



**AC Smith, "Katie Couric Reflects on her Colonoscopy and Excremental Philosophy —A Performative Lecture"**  
Homework Fair, Los Angeles, 1950 S Santa Fe Ave, Los Angeles, November 18, 2023  
Produced by Holly Harrell & Bryan Morello

Katie Couric's televised colonoscopy first aired on NBC's *The TODAY* show in the year 2000. Couric received the procedure following her first husband's death from colorectal cancer two years earlier. This historic event set off a trend of celebrities televising their colonoscopies or publicizing their colonoscopies over the following two decades. I joined this long line of celebrities this past August in a re-enactment of Couric's iconic colonoscopy for the soft opening reception of the exhibition *Hungry Bottom: On Cloacal Thinking*, with script supervision by artist C Bain and featuring performer Dallas Havoc. While Couric is under anesthesia and receiving her colonoscopy from Dr. Ford, an inception-like-dream-inside-a-dream unfolds in the style of a late night talk show hosted by Jimmy Kimmel. Featuring guests Heidi Klum, Steve Martin, and Martin Short. The latter three roles were read improvisationally by three randomly selected members of the audience. Dialogue is directly plagiarized and parodied from news articles, personal sexts, and celebrity interviews on their own colonoscopies. The performance culminates with Katie Couric receiving an enema from Dr. Ford— here is the importance of hosting this performance for the opening of the exhibition. As the curator *and producer* I am receiving a literal anal cleansing by and for my audience/artists— in receiving an enema administered by an artist and performer, C Bain, an exchange of care occurs where the curator, the caretaker, becomes the patient, the cared-for. Once the performance ends, I then expel the excess on behalf of the featured artists— this excess and excrement is the content I present on tonight, and what I aim to curate. I want to note that I was going to re-perform this enema for you tonight, however I am nauseous, had diarrhea earlier, and am on my period, so instead I actively bleed for you as another form of this cleansing and shedding of excess in the name of non-reproductive fluids and functions. (although i am interested in what this means as a non-performative as Sara Ahmed defines in *On Being Included* (2016) as “the ‘reiterative and citational practice by which discourse’ does not produce ‘the effects that it names.’”)

Through Couric's colonoscopy I aimed specifically to somatically explore and expand on my work building out a “bottom theory” that utilizes the colonoscopic procedure as a critical strategy— to document and *assess* corporeal performance,

function, and affect— in brief, a turn to anorectal conditions— an anal training of theory, a huff of poppers and series of butt plugs each larger than the other with the goal of expanding the sphincter, widening the ass-thetic canon in instances where “a cock’s length is rarely a problem; its thickness may be.”<sup>1</sup> In this approach, I make the argument that all anorectal (and therefore gastrointestinal) conditions are queer based on two primary properties: 1.) Every “body” has one, and 2.) They are non-reproductive.

The gastrointestinal is defined by the digestive system and systems in which it shares a transactional relationship. This definition and the idea of “cloacal thinking” pulls from Shannon Sullivan’s *The Physiology of Sexist and Racist Oppression* (2015) which “treats the gut and pelvic floor as psychosomatically integrated,” (Sullivan, 19). My concept of digestion also builds from Elizabeth Wilson’s *Gut Feminism* that calls for feminists to look at psychology’s biological effects. Wilson questions in the introduction of *Gut Feminism*, “how biological data can be used to think about minded and bodily states... in relation to thinking about the hostility (bile) intrinsic to our politics. What if feminist politics are necessarily more destructive than we are able to bear?” (Wilson, 1) What if the treatment is harsher on our bodies and minds than the results? Within the dialogue between Kimmel and Klum, the supermodel references receiving an endo/colonoscopy at the Lans Lanserhof, an Austrian detox spa— doubling as a vacation retreat and hospital, with practitioners and procedures— visitors are expected to not only cleanse the body but also of the mind.

The preparation for a colonoscopy similarly mimics the preparation to “bottom” or receive anal sex. Again a somatic process, both mental and physical preparation of the body, the gut in particular, often required for the act of bottoming. Traditionally, a bottom will restrict their eating habits to primarily liquids— the body is starved, liquidated, to be penetrated, and exposed. I could even further draw the similarities of a colonoscopy or enema to eating and drinking — an injection of fluids into a bodily hole with the goal of emptying your bowels (in order for the top to later fill them). Insertion (enema, phallus), fill yourself with fluids (enema, cum), expel (enema, cum, shit), and repeat. It is important to note that none of these anal functions result in “reproduction” or a reproductive exchange/insertion/excretion of fluids.

Preparing for a colonoscopy and focusing on the latter queer colonoscopic property of being “non-reproductive” (distinct from “non-performative”): can I translate the grammatical properties of the colon to a possible biological and overall colonoscopic approach? Where the colon serves as a point of difference... Derrida notably writes on iteration as repetition with difference in “Signature Event Context” (1972), describing iteration using the terms “riven [crever]” and “force de rupture.” These word choices by Derrida seem like violent verbs to describe iteration. Crever translates from French meaning “to die,” and riven is defined as “to split or tear apart violently.” Some might relate to this sentiment when experiencing rough sex, a “splitting” open or fissuring of your bodily holes. Others might relate to an upset stomach, a rupture to your system, to “destroy” a toilet through violent hot projectiles from your body. I am reminded of how Georges Bataille speaks on the anus as something that ejects violently, natural disasters, transcribing digestive characteristics to earthly holes: “The terrestrial globe is covered with volcanoes, which serve as its anus. Although this globe eats nothing, it often violently ejects the contents of its entrails.”

Rebecca Schneider in *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997) outlines how Andre Breton and other “high” Surrealists categorize Georges Bataille as “an ‘excremental philosopher’ (Breton 1969: 184; see also Stoekl 1985).”<sup>2</sup> Schneider continues to write that this positioning of the “explicit body and primitive practice” both reconstitutes a “Western art-canonical tenets of vision,” and creates a “formal aesthetic distance,” whereas Bataille sought to “interrogate and disrupt those tenets.”<sup>3</sup> Meaning that a rejection of excremental philosophy by “high” Surrealists constructs what is accepted in a Western canon of aesthetic and *sense*. In this way excremental philosophies may be an access point to expanding and therefore queering an institutionalized arts canon— opening/stretching the intact anus that is the canon— a tight sphincter, unpenetrated, ringlike, surrounding, contracting, with the ability to open/close a passage or opening. Beyond a heteronormative form of penetration, how do we fistfuck this canonical asshole open? How do we tear, injure, damage, fracture, and bloody what is intact, virginal, and sexed?

Ron Athey’s work most directly reflects on these connections between Bataille and a canon of performance studies. In an interview with Dominic Johnson, Athey reflects on how he resonated with Bataille’s excremental philosophies and the way “he elevated filth to sacred status - while completely destroying familial, cultural, and societal myths.”<sup>4</sup> However, within these histories of excremental philosophy I often see assholes in theory spotlight either the underage virginal girl (intact) or the homosexual cis-male (defiled). Athey notes how Bataille fetishizes “a young girl’s anus.” Leo Bersani in *The Rectum as a Grave* briefly references afab individuals in terms of performing masculinity, or the prostitute (relating to the multiple orgasm, the gay male stereotype of having multiple partners and/or engaging in criminal activity), or wife who has anal sex to fulfill her

---

<sup>1</sup> Nguyen Tan Hoang, *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 145.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Dominic Johnson, “Perverse Martyrologies: An Interview with Ron Athey,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 18, no. 4 (2008): 533.

husband's homosexual fantasies (and vice versa relating anal sex between two men as fulfilling a feminine or heterosexual fantasy, where the asshole acts as a vagina).<sup>5</sup> I question: How do we move towards a more queer and inclusive *assholeography* (Athey's language)? Amelia Jones begins to take a more queer approach to holes in her 2006 essay "Holy Body: Erotic Ethics in Ron Athey and Juliana Snapper's Judas Cradle." Jones acknowledges "I am a body of holes. Dripping, mucousy, bloody," with pores and orifices, a nose, eyes, mouth, ears, vagina, asshole, nipples, (piercings?), etc... However, also notably in this essay, Jones canonizes Athey's asshole, stating, "Ron Athey's asshole has its own place in the history of contemporary performance art."<sup>6</sup> In terms of Jones' canonization of Athey's asshole, why don't more female, lesbian, or trans assholes have their own place in the canon?

Considering queerness and queer topics/theories on the gut, I am interested in embodied experiences of the LGBTQ+ community and their relationships with gastrointestinal maintenance; however, I also want to highlight the queer properties of the gut as a non-gendered (+ non-human) hole running through every "body." Where the question isn't "can heterosexuals be queer?" but rather, "what's queer about heterosexual practices or heterosexual modes of identification?" (Jack Halberstam 1998). Through Couric's colonoscopy I integrate queer corporealities into a new material gut feminism that reorients the gaze off of heteronormative functions of the gut (ie. digestion) and onto queer relationships with our own body's holes (ie. however there is a new gap where Sullivan and Wilson do not address anal sex). While both Sullivan and Wilson consider a feminist new materialist approach to the philosophy of biology that I am similarly informed by— however, I aim to approach the gut (crawling on all fours, anus exposed) with a concern on removing the dualism and the "bi" from bi-ology in feminist new materialisms— rejecting an "adherence to binary sexual difference," such as outlined by Victoria Pitts-Taylor in *Mattering* (2016).<sup>7</sup>

I aim to reject this materialism within binary sexual difference while performing as Katie Couric receiving an enema on my hands-and-knees. On all fours like an animal eating off a table, or how animals are treated by vets on a table I am interested in expressing the visual signifier of a material hierarchy or "animacy hierarchy" written on by Mel Y. Chen in her book, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Chen defines animacy hierarchy as a conceptual arrangement of "human life, disabled life, animal life, plant life, and forms of nonliving material in orders of value and priority."<sup>8</sup> An animacy hierarchy is iterated in the position of being in doggy-style, cat or cat cow, on-all-fours "like an animal."<sup>9</sup> The idea of "acting like an animal" is reflected further in Klum's interview with Kimmel, dialogue inserted by Bain reflects on the taste of shit being sweet as a result of their partner's pre diabetic medication. Klum explains the reason she knows this is because, "It's not that I was eating his ass because I wanted to be eating shit, but you know...sometimes it's there..." Klum continues to describe her lover's shit as "sugary," further confusing aesthetics (taste) and actions (eating) for food with poop— threatening heteronormativity through the pathology of shit-eating presents "as a direct link to cannibalism."<sup>10</sup> Couric eating while receiving an enema further flattens this animacy hierarchy and mimics this pathology of shit-eating— an insertion on both ends. Here is where I leave you and position Katie Couric, in the end, left fucked with holes wide open —nothing but questions alongside the other celebrities that re-performed her colonoscopy in the name of the divine excrement, holy shit, on all fours, asshole exposed...

---

<sup>5</sup> ""

<sup>6</sup> Jones, "Holy Body," 163.

<sup>7</sup> Victoria Pitts-Taylor, "Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Corporeal Politics," in *Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Materialism*, ed. Victoria Pitts-Taylor, (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Moving towards expressions of dominance and power that queer masculine/feminine heterosexual hierarchies, I am reminded here of a 2022 artistic study at Human Resources, Los Angeles, by Xandra Ibarra on the relationship between BDSM, pleasure, and disability in the performance work of Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, "Perverse Martyrologies," 533.