

## **Consumo, estética, técnica e religião em Cloaca, de Wim Delvoye**

### **Consumption, aesthetic, technique and religion in Wim Delvoye's Cloaca**

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**Resumo:** *Cloaca* (2000-2010), de Wim Delvoye, consiste em um conjunto de máquinas desenvolvidas para produzir “merda real industrializada” em museus e galerias de arte. Após descrição sumária da série, desdobramos nossa análise em três eixos: o primeiro baseado na articulação psicanalítica entre merda e dinheiro; o segundo na diferenciação formulada geneticamente por Gilbert Simondon (1989) entre estética, técnica e religião; e o terceiro no conceito de máquina, formulado por Gilles Deleuze e Félix Guattari (1972). Por fim, comparamos *Cloaca* e *Anal Kisses* (2011), projeto do mesmo artista, e buscamos identificar alguns vetores culturais que incidiram na recepção desigual dos dois projetos.

**Palavras-chave:** *consumo; anialidade; técnica; arte contemporânea; Wim Delvoye.*

**Abstract:** *Cloaca* (2000-2010), by Wim Delvoye, consists of a set of machines developed in order to produce “real industrialized shit” in Museums and Art Galleries. After a brief description of the series, we unfold our analysis on three axes: the first one is based on the psychoanalytical articulation between shit and money; the second one on the differentiation genetically formulated by Gilbert Simondon (1989) between aesthetics, technics and religion; the third one on the concept of machine, formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972). Finally, we compare *Cloaca* and *Anal Kisses* (2011), a project by the same artist, in an attempt to identify some cultural vectors that affected the uneven reception of both projects.

**Keywords:** *consumption; anality; technique; contemporary art; Wim Delvoye.*

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## The series

The Cloaca project, created by the Belgian artist Wim Delvoye, consisted in a set of machines produced between 2000 and 2010 after over ten years of research of the artist with scientists of different areas. Endorsing the argument of Isabelle Wallace (2011), it seems fundamental to consider *Cloaca* as a series. The attention given to the design and logo of each version of the machine was a central aspect in the development of the project, through which the mode of post-industrial production acquired the statute of language. Even though Cloaca culminated in machines of industrial features; when we look to the series, we get to the conclusion that the process of production of parallel value to the development of different versions of a machine concentrated in these two aspects: design and branding.

Wallace presents the project in the following terms:

Described by the artist as a “shit machine”, *Cloaca Original*, 2000, like the seven works that quickly went after it, is simply that: a computerized machine created with the objective of creating real shit, machine made, in the open context of an art gallery or a museum. (WALLACE, 2011, p. 217, *all the translations are ours*).

Delvoye's machines receive food twice a day. These meals go through different recipients through which they are submitted to mechanical processes and the contact with chemical substances that mimic those excreted in our digestive system. The synthetic shit excreted in the end of this journey preserves an unsettling similarity with human feces. The product of these machines is widely responsible for the repercussion of *Cloaca*, but we cannot neglect that the machinery itself is extremely seductive, and that the aesthetic choices found in its origin play a crucial role in its seduction. If we only analyze *Cloaca Original*, we would probably hyper dimension the technical virtuosity of the installation. But if we look towards the set of machines produced between 2000 and 2010, we can observe the separation between form and function, operated by the artist in the opposite way of productivism and industrial efficacy.

The design of the machine varies on every version, while its function remains the same: to produce shit.

This parodic duplication of marketing procedures appears on Wallace's essay, when she compares the two earliest machines of the set:

As we could wait due to its title, *Cloaca New & Improved* is similar to the first machine, although it follows the trajectory of the series as a whole, *Cloaca New & Improved* is more compact and apparently more high-tech. While the aesthetic of *Cloaca Original* reminds a openly ambitious scientific project, *Cloaca New & Improved* has a more elegant, industrial design, with its neglectable parts (tubes, wires, etc.) elegantly kept in square windows of stainless steel that hide, more than confess, the details of the process. Even so, the production of the first and the second machine is essentially the same: as its predecessor, *Cloaca New & Improved* produces between 200 and 400 grams of shit every day at the same moment. (WALLACE, 2011, p. 218)

The development of the series witnesses the awareness of the artist around the fact that design and marketing would have been converted, on our time, into language. After *Cloaca Original* (Images 1 and 2), whose logo mixes the blue eclipse of Ford and *Coca-Cola's* typography; *Cloaca New & Improved* (Images 3 and 4) adds to these two iconic references the image of Mr. Clean – the character from Procter & Gamble – with his intestines exposed in the lower part of the image.

Image 1 - *Cloaca Original*, 2000.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2GyxV0H>>. Accessed in April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Image 2 - *Cloaca Original*, 2000, *Museum Kunst Palast*, Düsseldorf, 2001.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2GyxV0H>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 3 - *Cloaca New & Improved*, 2001.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2GttYKs>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 4 - *Cloaca New & Improved*, 2001, *Ernst Museum*, Budapest, 2008.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2GttYKs>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

An intestine also appears inside a coat of arms, in the logo *Cloaca Turbo* (Images 5 and 6), which parodies the brand Harley Davidson and reminds us that the coat of arms, distinctive emblems of noble and military people, are a part of the genealogy of this curious mode through which logos of multinational companies became fundamental parts of the repertoire of signs through which we contemporary subjectivize. The design of *Cloaca Turbo*, 2003, follows in general lines the design of *Cloaca New & Improved*, but introduces, instead of the six cylindrical recipients of glass, three washing machines, highlighting the mechanical organ that gives title to this edition of the machine and defined by the great velocity of rotation.

Image 5 - *Cloaca Turbo*, 2003.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2WUmsfO>>. Accessed in: April 9th, 2019.

Image 6 - *Cloaca Turbo*, 2003, CAPC, Bordeaux, 2004-2005.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2WUmsfO>>. Accessed in: April 9th, 2019.

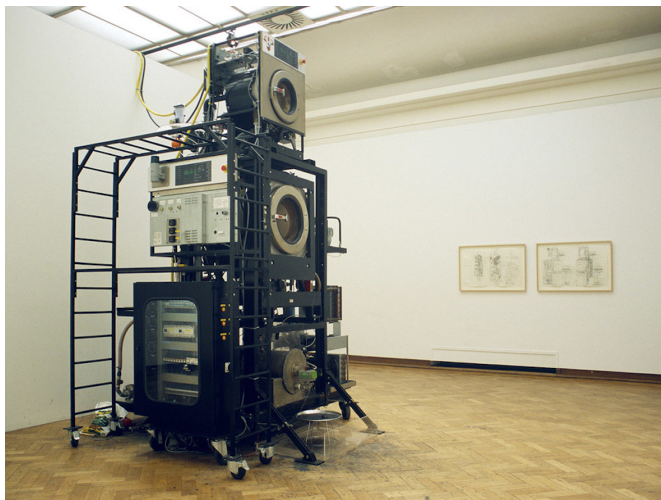
The compartments of the type washing machine are also present in the fourth version of the machine (Images 7 and 8) from 2004-2005, whose logo presents, once again, the image of Mr. Clean, this time without the ellipsis of Ford. The verticality of the anthropomorphic Mr. Clean is mimetized by the machine, which presents two superposed compartments and the output through which the synthetic excrement is evacuated in its inferior part. This verticality, similar to us, bipeds, is also explored in *Cloaca N° 5* (Images 9 and 10), with a more elegant design matching the logo, a parody of the brand of perfume Chanel N° 5, which has its Parisian origin replaced by China, emphasizing the process of offshoring. This phenomenon, important in the new geopolitical order of work, marks the own trajectory of the artist that, impeded of tattooing live pig on Belgium in another controversial project, moved to China.

Image 7 - *Cloaca Quattro*, 2004-2005



Source <<https://bit.ly/2EeBRRC>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 8 - *Cloaca Quattro*, 2004-2005, BOZAR, Brussels, 2005.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2EeBRRC>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 9 - *Cloaca N° 5*, 2006.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2TRxpxF>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.



Image 10 - *Cloaca* N° 5, 2006, *Glenbow Museum*, Calgary, 2008.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2TRxpxF>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Other tendencies marking the technological development in our time are explored through the sixth version of *Cloaca*, titled *Personal Cloaca* (Images 11 and 12). This version, in a more modest size, consists into a washing machine that receives meals through a compartment located in its upper side and *defecate* through a tube located in the lower side. Its logo, created based on the brand of condoms Durex, evokes more intimate relations with the machine, in a domestic scale. Delvoe reproduces, thus, the process through which machines of monumental dimensions and exorbitant cost become, over the years, objects of personal use.

Image 11 - *Personal Cloaca*, 2006.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2ST4xrA>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 12 - *Personal Cloaca*, 2006, *Marta Herford*, 2008.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2ST4xrA>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

One year after the production of *Personal Cloaca*, Delvoye produces *Super Cloaca* (Images 13 and 14) which goes back to the large scale, but, this time, in a relation of proportionality with its productive efficacy. Instead of producing the modest 200g-400g of excrement, *Super Cloaca* produces kilos and more kilos of shit. The logo superposes the name *Cloaca*, written with *Coca-Cola*'s typography, to the emblem of Superman, in a clear allusion to the American consumption society. This allusion is reiterated by the clothing worn by the performers manipulating the machine, clearly inspired on the uniform of employees in fast-food chains;

Over a table, *Mini Cloaca* (Images 15 and 16) from 2007, also explores the issue of scale. In contrast with *Super Cloaca*, *Mini Cloaca* can only ingest small portions, that is why its logo takes back the design of Chiquita Banana, transformed by the insertion of Mr. Clean's face. Instead of the character with fruits in her head, inspired by Carmen Miranda, present in the original version of the brand.

Image 13 - *Super Cloaca*, 2007.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2N8jJM6>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 14 - *Super Cloaca*, 2007, MUDAM, Luxembourg, 2007-2008



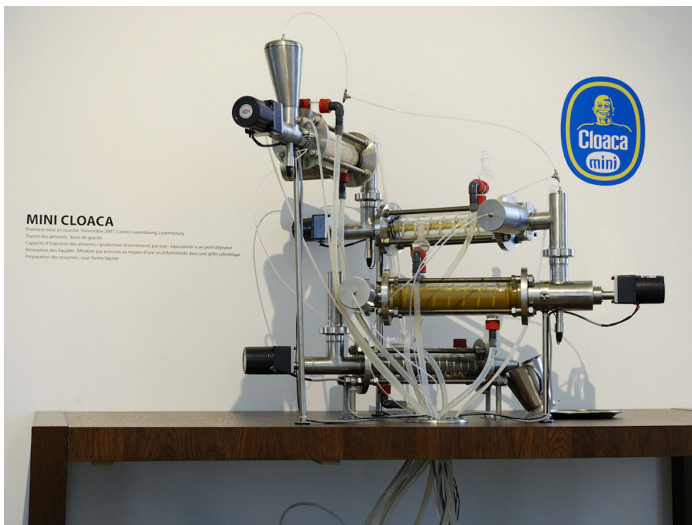
Source: <<https://bit.ly/2N8jJM6>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 15 - *Mini Cloaca*, 2007.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2Id6Gds>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 16 - *Mini Cloaca*, 2007, *Casino Luxembourg*, Luxembourg, 2007-2008



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2Id6Gds>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

The last two versions of the machine, produced in 2009-2010, approach the segmentation of the consumer market. *Cloaca Travel Kit* (Images 17 and 18), as the title implies, consists in the installation of the machine inside a travel bag. Therefore, Cloaca becomes portable. The logo of *Cloaca Travel Kit* appropriates the graphism present on Montblanc's logo. *Cloaca Professional* (Images 19 and 20), the last machine of the series, presents a design that evokes the dominion of high technology. It is not about a design like *Cloaca Original*, related to the imaginary of scientific-industrial experimentation of pioneer inventors. *Cloaca Professional* embodies the alliances between scientific and technologic development. The design preserves the linear horizontal structure more frequently associated with the industrial production, but the depuration of forms may evoke the pharmaceutical industry or the new technologies of medical treatment. The logo of *Cloaca Professional* is composed by an elegant and serified typography, and by an almost abstract image that evokes the bones of the pelvis.

Image 17 - *Cloaca Travel Kit*, 2009-2010.



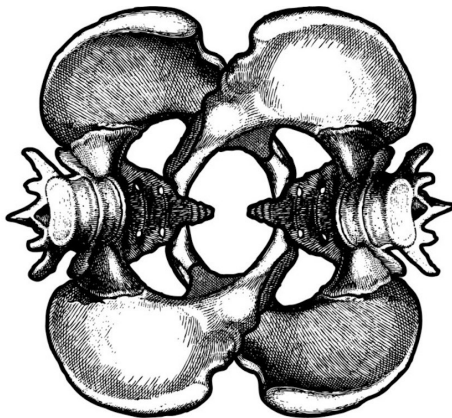
Source: <<https://bit.ly/2S4UPOs>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 18 - *Cloaca Travel Kit*, 2009-2010, *Pushkin State Museum*, Moscow, 2014.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2S4UPOs>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 19 - *Cloaca Professional*, 2010.



# CLOACA

## PROFESSIONAL

Source: <<https://bit.ly/2EfydHr>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Image 20 - *Cloaca Professional*, 2010, MONA, Hobart, permanent collection.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2EfydHr>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

## Shit and value

About *Cloaca Professional*, the website *The Conversation*, specialized in scientific divulgation, published an article by Kate Patterson, expert in the relations between science and art, where the author describes her experience with the installation:

In the depth of the iconic MONA, I was excited to see *Cloaca Professional* first-hand. The room was quieter than I imagined, and very, very calm. They said the defecation was programmed to take place at 2pm and I arrived several minutes before [...]. Obviously, others had the same thought as me, because there were several small groups of people waiting when I arrived. Some had their arms crossed, looking defensive while others remained standing, changing their weight through their feed, not wanting to be present longer than the absolute necessary. Occasionally, someone would whisper something inaudible or let an embarrassed sigh go out. Many held their noses, clearly offended by the unavoidable smell.

Everyone watched and waited. At the time, we, strangers, were united in the anticipation. So, without warning, the fecal receptacle began to move in a circular motion, ready to receive the deposit of the machine. Then, in a soft action like an ice-cream machine, the movement took place. The receptacle, then, stopped, and people quickly got out. Job done. (PATTERSON, 2016)

Patterson's brief article documents particularly well a dimension of Cloaca that is hard to access: the experience of the audience, who relates with the project in an ambiguous manner. At the same time there is a rejection to the production of the machine, experimented in the register of abjection (KRISTEVA, 1982), we observe a desire to see, modulated by affections that are looked with some suspicion on the behalf of the criticism of art and contemporary aesthetic theory. Jacques Rancière, for example, articulates two affections, attention and curiosity – to which he attributes an emancipatory potential – an impossibility of anticipation of the visible and thinkable. Such affections would point, at this point, in the direction of new politics of the sensible – “a policy based in the variation of distance, in the resistance of the visible and the uncertainty of the effects” (RANCIÈRE, 2009, p. 105). The issue, therefore, consists in knowing whether the wide mediatization and the punctual automatization of *Cloaca* don't end up reducing the desire to see a gaze that waits and follow the events only to confirm something that is already known that will come, impeding that the curiosity installs and unfolds an experience marked by uncertainty and indetermination.

Patterson's description witnesses, in some level, the complexity of the relationships established with Delvoye's machine. At the end of her article, she highlights a fact that, despite its predictability, doesn't stopped being interesting: “*Cloaca Professional* is apparently the most hated exposition at MONA, however, it is also the installation where people spent most of their time. It is in this conflict that we have a huge opportunity for public debate” (PATTERSON, 2016).

Our goal in this article will not be to psychoanalyze this audience. However, it is hard to neglect the fact that the theoretical repertoire



coming from psychoanalysis has become unavoidable, in a cultural point of view, in the approach of the relationship with excretion and the anality within what appears in Freud (1934) with the name of *civilization*. Considering some ideas dear to the father of psychoanalysis, we observe a double movement on Delvoye's part. On one hand, he puts in evidence the economic relations that found the sources of their development in the repression of anal erogenous relations in the course of process of genitalization of sexuality, through which anal erotism can transform in the anal character (FREUD, 1928). The economic aspect associated to the repression of anal erotism results in a process of reallocation of sexual drive that configurate the psychic development of a subject. According to Freud (1928), the interest that children have for excrement continues in the adult life, but it invests in new objects: it transforms, on one hand, in the interest in money, on the other hand, in the desire to have a child.

Beyond this analytical landscape, it is fundamental to observe that money, just like excrement, is always an excess, an *other* whose alterity we can never suppress. After all, what is *shit*? It is everything that, in my nutrition, I can transform in my body. Money doesn't exist differently from that. It, in itself, remains unassimilable. A long history was needed so we could count with a system of exchange whose abundance of merchandise and services becomes interesting the idea of saving money so we can never go without. In a society with a rudimentary exchange system, we would starve with filled vaults.

On the other hand, through technology and art, Delvoye ends up sublimating the excretory experience the same way it is lived physically and psychically by the subjects. Despite the strongly symbolic dimension of psychoanalysis, we can observe that Freud – even though he neglects the odor of feces in the erogenous relations that the kid entertains with them and their excretory organs – approaches the excretion from a perspective that considers its materiality:

The stool bulk – or *stick of excrements*, following a patient's expression – is, per se, the first penis; it excites a mucous membrane: the rectum.

There are people which the anal eroticism remains strong and intact until the pre-pubescent age (ten to twelve years old); these people teach us that, since the pre-genital phase, they would constitute, in the ghosts or in perverted games, an organization similar to the genital phase, the penis and the vagina being only replaced respectively by the stool bulk and the rectum. (FREUD, 1928, p. 614, *our highlight*)

The cultural background evoked by Freud when he formulates his classical analogies between money and excrement reappears, subverted, in the core of Delvoye's project. That happens because the artist introduces excrements in another system, whose function do not articulate culturally and psychically around the retention and accumulation, but around consumption, and even of certain waste. Throughout the 20th century, the relation between excrement and money were taken back and reformulated in different dominions. Georges Bataille evoked these relations to problematize the principle of utility as an organizing axe of economy.

It isn't enough that jewelry are beautiful and stunning, what make possible its replacement for falsification: the sacrifice of a fortune to which we prefer a waterfall of diamonds is necessary to the constitution of the fascinating character of this waterfall. This fact must be related to the symbolic value of jewelry, generally in psychoanalysis. When a diamond has, in a dream, an excremental meaning, it is not only about the association by contrast: in the unconscious, jewelry as excrement are the cursed material that run from a wound, the parts of self-destined to an ostensive sacrifice (they work, in fact, as sumptuous gifts charged with sexual love). The functional character of jewelry demands its immense material value and explains on its own the casual nature made by beautiful imitations, which are practically useless. (BATAILLE, 1970, p. 305-306).

The radical nature of *Cloaca* consists in the exploration of a matter whose absence of *value of use* seem to be socially consensual. If it is true that we cannot suppose that excrements do not have, in fact, a *value of use*, because, as Dominique Laporte (2000) reminds us, they were fundamental fertilizers for the development of agriculture; we are forced to

come to the conclusion that this property was widely repressed by our culture.

The symbolic dimension of shit is dislocated in Delvoye's installation as this sign – which is the thing itself (PROSS, 1980, p. 14) – whose production depended on a body and played a central role in establishing limits between the subject and the other, is transformed into a symbol of lack of meaning and use. The disproportion between the level of scientific research and investments that are found in the basis of the project and its practical result depends on the lack of meaning socially attributed to the fecal matter. Despite the development, the level of design and visual communication, of one version of the machine to the next, they all have the same and disturbing goal: to produce shit. The consensus around the lack of value in *shit* allows Delvoye to employ it to activate a device that is presented as the teleological demise of the consumption society.

But Delvoye's gesture doesn't only invest in the "devouring" of the art system by consumption capitalism; it also approaches aspects tangential to these two fields. For example, through reflections around relations between science and religion, or the limits of what we consider, for now, proper to the human race.

### **Aesthetic, technique and religion**

One of the paths opened by Delvoye's project allows to claim the delegation of producing excrement to the machine in the key we will call post-humanist hypothesis, that emphasizes the obsolescence of the human body facing technical development. If there is nothing absurd in this hypothesis, it seems to fall, at times, in a rhetoric excess to which we very quickly adhere. Two perspectives that will help to review this hypothesis: the first is systematized by Gilbert Simondon in *on the mode of existence of technical objects*; the second one is formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, notably through the concept of *machine*.

Regarding Simondon's book, what helps us think of Cloaca beyond a humanistic technophobia and a post-humanist technophilia is the revision, through the concept of technicity, of the logic that opposes the culture to technique and the man to the machine.

Culture is unbalanced because it recognizes some objects, like the aesthetic object, and it gives right to the city in the world of meanings, while it represses other objects, particularly technical objects, in the world without structure of what doesn't have meaning, but only one use, one useful function. Facing this defensive refusal, pronounced by a partial culture, men that know technical objects and feel its significance seek to justify their judgement giving the technical object the only statute valued outside the aesthetic object, the sacred object. (SIMONDON, 1989, p. 10)

What calls our attention, in the text above, is Simondon's categorization of three types of object: technical, aesthetic and sacred. Later, in that same work, the ontogenesis of these three forms of existence is described by Simondon in the terms of a discrepancy of a "unique, central and original form of being in the world, the magic form" (SIMONDON, 1989, p. 160). In this discrepancy, emerge two other types of being in the world: the technical and the religious mode. Between these two new phases – technical and religious – we can find, destituted from the statute of phase, the aesthetic object, whose form of existence is characterized by the remission of the lost originary unit, from which derived technique and religion. In the words of the philosopher:

The primitive magical unit is the relation of vital connection between men and the world, defining a universe at the same time subjective and objective before all the distinction between object and subject, and consequently also all the apparition of the separate object. We can conceive the primitive mode of relation between men and the world as previous not only to the objectivation of the world, but also the segregation of objective units in the field that will be the objective field. It is a universe experimented as a media that the man finds himself connected. The apparition of the object is made by the isolation and fragmentation of the mediation between men and the world; and, according to the principle, this subjectivation of a mediation must have the correlation, in relation to

the primitive neutral center, the subjectivation of a mediation; the mediation between men and the world is objectivated in a technical object as it subjectifies in a religious mediator. (SIMONDON, 1989, p. 163-164)

*Cloaca* mobilizes two dominions which, according to Freud and Simondon, respectively, were repressed by culture: excretion and the technical object. These two fields share an operation of objectivation, linked to the rupture of an originary unit which, in Freud, assumes the form of a pre-civilized stage of a child and, in Simondon the form of magical existence in the world, previous to the arrival, for discrepancy, technique and religion. Therefore, *Cloaca* installs a third cut, which exteriorizes, empowers and automatizes the digestive process, and creates an axis that complexifies the Simondonian scheme, as the technical objects that compose the series could, due to Delvoye's choices, but also historical contingencies, be thought as sacred and/or aesthetic objects.

On Freud's text (1928), the point of view of the parents that wait for the child's excrements is not a focus of analysis. When we observe *Cloaca*, that gains relevance as the position we put ourselves in Delvoye's device is not about the child that sacrifices (or not) a part of themselves as a gift to their parents, but rather about the parents waiting for this gift. And this place of waiting, at the same time, comfortable and destituted of power, also seem filled by us in our relations, frequently alienated, with technical objects.

If the technique corresponds to an objectivation of the world, the subjective correlation of this process is found, according to Simondon, on religion. In Delvoye's universe, these two phases will be tensioned until the belonging of objects installed in the expositional space to one or the other mode of existence approach the indecisiveness. It isn't random that some of the big machines that compose *Cloaca* were installed, more than once, within gothic buildings, or beside other series of works of the artist where X-rays of the insides of a body are transformed into gothic stained glass. The relations between science and religion are, today, much more complex than what we could glimpse through an

oppositional dualism. The belief, the faith, the demands of protection against suffering seem equally addressed to both dominions.

Valentin Nussbaum (2008) proposed a reading of the set of Wim Delvoye's work through the concept of *sacred*, mapping a series of religious references that cross numerous projects of the Belgian artist. Regarding *Cloaca*, the author writes:

In the specific frame of a machine that produces shit, the evocation of the sacred could surely go through an absolute contradiction. But if we know the artist that the artist wants to install this type of machine – which he qualifies as the “new God” – in gothic chapels, to the image that already exists in New York, the analogy becomes even more pertinent. (NUSSBAUM, 2008, p. 83)

*Cloaca*'s installation within gothic buildings can be better understood if we take back the relations of the artist with the catholic religion, to which he can live the rituals in his childhood. On one hand, religion (such as *marketing*) transforms itself in a language to the Delvoye adult, that even conceives a “religion kit, like design kits, with churches, hymns, liturgies” (DELVOYE, 2007 in NUSSBAUM, 2008, p. 84). On the other, some of the religious practices seen by the artist during his childhood remain as a source of haunt.

When Delvoye remembers the old women in his childhood that kiss statues' feet or that turn Saint Anthony's statue upside down when they lose a scissor, is not only the perplexity of a child that is expressed facing the intrinsic strangeness to this dogmatic, or even idolatrous, practices. It is also an interrogation that is put in front of paradoxical and surprising cultural phenomena in more than one sense. (NUSSBAUM, 2008, p. 84)

The inscription of a sacred and precious dimension over “spoils at time repulsive” (NUSSBAUM, 2008, p. 85) produces a gap that will precisely nurture the artist's research regarding the *mise-en-scène* of these extremely discrete and trivial objects that become a target of adoration and a vehicle of transcendence.

In a sense, the problematic linked to Wim Delvoye's *Cloaca* machines is not very far from this issue. When the superlatives are employed to qualify these machine that produce the abject sold as one of the most precious goods and to which we can speculate as an art object, there is a huge paradox put in place. If we consider, in parallel, the cult of relics, its ostentation and reunion as the infancy of principles that will rule some centuries later, the value of art objects in collections and the speculation of which they are currently subject to, it seems that the economy and dynamic of *Cloaca* is comparable to a true factory of relics. (NUSSBAUM, 2008, p. 85)

If we follow Simondon's thought about the genesis of the technical, aesthetic and religious modes of existence, *Cloaca* puts us in front of a problem. That is because, in Delvoye's project, both modes – technical and religious – cohabit the machine that, beyond that, is an aesthetic object. The technically mediated defecation effectively implies a process of objectivation, as postulated by Simondon after the rupture of the unit that originated the world. However, *Cloaca*, in its insertion in the space of artistic institutions, is inscribed in the sacred, either because the canonic configuration of the device of contemporary exposition – the white cube – creates a context close to other places of cult (O'DOHERTY, 2012); either because the artist deliberately opts for exposing his machines in gothic cathedrals or beside works that have a religious visual repertoire.

Delvoye approximates the technical and religious object in a way we can explore, synchronically and speculatively, the limits of the forms of existence that emerge in Simondon's formulations around the genesis of technicity. These limits are found, especially, in the separation between both phases – technical and religion –, that go through, today, numberless inflections, mediated by culture, by art and by politics. If we can suggest the hypothesis that *Cloaca* is also an aesthetic object is because, tensioning technique and religion, the *shit* machine may remind us, by contrast, of the moment where all these cleavages still didn't exist.

## Flow and cut

*Anti-Oedipus*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, fundamentals an important axis of our analysis, despite the harsh criticism the book makes to the Freudian theory, evoked more than once in the scope of this study. The development of the concept of *machine* was fundamental to the proposition of the French authors of a way of operating desire, through which they put under suspicion the Oedipian triangulation, structure of the psychism dear to Freud, through which desire was fundamentally postulated as something missing.

It works everywhere, sometimes without stopping, sometimes discontinuous. It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits, it fucks. What an awful thing to be said of it. On every side they are the machines, not metaphorically: machines of machines, with their couplings, their connections. An organ-machine is connected to a source-machine: one emits the flow, the other cuts it. (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1972, p. 9, *author's highlight*)

This proposition presents two consequences that are interesting to explore. The first is regarding our analysis of *Cloaca*, but it could equally work to a wider reflection around the statute of consumption. That is why it derives from the omnipresence of machines (source-machines and organ-machines) the impossibility of preserving the cleavage that separate production and consumption as autonomous and relative independent circuits. “Because in fact [...] There are no relatively independent spheres or circuits: the production is immediately consumption and inscription, inscription and consumption directly determine the production, but they determine in the breast of their own production” (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1972, p. 11).

*Cloaca* seem to become a privileged place for us to verify the primacy of production, or, in other words, the fact that the inscription and consumption are not exterior and/or posterior to production. The meal consumption of *Cloaca* machines already is the production of another flow: the flow of *shit*. Delvoye's machine allow us to see, in a very schematic way, what Deleuze and Guattari call “law of production of



production”. Not fortuitously, the artist invested in the same *topos* that fed the French philosophers: digestion.

The machine produces a cut on the flow only if it is connected to another machine that produces the flow. And without a doubt it is, in turn, a cut. But it isn't in relation to a third machine that ideally produced, or relatively, an infinite continuous flow. Thus, the anus-machine and the intestine-machine, the intestine-machine and the stomach-machine, the stomach-machine and the mouth-machine, the mouth-machine and the flow of the flock (“and, and, and...”). In summary, every machine is a cut of flow in relation to the one it is connected to, but flow or flow production in relation to the one connected to them. (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1972, p. 46)

The machine of machines of Delvoye reverberates some of the thought-provoking conceptions of the world and desire formulated by Deleuze and Guattari. Firstly, due to its literally machinelike dimension; but also for two other dimensions that are thought by the philosophers as a factory: nature and the unconscious. There isn't in *Anti-Oedipus*, a distinction between men and nature. Desire becomes an immanent principle in the relations of production that link men to nature – the human, organ-machine connected to nature, flow-machine or power-machine. The second field conceived as a machine is the unconscious, which stops engendering representations to become a machinic agency and, therefore, cut and production of flow.

This bet in the immanent productivity of the desiring machine calls into question the most nihilistic analysis of *Cloaca*. The moralistic perspective that reduces to consumerism the fact that the shit produced by Delvoye's machine are available for sale becomes unsustainable facing a taking back of the criticism of Deleuze and Guattari to the platonic division that separates *production* from *acquisition*. The desire, thought on this key, could only (1) have as an object something engendered by a producing-subject (2) be designed over an object missing that is necessary to acquire. The issue that remains open consists in knowing whether, in the case of the acquisition of the *shit* produced *Cloaca*,

facing a process of *production* or *consumption*. The synthetic excrement symbolizes something missing or its acquisition comes from a productive drive, like the one that originates collections<sup>2</sup>?

### **Anal kisses and final considerations**

It is interesting to observe how the theme of anal resurfaces in *Anal Kiss* (Image 21), project by Delvoye in 2011, which does not become an object of public debate, as it was the case in *Cloaca*. In *Anal Kiss*, the anality assumes a less spectacular form than *Cloaca*, even though it is more explicit; but the relations between economy, art and sacrality resurface. The series consists in a series of interventions of the artist on hotel letterheads. As the title indicates, it is a series of impressions of kisses whose particularity is in the fact that instead of inscribing the shape of lips on paper, it is the anus of the artist that is printed. Despite these images of anus are figurative and indicial, *Anal Kiss* did not have the repercussion obtained by *Cloaca* throughout the ten previous years. Issues related to the scale of work and media used may help understand why these kisses never got to the first pages of newspapers.

2 Our argument bumps into the following formulation: "Prodigality and greed are not fixed character traits, they are often found in the same person. Lets think about [...] collectors [...]. The expenditure is prodigal, but the relationship with the object is greedy." (BELO; MARZAGÃO, 2006, p. 124). We will work with this issue in the next study.

Image 21 - *Anal Kiss*, 2011, lipstick on letterhead.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2SGCnkm>>. Accessed in April 9th, 2019.

Anyway, it is interesting to observe that in the 2011 series we find some issues that were being formulated in *Cloaca*. In *Anal Kisses*, the logos reappear in hotel letterheads and come into tension with the images of the artist's anal kisses. The impersonal and globalized architecture of hotels is virtually inscribed in the work, through the institutional sign that cohabitates the composition with the anal kiss. *Anal Kiss* reiterates the existence of an exteriority in relation to the logic of consumption,

but it seems to try to open a gap through reframing the anus painted as lips. If *Cloaca* sublimates the anus in an industrial machinery producing shit, *Anal Kisses* coincides the anus with the lips, place of articulation of *logos* and, especially, part of the body authorized to manifest itself on the public space, either by using words or giving a kiss. In an effort of understanding the treatment given by the art critic and public opinion to these artistic projects we can observe that many factors come into play so that a project overflows from the system of art to the field of culture. It is essential to recognize that, beyond the aesthetic, technical and philosophical foundations found in the basis of *Cloaca*, there is an architectural, expographic, spectacular, and evidently, marketing dimension that incites in its reception.

The discrete reception of *Anal Kisses* could indicate, comparatively, a bigger disruptive potential in the synthetic shit of *Cloaca* than in the re-functionalization of a kissing anus. But we will bet that this context only supplies some clues about the historic, cultural and mediatic complexity, and the heterogeneity of factors that now incite on the experience and critic of art. Costs of production, institutional prestige and *instagramability* of works of art reverberate in the aesthetic experience, along with the sediments that constitutes the ground of our culture – among them, the strange coexistence of *technophilia* and *technophobia* in relation to technique; the banishment of the *shit* and the *asshole* from social life; the artificiality of the cleavage between production and consumption.

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