

Luca Blum EPISTEMOLOGIE

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## VORWORT

Ein Künstlerbuch zu produzieren, das sich mit oft nicht präsenten Aspekten von Urin beschäftigt, das habe ich mir in diesem Semester als Projekt im Forum gewählt. Dass Urin und der Akt des Urinierens in den meisten Fällen als ekelhaft, unangenehm und peinlich wahrgenommen werden, ist nicht überraschend. Den Akt des Ausscheidens und den Geruch von menschlichem Unrat mit Scham und Ekel zu besetzen scheint in den unterschiedlichsten Zivilisationen und durch alle Zeiten der menschlichen Existenz einem Urin-stinkt zu entspringen. Da diese Einstellung zu einer geringeren Exposition von Krankheitserregern führt, ist sie evolutionstechnisch bedingt gerechtfertigt.

Nichtsdestotrotz wurde ich mit einigen Beispielen konfrontiert, die mein Interesse an anderen Rezeptionen von Urin, als Roh- und Werkstoff und als ikonografisches Element, weckten. So liegen der Herstellung des Pigments Indischgelb und dem Angleichen neuer Kupferpaneelen auf dem Bundeshausdach an die alte Patina jeweils Tierurin zugrunde, einmal der von Mangoblätter-verzehrenden Kühen und einmal der von Pferden.

Aus diesem Interessenspunkt startete ich eine Recherche auf zwei Schienen; eine theoretisch-wissenschaftliche in historischen, kunsthistorischen und soziologischen Texten und eine materialorientierte Studie mit meinem eigenen Urin, in den ich Kupfer und Holzstücke einlegte und auf visuell wahrnehmbare, interessante Veränderungen abzielte.

In diesem Buch sammle ich die Ergebnisse, habe sie in einer wissenschaftlichen Ästhetik synthetisiert. Der Titel des Buches soll sowohl attention-catcher sein, aber auch mein Faible für schlechte Wortspiele befriedigen.

# I

## SYNTHETISISERTE SYNOPSEN

1 The object of the urinating statue is perceived as comical but not as shameful. It is incorporated into the civic and religious ceremonies of the city and is accorded a certain amount of respect.

2 Indeed, the monument in question might seem an unlikely recipient of such respect: a c. 60 cm high bronze fountain, it depicts a small naked boy urinating with the stream of water from the drinking fountain replicating the bodily fluids of the character portrayed. The use of fountains incorporating bodily fluids in both human and animal form is common in the Renaissance and these fountains still survive today. At first sight the urinating body might be regarded as indecent, but we should not presume that the physicality of such forms means that they were regarded in the Renaissance as offensive.

3 It fits into a tradition of urinating statues, that can be traced back to antiquity, often referred to using the Latin tag *puer mingens* or *puer mictans*. Victor Coonin has argued that this terminology is an attempt by art historians to describe the motif which is anachronistic in its approach because it focuses on the act of micturition, rather than on the symbolism of the statues. Coonin also argues that there are in fact two separate traditions, since the 'Italian tradition... is distinct from the northern' and it is clear that there are differences between the motif in an Italian context and the ways that it appears in France and the Low Countries, most notably in the frequency with which urinating figures are winged cherubs in Italy.

The object of the  
urinating statue<sup>1</sup> indeed<sup>2</sup>  
it fits into a tradition<sup>3</sup>.

4 The urinating statue is not simply a conduit through which liquid passes, but is imagined to have an impact on the character who drinks his urine and is filled by it to bursting point.

5 Naked humans, then, are associated with and in some cases equivalent to fountains in the form of animals in the late medieval period and the Renaissance and both can appear in official spectacle without compromising the seriousness of the event.

6 Around the time of Callot's and Stoskopff's depictions of a peasant fertilising his field with his feces and urine, Caspar Dornau's poem *De furno, et latrina* described the twofold nature of man as an oven, burning matter, and as a lavatory, excreting waste. Despite its humorous touch, the poet (who was a trained and practicing physician) acknowledges that being part of a greater natural cycle means consumption of earthly goods, and the return of feces and salty urine that serve as a generative fertiliser. This idea is connected to the ancient discussion of a possible preference for using human waste as manure over that of beasts. Columella, for example, recommends human excrements and well-aged human urine after that produced by birds, but before that of cattle (*De re rustica* II, 14, 1–3), while Pliny sums up that all authors unanimously prefer human ordure over dung from any animal.

7 Far from being seen as indecent, therefore, the urinating statue was situated in a context of a series of images that represented the joyous entry of the dukes into their inheritance.

The urinating statue<sup>4</sup> –  
naked humans – then,<sup>5</sup>  
around the time;<sup>6</sup> far  
from being seen as  
indecent.<sup>7</sup>

8 However, fountains often provided a point of interaction with the public and with the prince entering a town, allowing the procession to pause and take refreshment, often directly supplied from the fountain itself, though sometimes supplied separately from tables set up next to the fountain. This custom persists to this day, with Manneken Pis continuing to be used as a site of civic celebration, decorated for the occasion, and connected to a beer barrel.

9 Recent studies on Early Modern art have interpreted expressions referring to bodily fluids in relation to, among others, the notion of artistic «influence» or the «birth» of an artwork. Yet, very few attempts have been made to take human waste into account in order to better understand art theoretical metaphors and concepts of creation.

10 Most contributions on feces and urine in Early Modern art have overwhelmingly concentrated on the prevailing negative notion of this iconography or its undeniably humorous effect. In some cases, scatological details have been generally reduced to being either «polemical» or «subversive», as they seem to ridicule or ironise the primary object of a painting, or more broadly, aesthetic ideals. Other scholars, inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's groundbreaking *Rabelais and His World*, summarise such indecent depictions under the highly problematic category of Early Modern «realism».

11 A more frequently occurring image which played on the same confusion was that of the pelican, reputed to pierce her own chest to feed her chicks, the blood of the bird sustaining her offspring as if it were breastmilk. This became an image for Christ's sacrifice and in turn of the Eucharist,

However,<sup>8</sup> recent studies on Early Modern art<sup>9</sup> most contributions<sup>10</sup> a more frequently occurring image<sup>11</sup> among encyclopedic works:<sup>12</sup>

> reminding us that this particular substitution of one fluid for another – of blood for wine – is central to the practice of Christianity. The idea that urinating fountains might have the same message as lactating ones was one that Renaissance observers would have recognised as belonging to the same interpretative tradition. It is important to recognise that urinating fountains can be read in this way within the interpretative framework of Christianity, but that their message was not usually straightforwardly Christian.

12 Among encyclopedic works, Girolamo Cardano's *De Subtilitate* mentions numerous recipes using urine for manufacturing lead white, a verdigris patina on metal, and for cleaning gold.

13 The explicit celebration of the married couple in these instances demonstrates the extent to which the drinking fountain was used as a symbol of fertility, both that of the couple themselves and that of the nation welcoming them. As Fabian Jonietz has noted above, excremental representation could carry the meaning of fertilising manure, and the water of the urinating fountain here has the same symbolic weight, recalling the fact that water is essential to life.

## The explicit celebration.<sup>13</sup>

14 What is clear is that interaction between the public and the fountain was common and indeed encouraged.

15 Some aspects of the human body, however, have been considered indecent at all times by some individuals, even if the treatment and cleaning of specific areas differed due to religious or cultural beliefs and traditions. Liminal areas such as the genitalia and certain body functions and natural needs have at various times contested such socio-cultural norms. Norbert Elias has drawn attention to Erasmus's arguing against the recommended suppressing of passing gas in order to avoid indecent noises, or the equally unhealthy holding back of urine. Such an open-minded understanding of natural needs remains problematic when it comes to their visibility.

16 At the same time, the use of urinating fountains to deliver festive beverages might seem grotesque, particularly in case of the zotkin, the fool, who in Despars's account of the event, urinated good Rhine wine. The diminutive zotkin, used here instead of the standard zot, suggests a physically small character, perhaps a dwarf. Little people often performed the role of fools in entertainment and this fact, combined with the fact that the figure incarnated in the fountain was likely naked and certainly urinating, presents a strange contrast with the luxury product delivered by the mechanism.

17 Offering a drink takes on a symbolic meaning, and the symbolism of fountains in princely entries operated in both directions and on several metaphorical levels. At once the symbol of the generosity of the town and the liberality of the prince confirming the town in its freedoms, the fountain

What is clear is<sup>14</sup> some  
aspects of the human  
body<sup>15</sup> at the same time<sup>16</sup>  
offering a drink.<sup>17</sup>

> was also used to represent the fertility of the territory that produced goods that enriched the country and of the prince who, it was hoped, would produce an heir to maintain the relationship.

18 This interpretation of water as a natural liquid does not suggest that the urinating figure, which was the first to provide water, was considered disgusting in any way.

19 In this case, however, there was an important difference between the way that the fountains were used because the 1484 lactating woman was a drinking fountain, but the 1504 urinating child was not. Moreover, fountains at this spot after this date were not used to provide refreshment to the sovereign entering Paris, and the liquid from this date forward would only be water. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that this change was made because the physical form of the urinating statue in 1504 repelled would-be drinkers. The Ponceau fountain manifested in different ways over time and the subject was not always the human body.

20 Both lactation and urination could be considered as illustrations of these messages of royal fertility and plenty in the prince's lands.

21 The potential use of excrement was seemingly infinite: the sculptor Bernard Palissy, e.g., discovered that he could use urine, due to its acidic composition, to kill animals without visible harm to the cadaver, a condition necessary for his life-casts.

22 Still stranger does it seem when the high-status drink is incorporated into a fountain whose corporality

This interpretation of water<sup>18</sup> in this case<sup>19</sup> both lactation and urination;<sup>20</sup> the potential use of excrement<sup>21</sup> still stranger does it seem.<sup>22</sup>

> presents a dynamic illustration of an act of defilement. For instance, in 1511, a snow sculpture in Brussels is reported to have depicted a child peeing rosewater into the mouth of another character, whose belly swelled as the fountain played.

23 These accounts both report at least one – and possibly two – festive urinating fountains, one in the form of a boy and the other that of a fool. The use of French in these accounts suggests that the acclamations of 'Noël' were ritualised in the sense that the shout had become conventional and pointed to the celebratory nature of the event rather than to a particular theological understanding on the part of organisers or crowd.

24 Spitting, vomiting or urinating animals might seem repellent to us, but there is evidence that this was not always the case to the Renaissance viewer. Moreover, the fact of animality was not always given negative connotations in Renaissance thought. As in the Middle Ages, many animals had moral values (positive or negative) ascribed to them, but there was also a discussion around the symbolism and moral connotations of the fact of animal existence in itself.

25 By contrast, depictions of *Hercules mingens* showed the hero in an undignified state of inebriation, and reports of statues of Homer urinating or vomiting suggest that they were intended to be – and were interpreted as – critical of the poet.

These accounts both  
report<sup>23</sup> spitting, vomiting  
or urinating animals<sup>24</sup> –  
by contrast, depictions of  
*Hercules mingens*.<sup>25</sup>

26 According to a report published by the physician Jean-Baptiste van Helmont in 1648, he survived a twenty-three-day hideout in the woods by eating his own feces. This remarkable incident might be seen as an early record of an artist's inclination towards mental instability: apart from questionable medical recipes which advise the consumption of urine or feces in the Dreckapotheke, documented cases of coprophagy were typically explained as extreme gluttony provoked by demons, or as forms of insanity.

27 Participants were often encouraged to drink the liquid provided by the fountain, which would be modified for the occasion to serve something other than water, often wine but sometimes scented water. In the context of a civic ceremony such as a princely entry into a city, the transformation of fountains into distributors of festive drinks had a very precise iconographical meaning. To understand this meaning, it is necessary to understand the contractual nature of the princely entry in the late medieval and Renaissance period.

28 Both religious and secular images can be easily interpreted in line with the way fountains celebrate fertility, but at first sight it is difficult to see how images of urination can be read straightforwardly in this light. However, there is no doubt that they could be, given that lactating fountains often appeared alongside urinating ones, either as part of the same fountain or in adjacent fountains.

29 That is not to say that the act of urination would not have been considered obscene if carried out in real life. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that it was the imaginary

According to a report<sup>26</sup>  
participants were often  
encouraged<sup>27</sup> both  
religious and secular,<sup>28</sup>  
that is not to say<sup>29</sup> the  
pessimistic Christian  
perspective.<sup>30</sup>

> and therefore anonymous nature of such fountains that meant that they could be interpreted as depictions of abstractions.

30 The pessimistic Christian perspective that man was <born between feces and urine> (inter faeces et urinam nascimur), and was nothing more than a <container of dung> (vas sterquilini), would have been familiar enough to fit into comparable motifs of earthly vanity which so many still-lives express.

Sämtliche Passagen entnommen aus:

Fabian Jonietz,  
«Indecent Creativity and the Tropes of Human Excreta».

Catherine Emerson,  
«Noëls and Bodily Fluids: The Business of Low-Country Ceremonial Fountains».

Beide in *Indecent Bodies in Early Modern Visual Culture*. Hg. Fabian Jonietz, Mandy Richter, Alison Stewart, 197-228/257-278. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022.

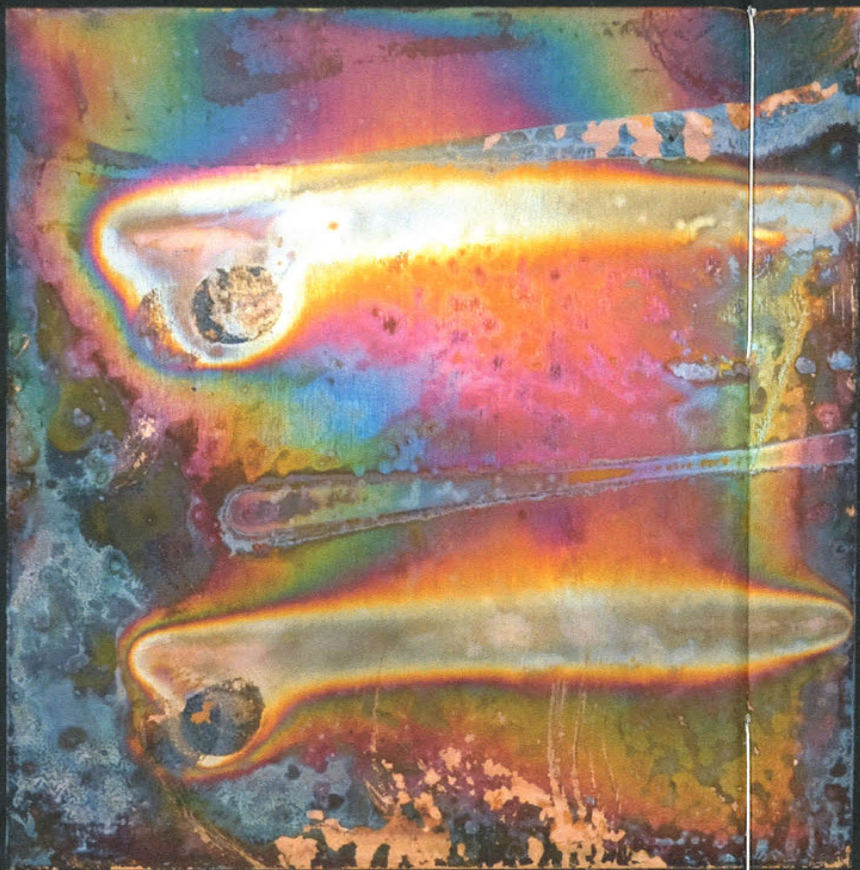
<https://doi.org/10.5117/9789463725835>.

Die Recherche mit dem Interesse, weniger bekannte Rezeptionen von Urin im Kunst- und Materialkontext zu finden, führte zu einem Werk, das sich jüngst mit <Indecent Bodies> im Kontext der Neuzeit auseinandersetzt. In den Beiträgen werden anhand spezifischer Beispiele, aber auch als Konzepte allgemein, unter anderem Körperflüssigkeiten, Unrat und defäkierende Körper behandelt. Von Interesse waren dabei insbesondere zwei der Aufsätze, einer zu ungewöhnlichen Konnotationen von menschlichem Unrat und einer zu den Brunnen in den Niederlanden – von denen heute noch beispielsweise der *Manneken Pis* in Brüssel durchaus bekannt ist – und deren zeremonielle Rolle.

Die Anfangsworte der bei der Lektüre markierten Textausschnitte wurden zu inhaltlich insgesamt konsistenten Synopsen rekonfiguriert, die ursprünglichen Ausschnitte sind mit Fussnoten beigelegt.

## II

### MARINIERTE MATERIALSTUDIEN



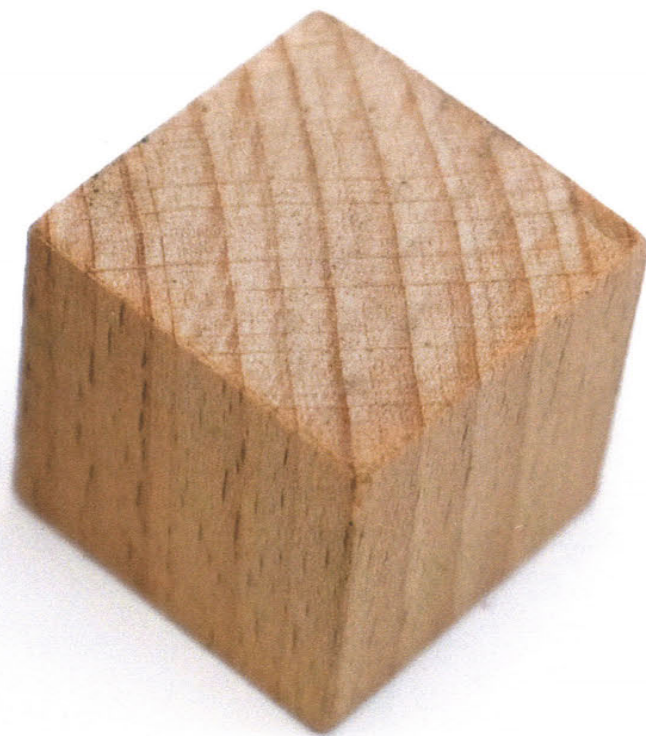
## VERSUCHSANORDNUNG

Es stellt sich heraus, dass es seit antiken Zeiten überlieferte Rezepte gibt, in denen Urin als eine der Hauptzutaten verwendet wird. Bei vielen davon ist es das Ziel, durch Korrosion von Metallen, vor allem Kupfer, verschiedene Pigment zu gewinnen. Dabei wird das Kupfer oft zusammen mit Holz und gegebenenfalls anderen Stoffen (oft Honig) in Urin eingelegt, wodurch sich korrodierte Schichten bilden, die dann abgekratzt und zum gewünschten Pigment gemahlen werden können.

Die Inhaltsstoffe von Urin, vor allem Harnsäure und verschiedene Metallsalze kombiniert mit den Gerbsäuren (Tanninen) im Holz reagieren dabei mit der Oberfläche des Kupfers, was zu einer meist grünlich-blauen Schicht führt. Dabei verdunkelt sich das Holz, da die oben erwähnten Tannine bei den chemischen Reaktionen verändert werden und Abfallstoffe der Reaktion sich ablagern.

Für die Materialstudie orientierte ich mich an vielen Rezepten, die David A. Scott in seinem Buch *«Copper and Bronze in Art: Corrosion, Colorants, Conservation»* von 2002 gesammelt hat. Dafür reduzierte die Versuchsanordnung auf das Minimum: Kupfer, Holz und Urin, zusammen in einem Gefäß, das abgedeckt für zwei Wochen stehen gelassen wird.

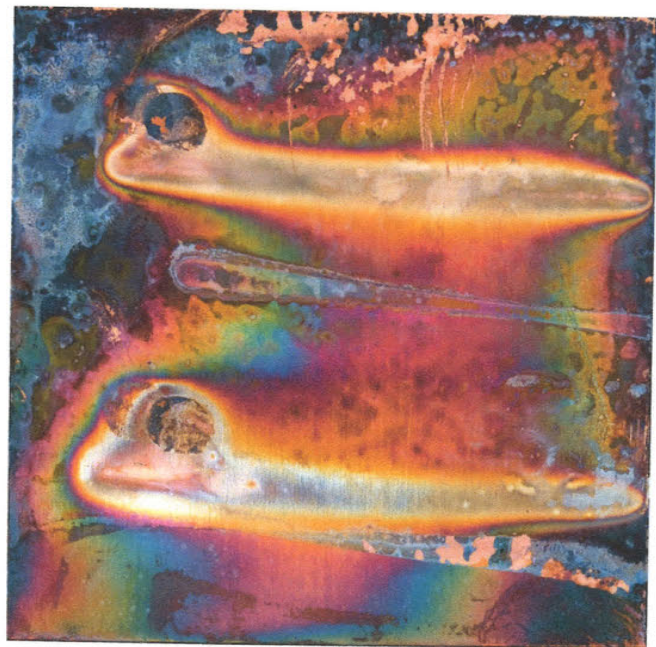
Auf den folgenden Seiten finden sich Fotografien der Ergebnisse dieser Materialstudie. Das Holz ist in einer vergleichenden Weise mit einem unbehandelten Exemplar aus dem gleichen Stück Holz abgebildet, das Kupfer steht für sich selber mit Vorder- und Rückseite.













## EPILOG

Am Ende dieses Buches möchte ich ein Fazit anbringen. Dass ich diese Recherche zu Beginn so breit aufbauen konnte und mich dazu entschloss, am Ende wieder zu einem gesammelten Format zu kommen hat der Arbeit meiner Meinung nach sehr geholfen. So konnte ich mein Interessensgebiet während und nach der Lektüre vieler Texte ziemlich genau abstecken und mit den gefundenen Anhaltspunkten eine zweispurige Strategie entwickeln.

Einerseits konnte ich meine Rezeption der kunsthistorischen Beiträge von Jonietz und Emerson durch das gezielte Reduzieren und Synthetisieren der Textausschnitte mit in die Arbeit einfließen lassen, ohne ausschliesslich zitieren zu müssen.

Den Material-Aspekt und die historischen Quellen mit all den Rezepten setzte ich direkt um, in dem ich einen Versuch anlegte und die Materialbeschaffung auf dem Weg des geringsten Widerstandes bestritt – indem ich meinen eigenen Urin verwendete. Dass dieser Schritt bei vielen Leuten, mit denen ich über meine Arbeit sprach – darunter auch welche, die mich wirklich gut kennen – für Unglauben und unverhohlene Überraschung sorgen würde, habe ich zu Beginn nicht erwartet und überrascht mich bis heute.

Wohl entstand mit meiner Art ohne Umschweife mit dem «Rohstoff» Urin umzugehen ein gewisser Bruch mit dem schambehafteten und geckelten Grundmodus, der Urin gegenüber herrscht. Diesen Bruch weiterzuziehen und auf ihn zu bestehen war etwas, das ich im Prozess beibehalten habe und von dem ich gespannt bin, wie er sich auf die Präsentation auswirken wird.

Vielen Dank für die Lektüre, ich hoffe meine Interessen  
waren ersichtlich und vielleicht sogar interessant :)

