

Bleugh!¹

Michael O'Rourke

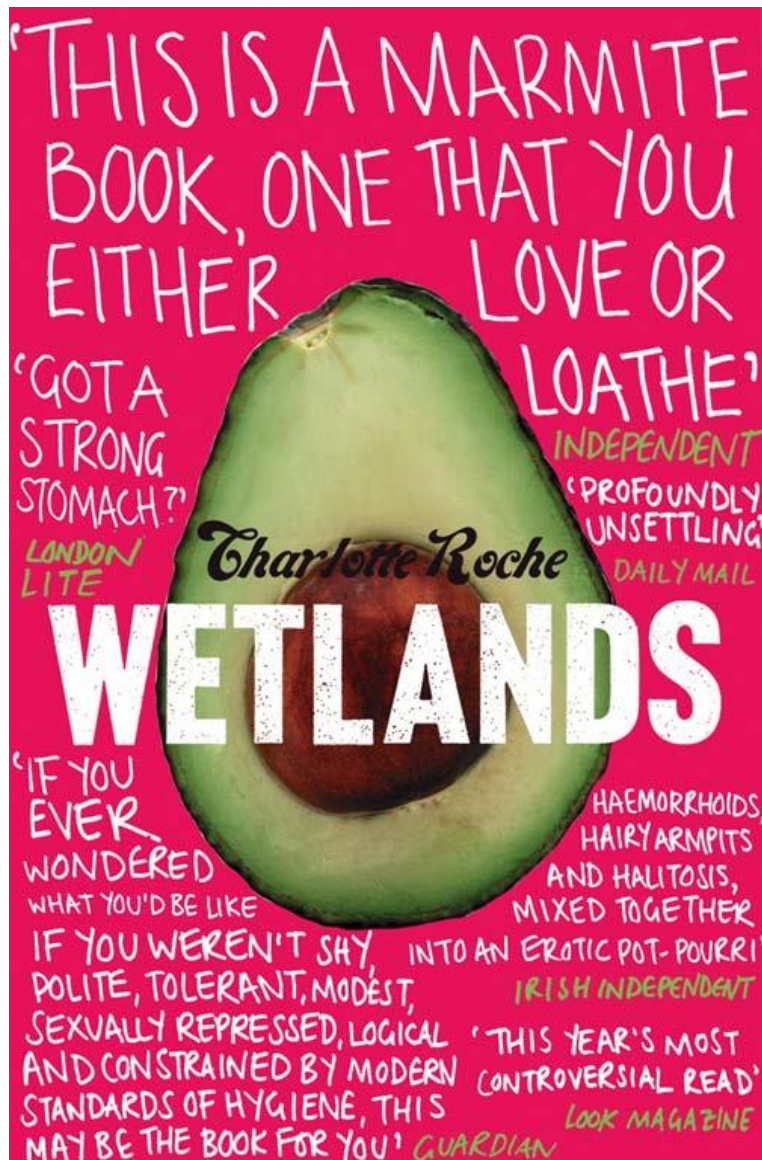
for Rebeka Pöldsam

We might need to talk about bodies, and body parts, in much more direct, precise, perhaps even crude ways².

Against Sanonormativity

Stanley Cavell asks that we "learn to maintain our disgust more easily than we learn to maintain what disgusts us"³. In this piece I launch a frontal (or rather dorsal) attack on the squeamishness (what we might call *sanonormativity*) and hygienicization (we might call it a *hygienonormativity*) of contemporary queer and feminist thinking which has little to say about (sexual) disgust (the term is Jonathan Dollimore's) and the erotics of bodily fluids and the ontologically leaky body⁴. One could mine philosophical texts, literature and film for a whole range of fluids: blood, sweat, pus, mucous, semen, milk, tears, vomit, diarrhea, saliva, bile, spinal fluid and urine among other suppurations which unsuture the neatly stoppered up body (and the very bodies of knowledge of queer and feminist theories).

My overall argument⁵ which is pitched against the domestication of queer thought—and it is apposite and serendipitous that queer and queasy share etymological roots; Jennifer Boyd has coined the wonderful and productive neologism *Queezy* which conjoins uneasy, queer, and queasy⁶—is that these bodily fluids potentialize new ways of thinking about corporeality, ontology, aesthetics and politics and that, as Derrida would argue, the worst is yet to-come. And that is a good thing. One might expect the proper (or improper) names of Georges Bataille and Julia Kristeva to be the main figures indexed in this project. But my archive will be Derrida, Heidegger, Lacan, and Freud and my focus, for this short piece, will be on the novel *Wetlands* written by Charlotte Roche (published in German as *Feuchtgebiete* in 2008 and the subject of a recent film)⁷.



<https://thejacketmuseum.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/wetlands.jpg>

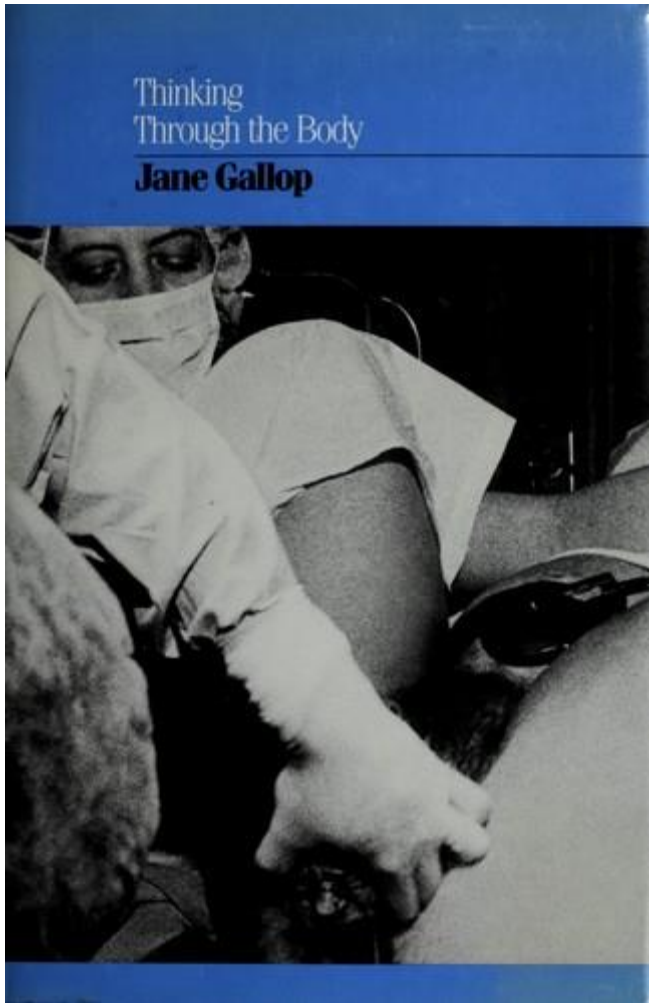
See Jane Run

Justin E. H. Smith wrote of Roche's novel in a review in *N+1*: "If Roche has hit on something true and heretofore unsaid, it is the insight that to write about bodily fluids is not to describe something exceptional in the course of human life. It is, rather, to describe something that is always there and always felt to be there, through all those other things people do and experience at that level that used to be the subject of novels (falling in love, challenging others to duels, talking about the buying and selling of land, etc)"⁸.



<http://forbookssake.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Charlotte-Roche.jpg>

I want to ask what kind of a reading practice Charlotte Roche's *Wetlands* invites from us as we ponder the legacies of feminism and queer theory and their ongoing possibilities for generating fluid futures that one might want to hold on to? One possible mode of reading this book makes a space for is *galloping*, a kind of close reading which would mime a propulsive and undoubtedly queasy movement of the body, a body that is thinking and moving and unsettled; this jolting movement would be operative at the level of the narrative itself: it "turns out your butt hole is always in motion" muses Helen Memel, the protagonist of this novel, whose remappings of bio-cartography and the (dis)gustatory set the stage for a revisiting of the politics and ontology of the body. *Galloping as reading* would mean a fluid kind of thinking and writing, a *scatogrammatology*. Of course, you might hear a glancing reference to Jane Gallop's *Thinking Through the Body* which has its own chapter on anality⁹.



<https://covers.openlibrary.org/w/id/7138073-L.jpg>

That chapter "The Anal Body" has a title which in its own condensed fashion might aptly describe the way Helen's body in this novel becomes a rubiks cube where all the orifices and erogenous zones of the body get swept up in the metonymic folds of the anus, Helen's is an *anal body*. The novel is also set in a hospital so the cover of Gallop's book could easily double as a jacket for Roche's which is nothing but a thinking through and out of the body.



<http://boomstickcomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/wetlands-1.jpg>

In a more recent essay Gallop makes a brief but nonetheless telling remark about Leo Bersani's book *The Freudian Body* (a text written some while before the now *ür*-text on anality, his essay "Is The Rectum a Grave?")¹⁰. That remark is that Bersani is a "fucking tease!"¹¹ I am not disinclined to agree with this assessment; after all, what is wrong with reading as teasing? Reading as flirting? Isn't that really what Bersani means by cruising as depersonalization anyway? (I have a companion text to this one, "Peri-Aesthetics" in which I lay out three new critical modes: rimming, cruising and fisting. I would now be tempted to add teasing and flirting¹²). The import of Gallop's as-ever close reading (nobody reads more closely) of Bersani's book is that not once does he mention the phrase "The Freudian Body". This is hardly an insignificant omission. And what Gallop teaches us, as she runs along, is that attending to moments like these is what opens up the future of reading as such. Finding a hole like this in Bersani's thesis about the Freudian body puts the brakes on for us (not quite in the same way Helen puts the brakes of the bed on in *Wetlands*¹³) and gives us pause. We put the skids on here and try to re-mark (about) this textual lacuna. So galloping as reading, the practice I'm adhering to here as we stick with the text, is as much about *reversing* as stalling and pressing on. We need to back up a little. So I want to say, up front (Helen would say from the top) that the news from the front about anality is that we need to go back to Freud, to the Freudian body and then to Lacan. I am doing everything in reverse.



http://38.media.tumblr.com/e412a88c947211cb7b4d9790ff9ef3f9/tumblr_nam7fkfi0e1tfbpzso1_500.gif

Helen's Freudian Body

The backdrop to my reading of *Wetlands* is Eve Sedgwick's writing on anal eroticism which in large measure put an end to the critical silence (another hole in discourse) about *female anal eroticism*. Despite the fact that Eve's most famous essays on anality are on men (or about texts by men, Henry James most memorably) it is in an essay such as "A Poem is Being Written" where she confronts her own anal auto-eroticism that Sedgwick opens up an avenue for thinking and talking about female anal *jouissance* (and in many ways her notorious essay "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl" was the proscenium for all critical attentions to the equally silenced topic of female autoeroticism. Fingering would be another peri-critical mode)¹⁴.



http://static.rogerebert.com/uploads/movie/movie_poster/wetlands-2014/large_Screen_Shot_2014-09-02_at_2.02.08_PM.png

Yet, despite this ever so generous attention to female anal autoerotic pleasures it is inescapable that, for Eve, whatever way you look at it, the focus is almost always on the ass as indicatively male, contributing to the in her own words “prior and entire exclusion of women from the general population of desirers, desirees, anus-possessors and even readers”¹⁵. In a posthumously published essay “Anality: News from the Front”, which I have already obliquely referenced, she worries over the way recent writing on male anality and barebacking sex covers over female anality and the pleasures and dangers it brings. It seems then that for Eve, and I am trying not to be ungenerous about it, that the female anus can only be discussed on the back of the male one (she even admits that she doesn’t mind, in fact some of her favourite scenes, *don’t* include women).

Another text that forms an important backdrop for my reading of *Wetlands* is Judith Butler’s “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary” in which the phallus, specifically the Lacanian phallus-as-transcendental signifier, is given a metonymical shove so that it can index *any* part of the body¹⁶. The whole body becomes a series of erogenous nodes and zones which challenges us to rethink what is sexual and what is erotic. Helen’s Freudian body which leaks and spurts from

every possible pore and orifice in this text does precisely that. So, we need to go back to Freud whose *Three Essays on Sexuality* paved the way for the Lacanian Real's destabilizations of sexuality, an unsettling of eroto-socio-sexual categories which lies in its de-essentializing and de-specifying abstractness (Sedgwick's axioms in *Epistemology of the Closet* do the same kind of slippery work)¹⁷. What is clear from Freud's three essays is that normative (hetero)sexuality derails the constitutive perversion which is the undertow of so-called normal sexuality. The desired shift toward reproductive heterosexuality—which eighteen year old Helen will never make, especially since she has been sterilized—is always bought by overcoming, sublimating or ejecting (a vomiting out) polymorphous perversity. This is a polymorphousness which Helen never fails to hang on to and it is hardly a spectre in Roche's novel, hovering like some lost state of plenitude to be mourned; rather perversion is primary, even constitutive as we shall see. Sedgwick writes in *Tendencies* that "sexuality" in the sense of the "open mesh of possibilities" can "*only* mean queer sexuality". And it is inescapable that sexuality can *only ever mean* queer sexuality for Helen¹⁸.

What Freud and Sedgwick are getting at is the subtle point that desire itself is anti(hetero)normative, inassimilable to the ego and unattachable to the person as such. Desire is fundamentally impersonal or depersonal and this concerns a way of thinking about how desire does not relate to or figure the face (this is a drive by reference to Giorgio Agamben's exhortation that we "be only" our face which I have elsewhere rewritten as "be only your anus")¹⁹. In this depersonification of desire which reveals its originary perverse force we witness Paul de Man's "defacement" or defiguration²⁰. If desire does not work by *prosopopoeia*—the trope whereby we *give face*—then we have to reconsider libidinal investments in both the auto- and allo-erotic registers (in *Wetlands* it is mostly, but not always, auto-erotic which at least partially negates the question about the other's alterity "in the face" of im- or de-personal desire).



<https://projectormagazine.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/gaothtw9jkwkvre9gb9ep1zsr.jpg?w=610&h=343>

Galloping along too quickly we can say then that Lacan's Real which designates that which is stubbornly inassimilable, unincorporable, inappropriable or symbolizable reveals how the unsettling kernel—*pace* Žižek— of sex is its inherent perversion²¹. That is to say that normative (hetero)sexuality is already fissured, *cut*, incised from within and the *objet a* does not cling to either a person or a thing: the *objet a* itself is exappropriative, multiplicitous and promiscuously adheres to heterogeneous possibilities for desire and this does not always, as Sedgwick would be quick to point out, cleave to gender (or indeed genitality) at all. Among her axioms in *Epistemology of the Closet* we have: "Some people, homo-, hetero-, and bisexual, experience their sexuality as deeply embedded in a matrix of gender meanings and gender differentials. Others of each sexuality do not"²². And, for *Wetlands'* Helen the *objet a* can just as easily be a showerhead or an eyelash curling tongs than another person. Going back to Freud: in the *Three Essays* he addresses this excess that Lacan will later call the *objet a* in terms of polymorphous perversity, a capaciousness which emphasizes the infant's (or anyone's) capacity to confer autoerotic pleasure on any number of bodily openings, corporeal apertures, surfaces, scenes and activities. Lacan goes back to Freud's holes:

the very delimitation of the 'erogenous zone' that the drive isolates from the metabolism of the function ... is the result of a cut expressed in the anatomical mark of a margin or border—lips, 'the enclosure of the teeth', the rim of the anus, the tip of the penis, the vagina, the slit formed by the eyelids, even the horn-shaped aperture of the ear ... Observe that this mark of the cut is no less obviously present in the object described by analytic theory: the mamilla, the faeces, the phallus (imaginary object), the urinary flow (an unthinkable list, if one adds, as I do, the phoneme, the gaze, the voice—the nothing²³).

Lacan is above, we might say, describing Helen's body as multiple erogenous fields. Tellingly, Lacan places the mark of the cut in objects and for Freud the child re-members acts of loss later on. The novel begins, of course, with a cut, the intimate shaving accident which slices through her haemorrhoid, a cut which is redoubled by the cut of the doctor who fillets open her anus when removing the infected anal tissue (which she will go on to ingest and reincorporate and, of course, she carves the wound open a third time on the brakes of the bed). But the cuts in and on Helen's body go far beyond this originary one. Among the many erogenous zones are her eyelids and lashes, her ears (which she pushes the cotton buds into to derive maximal eroto-sensual pleasure, an *oto-eroticism*), her fingertips, her vagina, her anus, her tear ducts, her nasal cavity, her every pore. Helen confers erotic meaning on just about every surface of her body, and on just about every aperture. Equally, she endows erotic plentitude on that which is expelled or excorporated from the body: her piss, tears, faeces, menstrual blood, shit, boogers, blackheads, and so on.



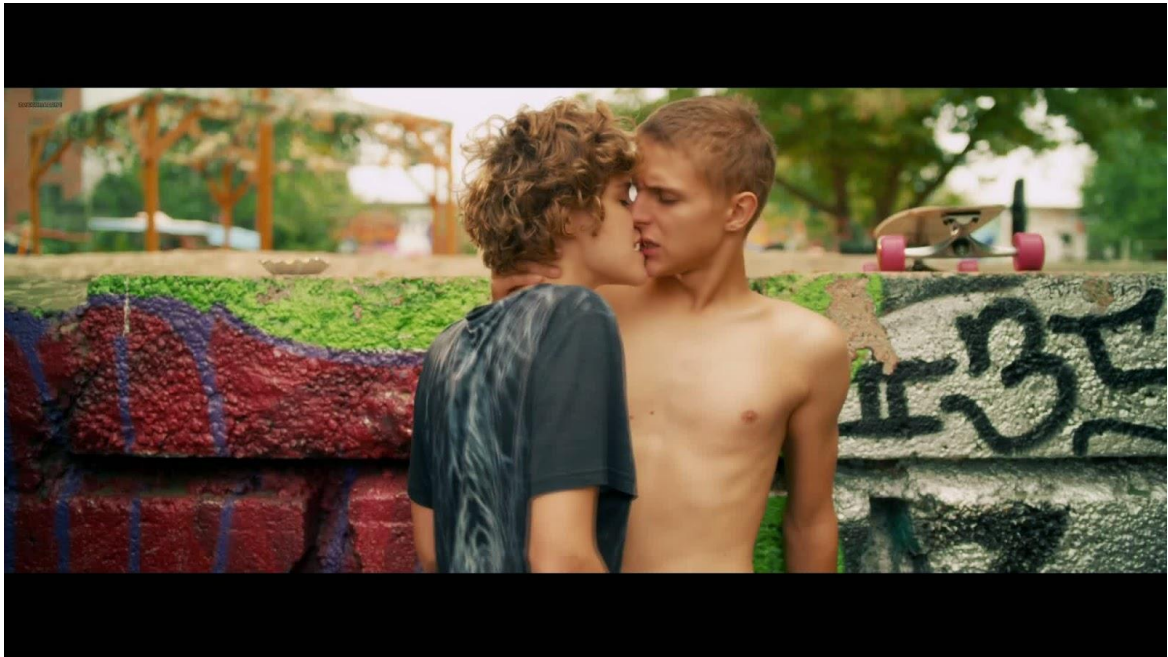
<http://i.imgur.com/FW8HBde.jpg>

What Helen makes explicit is that for Freud and later for Lacan erogenous zones come into being when sexuality is severed from any organicity, when the cut occasions the moment of autoeroticism (actually there isn't very much sex in the novel of *Wetlands* and the vast proportion of the sexual scenes are indeed autoerotic ones but usually they involve bodily borders and apertures which we wouldn't normally think of as erotic hotspots). For Freud and Lacan and clearly for Helen these "marks of the cut" which create *objets a* are multiplied throughout and across the body. Sexual desire originates in autoeroticism then, but more crucially, it is often not attached to (or is detachable from) the genital organs. But Helen's eyes, ears, nose remain no less erotogenic *for not being* erotogenic, because what Roche shows us is that nongenital parts of the body can behave *exactly* like genital organs.

In uncoupling genitality and erotogenicity (as well as genitality and organic function) as Freud and Roche demonstrate, as Butler does with the lesbian phallus, that there is an irreducibility and a metonymical slippage between gender and sexuality. As Tim Dean reminds us Lacan follows Freud in deprivileging genitality and suggests that the mouth is a model for all other erogenous zones²⁴. Lacan suggests that, at least from a psychoanalytic point of view, the body is covered in mouths. We can extrapolate from this that any and all "marks of the cut", those bodily openings where inside meets outside, are extendable to any and all bodily openings, endlessly re(sh)iterable. Every

hole—big or small—in Helen's body, every pore which breathes, absorbs, excretes, expels—becomes one of Freud and Lacan's many mouths. Or, better still, one of Lacan's many anuses (we could then begin to talk about the anal gaze, the anal voice and so on too).

In understanding kissing as perverse it is Freud who suggests that the anal zone is comparable to the mouth since the tongue leads to the gullet down to the alimentary canal and ultimately to the organ of expulsion. We are, for Freud, when we kiss, eating the other's shit, their waste.



<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/->

[igyRaHJ29K4/U7QZsIOIk8I/AAAAAAAAAR3M/E4XVu7gTjWg/s1600/Wetlands+5.jpg](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-igyRaHJ29K4/U7QZsIOIk8I/AAAAAAAAAR3M/E4XVu7gTjWg/s1600/Wetlands+5.jpg)

Helen's anal body displays a number of assholes, in that every opening figures an anal cut, at its surface and this anal integument—the skin as one elasticized erogenous zone—brings us back to Gallop and her anal body. In the *Three Essays*, again, Freud outlines how shit as *objet a* unhooks the phallus-as-transcendental signifier "the contents of the bowels, which act as a stimulating mass upon a sexually sensitive portion of mucous membrane, behave like forerunners of another organ, which is destined to come into action after the phase of childhood ... the retention of the faecal mass is thus carried out intentionally by the child to begin with, in order to serve, as it were, as a masturbatory stimulus upon the anal zone"²⁵.

The phallus in this Freudo-Lacanian scenography gets displaced and comes to figure for and as shit (or any other waste/ob-jects which the body ab-jects [literally to throw out]) and Helen spends quite a lot of the novel holding her crap in or retaining blood or cum in her pussy. This is hardly surprising given the physico-anatomical proximity of these genital regions. In terms of this substitutability we might think of Helen's daydream about the guy who has an impressive "log of crap" dangling from his ass but when he turns around it is his cock from the front; or maybe it is both). But, most queasy making I think, is that Freud and Lacan perform what Tim Dean terms (a critical, psychoanalytical) *reverse money shot*²⁶. It is not the phallus as a figure for the penis after all, but rather the phallus gets re-figured as shit and Helen's neologism "anal piss" captures this reversal quite beautifully.

Queer Theory's () hole complex

In the Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani's theory-fiction *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* he decenters the Heideggerian topology of the earth by developing what he calls the () hole complex. This model is a way in which to grasp the earth not as a solid Whole but rather as a "destituted whole" and a "holey-mess". The () hole complex is "the zone through which the Outside gradually but persistently emerges, creeps in (or out?) from the Inside"²⁷. The earth becomes an insurgent, holey, writhing mess. When the solidity of the earth is inverted by the tellurian insurgency of lube (here he means oil), the holes that emerge are polytical: "for every inconsistency on the surface, there is a subterranean consistency"²⁸, a confusion of solid and void.

What I want to call Queer Theory's () hole complex would be an ungrounding, desolidifying, deprivileging and destabilization of the intact, Whole body. Revealing the () hole complex of the body is to expose the leaky ontology of a body which is porous, soggy, fluid, craps out. Negarestani writes: "things leak out according to a logic that does not belong to us"²⁹, the logic of *durchfall*, which in Heidegger's *Being and Time* can mean falling or diarrhea. But Negarestani's () hole complex depends on what he calls "nested interiorities", the ways in which the outside gradually but persistently emerges from the inside or creeps in (or out?) from the inside. And I think we can find an example of this queered () hole complex in Dean's formulation of what he calls the "reverse money shot".

Heideggerian *Durchfall*

Disgust-aversion and scatontological anxiety are ubiquitous in philosophical discourse but nonetheless unavoidable³⁰. Even that wild thinker François Laruelle describes the “obscenities of philosophy” as follows:

Inebriated and bastardized by Plato, over heated, over thought, liquified by Descartes, moralized by Kant, whipped by Sade, devoured by Hegel, disgorged by Stirner, conscripted by Husserl, chewed over by Nietzsche, down the wrong pipe of Derrida, flipped over by Heidegger, crapped out by Deleuze, thrown up by Laruelle. And it would come back for more, if we let it!

Clearly Laruelle cannot stomach the philosophy crapped out by Deleuze into his mouth—it having been in the mouths or anuses of ten men before him—and expels it. But Laruelle’s attempt to move beyond philosophy’s coprological excesses necessarily fails since it can always come back for more. And the most obscene thing we can do is to just “let it”, to give ourselves over to scat-isfactory expulsions, precipitate into *durchfall* and “fully embrace the powers of ordure”³¹.



<http://www.vice.com/read/the-philosophy-of-excrement>

Arguably this *misophobia* can be attributed to the profound scatontological anxiety which, as Derrida argues, haunts Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and his refusal to accord *Dasein* a gender, a sexuality, or even a body. Consequently, Heidegger is unable to stomach bodily functions, but most especially, the productions of the anus and its abjectified marks. If Heidegger is reluctant to give *Dasein* a materiality then this squeamishness, I argue, has repercussions for a certain queer thinking about the body and its excorporations. In an essay by Michelle Ong on "The Philosophy of Excrement" which appeared in *Vice Magazine* a few years back, she gets real about the ass and theory's abjected coils:

I took a shit in the woods for the first time last weekend while tripping on four hits of acid. As the steaming pile of excrement eased out of my yawning butt cheeks, thoughts of God, mankind, and the universe crackled through the synapses of my electrified neurons. It struck me that while everyone is guilty of contemplating their navels, especially on psychedelics, the field of Shit Studies needs some good probing. Phenomenologically speaking, is there an ontological *différance* between excreta and feces? What are the linguistic ramifications of the protean spellings of the word "diarrhea"? The more I dwelled on the scatological subject—which was now quickly coiling into an Other with the *vraisemblance* of Being—the more I became aware of the need to cast off antediluvian prejudice and fully embrace the powers of ordure³².

The silent Heideggerian (and explicit Derridean) references will not be lost on the reader here. But, as Richard Kearney points out in *Anatheism*, "the fact remains that Heideggerian *Dasein* has no real sense of a living body: Heidegger's decarnalized *Dasein* does not eat, sleep or have sex. It too, remains, despite all the talk of 'being-in-the-world', captive of the transcendental lure"³³. Heidegger's *Dasein* doesn't even take a shit in the woods. What is needed, to counter Heidegger's constipated, anally retentive, non-disseminative ontology, Kearney asserts, is a "fully fledged phenomenology of flesh", the body as "*flesh itself* in all its ontological depth", a return to the body "in its unfathomable *thisness*", a re-corporealizing or re-enfleshing of ontology, a reverse money shot in which the body is fecalized.

Helen's Lacanian body

Charlotte Roche's own reverse money shot in *Wetlands* could be construed as a right pain in the ass for the Symbolic order. As Lee Edelman has recently argued in "White Skin, Dark Meat: Identity's Pressure Point", the Oedipal ruse depends on us not acknowledging this substitutability or reversibility of genital zones that we mentioned above:

for the anal zone, unique among areas eroticized in the various stages that chart libidinal 'development', does not just pass from early pre-eminence to later subordination, it also undergoes a demonization within a heterosexually-inflected Symbolic that subjects the history of its libidinal cathexis to a revisionary repression. It not only loses legitimacy, that is, as a site for the production of desire, it also comes to define the space of what is viscerally *undesirable*, the space that produces our primary cultural referent for disgust³⁴.

The anatomical confusion between front and back, which elsewhere I describe as peri-erotic, carries with it the stain or taint of what Jonathan Dollimore calls "sexual disgust"³⁵. This recoil in the face of sexual disgust and anatomo-genital indeterminacy leads to what Edelman describes as an insistent Oedipalization which would mop up, sanitize and place a *cordon sanitaire* around the mess made by the not-so-clear-cut distinction between the anal and the genital (again I quote Edelman at length):

as a result, the insistent Oedipal—or better, the insistent *Oedipalizing*—focus on castration as the law that secures the truth of a 'clear-cut' genital difference reiterates and displaces the determining, because culturally performative, insistence on another distinction represented as being—which is also to say, represented *so as to be*—clear-cut: that posited between anal and genital to elaborate our governing cultural fantasy of a urethra-genital process able, through the unfailingly redemptive agency of hetero-genital desire, to wash away, as if with a stream of antiseptic astringency, the primal taint of dirt and disgust with which, and as which, the law's prohibition first darkens our youthful doorway—or at any rate, with which it manages to darken the doorway in the back³⁶.

Might we read the filleting of Helen's anus by the doctor as precisely the Symbolic law carving the female body into shape using an Oedipal cleaver?



http://cf.badassdigest.com/_uploads/images/sxsw14_wetlands.jpg

The anxiety caused by dirt, shit, viscera and the subject's enjoyment of that which must not become a site of pleasure but rather one of phobic evisceration leads to a major cleaning up operation for the Symbolic law of hetero-genitality. But that which ought to be phobically repudiated stubbornly returns as an anamorphic blot or shitty stain on the landscape of the "foundational" law. But the Law is everywhere insistent on the effacement of the disgusting and its contaminations. As Dean says "excrement remains an extraordinarily difficult topic for sustained discourse ... even Freud, whose broadmindedness still retains the capacity to astonish, deems perversion most unequivocally pathological when it involves sexual contact with shit"³⁷. Slavoj Žižek elaborates on this anxiety we feel towards our excremental remainder(s) in *The Puppet and The Dwarf* and again in *On Belief*: "The immediate appearance of the inner is formless shit. The small child who gives his shit as a present is in a way giving the immediate equivalent of his inner self. The often-overlooked point is that this piece of myself offered to the Other radically oscillates between the sublime and—not the Ridiculous, but, precisely—the excremental ... We are ashamed of shit because, in it, we expose/externalize our innermost intimacy"³⁸.

However, the paradigmatic or maybe symptomatic Lacanian *object a* is shit. Lacan writes that "It is important to grasp how the organism is taken up in the dialectic of the subject. The organ of what is incorporeal in the sexuated being is that part of the organism the subject places when his separation occurs ... in this way, the object he naturally loses, excrement, and the props he finds in the Other's desire—the Other's gaze or voice—come to this place"³⁹. Here Lacan's model for subjective loss/the castratory cut is not the phallus but faeces, an ungendered object/abject. As Tim Dean muses: "whether or not we're all missing the phallus, certainly we've all lost objects from the anus. And, while we may not be certain that nobody has the phallus, we can be sure everybody has an anus. Castration isn't Lacan's only rubric for loss"⁴⁰. Dean goes on: "To transpose Freudian into Lacanian terms, we can say that by using faeces as both a sexual stimulus and a means of communication the child's relation to shit involves *l'objet petit a* and *le grand Autre*—that is, anality entails both 'big' and 'little' others, the different modes of alterity that constitute the subject and his or her desire"⁴¹. The phallus "is less a figure for the penis than, more fundamentally [fundament is, of course, another word for excrement⁴²], a figure for the turd"⁴³.

Helen's messy, leaking body in *Wetlands* seems to swerve away from the castratory and insistently Oedipalizing prohibitions of the Symbolic toward the Lacanian domain of the Real and her destabilizations and desolidifications of the intact, whole body exposes the leaky ontology of a body which is porous, permeable, and fluid. Tim Dean in *Beyond Sexuality* tries to anatomize our innermost intimacies with (and disquiet about) shit and claims there that "in its most *fundamental* formulations psychoanalysis is a queer theory image for the erogenous zones could be reformulated to suggest that the body exhibits a "number of assholes at its surface" and for Dean, as we have heard, the exemplary Lacanian *objet a* is scat.

In *Unlimited Intimacy* Dean reveals the precise logic of a body which craps out but *without* scatontological anxieties about abjection or besmirchment. In recent hardcore straight and gay porn the fascination with the hypervisibility of male ejaculate (which Calvin Thomas argues is anxiety producing for the male⁴⁴) has been replaced by the hyper-visibility of that part of the body over which we have no ocular control and which evades sexual and gendered differentiation: the anus⁴⁵.



<http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/kuspit/Images/kuspit6-10-18.jpg>

As Dean explains: "one visual fetish of recent straight hard core consists in filming what are known as 'dilations': after a prolonged bout of butt fucking, the woman's rectal sphincter does not immediately contract when the male performers penis is withdrawn, and the camera zooms in for a close up of her gaping anus, in a style very similar to the close-ups of freshly fucked or fisted asses in bareback porn"⁴⁶.

Far from being a disavowal of sexual difference, Dean sees this forensic emphasis on the difference between the inside and the outside of the body (one thinks of the birth canal on the cover of Gallop's *Thinking Through The Body*) by trying to get as far *inside* as possible as "hard core's latest attempt at representing what remains unrepresentable in sexual difference (what Lacanians call the Real of sexual difference)"⁴⁷.



<http://ilovedakotaskye.tumblr.com/>

The recent phenomenon in straight porn of “cum snorting” is interesting insofar as cum is snorted up into the ungendered, undifferentiated nasal cavity (which is always open) from the undifferentiated, ungendered anuses of male or female (sometimes both) porn stars.



http://31.media.tumblr.com/3fa527b086602c3b623415640d4727ba/tumblr_mgoy1zdQKe1rre7kuo4_400.gif

The phenomenon which I called earlier queer theory's hole () complex, and its hypervisualization of the (mostly female porn star's) dilating sphincter has, naturally enough, led to fascination with what the camera/penis cannot normally see: the internal cum shot. The internal pop shot is something which, we might argue, is slightly *less* anxiety-inducing for the male, although the "compromise shot" Dean talks about would suggest it is no less so. Negarestani might call it a "nested cum shot" where the outside creeps in (or out) to the inside⁴⁸. What Roche gives us, more so than the cream pie (the internal cumshot—and I'm imagining cum here as metonymical, figuring *anything* which is emitted from the body's orifices; in the novel it is "ass piss", blood, menses, water) is what Dean formulates as the "reverse money shot".

He explains: "although representations of ass fucking have become virtually *de rigueur* in heterosexual as well as gay hard core and although dilations of the anal sphincter appear across the board, viewers are accustomed to seeing their butt sex headed, as it were, in only one direction"⁴⁹.

Even in pornographic depictions of anal sex, fisting and rimming (any acts which cluster around the anus/rectum/sphincter), then, we witness a certain hygienicization: "as dirty and nasty as it gets in one sense, pornographic images of anal sex are expected to remain meticulously clean in another sense. The market for scat is small indeed. Seeing any bodily product coming out of an anus tends to provoke a visceral reaction of disgust in most adults, irrespective of sexual orientation"⁵⁰.



<https://uproxx.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/wetlands-shitbelly.jpg?w=650&h=292>

All male and female porn stars receive an enema before shooting an anal scene because the spectacle of the body leaking out, of the messy anus, leads to a high "ick factor" which many responses to *Wetlands* attest to and as Dean admits: "the spectacle of the reverse money shot takes some getting used to: various sensations have to be overcome before one can find such an image unequivocally erotic [this was certainly my own experience of watching cum snorting for the first time]. Fluids that trace the pathway of shit as they leave the body almost inevitably recall our earliest taboos about what's sexually enjoyable"⁵¹. While many of the scenes from bareback pornography of reverse money shots, cum pushed out of the anus are allo-erotic (and designed to be witnessed—both by other participants in the scene and by the putative audience for the film), one interview "Max Holden and his Dildos", which Dean discusses, dramatizes an *auto*-erotic spectacle with striking similarities to Helen Memel's autoerotic pleasures with her "brown water" in *Wetlands*.



http://www.treasureislandmedia.com/cart/images/videoimages/fuckcrazy_27.jpg

Holden holds semen inside him from the night before and relates that "If I go out and get fucked I have cum, loads, inside me, I save it inside me, and then the next day I squat it out into a bowl, and then I'm playing with my toys and I eat it"⁵². Just like Helen consuming the flesh removed from her anus after her operation Holden with his toys joys (an anal *jouissance*) in the fluid productions—cum and shit— of his rectum and "challenges another level of disgust"⁵³.

Derridean disgust

Roche's novel might be considered as a challenge in itself to a long German (recall that the novel is written in German) tradition of "sexual disgust" and prudishness. Heidegger, as we saw already, can countenance no production of abjectified marks or inscriptions. And if Helen Memel is all about the aesthetics of the cunt and its flows it is Immanuel Kant who is keen to wash away the disgusting in his transcendental aesthetics. For Kant, in the third critique, *ekel* (disgust, loathing) is that which is inassimilable to the field of aesthetics and the beautiful. The disgusting is what makes Kant gag and it functions as the limit case for him, as that which is unintegratable. Or, in the context of Helen's anuses-as-mouths (or vice versa: mouths-as-anuses), the disgusting is what Kant cannot digest, cannot hold down. In "Economimesis" Derrida anatomizes this antipathy toward disgust in the Kantian system and writes that *ekel* functions as the "border which traces its limit and

the frame of its *parergon*, in other words, that which is excluded from it and what, proceeding from this exclusion, gives it form, limit and contour"⁵⁴. Disgust's productive repudiation from the field of good taste, as with the law of the Symbolic in psychoanalytic discourse, defines and gives shape and coherence to the field of the aesthetic itself. As Derrida shows it is vomit which is particularly unrepresentable and indigestible for Kant and therefore must "cause itself to be vomited"⁵⁵.

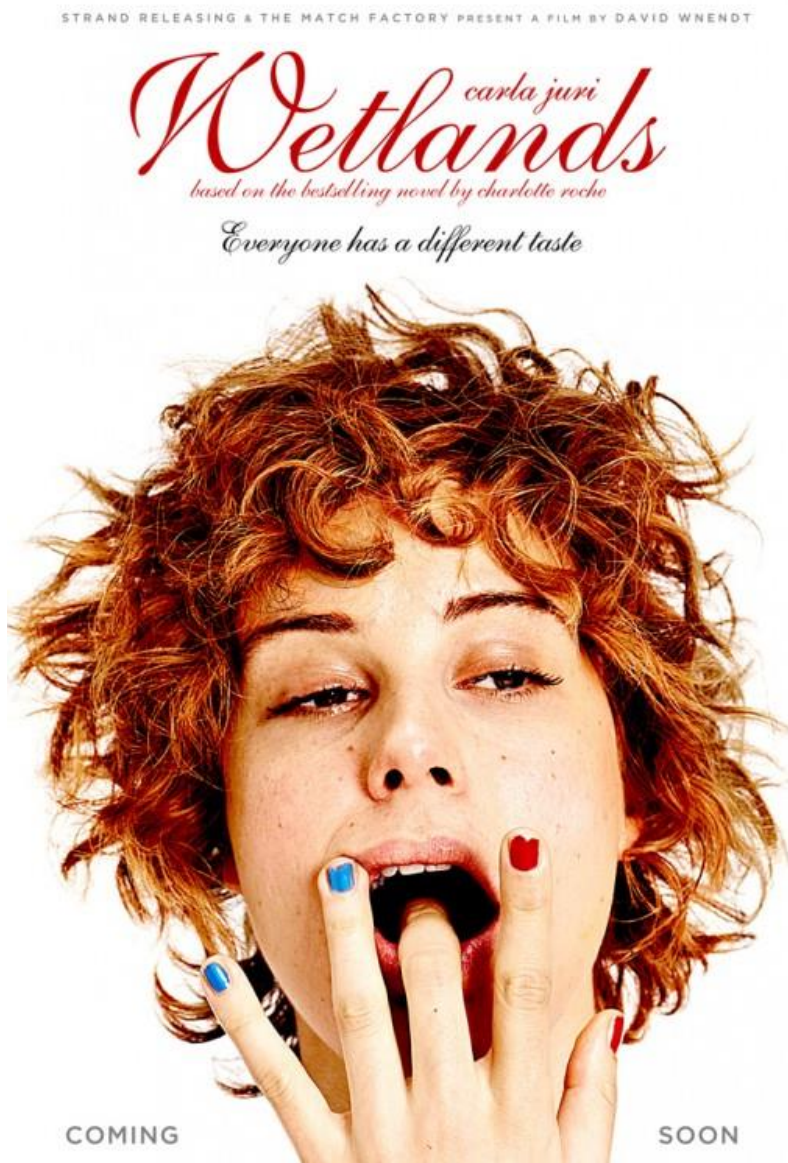


http://f.internetara.com/onbellek/12/12/25/iuuq_NV_00gpsvn_SL_ofu_SL_is0dgt_NK_gjmftztufn_gjmf_SL_btiy0_SK__SK_lfz0DpnnvojuzTfswfs_SL_Ejtdvtjpot_SL_Dpnqpofout_SL_Gjmft08808255_SL_3hjsmt2dvq_SK_3E11_SK_hsptt_SL_kqh.jpg

This Derridean reverse money shot (how can one forget the most nauseating moment in *Wetlands* when Helen and her friend taste each other's vomit for the first time) allows vomit to stand in metonymically, to figure for *all* that is excluded, rejected, emitted, expelled from the clean and properly fortified body. Disgust is that which becomes too proximate and therefore must be, indeed as Derrida says, "can *only* be vomited"⁵⁶. This is disgust's perversion, because as Derrida cautions, it "makes one *desire* to vomit"⁵⁷.

Vomit, for Derrida, becomes something desired, perversely so given the ban on enjoyment of the disgusting, and even if we might not think of puke as unequivocally erotic We cannot fail to recall Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's encounter with erotic vomiting in their essay "Sex in Public"⁵⁸.

They stumble upon a scene of erotic vomiting in a club which showcased a Wednesday night sex performance called "Pork".



http://www.screenrelish.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/feuchtgebiete_ver4.jpg

On this particular evening "word was circulating that the performance was to be erotic vomiting. This sounded like an appetite spoiler, and the thought of leaving early occurred to us but was overcome by a simple curiosity: what would the foreplay be like? Let's stay until it gets messy. Then we can leave"⁵⁹. At first Berlant and Warner feel a certain Kantian aversiveness. Even in a club where "spanking, flagellation, shaving, branding, laceration, bondage, humiliation, wrestling"⁶⁰ are *de rigueur*, erotic vomiting pushes at the limits of good taste. But as Derrida argues in "Economimesis" it is this very aversion, this too-proximateness of the disgusting, which fuels our desire and our

curiosity and causes us to flout the ban on erotic enjoyment of the disgusting so much so that we stay with the mess: "we realize we cannot leave, cannot even look away. No one can. The crowd is transfixed by the scene of intimacy and display, control and abandon, ferocity and abjection. People are moaning softly with admiration, then whistling, stomping, screaming encouragement"⁶¹.

Again, as we saw with Lacan there is a tendency to stick with disgust which localizes in and around the mouth although the *objet a* can figure the gaze (the eye is also we might note a sphincter) as well as the voice. Derrida in his critique of Kant also stays with the mouth. But for Kant there is something even worse than vomit, even worse than the very worst: smell. And even in *Wetlands* it is smell which is viscerally undesirable. Helen, who seems to be uptight about nothing at all, is totally grossed out by, gags on the smell of that which she otherwise joys in. And smell leaves such a bad taste in her mouth that she mentions it no less than four times.

In a reading of David Lynch's film *Wild at Heart* Eugenie Brinkema notes that Laura Dern's vomit (which is not visualized) lingers in the film and permeates it (vomit-becoming-form) but as smell it is parergonally overflowing since it is not fully locatable within the film's audio-visual economy⁶². In Roche's novel para-sensual smell is equally unlocatable and allows for a (textual) displacement from the visual on to the olfactory and this further extends, or opens up, a place *beyond* Edelman and Dollimore's disgusting, which is that "something more disgusting than the disgusting, than what disgusts taste. The chemistry of smell exceeds the tautology taste/disgust"⁶³. Brinkema argues that if we stay with disgust's sensual workings for long enough we are invited to "a worse that is always yet to come"⁶⁴. This Derridean formulation of the disgust *à-venir* (to-come) holds out an unsuspected ethical promise which in Derrida often goes under the name of the messianic.



<http://i.ytimg.com/vi/arMRzjpkiQA/maxresdefault.jpg>

And, if I may be permitted an unforgivable pun, Helen's messy anus in *Wetlands* also opens up an ethico-political messianicity. Her moist, orificial body, which refuses to be dammed or stoppered up, keeps the movement and possibility of disgust open. Roche's final reverse money shot might then be that her "disgust to-come" heralds a "new aesthetics" which Stanley Cavell calls for when he asks that we "learn to maintain our disgust more easily than we learn to maintain what disgusts us".

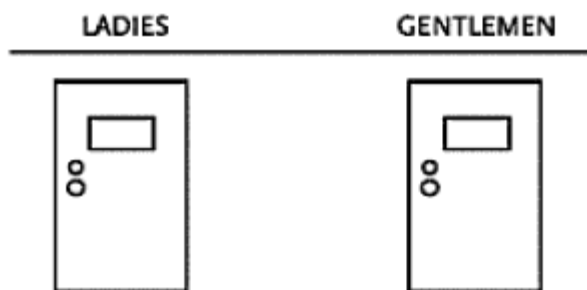
Just as Brinkema argues for vomit-as-form she also claims that rot is not something self evidently disgusting either (the suppurating corpse comes to mind). She does this in an essay which reads for rot in Peter Greenaway's film *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (via the virtually unknown Hungarian phenomenologist Aurel Kolnai who wrote a 1929 treatise *Der Ekel* which sounds like it could have been written yesterday)⁶⁵. Brinkema writes that "rot is neither immediate nor visceral nor obvious, and decay is certainly not a metaphor for moral declivity or ideological distaste: instead, putrescence is a *structure-in-process*, a textually constituting gesture that must be *read for*"⁶⁶. In effect, what Brinkema is saying is that texts—cinematic, literary, architectural, and so on—can always be read as structurally in the process of decaying. Rot is not a fixed, concrete or knowable thing. Rot, like disgust, is always forming and giving form (in Derridean terms is always

the worse to-come). We could rewrite Berlant and Warner's "exuding some rut" as exuding some *rot*. In Steve Finbow's cultural history of necrophilia *Grave Desire* he concludes that necrophilia is placed at the very outermost limits of sexual taste because ingrained cultural laws to do with moral, sexual and physical disgust must be "overcome" in order to fuck a corpse leaking urine, faeces, blood, vomit and in various stages of rotting and putrefaction⁶⁷.

As Derrida says it is because vomit forces pleasure that it is disgusting. But this very revulsion is what causes it (the disgusting) to be desired. Perversely, the disgusting—shit, vomit, menses, urine, and other excorporated mess— leads to excessive *jouissance*. Even though figures such as Nietzsche revalue disgust as a category he does not, for the most part, escape the *negative* valuation of the disgusting as that which Kantian aesthetics cannot speak. What Derrida does is to positively, affirmatively revalue that which aesthetics cannot digest, that we might take pleasure in the disgusting.

Enjoy your Tampon!

To conclude: the reverse money shot has operated in this essay as a figure for critico-theoretical moments where that which we expect to be tethered together refuses to cohere neatly or is unsutured. There is a famous moment in Lacan where a train is stopped on the platform and the two children see the two bathrooms marked ladies and gentlemen.



http://thediagram.com/12_1/shipley.png

Imagine if in those two stalls we have Helen Memel and her friend Irene, both on their periods, passing their used tampons under the door and inserting the other's tampon into their vagina.



<http://www.cinemablend.com/images/facebook/news/67179/67179.jpg>

In this scene I would like to locate a moment of reflection as we contemplate feminism and queer theory's fluid, wet futures. I want to argue, as I have been throughout, that queer and feminist thinking must—following Roche—exceed and overspill its own cleanness, antiseptism and propriety.



<http://i.ytimg.com/vi/1LCYRFkUw74/maxresdefault.jpg>

Like Helen who inspects her friend's tampon *closely* before inserting it, queer and feminist theory needs to get over its profound and deep-seated squeamishness and hygienicizations, needs to get past its sanonormativities and tarry, without delay, with the "disgust to-come".

[Note from *InterAlia*'s editorial team: due to the journal's policy ([see here](#)) four images have been edited out of the article. However, they can be accessed [here](#).]

Notes

- ¹ This is a shortened and much revised version of a presentation entitled "Bleurgh! On the Erotics of Disgust" given at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London on 19 November 2014. Thanks to Fabio Gygi and Caroline Osella for inviting me.
- ² Samuel A. Chambers and Terrell Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (London@ Routledge: 2008), 69.
- ³ Stanley Cavell, "On Makavejev On Bergman" [1979] in William Rothman (ed) *Cavell on Film* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005). He goes on to say that "this will require a transformation of the five senses, a new perspective, a new aesthetics". Tina Kendall provides a valuable and comprehensive survey of writing about the disgusting from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. See "Introduction: Tarrying with Disgust", *Film-Philosophy* (2011), <http://www.film-philosophy.com/index.php/f-p/article/view/923/801>.
- ⁴ Margrit Shildrick's *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* and her work in general have been hugely influential for me since I first encountered it fifteen years ago. See *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- ⁵ This extract is part of a larger project on erotics, aesthetics and bodily fluids. It could be called in Aristotelian fashion *Peri Erotics* ("About Erotics" or "On Erotics").
- ⁶ See Jennifer Boyd's essay "I Feel Queezy: Feelings, Guts, Revolutions" which appears in the reader accompanying the exhibition *Feeling Queezy?!* curated and edited by Rebeka Põldsam in Tallinn, Estonia (August/September 2014). The other texts collected in the reader are Sedgwick on reparative and paranoid reading and Renate Lorenz on Freak Theory and contemporary art.
- ⁷ Charlotte Roche, *Wetlands*, trans. Tim Mohr (London: Fourth Estate, 2009). The title is perhaps best rendered in English as "moist regions". The film is directed by David Wnendt (2013): <http://wetlandsmovie.com/>
- ⁸ Justin E.H. Smith, "Sea Slugs", *N + 1* (March 2008), <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/book-review/sea-slugs/>
- ⁹ Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

- ¹⁰ Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 3-30.
- ¹¹ Jane Gallop, "Bersani's Freudian Body", *PMLA* 125.2 (March 2010): 393-397. "And so the first time I read this book, I was disappointed, frustrated, and even a little angry. I did not find 'the Freudian body' promised by the title. 'Bait and switch', I thought bitterly. 'You fucking tease!'" (393).
- ¹² See my "Peri-Aesthetics", *Peripheries* (2014): <http://www.peripheriesonline.org/peri-aesthetics/>. On flirting see Anna Kłosowska, "Flirting as a Critical Mode: Barthes, Alcibiades, Sartre", *postmedieval* 2.3 (2011): 278-290. Wayne Koestenbaum has described ellipses as "fingering the abyss" in his talk "Punctuation", Royal College of Art, London, May 23, 2014.
- ¹³ To reopen her anal wound Helen deliberately squats down on the brakes of her hospital bed.
- ¹⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).
- ¹⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Anality: News from the Front" in Jonathan Goldberg (ed), *The Weather in Proust* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 172.
- ¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993).
- ¹⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 25-26.
- ¹⁸ Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 7.
- ¹⁹ See "Peri-Aesthetics". Agamben's essays on pornography are all interested in the disinterested face of the porn star but it is in *Means Without End* where we find this imperative.
- ²⁰ Paul De Man, "Shelley Disfigured" in Harold Bloom et al (eds), *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979).
- ²¹ Everywhere in Žižek but see especially *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997).
- ²² Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 25-26.
- ²³ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 315.
- ²⁴ Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- ²⁵ Cited in Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 82.
- ²⁶ Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- ²⁷ Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (Melbourne: Re: Press, 2008), 44. See also Zach Blas, "Queerness, Openness" in Cyclonopedia Symposium, *Leper Creativity* (New York: punctum books, 2012), 101-114 and my "Negarestani's Queer Polytics of the Twist" (forthcoming).
- ²⁸ Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, 53.

- ²⁹ *Cyclonopedia*, 49.
- ³⁰ The term "scatontological" is borrowed from Calvin Thomas' *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998). This remarkable book focuses on abjectified bodily fluids in Derrida, Heidegger, Freud, Bataille, Joyce, and Hegel.
- ³¹ The term scat-isfaction is also taken from Calvin Thomas. As well as his *Male Matters* see *Masculinity, Psychoanalysis, Straight Queer Theory: Essays on Abjection in Literature, Mass Culture and Film* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).
- ³² Michelle Ong, "Philosophy as Excrement", *Vice Magazine* (April 20, 2011), <http://www.vice.com/read/the-philosophy-of-excrement>.
- ³³ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 88.
- ³⁴ Lee Edelman, "White Skin, Dark Meat: Identity's Pressure Point", *identities: journal for politics, gender and culture* 8.1 (2011): 99-113.
- ³⁵ Jonathan Dollimore, "Sexual Disgust", *Oxford Literary Review* 20.1 (1998): 47-78.
- ³⁶ Edelman, "White Skin, Dark Meat", 101.
- ³⁷ Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 83.
- ³⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), 58-59.
- ³⁹ Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 81.
- ⁴⁰ Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 81.
- ⁴¹ Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 82.
- ⁴² See Jeffrey Masten, "Is the Fundament a Grave?" in David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (eds), *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 129-145.
- ⁴³ Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 82.
- ⁴⁴ See Calvin Thomas on sperm and piss as *objet a* in *Male Matters* (47-73).
- ⁴⁵ On ocularity, the scopic and anality see D.A. Miller's classic essay, "Anal Rope" in Diana Fuss (ed) *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London: Routledge, 1991), 119-141; Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), Edelman, "Rear Window's Glasshole" in Ellis Hanson (ed), *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1999), 72-96; Ellis Hanson, "Cinema *a tergo*: Shooting in Elephant" in Mikko Tuhkanen (ed), *Leo Bersani: Queer Theory and Beyond* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014), 83-104.
- ⁴⁶ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 110-111.

- ⁴⁷ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 111.
- ⁴⁸ Dean describes the "compromise shot" as one in which the male performer pulls out and begins cumming outside "so that the camera can record his climax". He then reinserts his cock to finish cumming inside. *Unlimited Intimacy*, 131.
- ⁴⁹ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 136.
- ⁵⁰ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 136.
- ⁵¹ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 136.
- ⁵² Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 137.
- ⁵³ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 137.
- ⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis", *diacritics* 11 (1975): 3-25 (21).
- ⁵⁵ Derrida, "Economimesis", 21.
- ⁵⁶ Derrida, "Economimesis", 23.
- ⁵⁷ Derrida, "Economimesis", 23.
- ⁵⁸ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public", *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (Winter 1998): 547-566.
- ⁵⁹ Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public", 564.
- ⁶⁰ Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public", 564.
- ⁶¹ Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public", 565.
- ⁶² Eugenie Brinkema, "Laura Dern's Vomit, or, Kant and Derrida in Oz", *Film-Philosophy* 15.2 (2011), <http://www.film-philosophy.com/index.php/f-p/article/view/276>
- ⁶³ Derrida, "Economimesis", 25.
- ⁶⁴ Brinkema, "Laura Dern's Vomit", 62.
- ⁶⁵ Eugenie Brinkema, "Rot's Progress: Gastronomy According to Peter Greenaway", *differences* 21 (2010): 73-96.
- ⁶⁶ See also Rosemary Deller, "The Body that 'Melted into the Carpet': Mortal Stains and Domestic Dissolution in Carol Morley's *Dreams of a Life*" (forthcoming).
- ⁶⁷ Steve Finbow, *Grave Desire: A Cultural History of Necrophilia* (Winchester; Zer0 Books, 2014), 154-155.