

**Excremental Ecstasy, Divine Defecation and Revolting Reception:
Configuring a Scatological Gaze in Trash Filmmaking**

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Scatology, for all the sordid formidability the term evokes, is not an especially novel or unusual theme, stylistic technique or descriptor in film or filmic reception. Shit happens – to emphasise both the banality and pervasiveness of the cliché itself – on multiple levels of textuality, manifesting itself in both the content and aesthetic of cinematic texts, and the ways we respond to them. We often refer to “shit films,” using an excremental vocabulary redolent of detritus, malaise and uncleanness to denote their otherness and “badness”. That is, films of questionable taste, aesthetics, or value, are frequently delineated and defined by the defecatory: we describe them as “trash”, “crap”, “filth”, “sewerage”, “shithouse”. When considering cinematic purviews such as the b-film, exploitation, and shock or trash filmmaking, whose narratives are so often played out on the site of the grotesque body, a screenscape spectacularly splattered with bodily excess and waste is *de rigueur*. Here, the scatological is both often on blatant display – shit is ejected, consumed, smeared, slung – and underpinning or tincturing form and style, imbuing the text with a “shitty” aesthetic. In these kinds of films – which, as their various appellations tend to suggest, are defined themselves by their association with marginality, excess and trash, the underground, and the illicit – the abject body and its excretia not only act as a dominant visual landscape, but provide a kind of somatic, faecal

grammar for which to discuss the status of these texts as somehow unclean, forbidden, or distasteful, as cinema's "dark matter".

In light of this language of refuse, then, where defecation tends to function in a descriptive rather than prescriptive manner, how can an actual cinema of scatology be conceptualised? That is, through what kind of lens can we scrutinise a filmmaking practice which not only displays an emphatically scatological aesthetic, but more centrally and often literally locates scatology as its subject matter? Furthermore, if the aforementioned "shitty" vernacular speaks of an understanding of the pleasures of certain modes of spectatorship as ambivalent and visceral, what sort of defecatory language, in turn, can be employed to negotiate the hyperbolic tensions of a spectatorial experience whose excessive, oppositional pleasures are just as ambiguous and marginal as shit itself?

Of all the bodily terrains located in a cinema already deeply concerned with the unstable body, the scatological realm is the most uncontainable. Fraught with connotations of risk, collapse and disorder, and heavily associated with the infantile, base, and aberrant, scatology is so unsettling and disruptive because it invokes such a broad spectrum of extreme, unsettling and discordant responses. Scatology, which the philosopher Georges Bataille defines generally as "the science of shit,"¹ and interlinks with his theory of heterology, "the science of what is completely other,"² centralises that which is otherwise denigrated, belittled and repressed. In art, film and literature, it enables the marginal, liminal and excremental to function within a more radically mobile, comedic, performative, and even sacred sphere, in which a "holy shit" can come to be elevated as a kind of scatological sublime.³ For Bataille, scatology has a connection with the arcane, alchemical and chthonic, invoking extreme and transformative states ranging from ecstatic laughter to the repulsion of horror, likenable to the elevated states of frenzy and rapture invoked in religious rites.⁴ It is thus much like the nature of excrement itself, comprised of both the mystical and the mundane, the hideous and the holy. Marked by an overpowering sense of ambivalence, the scatological elicits both extreme pleasure and extreme discomfort, as articulated most prominently here in the "morbid train-wreck fascination" evoked so resonantly in trash cinema, teetering the viewer tenuously between horror and hysteria, revulsion and revelry. The spectatorial dynamics of scatological film, then, like shit itself, are multiplicitous, polymorphous and heterogeneous.

This paper will thus explore this ambivalent tension of pleasures, negotiating the idea of and possibilities for a scatological spectatorship. Investigating more broadly the idea of scatological art as a form of transgression, I will look at its function as a potentially subversive tool for dehierarchisa-

tion and destabilisation. Scatological art – and in this case, film – operates, as I will examine, to disrupt and break down patriarchal, bourgeois ideas of order, containment, boundary and the body. In its resistance to official, normative authority, scatological film also engenders a corresponding collapse in the spectatorial process itself, threatening to erode the division between spectacle and spectator, the textual and the extra-textual, the body onscreen and the body of the viewer. To this effect, I also want to consider here the idea of a scatological imagination or sensibility which would vitally underpin both the concerns and the (dis)pleasures of scatological film.

Trash film, I will argue, looking specifically at the “shit cinema” of scatologist *par excellence* John Waters, is not only ideologically, thematically and aesthetically scatological at its core, but also importantly mobilises and plays with the scatological in often very explicit or literal terms, invoking a potentially radical collapse of order, system and language. Critically centred around and steeped with the scatological, Waters’ work (in particular, *Pink Flamingos*, which I will mainly focus on here) is especially striking because it actually delights and revels in the scatological, even adulates it as divine. Through Waters’ construction of a kind of scatological microcosm, I will posit that scatology’s dualistic, resistant nature can be itself understood to configure the dynamics of this spectatorial experience.

The perverse, ambiguous process of spectatorship elicited by scatological film – or what I will consider here as a kind of scatological gaze – reflects the concurrently alienating and compelling nature of these films, where aggressive, oppositional states of embodiment onscreen correspond directly with those of the spectator. In contrast to many of the gazes cinematic theory discusses – masochistic, sadistic, perverse or exhibitionistic ones, for instance – the scatological evokes such a dynamic, disorderly scope of responses that it cannot be contained by any single or unifying definition or discourse.

My contention, then, is that if scatological film represents a flagrantly resistant, unstable, risky, even dangerous kind of filmmaking *in extremis*, which negotiates a space for the mobilisation and celebration of trash, shit and “that which is completely other,” it calls for an equally unconventional, idiosyncratic kind of spectatorship which is perhaps as oppositional, excessive and unnerving as these texts themselves. Whilst I do not intend nor have space here to fully propose and outline a new spectatorial model through which to mediate scatology’s heterogeneous pleasures and dynamics, I would rather like to examine how this overarching sense of ambivalence and uncontainability can itself be conceived as a discursive framework with which to theorise scatological film and its broader aesthetic.

Scatology has a rich history in comedic, satiric and often resistant

forms of cinematic, literary and artistic tradition, in which its simultaneous banality and profanity can function as a form of transgression. “What makes shit such a universal joke,” writes John Berger, “is that it’s an unmistakable reminder of our duality, of our soiled nature and will to glory. It is the ultimate *lése-majesté*.”⁵ As Petra ten-Doesschate Chu suggests in her essay on scatological imagery in post-Renaissance Western art, scatological imagery pervades these traditions because of “the power of excrement to arouse laughter and its capacity to shock, repulse and alienate.”⁶ Since the bawdy tales of Chaucer, the writings of Rabelais (whose language often combined the theological and the excremental), and the satires of Jonathan Swift, writers have utilised scatology as a conduit for the broadening of audience response. Because it is focused on base instincts and utter commonality (what absolutely links all of us more than shit, “that zero-degree of matter”⁷), functioning as a metaphor for what is dirty and improper and as a source for irreverent humour, scatology as a literary device “forced a genitified response to acknowledge hitherto ignored sections of society.”⁸

It is this emphasis on liminality and otherness – of that which resides blurrily and seedily in the marginal space between boundaries, in the gutter, the underground, the sewer – which most centrally captures the spirit (or, in appropriately bad taste, the flavour) of scatology. Drawing on the work of the Marquis de Sade, the French psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel refers to “an anal universe where all differences are abolished.”⁹ Chasseguet-Smirgel conceptualises the libertine pervert’s dream of an atemporal realm of infantile pleasure reconstructed from chaos, which is liberated from genital difference, Oedipal models of authority, and the patriarchal rules of language. “All that is taboo, forbidden or sacred,” she writes, “is devoured by the digestive tract, an enormous grinding machine disintegrating the molecules of the mass thus obtained in order to reduce it to excrement”.¹⁰ This kind of abolition of boundaries, she suggests, can “push forward the frontiers of the possible, unsettling reality.”¹¹ The scatological thus not only pertains to a project of transformation, inversion and upturnment, but also to a collapse of hierarchy, system and order, which in turn creates “new” realities.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, shit is the child’s first gift. The infant proudly offers up his turd as a triumph, a miracle. Dominated by the impulses of the id, the child is able to take pleasure in shit, revelling in it, playing with it. It is only in the realm of the official, in the dominant patriarchal order, that this pleasure threatens the ego, placing into crisis law, order and language. The scatological is therefore heavily associated with chaos, regression, the infantile, and perverse, aberrant sexuality. It is also closely connected to Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection,¹² which is caused by “that

which disturbs identity, system, order” and “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”¹³ Like the abject, it resides in and draws heavily back to the maternal, primal space which precedes the dominant Symbolic order – that is, a pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic world of sublime oral-anal interchangeability in which, as I will argue, John Waters constructs his cinematic universe. Allen S. Weiss elaborates that excrement “as an image of death, as the formless, as pure heterogeneous matter, is excluded from the symbolic order.” As a sign of self-production, an autonomous, sovereign creativity, shit is a direct contestation of the Symbolic, eluding the “exigencies of the Oedipal situation, since the origin of excrement is in the body, not the *so-cius*.”¹⁴

Puerility, perversity and a kind of shit-slinging defiance figure potently in scatological art. In contemporary art, the scatological imagination can be seen in such work as Piero Manzoni’s *Merda d’artista (Artist’s Shit)*, Gunter Busch’s exhibitionist excremental performances, and Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ* and *Shit* photographs. Wil Delvoye’s digestive machine installation piece, *Cloaca*, consists of a huge contraption of glass, tubes, wires, and pumps that, when fed a meal on one end, would “digest” it using a blender and jars of enzymes, drawing to mind the great grinding intestinal machine Chasseguet-Smirgel describes. Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document* includes the usage of shit-smearred nappies as a commentary on maternity; Chris Ofili’s *Holy Virgin Mary’s* breast is smeared with elephant dung (Ofili’s other work includes such titles as *Bag of Shit* and *Shithead*; Ofili also sometimes uses elephant dung to prop up his paintings in shows); and Cindy Sherman’s photographic work emphasises the interchangeability of body parts. Whilst this work does not always feature actual fecal matter, it is marked nonetheless as fundamentally scatological by its concern with the annihilation of difference, its representation of the disordered or reconstructed body, and often, by an infantile, absurd sense of perverse “potty humour”.

Here, the scatological is a conduit for political and ideological resistance, and has an equalising function, raising or lowering all to the same level. It is thus linked crucially to the medieval carnival Mikhail Bakhtin discusses, with its elevation of the marginal, destabilisation of high and low culture, and emphasis on the “lower body stratum”.¹⁵ Like the carnival, scatological art and film lays down a project for decanonisation, employing burlesque, obscenity and caricature to “turn upside down”¹⁶ conventional ideas of form and value. If it is transgressive, it subverts from below, from the slippery ambiguity of marginal, obscure and undermined sites, engendering metamorphoses and altered states both sinister and joyous. Moreover, as with the carnival, scatology employs obscenity, inappropriate or

scabrous humour, and even violence in its process of upturnment. In his discussion of the carnival's broad relevance for cinematic expression, Robert Stam cites John Waters' *Pink Flamingos* (1972) and *Polyester* (1981) as films which "aggressively overturn a classical aesthetic based on formal harmony and good taste," and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* pop-cultural phenomenon as "films or film-related experiences that strive to erase the barriers between spectator and spectacle."¹⁷ Scatology disrupts or upturns the spectatorial experience in a similar manner. As I will explore further, scatological film spectacularises the spectatorial process itself, engendering a carnivalesque process of looking that not only draws attention to the relationship between onscreen bodily abjection and the embodiment of the spectator, but enables an interlinked experience of transformation and even transgression between these bodies.

The scatological also has a fundamental role in the erotic or perverse imagination. Sade's libertine tableaux of coprophilic parlour games and voluptuous cruelty – the "anal-sadistic ... universe of sacrilege"¹⁸ Chasseguet-Smirgel proposes – are pivotal here. The host of scatological activities Sade describes include defecation on and anal insertion of rosary beads,¹⁹ seemingly endless acts of excrement-eating and sodomy, the flavouring and seasoning of shit for the purpose of its consumption, and the sewing up of a character's mother's sexual organs. Similarly, Bataille's fictional work must be noted. In particular, the most frequently referenced *Histoire d'Loeil* (*Story of the Eye*) abounds with an ongoing intersection of sex and death, and the holy and profane, whose critical fusion underpin much of Bataille's work on heterology and scatology. In turn, Sade's amalgam of pornography and blasphemy (and as with Bataille, the interconnected violence of sex and death), render him a kind of spiritual ancestor to more contemporary trash-libertines such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Luis Buñuel, Andy Warhol, Ken Russell, and John Waters, who in film have come to similarly intermingle the scatological with the eschatological, and death with desire. As Lenore Malen writes in her postscript for the "Scatological Art" edition of *Art Journal*:

In a Sadean universe of abolished differences, all things are returned to chaos – to excrement. Good and evil are synonymous. Even death dies, or ceases to exist, since it is no longer distinguishable from life. Precisely such a view of 'shit' as metaphor for negation ... lies behind much contemporary art that is either explicitly scatological or has its subject matter entrails, waste or the disordered sexual body.²⁰

The scatological therefore acts in a form of resistance against hierar-

chy, common sense and reason. The “talking asshole” in William S. Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* – an image which John Waters appropriates and expands in *Pink Flamingos* – speaks directly of transgression and disorder: “It’s you who will shut up in the end,” it says. “Not me. Because we don’t need you around here any more. I can talk and eat *and* shit.”²¹

Aligned with a deep interest with the absurd and ridiculous, the Surrealist and Dada movements employed shit as an oppositional trope for political satire. Scatology is central to both movements’ nihilistic projects of brutal disorganisation and post-war resistance against the logic and reason of the Enlightenment, and underscores the Surrealist obsession with nonsense and the uncanny. Significant scatological works here include Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (which could be seen as a precedent to *Piss Christ* and Andy Warhol’s *Oxidation* paintings); the bottle of urine in Kurt Schwitters’ *Merzbau*; Salvador Dalí’s *Le Grand Mastabateur* (*The Grand Masturbator*) and *Le Jeu lugubre* (*The Lugubrious Game*); and the parodic role of excrement, cannibalism, religious iconography and bodily defilement in Buñuel’s films. Scatology is also grounded in the Surrealist fascination with the inextricability of eroticism and the death drive. The dualistic, ambivalent pleasures of scatology I have mentioned are critically bound up in the “compulsive beauty” which Hal Foster denotes as the Surrealist artist’s ongoing, convulsive crisis, which “stresses the formless and evokes the unrepresentable,” and “mixes delight and dread, attraction and repulsion.”²²

The British comedic tradition, particularly in television, is deeply steeped with a scatological imagination. The black, vulgar, schoolboy humour of such work as the *Monty Python* films and sketches,²³ *Bottom* (1991), *Filthy Rich & Catflap* (1987), *Derek and Clive* (1979), *The Young Ones* (1982-1984), *Black Adder* (1983-1989), *Nuns on the Run* (1990), and more recently, highly carnivalesque sketch shows such as *Little Britain* (2003), *Jam* (2000), and *The League of Gentlemen* (1999-2002), is located in its fixation with grotesque embodiment as spectacle. Imagery surrounding the most infantile of zones is perceived as hilarious, drawing to mind again the phrase “toilet humour”. Deriving from pantomime tradition, the absurdity, irreverence and utter puerility of jokes focused on anality, faeces and other bodily waste, and “taboo” themes as cross-dressing and paedophilia, work in opposition to propriety, moral/social uptightness, good taste, and conventionality. It should be stressed that the scatological imagination is vitally a comedic one, which latches on that which is otherwise taboo, improper or distasteful as a source of revelry, satire, and (to employ another rather appropriate phrase used in otherwise quotidian parlance), ‘shits and giggles’. The British sensibility is certainly highly emblematic of this: nothing appears to be more hysterically funny than the incongruity of

proper gentlemen in frocks, camped up or spoofed religious imagery, and the juxtaposition of the parochial with the excremental.

Similarly, in contemporary (largely American) comedic film, scatology runs rife in the crude, lewd, (possibly even more) puerile, fratboy-esque body comedy of such work as *South Park* (1997), *Jackass* (2002 television series, films 2002 and 2006), *Superbad* (2007), and the *American Pie* films (1999, 2001, 2003). Savouring the disgusting and vile with a maniacal kind of pleasure, these texts are concerned with the confusion of boundaries of gender, sexuality and the body, violation of taboo, and hyperbolic, perverse corporeality. The consumption of abject bodily waste, in particular, is a perpetual source of humour in this kind of work, for which bodily defilement appears to be considered especially funny. In the case of *Jackass*, for example, its troupe of scatologists deliberately and rather joyfully engage in extreme and repulsive activities, such as the drinking of bull semen and vomit.²⁴ In *American Pie*, characters often accidentally ingest bodily fluids, unwittingly transgressing social laws of cleanliness and contagion, and it is the “mistake” of the act which functions as comedy. Scatology is frequently transcribed through the extremely literal in such texts, resulting in a deeply fetishistic, Grand Guignol-esque theatricalisation of shit and other abject matter, depicted with an almost tenderly elaborate attention to detail.

A *South Park* episode entitled “Red Hot Catholic Love”, for instance, focuses on the town’s revelatory discovery that it is medically beneficial to consume food by inserting it into the anus, and to excrete it via the mouth. The episode, in turn, reads rather like an animated orgy sequence in a coprophagia fetish film, or the ultimate oral-anal film Hitchcock never made. As if taken straight from Sade, there are many spectacular, almost lavish scenes of excrement pouring out of the mouths of the town’s inhabitants. This doubling or exchange of orifices is reminiscent of Hegel’s oral system, which emphasises the interchangeable function of the mouth, Nietzsche’s connection of the spirit to the stomach, and Bataille’s “Solar Anus”, in which everything pulsates, circulates and communicates through an all-consuming sacred asshole.²⁵ This, as I will shortly discuss, is a theme which is particularly explicitly enacted in Waters’ constant exploration of the disordered sexual body. In keeping with *South Park*’s broader bad-taste body-centric aesthetic, whose riotously scatological scope has covered such subject matter as Mr. Hanky the Christmas Pooh and a gerbil’s hero’s quest through a homosexual man’s rectal passage, this hideous but undeniably hilarious Bacchanalia of oral excrement and rectal consumption is orchestrated not with the dead-pan, earnest humourlessness of much hardcore pornography, or the grim straight-faced cruelty of Pasolini’s *Salò* (1975), but rather with the gleefully infantile farce of pantomime.

It is in this spirit of bad taste, puerility, and burlesque humour, where scatology comes to evoke an inverted kind of divinity, that the work of John Waters is located. Crowned the “Pope of Trash” by William S. Burroughs, and alternately christened, to his own apparent joy, with such monikers as the “Prince of Puke”, the “Sultan of Sleaze”, the “Anal Anarchist”, and the “Baron of Bad Taste”,²⁶ Waters is regarded predominantly in cinematic circles as facetious provocateur, shock-tactician, taboo-twiddler, rather literal stirrer of shit, and consummate king of what can be seen as trash filmmaking. From the low-budget, high-camp, visceral exploitation style of his earlier work of the 1970s, to the more accessible but still utterly twisted “tribute” to perversity seen in his most recent 2004 film, *A Dirty Shame*, Waters’ oeuvre presents itself as a kind of continuum of trash, whose disjointed, obnoxiously vulgar, gleefully repugnant style has softened somewhat in lurid intensity over time and with increased budget. Waters’ subject matter is intimately scatological, including in its vile repertoire: chicken-fucking, dog turd-gobbling, rape by a giant lobster, a singing sphincter, a man with a two-foot sausage penis extension, incest, a game of the Hokey Pokey involving water bottle insertion, and a hideously botched sex-change operation.

These films are veritable canvases of bodily abjection and defilement. The body is not just penetrated, frothed and engorged, but is splattered with its own excreta, stabbed, shot, slashed, burned, raped, castrated, deformed and eaten. The boundaries between consumption and excretion, waste and food, and between bodily terrains and borders, are collapsed, locating the margins of the body in the same pandemonium as these disjointed plots themselves. Like the carnivalesque body, the body in Waters is “licentious, crude, dirty and self-destructive”,²⁷ and is more often than not in some way critically disordered, reconstructed or hybridised. For instance, Divine, Waters’ recurring heroine and collaborator, is biologically male, but is always in highly performative, over-the-top masquerade as the outrageous, excessive, carnivalesque feminine (her uncanniness importantly derives from the fact that her status as technically or anatomically male is never outright diegetically alluded to).

The body, for Waters, remains a constant site of abjection, a work-in-defiled-progress. It is always in a wild state of motion, engaged in perpetual revolt or defiance, as if in ecstatic frenzy, suspended between desire and destruction. To this effect, these early, “classically” trashy Waters films (*Multiple Maniacs* (1970), *Pink Flamingos*, *Female Trouble* (1974), and *Desperate Living* (1977)) are typified by an all-dancing, all-flailing revelry in the loss of control, marked aesthetically and thematically by a Tourettes-like compulsiveness and convulsiveness, or what Simon Doonan coins

“Waterhausen’s-by-proxy”²⁸ in his foreword to Waters’ autobiography, *Shock Value: A Tasteful Book About Bad Taste*. Dialogue drips with filth, spewing out in spontaneous, violent obscenities. Narrative is often so fragmented that it has a jarring, jolting quality; scenes randomly materialise as if in paroxysmic streams of consciousness or projectile regurgitation. These characters’ frenzied bodies and filthy exclamations seem seized as if by involuntary fits. Like Tourettes Disorder itself, this world Waters constructs bears a similar shocking taint of danger, disorder, distaste, and the need to be kept at a safe distance.

Just as Waters’ filmmaking is saturated with bodily transgression and a sense of defiance, the spectatorial experience it elicits is one of bodily assault and the loss of control. Bound by a peculiar pleasure equal parts revulsion and hysteria, the viewer is, as with the perverse fascination of the train-wreck, compelled to watch, despite a desperate desire to turn away. Suspended between converse states of compulsion and repulsion whose excessiveness echo that of the body onscreen, the violence of this kind of reception is rather fittingly echoed by the crude *Southpark*-esque image of a mouth which simultaneously ejects vomit and laughter, the Batailleian anus-mouth which both excretes and consumes. The curious mixture of body genres Waters evokes in these films – comedy, horror, and at times, a strange element of the pornographic which nonetheless seems bereft of any intention to actually erotically titillate – seems to render further ambivalent this oppositional amalgam of viewing pleasures, and draws to mind a range of particularly corporeal descriptions of spectatorial responses. Again calling to the simultaneous banality and obscenity of bodily function and expenditure, for a Waters spectator, there is a disarmingly close proximity between “I felt like throwing up,” “I almost shat myself,” and “I laughed until I cried.” It is perhaps precisely the excess itself of this spectatorial experience, of the threat of complete overpowerment as devastating and violent as orgasm, which delineates the dualistic nature of these scatological pleasures. If the body in Waters is dangerously fluid and polymorphous, it is directly connected to the body-out-of-control of the spectator.

The climax of violence and orgasm, for Waters, as for Bataille, are frequently interlinked. In *Eroticism*, Bataille’s description of this connection particularly encapsulates its configuration in Waters:

The violence of death and sexual violence, when they are linked together, have this dual significance. On the one hand the convulsions of the flesh are more acute when they are near to black-out, and on the other a black-out, as long as there is enough time, makes physical pleasure more exquisite.²⁹

This fusion is often figured in the literal: the bloodied, mutilated feathers in Crackers' frenzied chicken-fucking scene in *Pink Flamingos*, for instance, Divine's exclamation that "blood makes her come", and Raymond and Connie's incorporation of "death rattles", "bones breaking" and "dogs dying" into dirty talk whilst toe-sucking. The premise of sexual enlightenment in *A Dirty Shame*, whereby the "gift" of perversion can only be obtained via spontaneous head injury, suggests a correlation between the violent impact of collision and sublime pleasure, reminiscent of the configuration of sex, contagion and death in David Cronenberg's body horrors *Shivers* (1975), *Rabid* (1977), and *Crash* (1996).

What is particularly interesting here is that Waters regards trash, shit and what he himself refers to as "very bad taste" as sublimates which can be perfected. "To me, bad taste is what entertainment is all about," Waters writes. "If someone vomits watching one of my films, it's like getting a standing ovation."³⁰ These filthy thematics and aesthetics – and the filthy kind of response they invoke – are cultivated from a perversely systematic, studied refinement and adulation of filth, through which the grotesque and profane come to be inverted as divine and desirable. Vomit, semen, blood and shit take on, for Waters, the purity and reverence of holy water. This theme of "divine profanity" is enacted particularly poignantly (and utterly literally) in the incestuous blow-job scene in *Pink Flamingos*, where Divine moans, "Let Momma make the gift to you of Communion, a gift of divinity!"

"Trash", notably, is Waters' own term for his work: in the Warhol tradition, he strives towards it as a thing of great value. Bad taste itself, for Waters, is hierarchal, in which "there is such a thing as good bad taste and bad bad taste."³¹ The former, in his films, is usually represented by the hyperbolic, lewd, cross-dressing figure of Divine (whose name itself of course speaks explicitly of the sacred), who is constructed as bad taste's ultimate or ideal.³² If trashiness and bad taste represent an art which can be rendered perfect, immaculate, exquisite, Waters constructs his own doctrine or liturgy of trash, a "holy shit" which celebrates its own rites of defilement, for which we, as spectators, are a kind of trash-congregation. As in the final scene of "ultimate" perverse contamination and assimilation in *A Dirty Shame*, where the dominant normative order is not only usurped by the perverse other, but rendered outright indistinguishable from it in a transformative process akin to that of an ecstatic sacred rite, Waters elevates the profane as sacred. Through this process of inversion, like Divine's triumphant consumption of dog shit in *Pink Flamingos*' infamous conclusion, an act which plays out like a demented transubstantiation, this excremental theology emerges as a scatological sublime from Waters' landscape of trash.

Pink Flamingos, the first instalment of Waters' aptly named *Trash Trilogy*, three of his earlier and arguably most repulsive, tasteless films, takes these intertwined themes of scatology and divinity to what seems like their next logical, extreme and literal conclusion. A crucial case-study in Waters' "holy shit", and played out in a literal battle of trash rife with both scatological and eschatological imagery, *Pink Flamingos* can be posited as a kind of scatological meta-narrative, a "shitty" precursor for the more contemporary (and mainstream) revival of *American Pie*-style scatological film. Upholding an infamous, much-censored status as a disgusting piece of work, *Pink Flamingos* is seemingly inextricable from the mythological ambience of such titillating tag-lines attributed to it as "the most disgusting film ever made," "the sickest film you'll ever see," and as one reviewer poignantly put it, "like a septic tank explosion, it has to be seen to be believed" (Waters, unsurprisingly, considers the latter his favourite).

In this spirit of detritus, excess and Bataillean expenditure, *Pink Flamingos* reduces the body to base matter, to the realm of the asshole. This microcosm which Waters constructs from trash and the body's dregs, resides in the anal universe Chasseguet-Smirgel describes where all difference is annihilated, the pervert's utopia "in which all particles are equal and interchangeable."³³ Saturated with blatant scatological and anal imagery, where the literal and symbolic are increasingly confused and finally entirely collapsed and desublimated in a series of violent oral-anal climaxes, *Pink Flamingos* reads like a scatological manifesto. Like Waters' own suggestion that there are different "levels" of bad taste, *Pink Flamingos* is fragmentally located in a vague, sprawling narrative which seems to only be propelled by a "shitty, shittier, shittiest" continuum, the ongoing transgression of taboo (each one more aberrant than the last), and the increasingly aggressive breakdown of boundaries between binaries and bodily zones. It is propelled, moreover, towards the creation of immutable oral-anal perfection, a world of pre-genital completeness, in which the child enjoys the bliss of incestuous union with the mother, a "new reality" constructed out of anarchy.

Using the pseudonym Babs Johnson, Divine lives in a trailer with her deranged son Crackers, who engages in chicken-fucking, her sleazily glamorous "travelling companion" Cotton, and her seemingly retarded mother, who sits all day in a baby's crib eating eggs. They claim to be the Filthiest People Alive. Connie and Raymond Marble are "a couple of assholes" who peddle drugs to school children, and kidnap and impregnate young women whose babies they sell off on the black market to lesbian couples. Exemplifying what Waters terms "bad bad taste", and perhaps the only embodiment in the film of the paternal Symbolic order, they plot to usurp Divine and her ilk as the Filthiest People Alive, and instigate this war

by sending Divine a turd in the mail.

This battle is clearly a futile one. Divine, whose trademark straining skin-tight lycra, undulating 300-pound kitsch-clad body, and brassily peroxide coiffure come to be themselves metonymic for Waters' "holy shit" aesthetic, is filthiness and scatology incarnate. A Sadean figure of trash-libertinism, she is pure id, concerned primarily with the attainment of polymorphously perverse pleasure. Adamant about her filthy supremacy, she says that she has "done everything", and in what could be a Sadean anthem, declares: "Kill everyone now! Condone first-degree murder! Advocate cannibalism! Eat shit! Filth is my politics, filth is my life!" She steals a steak from a butcher, hides it in her crotch, and then defecates outside a mansion. She catches two policemen spying on her birthday party, tears them limb from limb, and devours them. In what she calls "an act of divinity only a mother can give", she performs fellatio on her son (to his perhaps just as discomfiting cries of "Oh, Momma, suck my balls!"). She convicts the Marbles of "assholism" in a mock-trial, and shoots them dead. Finally, if only to confirm her divine filthiness, she eats dog shit. Or put more simply, she eats shit because she is divine.

With the song "How Much is That Doggy in the Window?" playing as Divine scoops up a poodle's turd and gobbles it down, flashing the camera her shit-eating grin, this vile vignette is, for many viewers, the crowning aberration of Waters' career as the "P.T. Barnum of Scatology" (another of his many sobriquets). As J Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum write: "If beauty, as Jean-Paul Sartre quotes Genet, is 'the art of making you eat shit,' this act is the divine sacrament of Waters' black midnight mass."³⁴ As the Filthiest Person in the World, and as a kind of hermaphroditic goddess, Divine is the incestuous phallic mother of Waters' sacred scatology, the queen of his "holy shit". If this universe exists in the maternal, abject realm which precedes the Symbolic order, it can have no father. Her *unheimlich* body, with its "in-between" genderedness, carnivalesque appearance, completely blurred terrains and margins, and indistinguishable functions, is the disordered body of "mixture and hybrid"³⁵ which is reconstituted in the anal-sadistic universe.

This scene, moreover, has perhaps been so frequently recalled with such notoriety and formidability because, as with most of the "hardcore" antics in *Pink Flamingos* (Divine giving her son a blow-job, the chicken-fucking scene, the singing asshole, all of which were cut from numerous versions of the film), it is "real", not simulated.³⁶ Divine earns her right to be called not only the Filthiest Person Alive, but as the voice-over narrator gleefully informs us, "the filthiest actress alive", thus emphasising scatology and marginality doubly in both extra-filmic and filmic terms. Waters has on

many occasions validated the authenticity of the scene (“And yes, for the thousandth, for the millionth, for the trillionth time, Divine really did eat dog shit at the end of the film”³⁷). He reinforces his filmmaking troupe’s polymorphous perversity by stressing the casualness and banality with which the scene was planned and enacted: “I realized filmmakers would have trouble believing it, even without a cut. No actor could be this dedicated to cinema ‘art’ to eat dog shit, dressed in drag, solely for the audience’s amusement and entertainment.”³⁸ Additionally, in his own writing about his work and in myriad interviews, Waters speaks constantly of the biographical and extra-textual elements surrounding these films, narrating a plethora of filthy real-life anecdotes sometimes just as revolting as those onscreen. The extra-filmic elements here are thus arguably inextricable from these films themselves, particularly in relation to the persona/figure of Divine, so inexorably do Waters himself, his collaborators, and his hometown Baltimore, figure into the broader Waters universe. If scatology, then, negates difference and hierarchy, these unruly layers of excess textuality instate a further blurring of boundary inherent in Waters’ work (the public/private, authentic/inauthentic, reality/fantasy, fictional/biographical), rendering it all the more ambivalent. The viewing process, in turn, is rendered all the more unsettlingly intimate and unstable. Spectacle in the filmic text bleeds into spectacle occurring outside (or alongside) it, yoking the two together indistinguishably and uncontainably, thereby further eroding the already tenuous space between spectacle and spectator.

As I have said, anality and scatology not only potently pervade *Pink Flamingos*, but are also at several points desublimated through the strikingly explicit and literal. Whilst Waters’ aesthetic and sensibilities are unquestionably scatological, the blatancy, literality and even brutality with which *Pink Flamingos* inscribes this “ardor for ordure”, seems upon superficial examination to render analysis almost bafflingly redundant. In their essay/performance piece “Divinity”, Michael Moon and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggest that “if Waters’ experiments are literal-minded, perhaps there is no alternative way of refusing to take for granted how chunks of literality inject themselves into the circulatory system of symbolic consumption.”³⁹ In light of *Pink Flamingos*’ significance as “the most conspicuous textual site for considering the centrality of the anus and the anal,” Sedgwick and Moon thereby playfully rename it “*Pink Flaming O’s*.”⁴⁰ Indeed, *Pink Flamingos*’ scatological continuum, which escalates in its collapse of the metaphoric and actual, sublimated and desublimated, signifier and signified, recall Robin Wood’s reading of the metonymic images in Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (the eye/anus/bath drain/*PsychO*; the toilet/swamp; excrement/money).⁴¹ Interestingly, Bataille’s *Story of the Eye*, as read by Roland Barthes, is compa-

rably played out through the usage of an object (or part-object) that summons its own set of metaphoric substitutes (eye, egg, balls), and then a related set (tears, milk, urine). Bataillean transgression, Barthes contends, occurs when these two metaphoric lines are metonymically crossed, when “new encounters replace old associations,” and as a result, “the world becomes *blurred*.”⁴²

Pink Flamingos, moreover, presents its spectrum of anality and scatology through so many frames, fragments and layers, that Waters’ use of form itself seems overtly scatological (or formless, to use a Bataillean term). His grotty, sprawling, exploitation style and “scatty” fragmentation culminates in a kind of inherently skidmarked *mise-en-scène*. Even the tone of dialogue, spoken as with many of Waters’ scripts in painfully artificial, jarring, staged voices, is frenetically scatological, relentlessly speaking of shit and the anus: “There are two types of people, my kind of people and assholes.” “You stand convicted of assholism!” “Somebody sent me a bowel movement!” “Eat shit and die!” Again likenable to a sort of defecatory Tourettes, this overwhelmingly anal vocabulary can be read as an excremental dialect which is, as I will further elaborate in regards to the singing asshole scene, perhaps the alternate/other language of Waters’ anal universe. Characters are constantly referred to as “assholes”, even though the anus in the *Pink Flamingos* world is clearly a unifying, centralising, all-circulating force, a site of holiness. The term seems to act as an equaliser, dragging everyone and everything down to the same level of profane holiness and base materialism, in which there can only be different levels of “assholism” and shit in between. The world inhabited by Divine and her family (who embody “good bad taste”), moreover, is overwhelmingly infantile and matriarchal, in a stunted state of prolonged oral/anal development. In this sense, it is located in direct opposition to the paternal familial unit embodied by the Marbles. Hoberman and Rosenbaum aptly describe this dynamic:

Whereas the Marbles break laws, Divine and family shatter taboos. They confuse their alimentary and excretory functions. Their sex is polymorphously perverse and messy. Their behavior is infantile and regressive. Edith Massey sits stuffed in a playpen, ineptly acting like a toddler and babbling about eggs. Divine’s makeup verges on the clownlike. The Marbles, on the other hand, are mercenary, judgmental, and status-seeking. With their institutionalized cruelty and exclusive heterosexuality, they represent the established order, if not surrogate parents ... It is precisely the Marbles’ aura of sanctimonious uptightness that makes their sex scene – an orgy of mutual foot-kissing, Waters’s representation of ‘normal’ love – so funny.⁴³

Infantility and regression are perhaps most surreally embodied in the birthday party scene, before Divine gives Crackers her “gift of divinity”. In the midst of the party’s perverse festivities, the soundtrack has changed from a fast-paced tune to a deeper, more insistent, repetitive, even pounding track. A naked man quite randomly positions himself on a platform, legs spread in the air, displaying his buttocks and anus. In time to this new track, the man’s anus begins to “sing”. Or more specifically, he “lip-synchs to a record by rapidly flexing his anal sphincter.”⁴⁴ The camera languishes in this fantastical spectacle, presenting close-up shots of the asshole’s pulsing, gaping and puckering. It then diverts to pan over the clearly raucously entertained partygoers, who appear amused and elated, and not at all disgusted. *Pink Flamingos*’ increasingly scatological underpinnings, which have to this point been building up frantically to a chaotic crescendo in the increased blurring of difference, climaxes violently here with this extraordinary image, recalling *South Park*’s orgy of interchangeable assholes and mouths, and the infinite circulation of Bataille’s “solar anus”. Although shit is of course by definition abject, these particularly desublimated scatological images (Divine’s consumption of dog shit, the singing asshole) wholly transgress the space where Kristeva locates the “safeguards” of abjection: “beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable.”⁴⁵

Waters is referencing and taking to another level the “talking asshole” in Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*. For Waters, however, the asshole not only speaks; it joyously sings. As the most infantile and liminal of orifices, and thoroughly associated with filth, risk and taboo, the singing asshole, then, is the voice of the marginal and “that which is completely other.” If Burroughs’ talking asshole which “shout[s] out that it wants equal rights” and “want[s] to be kissed same as any other mouth,”⁴⁶ and can talk, shit and eat simultaneously, voices a demand for the abolishment of difference, Waters’ singing sphincter is perhaps doing something more radical. At Divine’s birthday party, where its “voice” (“bullshit”?) is freely welcomed, it does not *need* to make such demands; it is celebrating its assumed entitlement to them in Waters’ undifferentiated universe. In the pre-linguistic and pre-Oedipal, the only language it can speak is a primordial one, a baby-talk which pours out of the anus-mouth like alchemical ordure. Engaging in dialogue, espousing as much discourse as any other vocal member of the Waters set, a personification or anthropomorphisation of the very source of the shit and waste which Waters elevates to a level of holiness, the singing asshole can be posited as the mouthpiece of scatology: the convulsive, ecstatic, singing voice of shit. Furthermore, if shit is a substance that partakes of the universal, common, exalted and debased, the singing asshole seems to be Waters’ ultimate synthesis of an alternative radical vernacular, speaking, or

rather, singing, with a voice and language of absolute otherness.

In this vein, the defecatory vernacular I spoke of at the beginning of this paper – the attribution of scatological language to our responses to film – perhaps enables us to begin to attribute a perversely fitting linguistic economy to these heterogeneous, even aberrant ways of looking, and more broadly, the scatological imagination. If these films are “shitty” and “trash”, the perversity of the scatological gaze may be more aptly denoted by that horrible gem of a euphemism, “brown eye”, as an ever-puerile Waters or *South Park*’s Cartman might more appropriately have it.

When the excremental plays such a pervasive role in our everyday language (“The shit hit the fan”; “You don’t know shit”; “Scared shitless”; “Shit for brains”), the more radically “shitty” patois of the singing asshole acts as a kind of hybrid, reconstructed dialect. As Susan Suleiman highlights in her examination of Chasseguet-Smirgel’s work, the interest of the dominant order has always been to maintain separations and distinctions, calling to the “many biblical injunctions against mixing heterogeneous kinds, or the meaning of the Greek word for law, *nomos*: ‘divided into parts’”.⁴⁷ The anal universe, then – and its anal/scatological language – aims, as I have noted, for the erosion or “homogenization” of difference. Through this negation, it creates “new shapes and new kinds.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, in particular resonance with the tone of *Pink Flamingos*, the word “hybrid”, Suleiman points out, derives from the Greek *hybris*, which means “violence, excess, extreme, outrageousness”.⁴⁹ Could this idea of hybridity, moreover, be a way of understanding the excessive and oppositional pleasures of scatological spectatorship, with its peculiar blend of conflicting responses, and its highly active, corporeal and violent nature? Does this construction of new realities, bodies and laws subsequently enable new or hybrid ways of looking and viewing?

For the child who takes pride in the turd, shit has not yet become a taboo laden with horrific connotations of waste, contamination and disorder. The oral and anal are not yet segregated, discrete orifices. In Western adult society, to play with one’s shit, to in some way enjoy it, is considered perverse, even pathological – scatological pleasure is confined to animals, infants and deviants. Even sodomy is still a taboo subject. Coprophagia and coprophilia are considered symptomatic of mental illness, and are spoken of in terms of stunted development. To obsess over one’s shit is to be anal-retentive, neurotic. To think of one’s bodily functions too excessively, to enjoy the odour of one’s own effluence, is to embrace and fetishise the vile-ness of bodily waste and the chaos it pertains to. Marieluise Jurreits highlights “a direct correlation between the bed-wetter who protests against parental treatment and the ‘anal rebellion’ of the artist.” Shit has always been,

she claims, “the weapon of the unarmed and repressed, a means of ... alternative resistance.”⁵⁰

Waters’ scatology seems highly aligned with this kind of subversion. That which he resists – good taste, both normativity and counterculture, the “adult” world of common sense and ordinariness – he jovially smears with excrement. The peculiar joy with which the singing asshole puckers, and with which Divine gulps down dog shit, is reminiscent of the vitally primal, not unlike the monkey who hurls about its excrement and the child who delights in it. Whilst the infant, however, offers the turd up to a parent’s praise, Waters’ revelry in shit is anti-hierarchical and decidedly defiant; these images are not offered up for our acceptance, or to any kind of authority. They invite us, if anything, to regress to the same level of ecstatic puerility, to play with our own dark matter in that liminal space between utter discomfort and utter pleasure, between a sacred and profane.

Is this, then, the kind of spectatorial experience that scatological cinema such as Waters’ elicits, or rather, demands? That is, does the most apt and appropriate example of a scatological gaze engender an ultimate, hybrid erosion of the boundaries between spectacle and spectator, where the audience is transformed into a chaotic, Bacchanalian carnival of orgiastic bedlam, resounding with violent nausea and ecstatic laughter, where shit is slung and vomit hurled, perhaps with additional spontaneous libertine bouts of theatre-floor humping? The practical possibilities of such a prospect are obviously deeply problematic, although Waters himself would no doubt highly approve. Nonetheless, whilst of course more extreme, is this type of spectatorial framework so very different from the ‘hypertextual’, participatory, highly embodied and active practices of cult film fandom, such as the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* ‘audience participation’ experience, with its blurred boundaries between reception and production, its ritualistic, religious ambience, and its overtones of carnivalesque utopianism?⁵¹

For Bataille, the transgressive and transformative power of laughter is more profound than all philosophical thought and all systems – laughter transcends, tears down, shatters, desystematises. Laughter is excess, sacrifice, waste.⁵² Moreover, Bataille is concerned with the heterogeneous, which cannot be incorporated into the individual or social body, but has to be expelled – what is foreign has to be rejected or sacrificed, and is hence declared filthy or holy.⁵³ Bataille constructs this idea around the threshold of the sacred, the line marked by interdictions that solicit transgressive action, connected vitally here to Waters’ “holy shit” and utopian anal universe.

If heterology centres on the sacred as posited by those things which are rejected, hidden and taboo (objects of revulsion, such as the body’s waste), the sacrificial banquet becomes ingestion and communion. Scato-

logical spectatorship is perhaps then so problematic and disturbing because it instates a kind of perverse Eucharist, an excremental Holy Communion where the consumption of waste and trash exalts, purifies and excites us, rendering that which we consume and that which consumes us as interchangeable as the bodily zones and bodily matter which scatological filmmaking such as that of Waters so completely blurs.

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NOTES

¹ Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans Allan Stoekl (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) 102.

² Bataille, *Visions* 102.

³ It should be noted that Bataille's somewhat enigmatic or vague definitions of "scatology" and "heterology" frequently overlap and intersect, often serving to delineate very similar ideas, as do his concept of the "*informe*" (formlessness) and the term "base matter". These terms, in Bataille, and in many studies of his work, are often used interchangeably. Here I do not have adequate space to explore in detail the more complex nuances and dynamics of Bataille's theories (which themselves, he argues, are somewhat anti-methodological and self-defeatist), and will be primarily using the terms "scatology" and "heterology" in light of this broader and interconnected way in which Bataille configures them.

⁴ Bataille is concerned with sacrifice, religion, and the sacred, ideas which pervade throughout his theoretical, fictional and ethnographic work. It is important to note that in his preliminary definition of heterology as the "science of what is completely other", he also draws attention to the term "agiology", which is "the study of the holy". This term, he writes, "would perhaps be more precise, but one would have to catch the double meaning of *agio* (analogous to the double meaning *sacer*), *soiled* as well as *holy*." Bataille, *Visions of Excess* 102.

⁵ John Berger, "A Load of Shit" in *Keeping a Rendezvous* (New York: Pantheon, 1991) 40.

⁶ Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, "Scatology and the Realist Aesthetic", *Art Journal* 52 (Fall 1993) 41.

⁷ Allen S Weiss, "Between the Sign of the Scorpion and the Sign of the Cross: *L'Age d'or*", in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed Rudolf E Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987) 160.

⁸ Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Scatological Art", *Art Journal* 52 (Fall 1993) 18.

⁹ Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, "Perversion and Universal Law", *Creativity and Perversion* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985) 3.

¹⁰ Chasseguet-Smirgel, "Perversion" 4.

¹¹ Chasseguet-Smirgel, "Perversion" 4.

¹² It should be pointed out that Bataille's understanding of the abject, which he addressed in two papers in 1938, an idea which was to be explored and elaborated almost forty years later by Julia Kristeva, acts in a somewhat different manner. Whilst both theories intersect, and to my mind, often complement each other, Bataille's is significantly tinged with elements of the arcane, and is heavily bound up with the idea of *depense* (expenditure, evacuation). Kristeva's emphasis is a more emphatically maternal one, and is situated specifically within a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework. Although psychoanalytic ideas are certainly apparent in Bataille's work and seem to sometimes overlap with Lacan's writing, he does not actually write within a particular psychoanalytic purview; his is not psychoanalytic theory per se. Moreover, for Bataille, the abject eludes theorisation and should not be properly thought of a concept, but as a spectrum of bodily sensations ranging from revulsion to horror – the abject, he claims, is a defeatist discourse, and can never be enunciated, only suggested. My usage of the term here refers to the Kristevan understanding of it, and is not an attempt to depict the two as interchangeable.

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4.

¹⁴ Weiss, *Dada and Surrealist Film*, 161.

¹⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 309.

¹⁶ Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 110.

¹⁷ Stam, *Subversive Pleasures* 110-11.

¹⁸ Chasseguet-Smirgel, "Perversion" 2.

¹⁹ This is recalled explicitly in the "rosary job" in Waters' 1970 film, *Multiple Maniacs*, his perhaps most overtly Catholic piece of work. Waters readily acknowledges a debt to Sade, and one of the most prominent ways this manifests itself in his films is through the camp sexualisation of religious iconography.

²⁰ Lenore Malen, "Postscript: An Anal Universe", *Art Journal* 52 (Fall 1993), 79.

²¹ William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (London: Flamingo, 1993) 110.

²² Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993) 28. It is interesting to note that Foster locates the point at which the artist embraces or resists the inextricability of death and desire (the point where sublimation confronts desublimation) as the split between "official" Bretonian and "dissident" Batailleian surrealism. Where Breton cannot bear the uncanny power of sublimation and its imbrication with the death drive, Foster argues, Bataille elaborates and celebrates it, stressing the interspersion of "divine ecstasy and its opposite, joy". (110)

²³ See *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Gilliam and Jones, 1975), *The Life of Brian* (Jones, 1979) and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (MacNaughton and Davies, 1969-1974).

²⁴ A distinction should be made in the case of *Jackass* (and for some scenes in *Pink Flamingos*, as I will elaborate upon) in terms of the fact that these antics are performed for “real”. That is, they are not simulated, are shot as “reality” cinema/television, and are done so with no visible purpose apart from the players’ own pleasure in them. This element of the “hardcore”, in turn, significantly contributes to shock and repulsion *Jackass* seems to induce, whereas the *American Pie* films, in contrast, are fictitious narratives shot in conventional contemporary Hollywood style, and have nothing of documentary-style realism about them. *South Park*, moreover, as animation, operates on a different level to both of these, although its format arguably does not always detract from or alleviate its repulsive effect.

²⁵ Bataille, *Visions* 5.

²⁶ Jack Stevenson, “Camp America” *Desperate Visions* 1 (1996) 11, and Hilton Als, “The Duke of Dirt”, *Grand Street* 53 (Summer 1995) 11.

²⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (New York: Ardis, 1984) 177.

²⁸ Simon Doonan, “Foreward” in John Waters, *Shock Value: A Tasteful Book About Bad Taste* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1981) ii.

²⁹ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans Mary Dalwood, (London: Penguin Books, 1962) 105.

³⁰ Waters, *Shock Value* 2.

³¹ Waters, *Shock Value* 2.

³² These early films are also particularly noteworthy in terms of trash and the scatological because of Divine’s central role in them. Waters’ work after her death in 1988 (following her appearance in Waters’ first “mainstream”, even family-friendly film, *Hairspray* in 1988), is significantly less risqué and shocking. This shift in style and tone over time, in turn, seems quite directly connected to Divine’s absence.

³³ Chasseguet-Smirgel, “Perversion” 4.

³⁴ J Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies* (New York: De Capo Press, 1983) 152.

³⁵ Susan Rubin Suleiman (on Chasseguet-Smirgel), *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990) 148.

³⁶ Whilst this scene almost seems tacked onto the film’s end like a non-sequitor or a titillating epilogue, the detail here in relation to other “real” segments appears somehow especially “hardcore” and “authentic”. Divine visibly gags on the dog turd, yet is intent on triumphantly completing the foul deed, and appears herself to be both repulsed and amused.

³⁷ John Waters, *Trash Trio: Three Screenplays* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1988, reprinted 1996) ix.

³⁸ Robert L Pela, *Filthy: The Weird World of John Waters* (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 2002) 65.

³⁹ Michael Moon and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Divinity: A Dossier, A Performance Piece, A Little Understood Emotion” in *Bodies Out Of Bounds*, eds Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California

Press, 2001) 323. Originally published in *Discourse* 13.1 (Winter-Fall 1990-91).

⁴⁰ Moon and Sedgwick, "Divinity" 320.

⁴¹ Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films* (London: Barnes, 1969).

⁴² Roland Barthes quoted in Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* 106.

⁴³ Hoberman and Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies* 150.

⁴⁴ Moon and Sedgwick, "Divinity" 321.

⁴⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 1-2.

⁴⁶ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* 110-11.

⁴⁷ Suleiman, *Subversive Intent* 148.

⁴⁸ Chasseguet-Smirgel quoted in Suleiman, *Subversive Intent* 149.

⁴⁹ Chasseguet-Smirgel quoted in Suleiman, *Subversive Intent* 149.

⁵⁰ Marieluise Jurreit quoted in Chu, "Scatology and the Realist Aesthetic" 41.

⁵¹ Numerous cult film theorists (Andrew Sarris, Barry Keith Grant, and Irene Ophenheim, for example) have drawn a connection between religious ritual and the interactive, ecstatic rites of the cult film experience, highlighting the latter's ability to enable both meaningful individual identification and communal belonging, its performative and theatrical ritualism, and its capacity for a quasi-theological process of escapism, salvation and reintegration. Although this argument does not resonate effectively as an effective/useful theoretical model for which to frame scatological spectatorship as I have described it (and I am not suggesting here an application of it), I want to draw to this heightened relationship between religious celebration, elevated states, and the spectatorial experience, which evoke a very Bataillean motif of transgression, taboo, altered and extreme sensations, and sacrifice.

⁵² Bataille, *Visions of Excess* 99.

⁵³ Bataille, *Eroticism* 63-70.