

Shit, No Present: Faecetious Serrano

Hélène Cixous

Université de Paris 8

In Lieu of an Abstract: Introductory Note

“Pas de cadeau”, subtitled “Serrano fécétieux”, was commissioned as an introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue to Andres Serrano’s photographs at the Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris, in 2008. It was first published in a two-column layout with an English version prepared by Laurent Milesi in consultation with the author. The French original was subsequently reprinted in a special issue of *La règle du jeu* (43) on the relation between literature and contemporary art (Paris: Grasset, 2010). The original translation, “Shit, No Present: Faecetious Serrano”, also appeared in Hélène Cixous, *Poetry in Painting: Writings on Contemporary Arts and Aesthetics*, ed. Marta Segarra and Joana Masó (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 85-108. We are delighted to be able to make this essay more easily available in a revised and fully annotated translation kindly prepared by Laurent Milesi for this special edition of *Word and Text*.

The exhibition of Serrano’s work, which Cixous’s essay responds to, was comprised of sixty-six large-format close-up colour photographs of faeces. The images depict excrements of different creatures, some carrying playful titles, such as “Bull Shit”, “Self-Portrait Shit”, or “Holy Shit”. This might serve to contextualise some aspects of Cixous’s essay, included here as a stand-alone piece because it offers thought-provoking perspectives on the multiple bodily limits which its subject matter exposes.

The additional annotations provided by the translator especially elucidate the scatological *double entendres* in the text. Asterisks (*) indicate those numerous English words or phrases used in Cixous’s original French text, with the exception of ‘shit’, which she kept in English throughout. Cixous’s idiosyncratic punctuation has been respected as far as possible; especially what Jacques Derrida called her “punctual depunctuation” to designate how she removes final stops at the end of some sentences for rhythmic effects.¹

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Christopher Müller and Mareile Pfannebecker

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¹ Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say...*, trans., with Additional Notes, by Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

You gave a start? You recoiled?²

You said to yourself: 'I don't feel the urge'?³

Wait! Don't leave.

There's something there.

If you felt the urge to leave, it is something, isn't it? An urge not-to is still an urge, a movement, life, which protects itself, which repels and pushes again [*qui repousse, qui re-pousse*].

I too gave a start. I was about to leave. I stayed.

What held me back? On the one hand the *force* of the strike. Or the strike of the force [*coup de force*]. But what strike and what force are we talking about?

On the other hand, and I'll return to this, it is this question of the *Remainder*, so often and so powerfully tackled in literature and in philosophy, it is this *Remainder*, around which so many magnificent thoughts turn, called by the mysteries of the *Border-Thing*, this left over or dropping [*ce laissé ou cette laissée*], which *touches* (upon) the limit, my, his or your limit, makes this theme of 'the limit' tremble, under the shock of its sudden emergence, our relationship to ourselves being uncertain, and forces us to interrogate the *Where* of the beginning and of the end, of being and non-being. Of life and death.

The Remainder resists, by definition, any definition.

Any assured recognition.

Let's cast a first glance at these images of immediately *unheimlich* Things. What can that be? But for the given name, one would not be able to say, one would be worried, disturbed.

Who remains, what remains, contravenes the secret laws of time and place. It's finished. It continues. It 'subsists', out of body, without a domicile. What remains lingers, subsists, beyond the time allocated through time, *despite* the flow of time. The remainders, remaining, remained and remains, hold, *after* all. Disturb what one believes one can imagine as a limit, a border, an end.

The remainder is neither nor and is not, the remainder exceeds the ontological mode, the remainder presents itself to and evades the question 'What is?' The remainder is a *what-can-that-there-be?* which remains unanswered

In the immense polysemy of the remainder, of what falls outside what it is the remainder of, among all the senses which remain more or less stuck to the remainder 'as such' the artist, whose entire work happens to be fascinated by remainders, will have been led ineluctably towards the Remainder which most resists sublimation.

As for Jacques Derrida, so many of whose texts remain as monuments to the Remainder, literarily as well as philosophically, he once chose to distinguish four plus one of those.

the remainder *as such*, the remainder with all its polysemy, with at least the four senses which one can distinguish and which I am trying to formalize (the remainder as what remains and abides [*demeure*], the subsisting substance, the food remains, namely the reliefs, the mortal remains, the remainder as the residual product of a subtraction, and I will soon add the rest of what always remains to be paid, which always remains to be settled in an insolvent debt because it is originary and in front [*devant*] of which we are always and

² In this 'faecetious' [i.e. faeces + facetious] text, *cul* (arse) can be heard in the original *recol* – Trans.

³ Here the French *Je n'ai pas envie* plays on the idea of wanting or needing to go to the bathroom – Trans.

forever in debt, having to [*devant*] settle, having to pay the creditor, the donor who comes before us and in front of us).⁴

Under the name 'Shit', Andres Serrano pushes us to face that *what* in us, which is a remainder from us and does not remain to us, which we erase absent-mindedly, through automatism of our thought, which we evacuate every day. Andres Serrano makes himself the guardian of the Repudiated.

'Shit' does not fudge.⁵ It's straight and to the point. It is not *politically correct*, it is *politically direct*. It's what he could do *most*. To attract in order to repel or to repel in order to attract. To pay attention to what *interests* nobody. To reinvest what is shat in unadorned fashion, without keeping it in the eroticocomical register of a Rabelais or a Shakespeare.

He presents us *Plain Shit*.

As is well known, the theme of the '*shithole*' runs through the whole of literature, commands the Bible from *Leviticus* onwards, and organizes the rites and myths of hygiene.

I think of what has remained to me forever of *What remained of a Rembrandt torn into small, very regular squares and rammed down the shithole*.⁶

I immediately think of what remains, in the fourth volume of Jean Genet's works, of this title whose lengthy whole is successively reduced to *What remained of a Rembrandt torn into small, very regular squares...* then to *What remained of a Rembrandt* as if the title had had to yield to the natural law of being cut up for delivery [*débit*].

I think of the unrelenting repetition of the evocation of disgust\distaste [*dégoût*] in Genet, until there is almost nothing left of it anymore. I think of the strange taste of distaste.

I think of the construction of the taste of distaste. Of the invention and the division of the edible and the inedible by the unknown genius who authored *Leviticus*.

Thou wilt eat *that*. This *that-there* [ça-là] will be inedible.

This is dirty [*sale*]. *That* is clean. *That's how It is*.

All that is, is by division, as we've known since the Bible, it is God who began by dividing in order to begin. First it is the creative division. Later the God *makes* [*fait*] the creatures. *First* the animal creatures. Then the humans. The God divides. Divides himself.

These objects are not always well made. It even happens that, displeased with his products, the God decides to wipe them out. To bury, to forget these drafts, these smelly traces. A flood and one begins to *do* [*faire*]⁷ again.

⁴ Translated from an unpublished essay by Jacques Derrida in Hélène Cixous's possession – Trans.

⁵ *ne fait pas de chichis*, literally: makes no fuss. Here Cixous is punning on the homophone *chie-chie* (*chier*: to shit); cf. *chiottes* (shithole) *infra* – Trans.

⁶ The famous opening of the right column, quoting the title of one of Jean Genet's essays, in Derrida's *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., and Richard Rand (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 1 – Trans.

⁷ All these (and later) uses of *faire* carry an innuendo of *faire ses besoins*: to do one's business, or, in absolute usage, *faire* – Trans.

SHI(T)STORIES

What remained of the strange word 'Shit' nowadays resembles an onomatopoeia, an eloquent phoneme, which mimes the sonorous expulsion of spit. Shit with a short, dry, taut I.

'Shit!' is an American interjection which has a double contemporaneous history.

'Shit!', like *merde* in French, tells you to fuck off. It expresses anger and scorn

But Shit becomes in the sixties the name for a most desirable *consumer* product, marijuana, this weed which spreads throughout society under this name which had become commonplace and fallen out of use. Increasingly frequent. This word which, like the designated thing, used to be 'forbidden', 'looked down on', is now not only trivialized but outmoded. Shit no longer stirs anybody, it's the ordinary. One does not even say it anymore. It goes up in smoke — Do you smoke?* one says. — How can this fall be explained? Compared with the other drugs, the high,* hard, expensive, lethal ones, Shit is worthless. Its provocative, subversive value is gone. At most shit remains a bit *dodgy* like the *joint*.

Two words on *Joint*: this word carries the ambivalence of this shit, which having become desirable in the twentieth century, gives shit back some golden prestige, adding to the forbidden matter the aura of contestation, the romantic flavour of rebellion, the shine of ordure opposed to order. In *Joint* are joined connotations of resistance to the edicts of the clean and proper. The same cigarette is used for the whole group, communion is mimicked in shit. And then the *joint* joins the object of communing [*communiance*] to the place known as the *Joint*, the *dodgy* place of indefinable promiscuity.

All this already belongs to the past.

Remains the force of the monosyllable 'Shit'

SHITATIONS*

What do we do when we utter the word 'Shit' with the small satisfaction of the stroke of the tongue which raps against the upper teeth and the roof of the mouth? As if we were poking a little [*tirait un petit coup*] with — a reptile's tongue.

In so doing one forgets the genealogy, so ancient and so rich, of this term of Indo-European origin. Look at its root: *skei*. It says: to cut, to separate, to split, to set aside, to decide. It marks the unconscious and history with its skizzing [*skizzante*] force, it shares, divides and underlines all that's shareable and dividable in the world until it settles on shit in modern times: *Scheiße*, *Kot*, *Schiet*, *Schiete*, and all the near relatives [*cousinage*] that have spread in Germanic as well as Romance languages, which schiz [*schizent*] round this theme of separation, partition, of what institutes sides and shores, and traces a parting (German *Scheitel*) through the hair in order to style it [*coiffer*]. One would see that the *Shittery* [Shitaison] or the *Shitation** is everywhere. And everywhere even when it arranges the fine volumes of a hair, it is accompanied by the shadow of an archaic suffering, the impossible dream of a non-separation.

Shit brings us back to the figure of the Androgyne in Plato's *Symposium*, to this myth of the division of an amphibious being who suffers from having been cut off from their other half in legendary times and secretes in reaction the mystery of love, this glue which sublimely sticks the pieces together again. This is when I note the etymological

heritage: it is the part thrown [*rejetée*] downwards, towards oblivion, to which the word marking decision comes back.

The split is cursed [*maudite*]. Ill-spoken [*médite*]. One would like to expel expulsion but in vain. One projects the negative outside oneself, one calls dirty what one does not keep within oneself.

Shit, therefore, *acts*. The catalogue of Shock-Thing undeniably *strikes home*.

Shit is both thing and act. An act of anti-art art. First Shit attacks. Has a certain public in its sights. Shit is an anti-American American act. In the *Cock-Snooks* [Pieds-de-Nez] series. Imagine a tribe called Cock-Snooks who wants to get the dominant Unightedstayd [*l'Étazuni*], the theologico-conservative mainstream, the immense politico-puritan network, into a terrible state. The Cock-Snooks put on a shit costume, wrap themselves up in cack-coloured, brownish-yellow canvasses and go about haunting cities, art galleries, museums, churches, and institutions. Do you recognize us? they say. We are the work of your Eliminations.

Shit breaks into the filtered quiet of the volumes of galleries-houses-museums. It shakes, worries, causes the spectator's body to twitch

These Immobiles communicate a movement. Besides these strange lumps are perhaps not immobile, in truth and deep down. Who knows?

I have already seen this Immobility somewhere: it is the one which 'animates' the terrifying, immobile wolves sitting on *the wolf man's* tree perfectly quietly and without making any movement on the branches of the tree, on the right and left sides of the trunk, and which do nothing but stare at us. These wolves, these Immobiles, these turds, these Cock-Snooks *stare at us*.

I imagine a four-year-old Andres as a Honduro-Cuban version of the Wolf Man, the hero of *The History of an Infantile Neurosis* (Freud 1918) who left us the famous picture entitled *Tree with 6 or 7 branches and with 6 or 7 white wolves facing*. Having fallen asleep in a mock-Gothic church, he dreamt this terrifying dream of the Turd-Tree. He will never forget it.

It will be up to us to analyze or to refuse the anxiety which this strange staring [*regardement*] causes us.

The Shits are the totems of the Cock-Snooks tribe. Perched on the branches of the Galerie Yvon Lambert, immobilized during the brief, endless time of a dream, they stare at us and we don't see their eyes.

We are forced to notice that there is *a force* at work there. *A force and a farce*.

FORCE

With all the brute force of a – feigned? – naivety, he takes on the ideological, political, theological, Catholico-American machine, which is at one, body and image [*fait corps-image*], with what Jacques Derrida called 'the sacralising, poisoned hierarchie of this accumulated culture [the French *cu – cul*: arse – must be heard here], between Europe and American colonization'.⁸ It is as if he exorcized through these electroshits all these meek, worrying figures which teem within the American

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Artaud le Moma* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), 22; translation mine.

Institution of Right-Thinking⁹ under their costumes their cassocks their attributes and trinkets

Shit is antidotal and antisacerdotal. ‘A drastic remedy [*de cheval*]’, as the phrase goes. The virulence of the poison is measured by the strength [*force*] of the remedy

— The farce is in bad taste, some will say. They want us to swallow that? This emetic hash?

How long gone is the coprophagous time of infancy when one takes everything to the mouth in order to know with the tongue, and when the taste of things is undecided.

SENTINELS

It was the name which my father, the young doctor Georges Cixous, had given them. They were everywhere in the childhood woods of Algiers, along the footpaths [*sentiers*], under the maritime pines, in the fine timber of the bois des Arcades, on the hills where the Bâinem forest stretches. We were seven and eight years old, barefoot my brother and me, on dad’s brisk footsteps, ‘watch out, a sentinel!’ We walked with a lively pace, to life, escorted by these small monuments, mostly human, sometimes left by dogs. One must imagine the waft of sun-warmed scent which alchemizes Algeria, a blend of pine needles, purulent red earth, wormwood, mastic trees, droppings [*crottes*] caked by the blazing heat, now mineralized now still graced by flies, those regular dung-eaters. Yet under the earth of the forest, hallowed into a secret graveyard, the small corpses of the nurslings too soon dead returned to the vast maternal matter. Thus my Georgic father had sublated [*relevé*] and transfigured with a magic word the excrements which accompanied us.

Who was keeping whom, in the primal forest run over in all directions by children above and below the earth? Life death? Death life?

Nature works towards cleaning the dead by ingesting it anew [*ravalier le mort*].

It was paradise and we had no knowledge of disgust.

In order to find the way and the step which take me near the portraits of matter drawn by Andres Serrano, I realize that I need to go back to the time of the *Songs of Innocence*. I was keeping watch over my life in Algeria, a violent beautiful country where all (that was) Rejected, person thing, being, returned. The walls and divisions did not divide the excluders from the excluded, poverty and ulcer shone like stars in the capital streets. What is *behind* is *in front*, in intractable Algeria. One cannot *do* as if one did not see what one drops behind.

To make a Subject out of the Reject, pick up [*relever*] the dregs, make room for the Expelled in the Museum galleries, is his project. Andres Serrano is of those who are born without scales on their eyes

⁹ *Bienpensance*, a neologism coined on the model of words like *bienséance* (decorum) or *bienfaisance* (charity) – Trans.

*REFUSE**

I need this word which the English language borrows from Latin. The excrement, in English, is refuse(d). Let's follow the thread of the term: one can refuse only what is given. Shit, the speck of shite [*chiure*] is given/refused. A gift promised to be refused and avoided.

Let's return to its source, the rich Latin *fundere*, that is to say *to pour*, used about liquids and especially molten metals, by analogy, one 'melts' or 'fuses' [*fond*] all that can be spread: grains, rays, sounds, odours, spoken words, *et cetera*, and among the 'coetera', what remains of a thing, of a group of things, of people, there remains the remains of remainders, the part which is designated in opposition to the other. It is what remains from the remainders that is poured/back or re/verted [*re/verse*], thrown back [*rend*], and that sometimes makes one feel like throwing up [*rendre*].

Subsequently, from the earthy roads of my childhood the familiar nickname of my younger brother comes back to me; I had completely forgotten it yesterday in the Algiers gully. We used to call him Little Peter Dung [*Pierre Crotte*]. — You recall, I say to the former child, that we used to call you Little Peter Dung? — Whereas there was no justification for it, says my brother the veteran paediatrician doctor, because I developed sphincter control early. — But who named you like that, I wonder? — You did, obviously, Pierre my brother says in a resounding, deep baritone — Out of dungarees [*décrotté*]? Surely there remains a bit of affection for stones and dung [*pierres et crottes*], our first materials. 'My brother dung', as Saint Francis of Assisi would say. My brother donkey. My brother body, the saint used to say. How many brothers are granted us when we dwell in humility. Downwards, sitting or lying on humus.

— The cohort of the Shits, this haughty tribe photographed by Andres Serrano, would, according to you, signal towards humility? Does it not seem to you that all these lumps of dung erect rather than lower themselves?

— According to me it is less a matter of erection than of rehabilitation. The artist relieves [*relève*] the singularity of each ejection by identifying and qualifying. 'Shit' is not what one unthinks it is [*impense*], he thinks, it is not the uniform, formless, characterless matter. He deals a final blow to any form of anthropocentrism.

— The extraordinary variety that is revealed: processes of identification are related to sublimation.

— The shock is that it gives me a shock. This shock is caused by the return of the shunned [*fui*].

The Shits take up rank among the Shunned, the excluded, the abhorred, the avoided, the pestiferous, the sick whose festering wounds burst on hospital beds, the annihilated homeless, the leper whom Julian the Hospitaller tries not to embrace.

The tribe puts everybody to the test of limits: whom or what can I not bear *seeing*? Seeing, that is, *touching* with the eyes' fingers.

I admit: I affectionately take my cats' stools in my fingers. A young mother, I congratulate my little one on its fine poo. A mistress, I do not reject the lover's stools.

So? It is therefore non-me, non-mine, that I repel. That I do not approve of. Here I am in my home [*chez-moi*]. Non-me, remain in your home [*chez toi*]! *Noli me tangere*.

The artist's calculated cheek [*culot*]: as soon as we enter the exhibition room, we are done for, up shit creek.

DOING

Shit *does*\makes [fait]. What?

Pivot. Reflect-flee-flee-think-repel-think repel-repelthink.

Bristles [*hérissé*]. Brings out the secret mainsprings of the word *ordure*.

Ordure, a term whose sounds are more ample, more substantial in French than dry English Shit, knows a lot about our life and death drives. Remember: *ordure* comes from Latin *horridus*, depicting our hair(s), feathers, thorns standing on end [*dressement*], the whole epidermic hedgehog [*hérisson*] which we human animals use as a mock-armour, an apotropaic ornament. We respond to what addresses an unbearable message to us by an equivalent standing on end.

A tooth for a tooth, hair for hair.

What does this message, this puzzle [*rébus*] of *ordure* tell us? — This: ladies and gentlemen, you will be this manure tomorrow.

But who would want to 'think' that?

— The whole elaboration of our human 'elevation' consists in distancing ourselves from both our *obscene* extremities, in separating-detaching-cleansing-purifying ourselves from the filthy motions [*remuements orduriers*] of birth and death. *Inter urinas et faeces nascimur*.¹⁰

In order to live we busy ourselves casting off our sloughs. We pretend to be virgin and free from mortal remains and decomposition. We disown ourselves in bits and patches. Poor us, the denizens of heightened buildings, champions of denial, defenders of the Clean and Proper,¹¹ we scaffold distances, walls, skyscrapers, classes, borders, in order to separate ourselves from our improper proper part. We furiously distinguish ourselves from our animality. We forget our natural mortality every day.

Shit breaks the truce. It's the jack in the box. You open the door, the package unsuspectingly and shit springs to your nose.

— To your nose? you say. Isn't it to your eyes?

— Yes, it springs to your eyes.¹² But as we testify through our start of repulsion, our eyes have a good nose.

Seeing gives one to smell\sense [*sentir*]. Whoever *gives* one to 'see' makes one smell\sense. Seeing, sensing, all our senses are activated in imagination. When Stendhal gives back to death all its strike force, by *making* (a concrete making) me *see*, under the page of the battle written in *The Charterhouse of Parma*, the grime which coats the corpse-like bare feet of the corpse of a dead soldier, when he depicts his green-coloured corpse-feet, when he makes me discover the death of feet, the dead feet turned green, I

¹⁰ A proverbial Latin phrase, attributed to St Augustine, meaning "we are born between urine and faeces" – Trans.

¹¹ The last word is also used in the original – Trans.

¹² *cela saute aux yeux*, more idiomatically: it is plain for all to see / as the nose on your face – Trans.

sense that it is this detail which rings blatantly true [*crie vérité*] and almost makes me faint.

The detail magnified by focalization, the focalized, faecalized detail, tears through our protective shield.¹³ It is the finger or the fang [*dent*] of death – for death bears a grudge [*une dent*] against us.

What does the artist do?

He knows what he is doing: *he does\makes*

Violence

Laugh

Horror

Bend

Fear

A blow\trick\stroke [*coup*] (bad, good, of the wand or baton)

The Conductor

Pass out cold [*tourner de l'œil*]

...

And above all what he always believed he was *incapable of doing*

I said it one day 'I dug a pit in my mother and threw myself in'.¹⁴ In our eyes, my mother's as well as mine, I acquired the status of the most miserable human creatures: gamblers, drug addicts, the bewitched and discredited. I did not fly: I pierced the shell of the earth, I gutted it, scooped it out. I made my mother pay for it. Without any explanation. That took place in Manhattan. The history of art can vouch for it: this kind of excess always takes place in Manhattan after beginning in Brooklyn. I should have stopped myself but I kept on going all the way.

Whenever I say to myself: 'I will not write this book, that's settled', I begin writing it

Whenever Andres Serrano says to himself: 'I will not take this photo', the photo is taken

This is not a provocation; this is an invocation, a surreptitious convocation. A decision but a passive one. Some years ago he was groping in his darkness: where is the limit? He has always tried to keep himself on the limit. The limit was: 'I will do nothing, I will not create, with children and I will do nothing with shit'. The law spoke English, with a stubborn accent: '*I won't work with children, I shall not work with shit*'.*

What he did not want to do, got done.

Then he went from New York to Colombia and from Colombia to Ecuador: and this is where Shit was waiting for him. He goes where he would never go himself

Thus goes the artist: towards the impossible, but there's always an impossible waiting for him behind the horizon of the impossible he believes he approaches.

He would not have been able to work at shit and with shit for anything in the world.

From one day to the next it happened. It got done. One will never know why

¹³ The last phrase is also used in the original – Trans.

¹⁴ This paragraph is a montage from Cixous's novel *Manhattan: Letters from Prehistory*, trans. Beverly Bie Brahic (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 46 (translation emended), in the chapter titled 'I Will Not Write This Book'. For the original, see Hélène Cixous, *Manhattan. Lettres de la préhistoire* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), 63 – Trans.

I too at this very moment am doing something I did not want to do: I am writing a shit-filled [*merdicole*] treatise. Without my own disapproval, I would never have indulged in such an exercise.

He had said: With Shit, never. And there you are.

Likewise: With children never.

Now ghost children prowl in the streets, in front of his windows.

Is he going to make the sacrifice?

It occurs to me that perhaps, he will have already done this 'work with children'.*

For he is fully aware of the famous Freudian equation: faeces = children = money.

Shit could be in secret a school, a flight of orphans. A gang of ragamuffins.

Shit is theory

A theory of Ghosts.

The question will always have been of the difference between the living and the dead.

A fly walks over the face of *Strange Shit*. *Fly, Fly, flirtation*.¹⁵

This fly is perhaps Psyche, the soul of Shit

COMEDY

When, at the turn of a page of the catalogue *Comédie-Française*, I catch sight of a photograph of the artist, something holds me back; my eye becomes sharp, curious, precise. I see the straight, light-coloured hair in a crew cut, erect, pulling the face upwards. I see the freshly brushed, shiny boots.* Between both neat extremities, the plinth and the head, also neatly done, spotless, spick-and-span, dressed up to the nines, the body traces a neat, slender movement clasped into a tight sports outfit. The artist's body is a sculpture. It sculpts an ethereal volume, an invisible body, perhaps a head, in which a thought is photographed, an idea in search of its embodiment.

The body is dressed in sober, sombre, supple, dense, dancing, assured fashion. It knows what it wants to do. No smudge. Clean Poo. Clean Shit* in clean shirt.* He gives an actor (from the *Comédie-Française*) the direction of a gaze.

One can see Serrano is an operator of gazes. He wants you to see. He wants you to see what you do not see. He wants to take a photograph of your gazes – before any expression. He wants to disarm eyes, unseal them, widen them, hold them back, feed them with these images he has in his head. He undresses, removes the make-up from the figures of people and things, then he re-costumes these naked-objects, fashions an edge for them, dips them in a raw light, prepares them. The costumes too are naked and dipped in amber. The colours are dominant, overbearing. Naked. Naked? Yes.

What there is not, that's what strikes: *No veil*. His art and craft is that: *nudification through photography*.

He does not state it, he acts it out: he paints *écorchés* only. The citizens of the *America* ark, no matter how motley coloured, all nudified. Nowhere to fall back to or hide. Eyes like those of newly born. Like future dead bodies. The flashy apparel, headgear of all kinds, badges, jewels, hair slides, all the details are crude, nudified.

¹⁵ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber, 1939), 352 – Trans.

So are the dungs of Shit: *Excrements exhibited to the naked eye*.
A light device spreads a similar lividness over all these faces, imagifies them.

When I turn round in the gallery and look back on the whole of Serrano's work, I realize he keeps pursuing the same idea:

the question always comes back to the difference between the living and the non-living.

That's what makes us shiver. The non-living is already... there. The non-living is still alive.

Shit casts a retrospective light over antecedents

One cannot separate the gallery known as *America* or the *Comédie-Française* album from the *Shit* collection. *Shit* is a part of the whole. All is shit. It is what befalls [*l'advenant*]. The avatar, the ultimate incarnation of these processions.

Most of the *Shits* look like heads in the throes of decomposition.

It is a hypothesis of Serrano's: if one so much as lingers with a look of 'investigation', one will believe one sees a dog's head, the recollection of a wolf. There is perhaps a memory of an aspect of yore in remainders

And in the heads of *America* which burst with carnal vigours, the way of all flesh is announced, just as in the beheaded parade of the *Comédie-Française* it is proclaimed that life is a temporary mask. The time of a play

There is some hidden Janus in these figurines: the plus, the excess, this supravisibility is that of I-anus [*J'anus*]. Such a protuberance of the surface is a sign of the forceful spectrality of the secret bottom of things [*fondement au secret*].

When Genet sees the top, he sees the underside, when he dwells in a museum, there is:

Something like a scent from a cowshed. When he merely sees the busts or the heads of characters, he cannot help imagining them standing on a dunghill. In Berlin, Hendrijke, one does not see the manure, one smells it. The table of the Drapers' Guild is set on straw, the five men smell (of) [*sentent*] manure and cow dung. *Sentent* in both senses of smelling and smelling of. They are infused with the stench, they exhale cow dung; Genet inhales the double odour.

Beneath Hendrijke's skirts, beneath the fur-lined garments, beneath the levites, beneath the painter's extravagant robe, the bodies fulfil their functions well: they digest, they are warm, they are heavy, they smell, they shit.¹⁶

¹⁶ Jean Genet, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. IV, ed. Albert Dichy (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 22; our translation. Trans.: this and subsequent passages are excerpted from the above-mentioned essay by Genet, "What Remained of a Rembrandt...", which refers to one of his Hendrijke paintings in Berlin. The *je m'éc* motif, highlighted below, is discussed by Derrida in *Glas*.

AN IMPRESSION OF DISGUST

Some horrible details even: dirty moustaches, which would not be much, but hard and stiff as well

the bristle set almost horizontally above the tiny mouth ruined by bad teeth, gobs he would spit between his knees at the carriage floor already soiled by cigarette butts, paper, pieces of bread, anything that in those days made a third-class compartment dirty, in the look that stumbled against mine, I discovered, experiencing it like a shock, a sort of universally human identity.¹⁷

I discovered, says Jean Genet, Serrano's precursor, experiencing it like a shock, a sort of universally human identity

His look was not another's: it was mine that I encountered in a mirror, *inadvertently and in the solitude and oblivion of myself*. What I was experiencing I could only translate in this form: I was seeping [*je m'écoulais*] out of my body, through my eyes, into that of the passenger *at the same time as the passenger was seeping into mine*. Or rather: *I had seeped*, for the look was so brief that I can recall it only with the help of this verbal tense.

[...]

What is it then that had seeped out of my body — *je m'éc...* — and what was it of this passenger that was seeping out of his body?¹⁸

Je m'éc, he says
Christ too is a bloke [*mec*]
Rembrandt too digests and shits.
So does the mother. Mothershitter [*Chiemère*]

Serrano too is a bloke

He rediscovered in turn the *principle of equivalence* stated by Genet: 'any man is as good as another'. Just as a calf is worth a calf [*un veau vaut un veau*]. Any stool [*selle*] is as good as another stool.

The Principle of Ecclesiastes: Nothing new under the sun. The difference is implemented by the cutting, the editing, the staging, the lighting, art.

'Any man', I said to myself, says Genet, Serrano muses, 'behind his charming appearance or monstrous to our eyes, *retains* a quality which seems like an extreme resort, and which, in a very secret, perhaps irreducible domain, makes him be what any man is'.

This thought of a secret, irreducible residue leads them, Genet and Serrano, to the slaughter house [*abattoirs*], to see.

Now they don't fail to find this equivalence in the fixed, though not expressionless eye of cut-off sheep' heads, laid in a pyramid on the pavement.

— Where shall I stop? they ask themselves.

Don't go and think that this apocalyptic discovery reduces pain

On the contrary: it is the wound that is irreducible.

A sheet of sadness overcomes [*s'abat*] him. He turns this sheet into the backcloth for his visions.

¹⁷ Genet, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 22; our translation.

¹⁸ Genet, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 23; our translation.

SERRANO GHOST SERIES

He moves forward, conducts his battle, sorts out in orderly Series. He can't help it: the singular, the particular is immediately taken up and replayed in the series. Peoples, columns, societies, processions, gangs, collectives, companies smell\sense and think through him,
 in theories,
 in theory
 one never knows when it stops

A series thinks, calls, recalls another series

Rites form. In Serrano's head each time a new play declares itself, the same backdrop is hung for these formations appear in a theatrical aura.

Ancient choruses, death awaits them, there will remain from them this residue of a look.

Let's make the following Gulliverian experiment:

Let *I* be such an image of Shit: one diminishes it until it is no bigger in size than a rabbit's dropping. It no longer frightens us. If on the contrary one magnifies it several times, we are stricken with fright: it seems to us as threatening as the mountain of temptation which appears to Francis of Assisi in a hallucination.

When the repressed returns, it stalks back with the sweeping force of a tidal wave. Swollen by the uncontrollable spirit of revenge. Then, how afraid we are of being swallowed up by what we expelled. Afraid of peoples who eat into the continent which belongs to us. Afraid of beggars. Of lepers. Of the poor. Of devouring hatred. Afraid of invasion. Of contamination. Of drowning. Afraid of being killed by garbage [*ordure*].

THEORIA

They come to us in a solemn, organized procession, as a *theoria*, a deputation sent by a city to a solemn festival, used to do. Like a cortège repairing to a temple or to a burial.

A cortège of crumbling colossi. Why do they impress us? What there is not: there is no landscape behind these furrowed sculptures which furnishes the ruins and the remainders. No distant memories behind the characters, no hills, valleys, rivers or cities, no bell towers or minarets.

The colossi are desolate, isolated. Originless and futureless. Lumps abandoned on the stage of a deserted Theatre.

Nothing remains but the remainders in Serrano's world. The environment has completely disappeared. The scraps of humanity are preserved in a phial.

Beyond the opposition between the clean and the unclean [*impropre*], the Shittery* lines up in orderly fashion in front of the artist, and poses, with a model's neutral patience, for the photographer. A docility creeps over the Sequence. Passivity, patience even, passion pushed, far from the cry or the sigh, to the point of silence. What silence!

One has never seen such a silent procession

And yet

When my eyes rest on a painting of faeces, I cannot help my gaze retreating [*recule*], trembling and then becoming shifty [*fuit*]. As if it had inadvertently touched the faecal fire. As if, a small child, it had feared that the wolves might rush from the painting to meet it. It takes a great mental effort to bring it back in front of the painting. — What is it then, there, that makes you so shifty? There's only a small pile of primal mud. Says my thought.

It's not me, it's my memory as a chastened [*échaudé*] child which reacts in fear. The child playing within me among the desires and ruins has been warned that that is dirty, dirt itself. Dirt that protects itself through the emission of a stench.

Is Photography odourless? Only 'in reality'. But we are never in real-reality. We are in fantasy-reality. It stinks in fantasy, still more internally.

One cannot simply say that the Series of Serrano's Shitsters* stinks.

Nor can one simply say that the Shitsters do not stink.

One cannot say that photos have no smell. Nor that they have any

Who will reveal to us the origin of Dis-taste [*dé-goût*]. Analytic legend has it that the sensation of distaste\disgust seems to be primitively a reaction to the smell of excrement.¹⁹

And later also to what it looks like.

And later to the idea. The idea of the smell, the idea of what it looks like. What is called 'shit' stinks. One calls shit all which one wants to make disappear. The series of the condemned is endless: black shit,* jew shit,* bull shit,*... a list to be completed in all countries, at all times...

Shit, the unsung hero, the homeless, the man in the street, if he slips in between America and the Comédie-Française, on the same stage, it is because Andres Serrano naturally grants them *the right of asylum*.

Any element, thing, shard, residue, peeling can attract attention and for a moment be the object of a gaze. Snapshots of the world of squalor [*monde de l'immonde*].

'If my theatre stinks it is because the other one smells nice', states the declaration of rights for all that exists to reside on earth, according to Genet.

RECRUITMENT

They were about to return to dust. There He comes and holds back the residues, interrupts the fate which leads them to (sur)render [(*se*) rendre] to nature. They are stopped short. Reinscribed. Archived in a memory, humanized. He charms them and attracts them into a narrative, installs them in a vast configuration. He lends them names. With one shot of the camera, these piles of being heading towards non-being are

¹⁹ Let us reread *Five Psychoanalyses* and the case of the Wolf Man.

put on display. Blown up. Magnificent. They are stars. And he, Andres (his name is Man), is like the guardian of threatened species, the chief of the ark of nothingnesses.

*SHCRYPTONYMY VERBARIUM*²⁰

As in an inverse movement to his drive to collect and sublimate matter, the use of the word *Shit* is a common reducer, a standard generic term, just as the title of a book is a convenient reduction for a worldwide content.

Everything happens as if the artist had branded this patiently gathered flock with an owner's seal. Thus does Biblical man with animals.

But on earth, faeces are also *words*, as anthropologists and farmers know. The faecal verbarium is immensely rich and poetic, on a scale with the friendly exchanges which build up the coprobiological economy. Take the following *augurs*: columbine, golden, smoked, pounded, grafted, dropped [*laissées*], mirror, knotted, wrinkled, vain, club-shaped [*cordylées*]. Such are the traces left us by the passages of the winged race or by cervids, wild boars, hares and other brothers neither more nor less wild than humians [*humians*]

Augurs, I say: for actually they are the factors of growth, the increasers of harvests. One just needs to know how to read.

OF IMAGINATION

One does not smell one's own smell, notes Montaigne. As for the other's smell it is the odious idea which disturbs me. I smell it even before smelling it.

Dirt is proper [*le propre*] to the man of the City.

The man of the earth knows the value of manuring [*fumures*] which fertilizes his field.

What has been separated out, what cannot be assimilated through the cycle of this body comes back in the cycle which produces the life supplies

— Still, one does not eat one's excrement, there's a limit, isn't there, one says to oneself.

— Yes, one does, one eats again. Whatever the species, all the wild creatures, for example when they suffer from deficiencies in pancreatic enzymes, absorb these rich stews which restore the subject's balance. Minerals, trace elements, fibres, proteins. Dung is no mean thing. Take a vet's word for it.

It is the humanized animal creatures who have internalized domestic behaviours of repulsion

What Serrano does: a double act [*double coup*]. On the one hand he transgresses, he sickens the various advocates of established sublimations (the religious profession and other museums). On the other hand he *fattens* [*engraisse*] his camera. He transgreases [*transgraisse*].

²⁰ I borrow this signifier, formed on the word *herbier* (herbarium), from Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's *Le Verbier de l'Homme aux loups* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1976). Trans.: translated in English as *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

AND THE SURICATES?

not only are these small colonies grace itself (I especially have in mind the Suricata Suricata from South Africa, their agility, their elegance, the solicitude they show to one another, well beyond the family circle)

but there's nothing more entrancing yet than their anal secretions. Nothing has ever been inhaled which is more odoriferous than their musk.

Perhaps *Mother's Shit* exhales such a scent? It does not show on the photo, but I like the idea of the thing.

When I ask Andres Serrano if the portrait of *Mother's Shit* is related to a personal mother, his maybe, I say to myself, he makes it clear that it is the stool of a mother from Ecuador. His delivery man brought it back to him. I get worried: are you sure it was really the present from a mother? The man could have deceived him about the Origin of the Thing. One never knows. A substitution can be done quickly. It's frequent. — *I had to take his word for it,** he says to me. I took his word for it, I took his word for granted.

I take his word for it. If there had been a ploy, he would have been alerted by a sign

Still, the mother is something sacred. A son makes no mistakes, at least in his desire. As if there was only one mother. *Mother's Shit* is therefore a mother's stool indeed. You see?

RECONNECTIONS (SCENE)

The remainder-body which is no longer part of the body, which no longer forms one body with the body of which he was a part yesterday, the departed remainder-body will not remain lost or doomed to the total corpse. Here is a Passer-by ready to adopt it.

He gathers faeces. He protects them from pounding, from abstraction.

With each deposit he returns the name and the distinction, with the precision of the scientist mindful of the differences between species. That's the least he can do: salvation. To render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, unto the Tapir the things which are the tapir's, unto the pig, the jaguar, the rabbit, the wolf, the dog too, and make an Ark of the Shits with a difference. And to render unto the Specks of shit [*Chiures*] their infinite diversity, their expressiveness, their peculiar characteristics.

In a moment he will lay them on a small table, as an officiating priest would on an altar, one will unfurl behind the icon a cloth curtain of a carefully chosen pastel. Everything will be performed with tact. Displayed against the pale background, the pile will gain in intensity.

The officiating priest will adjust his tripod and furbish his optical ciboriums.

Now the ceremony will begin.

I won't be surprised to hear Artaud's ghost chanting, behind the curtain

[I am]

I do

[Shit on me.]

Yo kutemar tonu tardiktra

Yo kute drikta anu tedri²¹*NEGATIVE SHIT-THEOLOGY*

What, in the names of Deucalion and Pyrrha, and the incensed privy and the licensed pantry gods was this disinterestingly low human type, this Calumnious Column of Cloaxity, this Bengalese Beacon of Biloxity, this Annamite Aper of Atroxity, really at, it will be precise to quarify, for he seems in a badbad case?²²

It's not Duchamp's polite\polished [*poli*] urinal
 It's not Man Ray's prayer
 It's not polite\polished
 It's not red
 It's not blue
 It's not white
 It's not black
 It's not beautiful
 It's not elegant
 It's not smooth
 It's not hollow, except once, through the trick of a prod of the thumb
 It's not made
 It's done

These are not reused
 These are not recuperated
 These are not Louise Bourgeois' bone hangers [*os-cintres*]
 These are not objects
 These are found nobjects

What remains from the idea of abandoned children

He knows analysis *and whether he uses it \ helps himself to it* [s'en sert].

MATTER

All this is perhaps nothing but a monument to the mother, of whom (only) these unpresumptuous fragments remain.

For it is from her, *mater*, that all matter flows. Now *mater* the first insofar as she is the trunk of the tree regarded as the producer of offshoots and offspring [*rejetons*], the hard part as opposed to the bark and the leaves, the one which supplies timber, is the

²¹ The last two lines are from Artaud's Notebooks; quoted in Jacques Derrida and Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. and preface by Marie Ann Caws (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 83 – Trans.

²² Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 179.

mother with the child, the childbearing mother. As *mater* she is the nurse, as *materies* she is the aliment and food, and the fed.

Matter is the matter of Serranian research, Andres' fragmented mother, the theme and content of his observation.

In the end he will not have rejected the rejected. Save [*sauf*], the offspring [*rejeton*].

TALE

There was a little boy, shrewd from his earliest days, who knew a thing or two about not being made to do things [*à qui on ne la faisait pas*].

His first memory is of having bitten the woman next door on the cheek. He can still see her: a twenty-five-year-old woman with big breasts and a lot of rouge. Apparently it was this red on her cheeks which aroused him. A cardinal scarlet. Sat in the middle of the meadow, the cheek was exactly level with him. — 'Kiss me, Andres', she said. He didn't want to. She got cross. He took a firm bite. It was held against him as a crime. He was told he was a monster. He remembers the vivid colours of the scene. The woman wore a garnet-coloured pendant.

As one will have recognized, this memory is reconstructed from the life of Henri Brulard, that is to say Stendhal. It is as true fake as the memories of the life of Andres Serrano: vivid colours, attractive and forbidding bodies, bites from the teeth. There were also animal corpses made revolting by the indifference surrounding them.

At age five he rebelled against the sacred history told by his nurse, criticizing the weak points of the sacred text with ruthless severity. To begin with he rose up against the character of suffering of the figure of Christ. There was according to him nothing beautiful, nor fair about it. He brought his criticism to bear on God the Father: if he was omnipotent, he was to blame if men were mean and doing evil and dirty things. Following which they went to hell. All that made a scandal. To the question: did Christ have a bottom? the nurse replied that Christ had been a man. To the question: had Christ also shat? the nurse walled herself up in silence.

When he was ten he did his first communion and had his first ejaculation. Until then, when he saw three little piles of horse dung next to one another on the road, this forced him to think of the Holy Trinity. He stopped going to church. At least to the 'American' church, the one that faithfully sticks to the tale without the distancing of metaphor. One will find him later having become a ruthless photographer, the artist of stolen obscenity.

he got the charm of his optical life when he found himself (*hic sunt lennones!*) at pointblank range blinking down the barrel of an irregular revolver of the bulldog with a purpose pattern, handled by an unknown quarreler who, supposedly, had been told off to shade and shoot shy Shem Serrano should the shit show his shiny shnout out awhile to look facts in their face before being hosed and creased [...] by six or a dozen of the gayboys.²³

²³ Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 179.

CATASTROPHES

Droppings,* excrement, other names of catastrophes. *Cacas* (poos) are little catastrophes.

The Tsunami, according to American anthropologist James Siegel, has been experienced by the inhabitants of Atjeh, in Indonesia, as the Great Catastrophe of Cacastrophes. This population from Sumatra has always smoked its most ancient epics and its folk tales by taking Caca into account. Thus there is an Interpretation of the Shits, just as in India the issue of remainders occupies a decisive place in Hindu mythotheology. The gods themselves are residual residents.

I return to the Great Catastrophe. According to Siegel, the main effect of the Tsunami which engulfed, smashed and carried everything away, is an obsession for Garbage. A man lost seven family members killed by shit. They did not drown. They were hit on the head²⁴ by Litter. O, horrible, horrible!²⁵

Still nowadays, the giant mass graves are covered in debris and garbage. Death is one thing, garbage is another thing. The Great Catastrophe is that the violence done to the world was such that the work of mourning lost any meaning, any possibility; shit has not been reingested into the circuit of natural fertilization. The universe is broken. The ghosts that roam everywhere are no longer frightening. All beings are ghosts. The town is full of people who are dead. You never know whom or what you are talking to. The Tsunami caused the sudden emergence of the absolutely Unassimilable. Come from nowhere it is going nowhere.

The Bible tells us that when God, furious at seeing that what He had done gave off a stench, and not the smell of incense and musk which He was expecting, decided to evacuate the unpleasant Creation, he flushed the toilet and the Flood cleansed the pit. But in Atjeh the Flood is a tidal wave of garbage. So, is it the end of the world over there?

Yet, the anthropologist tells us, young people can be seen this spring clambering up the mounds of refuse and making love up there on layers of 'garbage'.* I imagine some come with cameras.

SHIT, NO PRESENT?

I said he knows analytic litter [*litière*], this *litter* – *letter* which Joyce heaps up in *Finnegans Wake* and on top of which is perched the original hen (Belinda of the Dorans is her name) which scratches 'this zogzag world', this world of shit, in order to extract 'a goodish-sized sheet of letterpaper originating by transhit from Boston (Mass.)',²⁶ at once a wafer, a fragment and – litterature [*litiérature*]. It is this litter which he scratches, this son-of-a-hen, pushed by the *need* [*besoin*], the hope, to be *relieved* one day of this damned Interminable Analysis. But what from whom could possibly put if not an end but at least a truce to this labour? What from whom could deeply alter the course of this bricklaying/demolition [*démolition*]? As one can guess, this is what Andres, the Last of the Shits that he is, is thinking about

²⁴ The phrase was also in English in the translation – Trans.

²⁵ Compare with the Ghost's famous exclamation in *Hamlet*, II.v.80 – Trans.

²⁶ These two quotations (and the hen's name) are from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, 111 – the second extract glossed as "une feuille de cacapier en provenance de la Messe" in the French original – in which 'transhit' is turned into 'transhit' by Cixous – Trans.

I look at his *Self-Portrait*,* this portrait of the artist in deep shit. Now what's wrong? There's something lacking for his satisfaction.

Do you see the Absence?

There was the Mother's present.

And then?

No present [*pas de cadeau*] from the father?

That's what he is thinking about.

The Series you have just seen, no matter how signed it is by the self-portrait of the artist with a dog, is on hold.

The offspring (from the unconscious) is stubborn. He gives up on nothing.

Not that he has forgotten or repressed.

But he has not been able to obtain the desired ones in due time. That supreme idea and crowning imposed itself to him, as always in such cases, *a little too late*. There are two of them, but it is always the same in two guises, that are still lacking. These are *Holy Shit** and *Freudian Shit*.*

He can see them very clearly in his head. When he asked his delivery man, a taxi driver, to supply him with the stool of a priest which would have become *Holy Shit*, 'at one day's notice', says the driver, 'it's too short'.²⁷ – One day? Too short. One does not know how much time would have been necessary in order to obtain the present from the father.

As for *Freudian Shit*, he is making the request to his psychoanalyst. He spoke to him about his dream long ago.

One must imagine the scene, with all that analytic reflection will have given us to think about the 'present' and its equivalents, one must imagine the analyst.

It's not so simple to do this. Such a crap present [*cacadeau*]. I know something about it.

'I have to push for some *Freudian shit*',²⁸ Serrano says to me. I have to push for that

Now I push him for real.

Maybe he thought I was pretending? Now it's for good.

Now is the time to push

The time has come to push, he says

Evil be to him who evil thinks.

'Honeys wore camelia paints'²⁹

This Freudian slip,* he will add it as a P.S. 'Pee ess'.³⁰

Translated by Laurent Milesi

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1. Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Torok. *Le Verbier de l'Homme aux loups*. Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1976.

²⁷ The quotation is in English in the original – Trans.

²⁸ This quotation as well as the two following fragments in italics are in English in the original – Trans.

²⁹ Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 113. Trans.: the fragment appears in a later version of the hen's 'litter-letter'.

³⁰ See Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 111 – Trans.

2. Cixous, Hélène. *Manhattan: Letters from Prehistory*. Translated by Beverly Bie Brahic. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.
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Nici un (ca)cadou: Serrano feșos

„Pas de cadeau”, cu subtitlul „Serrano fêcétieux”, a reprezentat eseul introductiv din catalogul de expoziție fotografică a lui Andres Serrano de la Galeria Yvon Lambert, Paris, în 2008. A fost publicat într-un format bilingv pe două coloane, conținând traducerea în engleză pregătită de Laurent Milesi împreună cu autoarea. Textul francez original a fost publicat ulterior într-un volum special intitulat *La règle du jeu* (43) despre relația dintre literatură și arta contemporană (Paris: Grasset, 2010). Traducerea originală „Shit, No Present: Faecetious Serrano”, a apărut de asemenea în Hélène Cixous, *Poetry in Painting: Writings on Contemporary Arts and Aesthetics*, ed. Marta Segarra and Joana Masó (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 85-108. Ne bucură că putem oferi acest eseu într-o formă mai accesibilă în traducerea revizuită și adnotată de Laurent Milesi pentru acest număr special din *Word and Text*.

Expoziția cu lucrările lui Serrano, la care eseul lui Cixous răspunde, conține șaiszeci și șase de fotografii în format mare cu prim-planuri ale unor fecale. Imaginile descriu excremente ale unor creaturi diferite, unele cu titluri hazlii, ca de exemplu „Bull Shit”, „Self-Portrait Shit”, or „Holy Shit”. Acest preambul poate folosi la contextualizarea unor aspecte din eseul lui Cixous, inclusă aici ca o piesă de sine stătătoare pentru că oferă perspective provocatoare asupra multiplelor limite ale corpului pe care materia sa primă o expune.

Adnotările adiționale ale traducătorului elucidează în mod special acele sensuri duble de tip scatologic ale textului. Asterixurile (*) indică numeroasele cuvinte sau expresii în engleză folosite de Cixous în textul original în limba franceză, cu excepția cuvântului „shit”, pe care l-a păstrat în engleză în întregul text. Punctuația idiosincronică a lui Cixous a fost respectată pe cât posibil, mai ales ceea ce Jacques Derrida a numit „punctuația depunctuată” pentru a desemna cum elimină punctul de la finalul propozițiilor pentru a crea efecte ritmice.