carnivalesque protest in a humorless state, the LSU Big Squat did not make a political splash, which is not to say the event was not political or critical. I believe it did encourage participants to reflect on their privileges, to criticize the effects of poverty, and to test the limits of what kinds of activities can occur on the LSU Parade Grounds. However, it did not challenge the institutions of LSU, the U.S. government, or western bathroom practices. It did not attribute poor sanitation to the systematic oppression of the poor or link the lack of water with the corporate privatization of water. To some extent, my Big Squat, and the Big Squat generally, suggests that western bathroom practices are superior to those of non-western countries and the solution to others' sanitation crisis is to provide them with toilets like ours so that they can go like we go.



There are, however, merits to the Big Squat. The event focuses on one particular goal: to raise awareness of the billions of people who lack proper sanitation. It brings people together in solidarity to recognize a problem, works to create *communitas* or a sense of togetherness and equality, and is a celebration for those who have access to proper sanitation. The Big Squat is a starting point, a place to learn about others' experiences and generate dialogue. It is not an end solution.

Informed by a philosophy similar to Bruner's, Robert Hariman argues humor plays a "crucial role in keeping democratic speech a multiplicity of discourses" (Hariman 260). Hariman is particularly interested in how parody functions as a genre of political humor. He provides several descriptions of parody, including Margaret Rose's definition of parody as "*the comic refunctioning of performed linguistic or artistic material*" (Rose quoted by Hariman 250; emphasis in original). Expanding on Rose's definition, I might offer that everyday behavior and practices are artistic material, too, that parody is used to re-function. In the Big Squat, for example, people imitate the action of going to the bathroom; they squat, but they also are fully clothed, they do not urinate or defecate, and they perform the action in public. In these ways, they re-function the purpose of the squat from that of relieving oneself in private to highlighting a problem in public, the very publication of the lowbrow squat turning it comic. According to Hariman, parody exposes the constructed and arbitrary nature of social norms by combining "imitation and alteration" (Hariman 250). The public squat re-construes the private experience as a social experience, a lively good-humored act that connects individuals. Relieving oneself is not just a bodily compulsion or a biological need, but a conduit for social expression, in other words, a tool for communication.

Drawing on an experience when his daughter used parody to poke fun at his speech, Hariman describes the ability of imitation to evoke laughter, temporarily invert power, and expose the mechanization of the body. At first, Hariman found his daughter's imitations amusing, as he "had become ridiculous in [his] own eyes simply by being placed beside [himself]" (Hariman 249). As the performance continued, however, "the temporary inversion of power was starting to look less than temporary" (Hariman 249). The reversal of control threatened Hariman, in part because his daughter's parodic performance revealed to him the rigid repetition of his speech patterns, thus exposing "something mechanical encrusted onto [his] organic speech" (Hariman 250).



Figure 4. Low-to-the-Ground Squat (Photo by Ruth L. Bowman).

By means of the low-to-the-ground squat, participants in the LSU Big Squat imitated the bathroom practices of other people more so than their own, thereby comparing others' practices to their own. In response, participants commented on how difficult it was to hold the low squat for a full minute and complained of sore legs. The temporary ache demonstrated that squatting is

not routine for them, thereby producing embodied knowledge that bathroom practices are not universal. There are different ways to defecate and urinate, in public and private, by choice and not. Like Hariman's experience with his daughter, the LSU Big Squat revealed how autonomic and potentially un-reflexive we are toward our bathroom practices. As Foucault might have it, the Big Squat exposed the disciplinary machinery of our bathroom practices, resulting in evacuating bodies that are dissociated from their act of evacuation and, in the broader scheme of things, privileged in that dissociation.

Carmen McClish is critical of parody based approaches to activism, describing them as "negative, critical of potential allies, and pretentious and mean-spirited" (McClish 3). Although parody may be fun for the participants, McClish claims the use of parody often results in a cliquish, if clever, "snub" of others (McClish 3). She is wary of the effectiveness of parody as deployed in political movements, arguing parodic approaches often fail to offer solutions or alternatives to the problem they mock. Unlike Hariman's example of a child's game of copycat, the LSU Big Squat did not intend to poke fun at people, specifically, those who squat to relieve themselves. Rather, it was my hope that the Big Squat was an experience and expression of solidarity, implementing (self) parody in an effort to level rather than invert power relations, and to convey alliance with others in a playful manner. I believe the Big Squat is able to compel parody in these ways through a pedagogy of shame.

### **Shame and Activism**

For many participants, the Big Squat was entertaining, humorous, and a pleasurable break from the everyday routine of their lives. However, as Hariman observes, "the parodic imitation simultaneously praises and blames" (Hariman 251). Although the Big Squat was enjoyable, it also implemented a feeling of embarrassment or shame for some participants. One student

expected her participation to be anonymous, but during the event a friend passed by, catching the student “in the act.” Other participants giggled nervously while performing the taboo gesture in public, and everyone was quick to stand at the end of the minute. Typically, shame is framed negatively and linked with the fear of exposure and judgment, failure, or guilt. Anthropologist Richard A. Shweder explains:

[shame] results from knowing one is vulnerable to the disapproving gaze or negative judgment of others. It is a terror that touches the mind, the body, and the soul precisely because one is aware that one might be seen to have come up short in relationship to some shared and uncontested ideal that defines what it means to be good, worthy, admirable, attractive, or competent person, given one’s status or position in society. (Shweder 1115)

Shweder’s description of shame stresses the communicative or interactional aspect of shame.

That is, shame is an emotion produced by and through social interactions and, thus, can provide insight into what attitudes and behaviors are and are not accepted and valued. In this way, shame functions to maintain and reproduce social structures through panoptic discipline. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault uses the Panopticon, a prison designed by Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century that grouped individual cells around a central viewing tower, as a metaphor for how power and surveillance operate in contemporary society. According to Foucault, institutions use surveillance systems as a threat to discipline individual behavior and thereby control or order the masses. Whether the surveillance is actual or not, people internalize it and the behavior and values it supports, engaging in practices of self-monitoring. To feel or express shame is a sign of the individual internalizing and activating the broader disciplinary technology of society, which, for Shweder, is an act of terrorizing the self.

While many scholars align shame with negative consequences, others argue that shame has productive and transformative qualities. In an essay that explores how Margaret Cho uses shame in her stand-up comedy to investigate identity categories, Susan Pelle states, “shame is

productive and performative not in what it ‘is,’ *per se*, but in what it ‘does’ to individual bodies and social relationships” (Pelle 24; emphasis in original). Pelle’s statement highlights two important aspects of shame, namely its relationship to the body and its ability to forge connections between individuals and groups.

Shame is an embodied experience; it is felt and expressed in and through the body. Pelle writes, “the body announces, registers shame: the burn of a blush, the plummeting in the belly, we bow our heads, look away, gag on words, crumble within like ash” (Pelle 218). Although Pelle describes less than desirable bodily experiences, the relationship between shame and the body is ripe with potential. In their study of the pedagogical value of shame, Margaret Werry and Róisín O’Gorman explain that shame reminds us that the body is:

a site of knowledge and an instrument of knowing: knowing one’s ignorance, knowing one’s place, knowing ethically, knowing abstractly, knowing in relation to others’ knowledge. The body is habitually denied, controlled, and ritualized within public space precisely through the operation of shame. All overt bodily acts are privatized: birth, death, sex, elimination....At the edges of these “showings” of the body lurks shame, stage managing the body’s appearance within the social proscenium, keeping its unseemingly, unstable processes offstage, ob-scene. But when shame shows up, so does a body. Thus, acknowledging shame recuperates the body, its ability to feel, even to feel unpleasant things – and it recuperates the body in its relational fluidity, its capacity to affect other bodies, to register them. (Werry and O’Gorman 219)

Pleasant or not, to embody shame is to learn, to learn which bodily acts are and are not considered appropriate for public display. Social codes and categories of public and private often reveal “painful asymmetries in power” (Werry and O’Gorman 221). The feeling of shame or embarrassment (which is a less intense emotion than shame) during the Big Squat compels an understanding of how bodies living in poverty are controlled habitually through the operations of shame. Prompting shame’s ability to leap “from subject to subject through a lightening rod of unwilling empathy,” the Big Squat asks participants to embody and empathize with the shame of others (Werry and O’Gorman 221).

Werry and O’Gorman believe shame’s infectious quality is its “deepest promise,” as it “allows us to think [about] intersubjectivity, identification and sociality in new ways” by focusing on “the tensive, ambivalent spaces between subjects – between subject and socius – where power-saturated relations can be both apprehended and revised” (Werry and O’Gorman 221-222). As Big Squat participants embody shame, they connect with others’ experiences, at least temporarily and to the extent we can understand them. The tensions and gaps between our bathroom experiences and those of others can help participants locate and discover asymmetries in power. There is a radical difference between one hundred college students squatting in public and several women who squat together as a safety measure and because there is no other place to go. The Big Squat encourages students to recognize their privilege and to acknowledge that any shame they experience at the Big Squat is temporary and fleeting.

For those who must squat in public daily, shame can activate a sense of inferiority and inhibit social action (Rutten 353). However, precisely because “the shame-ridden subject lacks a sense of entitlement,” embodying shame can transform bodies into sites for learning empathy, locating privilege, and connecting with others (Bartky 225). In this way, the Big Squat demonstrates how shame has the capacity to affect other bodies, making it a powerful tool for social change.

The Big Squat event occurs all over the world, and I imagine it is a very different experience for participants in places like Mumbai, where a large percentage of the population must squat every day in public in order to relieve themselves. To recall the work of Arjun Appadurai, the everyday practice of defecating in public renders the urban poor invisible to the state, making privacy a political issue that articulates people’s perceived worth in society, e.g., as a citizen or not. In Mumbai and cities like it where a Big Squat has been staged, the performance

of the “fictional” squat operates to restore, revise, and refunction temporarily the effect of the “real” squat (cf., Bruner 142). Contextualized within the frame of a deliberate public performance and protest, the participants’ act of squatting asserts their agency and (re)claims their visibility, turning a perceived act of shame into one of pride that demonstrates the participants’ active investment in improving their community and the world. Further, any shame that might persist is no longer a private burden, but a collective responsibility. As Augusto Boal might have it, the Big Squat takes the oppressive “real image” and changes it, not so much into an “ideal image,” as people are still squatting in public, but into an “image of transition” where people are squatting by choice and in solidarity in an effort to make things better (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* 185).

Broadly speaking, the Big Squat is a performance event that encourages participants to perform a body style of communication rather than discipline. Typically, due to the repetition of toilet techniques and proprieties, the defecating body is a body of discipline, enacting a predictable and monadic regimen in order to limit corporeal “accidents” and thereby avoid social censure. While, in the Big Squat, the performers do not actually defecate or urinate (assuring order in that regard), they do squat in public, with others. As I discussed earlier, in the LSU event, the squat operated to parody the practices of others, however, I believe it also parodies our own practices. That is, the squat-as-synecdoche operates to index the toilet over which most of sit-squat to defecate and, for women, urinate too – leaving little question on the part of Big Squat participants and audience what the performers are doing. As a result, the disciplined body style is not erased in the performance (the style is embedded in the physical act of squatting), but it is made to function in another register, the register of communication, as Frank would have it. In this register, the performers parody “discipline,” with each other in public, thereby creating and

enacting a multiple body, a multiplicity of bodies. In this way, they also destabilize the disciplinary factor of control and embrace contingency as possibility. While audiences may not interpret what they see as a statement about “the global sanitation crisis” or “the systematic oppression of the poor,” what they do see speaks to the base message of the WTO, which is to create a more egalitarian society. They see a lot of bodies gathered in the same place at the same time doing the same thing. And that “thing” (the performative task of the body) does not look like going to the bathroom, together, for some reason. It is the latter image and thought that propel viewers into the ballpark, at least, of the WTO’s more specific message, which is to create an equalitarian society in which access to a toilet is understood as a basic human right.

### **Communicating Community**

The Big Squat uses humor as a check and balance against oppressive cultures, breaks up routine, encourages new perspectives, and reveals social limits and possibilities. Although university officials granted me permission to use the LSU Parade Grounds, the process I went through to gain approval for the Big Squat suggests the university has a “difficult time dealing with absurdity, symbolic protest, and the curious blending of the fictive and the real” (Bruner 148).

The Big Squat creates conditions for people to play and experiment with critical techniques that can unmask the humorless state. As Big Squat participants put techniques of carnival, such as parody, into practice they are encouraged to reflect on their own bathroom practices and consider their own privileges. The embodiment of others’ behaviors promotes reflexivity and empathy, urging participants to imagine what it is like to defecate in public. Despite being a “fictional” squat, some participants found the act of squatting in public embarrassing and shameful. As a bodily affect, shame has the pedagogical potential to expose



asymmetries and foster inter-subjectivity. By combining parody and shame, the Big Squat communicated solidarity with those it imitated, suggesting parody can be used to balance powers and unite those practicing parody with those being parodied.

Overall, the Big Squat demonstrates bathroom practices as a resource for human communication. To draw on Frank, our biological need to expel is “no longer [the body’s] problem but its possibility” (Frank, “For a Sociology of the Body” 79). The WTO and the Big Squat transform our regimented practices of defecating into a communicative act that expresses concerns about human equality at the very least, and as regards sanitation issues more precisely. The performative task of squatting, specifically “going to the toilet,” becomes a method to engage others in awareness of their own bodily practices, to connect with others’ experiences, and to dialogue about the global sanitation crisis, ultimately transforming a body of discipline into a body of communication.

## Chapter Six

### Putting Matter Into Place

Since the start of this project, I have been influenced by Mary Douglas' definition of dirt as "matter out of place" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 44). As Douglas explains, when matter is out of place or does not fit into established categories of association, people create rituals to impose order on the untidy phenomena, thus putting matter into place. In U.S. culture, we have rituals and symbolic patterns that keep the toilet in its place. Isolated in its own little room, the toilet is separated from the rest of the home, and there, we separate ourselves from our body's material substance and that of others. Further, our toiletry times are separated from other times. In these ways, we keep the toilet in its place, and we keep the body and the tasks of bodies predictable so as to order social hierarchies.

In this study, I investigate how performance displaces or shifts the toilet "out of place" in ways that defamiliarize and refunction the body's techniques, proprieties, and ceremonies. As a performance studies scholar, I argue that the body is central to how we understand performance theory and practice, thus viewing the body as a site where behaviors and the values associated with them are inscribed by historical circumstances and, in turn, are upheld or countered by the agent and agency of the body. Drawing on the work of Arthur Frank, I approach social structures, processes, and policies as built up from the tasks of bodies doing things in particular times and places. I apply and thereby provide a model of Frank's body up approach to studying social problems, which moves from "body to self to society" (Frank 47-48). I modify Frank's model slightly by beginning with an object, a toilet, and tending to its story-event, which is created by bodies interacting with it in their social-historical moment. By stressing how people perform toilets and how those performances act to uphold or counter norms, I reveal how people

use body styles and modes as resources for solving social problems that derive from the body's own problems. Additionally, I argue the performing toilet makes visible the networks of corporeal, discursive, and institutional practices that surround it.

For Frank, the communicative body is the ideal body style for problem solving, as it embraces its own contingences and those of others, is dyadic or multiple, and thus open to locating possibility in and constantly creating itself through its unpredictable material interactions with others. In Chapter Five, I offer an example of how a body style of discipline can shift into a body style of communication, suggesting that the latter style is in operation more frequently than Frank indicates. Furthermore, I provide examples of how a body style of discipline can be and is a resource for solving problems. In Chapter Three, various technologies of discipline, including panoptic discipline, function to keep the urban poor in their place, as bodies that lack cleanliness, moral purity, citizenship, and, ultimately, the ability to act. Rather than dissociate with their corporeal substance, the urban poor refunction their bodies as tools for taking action, acquiring land, and building latrines. In this case, the urban poor adhere to a body style of discipline as they perceive their bodies as lacking and use their bodies as tools to service that lack. However, the urban poor embrace their corporeality also, and reveal bodies that long to interact with other bodies and to (re)create themselves and their communities. In other words, the discipline body communicates too, supplying the body with resources for problem solving and creating change.

By focusing on the performance of toilets, I associate toilets with the artistic and generative possibilities of culture-making, revealing how toilets can and do encourage productive communication. People use toilets as a tool of communication to counter disabling disciplinary norms, encourage collective action, and bring about change for those that desire it. By drawing

on research emerging from the fields of performance studies, sociology, and anthropology, an analysis on toilets offers insights into what constitutes activism, the politics of in/visibility, and how body styles and modes are and can be used as a resource for solving problems.

In this chapter, “Putting Matter Into Place,” I re-view the prior chapters, paying close attention to how the toilet, as a performing object, tells a story of bodies performing in a particular space and time, and how, in terms of their particular circumstances, bodies use performance as a catalyst for social change. Specifically, I move from object to body-self to society, aiming to articulate how the performing toilet reveals broader social patterns and structures. To conclude, I detail my own backstage experiences of studying the toilet as a compliment to the prior discussion.

In Chapter Two, “Pots and Purity: Performing the Domestic Goddess in the Nineteenth Century,” I describe how, in the nineteenth century, it was considered the role of the *actual* Domestic Goddess to keep the toilet backstage and thereby the *idea* of the Domestic Goddess in place. Public, front stage (non)performances of gentility show the Domestic Goddess as engaged in bodily tasks of etiquette imbued with Christian mores, thus substantiating further notions of the Domestic Goddess as a counter-balance to the corrupt public sphere. The codes of parlor etiquette were intricate, required practice, and, as such, were repeated and perfected until they appeared to disappear. In other words, parlor etiquette and the accompanying proprieties were naturalized and treated as (non)performances.

However, by going backstage in the nineteenth century home, I observe other bodily tasks and codes of conduct that counter the front stage constructions and ideas about the Domestic Goddess and domesticity generally. In *The American Woman’s Home*, Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe make backstage performances concrete through their use of

scientific-technical discourse. Beecher and Stowe describe the nineteenth century woman filling the commode with dry and sifted earth, collecting raw material for compost, and, in the case of a child ill with diarrhea, “walk[ing] with the child in arms a great deal in the open air, and giv[ing] it rice-water to drink” (Beecher and Stowe 217) – a seeming poetic turn in their use of language. Beecher and Stowe dedicate twelve pages of their domestic manual to the earth-closet, which tells a story of a woman covered in soil and smelling of sweat as she shovels the daily fourteen pounds of earth into the earth-closet in an effort to temper effluvium and manage family waste.

By foregrounding the earth-closet and women’s practices with it, Beecher and Stowe counter notions of the Domestic Goddess as performed in the front stage regions of the home, suggesting that there is another performance, an alternative body, and other social patterns at work there. The commode, an object tucked away in the backstage regions of the home, refunctions the Domestic Goddess (her body, practices, and identity) as rational, competent, and readily engaged in public discourse. This corporeal history of the Domestic Goddess functions as a counter-archive to official histories of domesticity. Thus, the ideology of domesticity is undermined by historicity, or the understanding that people do things in a particular time and place that affect and are affected by their particular circumstances.

To modern readers, this story of domesticity may seem novel, astonishing even. However, we do not know if Beecher and Stowe’s candid talk about constipation and commodes was unique to the nineteenth century experience. For all we know, diarrhea and earth-closets were common topics of discussion among women in the parlor, very much “in place” there. If so, the idea of the Domestic Goddess may indicate more about our sketchy memory of the past than the nineteenth century people’s practice of it. A future research project on nineteenth

century domesticity might try to unearth whether women talked about bodily processes as openly and candidly as Beecher and Stowe suggest they did.

In Chapter Three, “Indian Toilet Festivals: Performing Community, Citizenship, and Sanitation Activism,” I argue that, in Mumbai and Pune, the urban poor are excluded as “matter out of place” and, as a result, are denied access to toilets. The lack of access to toilets results in the urban poor having to defecate in public, creating a recurring ritual so familiar it renders the poor invisible, keeps them in their place, and thereby upholds social order as determined by and benefiting the upper caste. The violent irony of this reality is that shitting in public where one is visible results in the urban poor’s invisibility.

To address this systematic oppression, the urban poor set for themselves the task to make toilets. First, they formed an organization called the Alliance to facilitate the community in the practice of making latrine blocks. Next, by means of tactical performance, they obtained permission to build toilet blocks via their own (contrived) contamination. After gaining permission and locating places to build, community members worked to develop negotiating skills to garner materials for latrine construction. Past latrine designs were studied and improvements were made, people experimented with and developed construction skills, and plans were made for the post-construction cleaning and maintenance of the blocks.

Sheela Patel’s “notes on the art of gentle negotiation” advise the urban poor to “paint beautiful pictures” (Patel 128). The completed latrine, however, is more than just an image; it is a concrete object that tells a story about intelligent and motivated actors who addressed a community problem and thereby effected social change. The toilet festivals and tours proclaim and celebrate the community’s input and investment, the enactment of a recognized need and the collaborative effort to fulfill that need. In a generative and generous act, the urban poor invite

government officials to the festivals. This invitation provides the urban poor with the opportunity to assume public roles and participate (temporarily at least) as democratic citizens, thereby, establishing community standards for a charitable and inclusive public. Embedded in the latrine blocks then are the technologies and proprieties of the collective who made them.

By tending to the backstage acts of preparation that result in the festival, I show the urban poor refunctioning the toilet for its culture-making potentials. Patel's notes on negotiation observe the urban poor starting small, practicing patience, and avoiding finger-pointing in order to collect information and persuade government officials how they will benefit from a community partnership with them. Patel's recommendations show the urban poor establishing their own rules for acceptable conduct, which include adjusting their rules in light of their negotiations with state officials and other upper caste citizenry. Still, the message of the story is clear: in order to make toilets a realized-ideal, the urban poor revise and refunction the social body, its techniques, proprieties, and ceremony so as to celebrate the toilets and community that built them.

In Chapter Four, "The *Cloaca* Carnival," Wim Delvoye takes on the artful task of creating a toilet or, perhaps more accurately, a body-toilet mash up. Delvoye's defecating machine appears as matter out of place, not quite fitting into established categories of association. *Cloaca*'s incongruity is odd given its placement in museums, which routinely accept and make room for the strange and "inappropriate." Still, people find *Cloaca* defamiliarizing, and I too found myself making comparisons and asking questions regarding the machine's functions and meanings. To briefly review various interpretations of the machine, *Cloaca* speaks to the commodification of art and issues of authorship as, in the spirit of the conceptual art movement, it attempts to subvert the elitism of art. Some critics argue that

Delvoye's creation undermines art's elitism by proclaiming art is shit. Others assert *Cloaca*'s shit is symbolic of our control over nature through technological invention, thus speculating on the relationship between humans and machines.

For me, Dan Cameron provides the most intriguing argument when he claims that *Cloaca* compels viewers to consider their bodies and its bodily functions, as well as the fears and phobias that accompany them. Similarly, Dieter Roelstraete describes Delvoye's work as "grounded in actual bodies and social sites" (Roelstraete 50). Visitors see and smell something shit-like, associating *Cloaca* with the corporeal body first, rather than an abstract idea or theory. In this way, *Cloaca* transports visitors from the museum to the bathroom, the body-toilet back in place, as it were.

Judith Hamera argues objects tell stories, and *Cloaca* is no exception. In all good fun and with bawdy humor, *Cloaca* urges us to listen to the story and event of the body-toilet. As with Delvoye's *Rose des Vents I*, we gain compass by viewing the world through the arse, a carnivalesque grotesque site and sighting that refunctions perception. There, we experience a tale of laughter overcoming our fears of the unfamiliar body and bodies. There, hierarchies among people and bodily practices are leveled. The body is multiple and double-voiced, overloading the senses and celebrating excess with a surplus of citations and meanings. As a relay, *Cloaca* encourages visitors to rehearse counter behaviors and ways of thinking that level the upper regions of the body with the lower, and question the presumed superiority of head, mind, intellect, and sight. *Cloaca* refunctions how we see the world and invites us to hear and smell our way into alternative modes of sense(s)-making and interrelating.

In Chapter Five, "World Toilet Day: Squatting for Global Sanitation Activism," the task of the body was to squat, and in our LSU event, the squat-as-synecdoche operated to index the



toilet and how we typically use it. If onlookers know the broader story of the toilet, how, due to the systematic oppression of the poor, 2.4 billion people live without a toilet (Environment News Service para. 14), then the mass squat represents a desire to alter the rituals and symbolic patterns that keep the toilet in its place and out of the reach of many. For those who do not know the Big Squat story, the performers' bodies and their purpose are unclear, unpredictable, and, as it were, all over the place. Multiple shifting shitting bodies all at once. At base, this image of bodies suggests a social leveling and a desire for equality.

By means of performance, then, the toilet is transferred from the backstage to center stage. Out of place, the toilet defamiliarizes the body and its practices, telling a story that binds “communicative competence, history, affect, action and thought together” to perform counter structures, histories, bodies, and modes of understanding (Hamera 58).

Like many of the toilet performances I discuss in this dissertation, the process of writing the study entailed backstage activities, such as trips to the library, discussions with colleagues, test-drives of chapters at conferences and job talks, and the submitting of paperwork to the LSU Graduate School. A close observation of my backstage experiences reveals that by writing a dissertation on toilets I, too, have “put matter out of place.” Since beginning this project in 2008, professors, job search committees, representatives from the National Communication Association (NCA) and the LSU Graduate School, family members, and colleagues have recommended in subtle and not-so-subtle ways that I need to clean up my language, suggesting I avoid using words like “shit” or “poop” in my academic research and in scholarly conversations. Many of the same people have advocated that I sanitize my academic interests by reframing my dissertation topic, so as to claim I study domesticity, gender, or activism only. Although most people who offer such council have done so with my best interests in mind, their advice reflects

the resounding view that toilets are not considered an appropriate scholarly endeavor and, should I continue such research, my career and, more generally, my identity as an intellectual are at risk.

Of course, in the spirit of the project, I try to accept the advice generously, as well-intentioned and in good humor. After all, I am not exempt from acting “ridiculous in my seriousness” (Bruner 136). Take for example, the humorous scene I must have created when I stomped into the LSU Library ready to start a fight over the “unjust fine” I had accrued for damaging the book, *Foul Bodies*. In a fit of fury, I demanded the librarian lower my fee, as my little tiny dog had chewed only a little tiny corner of the hardbound text. A foul body indeed.

There also was the incident I mentioned in Chapter Five concerning the two LSU Union representatives, one who corrected my “inappropriate” placement of Big Squat posters in the bathroom stalls and the other who wondered if the Big Squat included defecating on the school lawn. Then, just recently, when I submitted my paperwork for the dissertation defense, I received a phone call from a representative of the LSU Graduate School asking me if, perhaps, I had mistyped the title of my dissertation. And if not, she continued, “what exactly is the nature of the ‘performing toilets’?”

The backstage stories continue with a job interview I had at Villanova University in the fall of 2010. At the interview, the search committee applauded my unconventional research, but expressed concern with how the university’s administration might respond to my topic of study. The committee members offered me suggestions on how I might re-frame the project in my meeting with the dean, so as to avoid complications with upper administration. I took their advice and tidied up my description of the project. To my surprise, when I met with the dean, he was excited about the topic and wanted to exchange “poop stories” and jokes. On a little different note, at a job interview at the University of South Florida in the spring of 2011, a

faculty member told me a number of personal stories about experiences he had had in public restrooms. For example, he recalled a situation where a stranger in the stall next to him began to engage in casual small talk. I was asked for my opinion on how he ought to have behaved in the situation, as if my research had provided me with the answer to such awkward situations.

More sobering was the response I received to a panel on “The Politics of Shitting” that I organized for the 2011 NCA National Convention. As with this project, one aim of the panel is to analyze acts of defecation as embodied performances that produce, maintain, or challenge cultural norms. Months after receiving notification of the panel’s acceptance, I received an email from a NCA representative explaining that the organization will not print any reference to defecation, fecal matter, or any other related terms in the 2011 convention program. In the email, the author described the title as vulgar, inappropriate, and tactless. The author also charged me with a lack of understanding of the “politics of programming,” claiming it was inevitable that people would file complaints if he were to print the word “shit” in the program (NCA Representative). To save time and avoid conflict, I adjusted the title to “The Politics of Bodily Waste.” Rather than get upset, I chuckled, reflected on the politics of language, and resumed reading “The ‘Grotesque’ Pussy,” an essay published in the January 2010 issue of *Text and Performance Quarterly*, a NCA journal.

Recommendations to clean up my language or sanitize my academic interests are indicative of people’s resistance to and the risks of intellectualizing shit. There is a desire to keep shit in its place, behind closed doors or associated with lowbrow (“low class”) cultures, bodies, and discourses. To claim shit is shit and nothing more or less is to separate further our minds from our bodies, the high from the low, the serious from the comical, and the sacred from the profane. Often practices and norms in western education and academe reflect the Cartesian

separation of the mind and the body, functioning to privilege upper body regions as the bearer of intellect and rationality and devalue the corporeal body and its knowledges as merely intuitive and emotional. As such, to legitimate the study of shit is to risk the charge of anti-intellectualism.

In my stories regarding the NCA representative and the Villanova University search committee, their attempt to temper my language and research anticipated and circumvented any potential controversy. In both cases, it was assumed that toilets and excrement are offensive and insulting, and that people will respond accordingly. This presumed inevitability of shit to offend indicates deep-seated attitudes about excrement that, in part, are upheld by practices of surveillance and disciplinary control. Regardless whether the monitoring of behavior is actual, people engage in self-monitoring practices out of fear of being caught. Violating social norms is a precarious act; you run the risk of offending others and being labeled “out of place.”

To clarify, in neither case did anyone state explicitly that *they* were offended. In subsequent correspondence with the NCA representative, he specified that he personally did not find the title “disrespectful,” but was concerned that the word “shit” would be “red flagged” by NCA membership (NCA Representative). The search committee at Villanova University made it a point to express their support for my research, thereby shifting any felt apprehension away from the topic of defecation to *other* people’s potential reaction to the subject. In both cases, a chilling effect occurs, not because anyone is offended necessarily, but because of the potential of offense, which leads not only to censorship but to one’s accountability for censorship being disavowed. The presumption of offense and lack of communication operate to keep shit in its place, on the fringe and outside professional academic discourses.

In Chapter One, I wondered what it might mean to get in touch with the story of the object, what we might gain and also lose if we listened to the story of the toilet attentively and more often. The toilet tells stories that denaturalize the bodily practices that surround it and expose broader social patterns and rituals that keep particular toilets, people, and ideas in their places. The toilet tells a broad story of waste and sanitation problems, a story of bodies at risk and in pain, or as Richard Shweder describes, bodies in terror. Performance tends to the body at the level of its practices, listens to its stories, and understands it as a bearer of broader social concerns. And, while performance does not remedy the body's pain, it does ask questions about it, offer opinions or imagine alternatives, prompting us in turn to be accountable for ourselves and responsible to others in this world we share.

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## Vita

Danielle Dick McGeough spent her childhood in the Midwest, living in the rural town of Pomeroy, Iowa. At fifteen, she moved to Dayton, Iowa, where she later graduated from Southeast Webster High School. In 2000, Danielle relocated to Cedar Falls, Iowa, where she studied communication studies at University of Northern Iowa (UNI). During her undergraduate studies, Danielle competed on the Individual Events Speech Team, was actively involved in the Interpreters' Theatre, a black box theatre at UNI, and Students Against a Violent Environment (SAVE), a peer education performance troupe. After completing her Bachelor of Arts, Danielle attended Illinois State University. There she studied communication studies and, as a part of her graduate assistantship, coached the Individual Events Speech Team, which went on to be the 2005 National Champions of the American Forensics Association. In 2006, Danielle transferred to University of Northern Iowa to focus her studies in the area of performance studies. In the spring of 2007, she performed *Telling My Way Home* in the Interpreters' Theatre as a part of her master's thesis.

After completing her Master of Arts degree and having discovered a passion for teaching, writing, and directing, Danielle moved to Louisiana to pursue her doctorate at Louisiana State University (LSU). In addition to her coursework, she taught a variety of communication courses, including performance of literature, communication and gender, and film genres: the horror genre. In the fall of 2008, she directed *Crap Happens* in the HopKins Black Box theatre, an experimental performance lab at LSU. Danielle's research interests center on how performance, as a mode of communication, is and can be used for collaborative problem solving, community building, and social justice work. After graduating in December 2011, Danielle plans to continue working as an instructor, researcher, and director in the field of performance studies.