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ROLAND LINGATING CARTAGENA JR.

*Flush*

Thesis Adviser:

Prof. Rolando B. Tolentino, PhD

College of Mass Communication

University of the Philippines

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ROLAND L. CARTAGENA JR.  
College of Mass Communication  
University of the Philippines

FLUSH

by

ROLAND LINGATING CARTAGENA JR.

has been approved for  
the University of the Philippines Film Institute  
and the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication  
by

Prof. Rolando B. Tolentino, PhD

Prof. Arminda V. Santiago, PhD  
Dean, College of Mass Communication

## ABSTRACT

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*Flush* is an animated short film that critically explores the subject matter of material excessiveness and its correlation to unjust labor and capitalist greed. The film follows a day in the job of a worker who serves a swollen man bound in a perpetual cycle of simultaneous consumption and defecation. A series of unprecedented events follow after the man forcibly lays the worker off. The production thesis uses an arts-based method in approaching its subject namely a pre-production phase, an in-production phase, and a post-production phase. Grounded on Marxian perspective and interrelated theories of Abjection, the film employs the imagery of excrement as a device to debase abusive capitalist enterprises and denounce the exploitation they engender. The technique of digital hand-drawn frame-by-frame animation is applied in creating the film, opted to suspend disbelief and add humor, exaggeration, and a satiric undertone to what is otherwise a serious and socially provocative subject.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“Along the fault-lines of the world disorder, piles of human waste are rising” (Bauman 47, qtd. in Tyler 19).

Material excessiveness is a social practice that concerns consumption. Sociologist Thorstein Veblen in his treatise *The Theory of the Leisure Class* makes a critique on such behaviors typified by the upper class who, owning the means of production, are ironically engaged in practices that are economically unproductive. Veblen coined the term *conspicuous consumption* (33) and *conspicuous leisure* (18) to refer to specific activities of the elite that are not done for pragmatic or meaningful utility per se but foremost for the assertion of material wealth, manifesting through public display of power and position within the domain of consumer culture. This glorification distinguishes the “leisure class” from all else and validates their occupancy in the tip of social strata, maintaining a bottleneck distribution of labor and compensation that preserves the designation of workers into hierarchic order. As with extravagant consumption, a bifurcation in the amount of labor and compensation acts as a form of exclusion, separating the elbow-greased from the reposed. Along this hedonistic process of satisfying what Marx has described as a form of “fetishism” (*Das Kapital* 47), material excesses are simultaneously and constantly churned out by the volumes. In the rich’s pursuit of capital accumulation motivated by nothing but its own sake, material excess becomes equivalent to waste, discarded and disposed either out of extrinsic gratification or simply out of ignorance and apathy. As how corporeal bodies would discharge what is scrap and indigestible, I make the association between this biological form of waste and

the aforementioned class-induced waste to put together a metonymic scatological premise.

The use of scatology as an apparatus for criticism has been observed as early as 19th century in the form of lithographs printed in French journals. One such work by artist Charles-Joseph Traviès shows a crude figure whose head appears to be a pear with a face and whose body is a large rounded container labeled “mélasse.” Entitled *Pot de mélasse* (Crock of Shit), the illustration is one example of the many “visual puns that subtly criticized class and the role of the king in society” during the time (Weisberg 36). This tradition of provocation via scatological inference can be derived from the analysis that excrement holds the potential to deconstruct established hierarchies in the social order, the matter being the obscene yet natural by-product of a class-independent and non-exclusive act: defecation. In this manner, feces is used in *Flush* as a counter to the deodorization of distended wealth and its proprietors.

Time and again feces has been associated with the fringes of society, the “scums of the earth” (Arendt 267). Part of the film’s aim would be to upend this image, to associate waste with the wasteful and not with the wasted. By operating within the taboo that surrounds excrement, obscene images serve to incite aversion and elicit responses such as being sickened and repelled towards the ill-effects of dissipative greed. The film further invites its viewers to participate in discussions about capitalism and its flaws and conditions, in addition to questioning the perceived socio-bureaucratic power of capitalist enterprises and its entitlement to material excesses. It also aims to arouse an appreciation for Filipino animation, a form of filmmaking that is rarely produced or exhibited in national cinemas, by dispelling the assumption that animated films are only suitable for

younger audiences and by demonstrating the medium's capacity not only for creative expression but for fostering critical and relevant dialogues.

On the one hand, the academic value of the film is underpinned by the medium's capability to generate discourse. Its openness to varied analyses and interpretation derives in part from the creative freedom that is afforded by the animated form. The film's visual style is arguably not a novel creation as it is seen to be used in artistic practice elsewhere. Notwithstanding, the use of scatology as a device to denounce capitalist enterprises and material excesses distinguishes the film from works that bear a similarity, most especially when it is placed among the breadth of filmic forays created for and within an artistic-academic setting. The film also contributes to the body of work in scatological art and serves as a potential source for scholars of, and studies related to, the matter. Its artistic value, on the other hand, rests on the disposition of its spectators; as with any art, value held, if any, may or may not thus rely on the intentions herewith elaborated.

## II. CONCEPT

Inside a floating corporate building, a swollen figure of a man squats on a large throne-like toilet, perpetually defecating money as a conveyor belt endlessly delivers fruit into his mouth. A worker on the other hand, located a floor above the man, harvests and deposits the fruit nonstop onto the moving belt. The toilet occupied by the swollen man leads to an orifice underneath the building where his defecated money come out as material things: appliances, sculptures, yachts, shoes, jewelry, cars, etc. They fall down a barren wasteland strewn with more material things, inhabited by displaced workers who scavenge the landscape.

Above, the assembly line is suddenly halted. The swollen man steps down from the toilet and comes up to the worker's area. Before the worker could realize what is to come, the swollen man regurgitates a robot. It activates immediately, carries the worker away and throws him into the toilet. The swollen man resumes his seat on the throne while the robot replaces the worker's job. In the sewer below, the worker attempts to climb for dear life. The next flush of the swollen man's feces however smothers the worker down the hole; he is ejected along with material things and crashes down a mound. In a decisive moment the worker turns into a bug and triggers all the other workers to turn into bugs as well. They pile on top of each other like stones, their bodies collectively forming a hill that soon reaches the building's hole. Unaware of the uprising, the swollen man suddenly bursts apart as a wave of insects forcibly come out of the toilet. They swarm everywhere and causes the building to collapse to the ground. Taking away all fruit they could find, the bugs plant them outside and the once barren landscape becomes alive with trees.

The narrative of *Flush* is linear and presents no dialogue. The film is 2D-animated and mimics the visual style of editorial cartoons and comic strips. The choice of style is informed by the former's satirical and often offensive nature and the latter's playfulness in storytelling—both characteristic of the film's theme. The minimal and “clean” treatment of space and sparse use of visual elements have been opted to enhance viewers' focus considering the diminished depth of field in a dominantly monochromatic and two-dimensional composition.

The concept of money as feces is lifted from the Filipino idiom “Tumatae ng pera” (Shitting money) which loosely connotes to a wealthy person or a squanderer. The literal representation of the metaphor is central to the film as it serves as the point of ideation from where the narrative developed itself around. The title *Flush* derives from the word's ironic definitions that relate to affluence, “having a large amount of money,” and bowel mechanisms, “to cleanse or wash out” (Merriam-Webster).

Albeit digital, the traditional technique of hand-drawn frame-by-frame animation was used to create the diegesis of the film using a frame rate of 12 fps in video format. The swift and precise strokes that compose the movement of the film are a deliberate choice employed to convey a succinct, almost rigid look.

Animation shorts that are visually similar to *Flush* include *Cipka* (Pussy) by Renata Gąsiorowska; *Procrastination* by Nata Metlukh; *ABCD* and *The Great Smoke* by Filipino filmmaker Roxlee; the music video for Labrinth's *All for Us*; the film trilogy *Impossible Figures and Other Stories* by animator Marta Pajek as well as her other works *Po jabłkach* (After Apples) and *Snepowina* (Sleepincord); *Trusts and Estates* by Jeanette Bonds; Global Health Media Project's *The Story of Cholera* animated by Yoni Goodman;

and the animation for the music composition *Rhapsody in Blue* as seen in Disney's *Fantasia 2000*. Alongside various editorial cartoons found in local newspapers, semblances to the film can also be drawn from the works of Filipino cartoonist Washington "Tonton" Young and from the children's book illustrations of Filipino artists Jason Moss and Beth Parrocha-Doctolero. *Flush* runs for less than 4 minutes and has a 1:1 aspect ratio.

### III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Scatology

The 52nd volume of *Art Journal* gives a comprehensive overview of scatology as has been observed in Western artistic and social practice. The articles within its pages include, among others, the excremental liturgy of ancient Aztec civilization (Klein), a historical account of the erotic imagery of enemas and its supposed hygienic use during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century (Dixon), a discussion of select literature and artists that have employed scatological themes in their work (Weisberg; et al.), as well as including in its final article a survey of contemporary art pieces whose references can be traced to scatology (Malen).

In cinema, coprophilic themes pervade Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò or The 120 Days of Sodom*. Excrement is among the many fetishes demonstrated in this film about class and sexual exploitation. While only beholding fecal matter briefly, Alejandro Jodorowsky's *La montaña sagrada* (The Holy Mountain) contains a significant scene that demonstrates the association of feces with money and thereby with power. The scene shows the manipulation of the body of a Messiah-like protagonist whose feces, after stages of metamorphoses, turns into solid gold. John Waters' trash film *Pink Flamingos* is another that contains a short scatological scene. At the end of the film, a dog's turd is immediately consumed after it is expelled from the animal's anus. The consumer, Divine, holds the title of "the filthiest person in the world" (01:31:02-01:31:08) after having dealt with a couple who had made attempts to sabotage her. In the beginning of the 1979 surreal animation short *Asparagus* by Suzan Pitt, there is also a defecation scene but instead of feces, a woman sat on a toilet has stalks of asparagus slide out of her bum. *Putting Trono* (White Throne), a local film, is another that contains fecal inference.

In conceptual art and of its many scatological works, Italian artist Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* (Artist's Shit) is notable in that it is among the few that "address the subject of scatology so directly" (Silk 65). Packed and sealed in ninety cylindrical tin cans, each one purportedly contains 30 grams of Manzoni's own excrement. *Merda d'artista* proposes the irony of waste turned into luxury, dictated by an artist's esteem extending towards his "work."

In his short Surrealist text *L'anus solaire* (The Solar Anus), French intellectual Georges Bataille draws a connection between the sun and the anus. Written in 1927, the work contains many aphorisms that refer to "decay, death, vegetation natural disasters, impotence, frustration, ennui and excrement. It makes ironic references to the sun, which, although it brings [*sic*] life to the Earth, can also result in death from its unrestrained energies. Moreover, the anus may be seen as a symbol of the inevitability of residual waste due to its role in excretion" (Calibanu; et al.).

In music, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is notable for incorporating scatological humor in a few of his recreational compositions. Perhaps the most known is *Leck mich im Arsch* (Lick Me in the Arse), a canon for six voices composed during the 1780s. Mozart himself is suspected to be coprophilic, with some of his letters addressed to his family containing scatological passages. Some medical writers have interpreted this to be pathological, opening up speculations that the composer might have had Tourette's syndrome. However, folklorist and cultural anthropologist Alan Dundes asserts in a published study that a preoccupation with scatological matters is a cultural norm in Germany, stating: "In German folklore, one finds an inordinate number of texts concerned with anality. Scheiße (shit), Dreck (dirt), Mist (manure), Arsch (ass), and other locutions are commonplace" (9).

In popular culture, there exists a cartoon hero known for his unique anal abilities. Doodieman, a creation of artist Tom Winkler in 1998, is dubbed as “America’s Pooper Hero.” The chivalrous man uses his own unlimited fecal discharge to propel himself to fly, bombard villains, save civilians, and accomplish other heroic deeds. He sports a red suit with a flap behind him wide enough to expose his buttocks. When flying, the flap whips in the wind very much like a cape. Doodieman’s presence is dominant, if not limited, in the online web where various videos with millions of views and virtual games featuring the odorous superhero have spawned out of popularity.

More on cartoons, *The Oddbodz* is similarly vulgar in terms of subject matter. Created by Australian artist Andy Hook, *The Oddbodz* are a set of grotesque characters that were made into collectible trading cards, comic strips, and even flash games for children. Feces and related matter such as snot and dirt most prominently appeared in the comics that were a regular segment in the kids’ magazine, *K-Zone*. One particular strip from the series featured a time toilet that transported into the past or future those who sat on it. In order to function, the toilet needed to be fed with shit first.

### Class and Consumption

*Anomi*, an undergraduate thesis film by Renei Patricia Dimla, has a narrative structure similar to *Flush*. With a story told through the eyes of an impoverished child, the animation film follows a boy in his daily task of catching and collecting bangaw (blowflies). He puts them in jars and sells them to rich aquarium-keepers as fish food. A feast held by one such owner quickly turns into a nightmarish event as his guests fill their appetites and devour each other. Their carnage attract more bangaw which in turn attracts the child to the scene to collect the flies.

Another short similarly demonstrates the pointlessness and self-destructive nature of greed. *Rabbit* by British animator John “Run” Wrake tells the tale of two children who

hunts down a rabbit and slices it open to make a muff, only to find something come out of the carcass: a small idol with the power to transform insects into jewelry. The opportunistic children abuse the idol's magic and end up getting consumed by a hoard of wasps and flies.

Stop-motion short *Jídlo* (Food) by Czech filmmaker Jan Švankmajer—director of the surreal comedy *Hmyz* (Insects)—is a triptych of people dining in different setups. The first short *Breakfast* shows a system where two people sit in front of each other, one functioning as a diner while the other as a “dispenser.” By manipulating the body of the latter, the diner is able to receive his meal. After finishing, the two persons switch roles and the diner becomes the mechanical dispenser and the dispenser, the diner. Only after serving both as a dispenser and diner is any person finally able to leave, with another entering and replacing the last one to gobble a meal, restarting the cycle anew. By the end of the film a long line trailing behind the dining table can be seen. The second short *Lunch* similarly has two men sitting in front of each other. Despite their calls, a passing waiter does not attend to them. This prompts the rich-looking man to begin eating objects around him. The poor-looking man imitates, wolfing whatever the other man puts in his mouth. After every object in sight has been consumed by the two, the film ends with the rich-looking man advancing towards the other with fork and knife raised. The last short *Dinner* is the most brief. The film intercuts to various individuals who have in front of them “foods” dismembered from its consumers: a hand, a leg, a pair of breasts, and finally a flaccid penis. Here, consumption and the edible take on a cannibalistic meaning.

*Runaway* by Canadian animator Cordell Barker presents a playful metaphor on differing class privilege in an unstable economy. Set in a rampaging train, tension rises as the captain disappears and leaves the train hurtling uncontrollably across cow-grazed plains and hills. More coal is needed for the train to run properly, but after all has been

shoved into the furnace, the machinery begin to slow down. This forces the coal-shoveling assistant to take matters into his own hands and asks for help from the passengers of the train that are segregated into two: the rich and the poor. The rich entices the poor by having them exchange their belongings with money; the belongings are then thrown into the furnace in replace of coal. The poor willingly give away their things and the train soon begins to gain momentum. However when the poor's things have all been given away including their clothes, their eagerness to receive more money results in them tearing down the train to give away the parts. In the process they fall out and get left behind. Ending in a train wreck with everyone dying, the film offers a view of the imminent threat that comes as a consequence of letting the bourgeoisie steer, or perhaps abandon, the wheel.

Multi-awarded short *El empleo* (The Employment) by Santiago Grasso also makes use of a creative metaphor to unravel its message. The 2D-animated film shows a dystopian society where the jobs of people are equivalent to the function of everyday objects; humans stand as lamps, coat hangers, tables, chairs, traffic lights, etc. In the beginning, the protagonist of the film seems to appear superior to these human objects as he puts on a corporate attire and prepares himself for work. The end of the film, however, reveals that his "corporate job" consists of lying down flat on the floor by the door of an office, effectively fulfilling the role of a doormat. A Filipino adaptation of the animation entitled *Bagay Tayo* has been created by Adrian Francisco. A live-action satire, the short follows the filmmaker Ednis after he accidentally breaks an equipment while working on a film set. His trouble ultimately leads him to visit an underground business that offers cash to customers in exchange for standing in as any object of choice for a period of time that depends on the amount of money borrowed.

More on satire, Steve Cutts is an illustrator and animator whose works “satirizes the excesses of modern society” (Gethen). One of his notable works is *Happiness*, “the story of a rodent’s unrelenting quest for happiness and fulfillment” (Cutts). Reimagining humans as rats, the animation short is a critique on the culture of consumerism and its futility. A different take on consumerism is shown in *Window Shopping*, an undergraduate thesis film by Maryjoy Abrazado. Animated using stop-motion, the short is a critique on fast fashion and juxtaposes the underside of manufacturing clothes with glamorized outfits displayed in shopping stores, combined to reveal the harsh and labor-intensive nature of the major industry. A related film, *Guava Island*, similarly portrays exploitation through the eyes of a factory seamstress. Although a live-action, the musical which features songs by Donald Glover begins with a 2D-animated prologue.

Other works that tackle class conflict, capitalism or consumption include the documentary *Generation Wealth* by Lauren Greenfield; animation shorts *Pigpen* by Felix Colgrave, *Fast Week* by Sakamoto Yusuke, *Egoism* by Kai Haraguchi, and *Anti-Chaos* by Shiho Nagasako; and René Laloux’s sci-fi classic *La planète sauvage* (Fantastic Planet).

#### IV. FRAMEWORK

##### Bataille's Abjection

Georges Bataille's notion of abjection as addressed in his short essay, *Abjection and Miserable Forms*, is a significant work in the theorization of Abjection. Writing with a glance on Hitler's ascent to autocracy, Bataille was concerned with the dehumanizing effects of labor and class struggle that perpetrated in the 1930s. Bataille observed that casting disgust to the proletariats was an apparatus designed by sovereignty to throw the masses into marginality as outcasts, "disinherited the possibility of being human" (11 qtd. in Tyler 19). However, Bataille argued that this exclusion perpetuated by the upper class is paradoxical because the lower class cannot be expelled without removing the legitimacy and position of the upper class altogether. The lower class "constitutes the boundaries of... the prevailing order of power" (Tyler 20) and as such, they form part of the sovereignty's identification. Abjection therefore, according to Bataille, constitutes this phenomenon, or the "inability to assure with sufficient force the imperative act of excluding abject things" (10). And along this paradox, the ability to subvert and resist is made possible because, as Bataille writes, "in the collective expression, the miserable, the conscience of the affliction already veers from a purely negative direction and begins to pose itself as a threat" (10).

##### Kristeva's Abjection

The abject, as described by Kristeva through the tradition of psychoanalysis in her seminal essay, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*, refers to the conflict caused by that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). This conflict arises from a

person's premeditated notions of subject (that which is part of oneself) and object (that which is excluded from the self), where the blurring of distinction between the two, the "I" and "Other," causes an internal destabilization. This eventually leads a person to perceive the instigator of the abject as a threat, and consequently reject it. Kristeva's abjection, therefore, is defined to be the process of encountering the abject and extricating and salvaging one's sense of self out of it. To confront a corpse, for example, induces a breakdown of subject and object within the state of its human spectator, in that the body, once alive and once a subject, summons us to identify with it. But reeking of death, the antithesis of life and living, the corpse impels us to be repulsed. In the same manner, human excreta, having been once a part of us and once again a subject, relates to us as a bodily effluvium. But having been separated from our self and having become an object rather than subject, we disassociate ourselves from it. This continual process of opposing thrusts, of exclusion and inclusion, is what constitutes the phenomenon of the abject according to Kristeva.

### Social Abjection

In a book called *Revolting Subjects*, British sociologist Imogen Tyler advocates for a less abstract theory of abjection. Termed as Social Abjection, Tyler draws from the works of Georges Bataille, Ann Laura Stoler, Judith Butler, Franz Fanon, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Anne McClintock, Ranjana Khanna and others to develop a revision of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. The theory posits that abjection is a social force operating on different levels of society through the inclusion of othered groups. As such, it builds upon the accumulated works on the theorization of abjection and "scales up"

previous understandings of abjection which center on individual subjects” (“What Is ‘Social Abjection’”).

### Marxism

Finally, overarching the theories of abjection is Karl Marx’s social, economic, and political philosophy that looks into the effects that capitalism has on labor, production, and the economy. Marx argues for a revolution lead by laborers to capsize the entire system of capitalism in replace of communism, seeing this the way towards equality. It is under this umbrella of Marxism that the issue and threat of worker displacement due to automation and technological advancement becomes relevant. This concept along with Marx’s worker revolution plays a vital part in the plot of the film, with the former and the latter serving as frameworks for the denouement and the inciting incident of the film’s narrative respectively.

## V. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

### Pre-Production

Pre-production began as early as the month of August in 2019 or the start of the second semester of the school year 2019 – 2020. Film 199 (Research in Film), a prerequisite to the thesis course Film 200 (Thesis), requires its students to build a strong story or concept using techniques and methods taught in class to prepare them for the coming proposal defense. This was where the ideation and development of *Flush* first took place albeit as a different story. The idea however, has remained the same since its conception: a critical film that uses feces and defecation as a prominent image. Prior the COVID-19 pandemic, the film production saw six crew members: I as the director; Nina Torrente as the producer; Erika Garcia as the production designer; JD Lim, Rosey Tanyag, and myself as animators; and Jaena Catalan as the music composer. There was already a production schedule set, meetings have been conducted, and even the live-action shoot for reference was already done. Since the outbreak of the pandemic however, the team has eroded into a one-man band composing of myself. With collaboration more or less out of the question, the story of the film had to be revised considering the limited time frame and labor force I had. The animation plans, as it were, were no longer achievable. Thus majority of the time during the pandemic was spent on conceptualizing and developing a scaled-down version of the original film. Sketches, research, and self-debates were made until I was able to come up with a more concise but nevertheless uncompromised story for *Flush*.

## In-Production

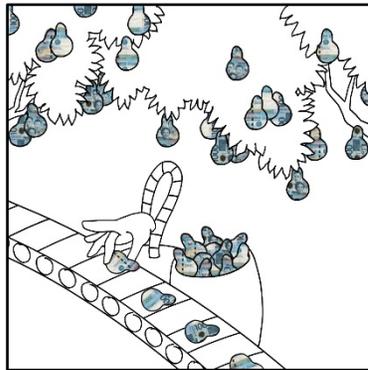
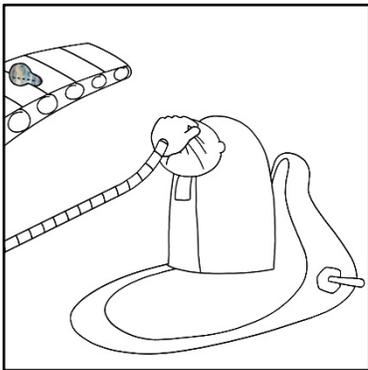
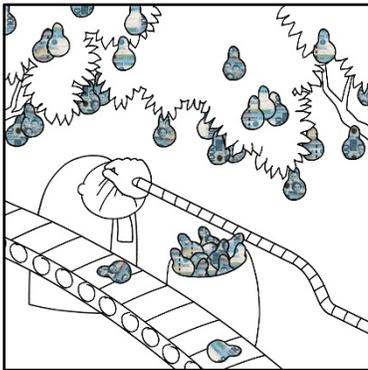
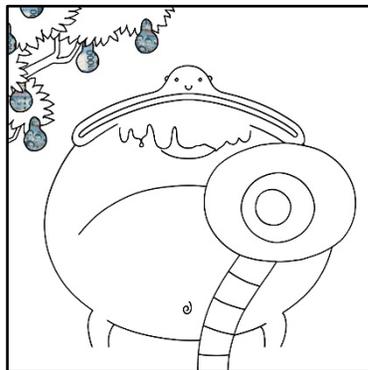
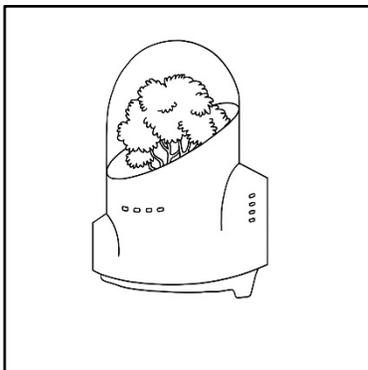
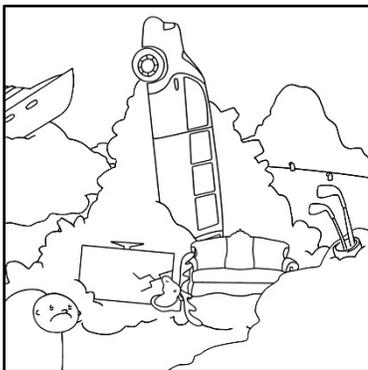
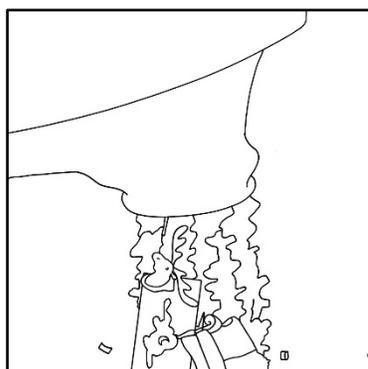
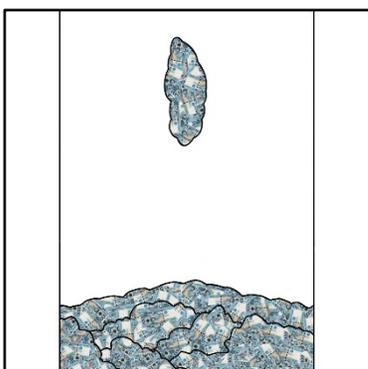
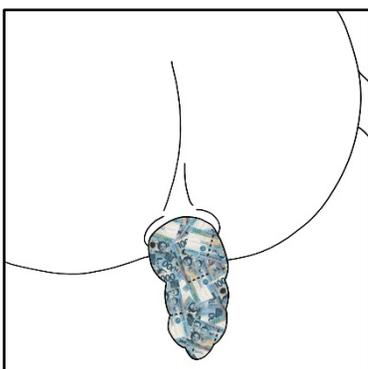
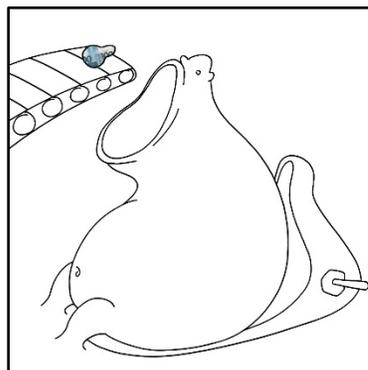
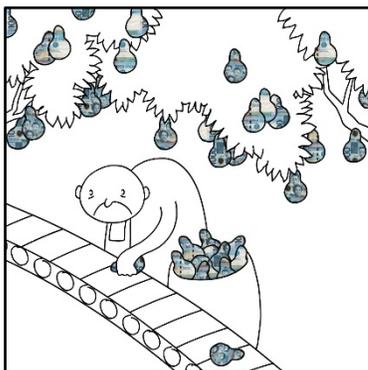
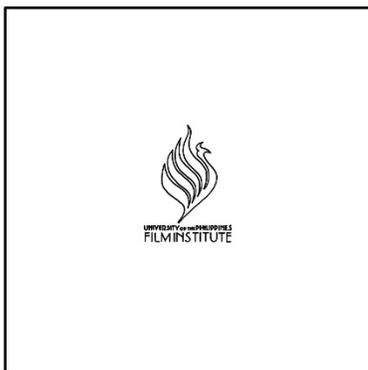
The choice for digital animation was one made out of convenience. There was not much space nor equipment in our house to do stop-motion or other space-consuming animation filmmaking. All of the work was drawn using a pen tablet I was fortunate enough to borrow. The software the animation was done in was Adobe Photoshop. A passing comment I have heard is that Photoshop is not the best software for hand-drawn animation. I agree. After weeks of drawing sessions I found that some of the things Photoshop does while animating is simply counterproductive. However, I stuck with it because it was the threshold for high-intensity software that my hamstrung laptop could carry so far without malfunctioning. Anything more intensive than Photoshop and my laptop would give in. Another reason is my familiarity with the program. I feared that if I tried using other software, the learning curve would be too long that I would lose time to actually animate. The setting of the pen tablet was altered to remove the correlation between pen pressure and ink thickness. This way all the drawings would look uniform by having the same line thickness, a stylistic choice going after the newspaper comics and editorial cartoon look. A 12 fps frame rate meant for every second of *Flush* I had to draw 12 frames of action. As with the choice to go digital, 12 fps was chosen out of convenience since higher frame rates such as 24 fps would take me longer to finish the film. All frames were exported in JPEG and then organized into numbered folders in an orderly fashion. These assets were needed to be arranged because after almost two months of rigorous animating I had to send them all via cloud storage over to a friend who had the generosity to compile and render the frames into video format for me. This was because my laptop could not handle anything else beyond Photoshop, which meant I

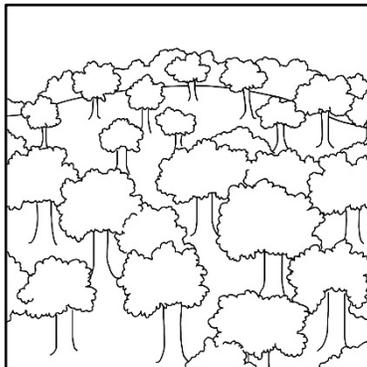
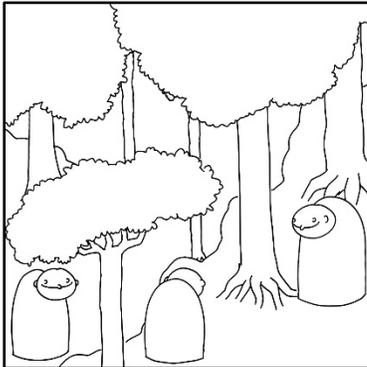
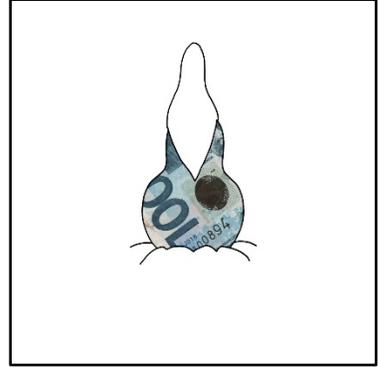
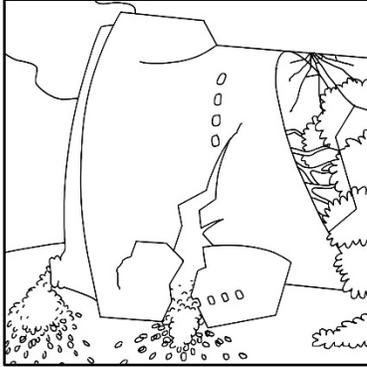
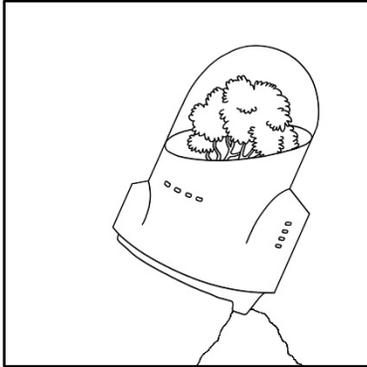
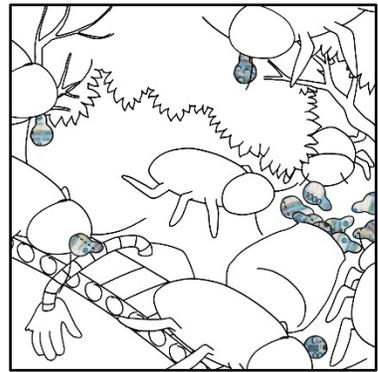
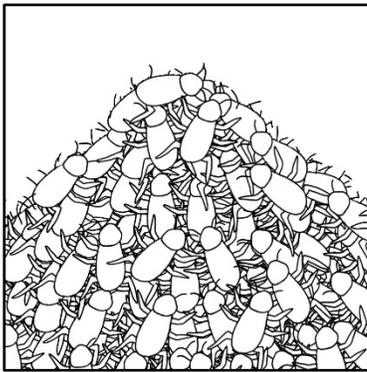
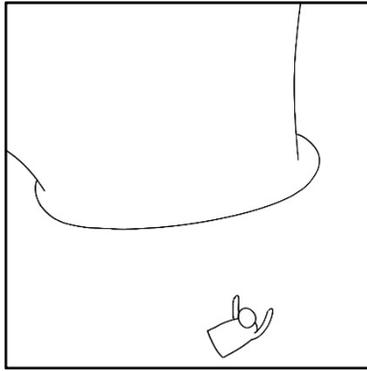
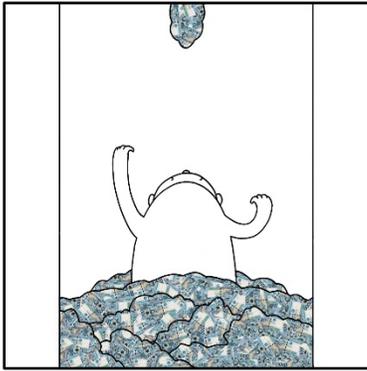
could not run a video editing software. I would be stuck with frames that needed to be stitched together by somebody else using a capable computer. This process of turning the work over was conceived only because at the time of the film's creation a general community quarantine had been imposed as a preventive measure against the spread of COVID-19, restricting all forms of travel and necessitating people to stay inside their homes. And so after having consolidated all of my creative work my friend exported the film in H.264 format with an MP4 container and uploaded it in cloud storage for my access. I decided then that the film would be silent so I would not overburden my friend with favors.

#### Post-Production

Since the medium of the film is animation, the post-production phase practically melds with the in-production phase. In animation studios, more often than not post-production would involve color grading, mastering, and tweaking the output to produce a more polished film. With the scale of *Flush* however, such adjustments were not available to me. I could make no changes with the final file because of the limitations with what my laptop could do. Despite so, the film turned out capable enough to stand on its own as an independent animation film.

VI. STILLS





flush

## VII. SCREENPLAY

Since the film has no dialogue, its story unfolds as it has been narrated in Chapter 2 of this paper. Two versions of the screenplay of *Flush* exist,<sup>1</sup> both of which did not finish production and instead served as foundations for developing a new story, adjusted and shortened as a result of the need to adapt to the constrained conditions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic that broke at the time of this writing. This third story however has never been formally written as a screenplay; it only exists as a short synopsis as written in Chapter 2 of this paper. The present film has therefore no working script. This is partly due to the unconventional, intuitive, and slightly improvised process in making *Flush* and mainly due to the implications of the pandemic that rendered a written format of the film unnecessary.

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<sup>1</sup> The two screenplays can be found in the Appendices section of this paper.

## VIII. FACULTY CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that persisted as of this writing, the Institute's faculty deliberated and made the decision that no formal screening nor critique for *Flush* or any of this semester's produced thesis films would take place. However, a detailed account of the previously held thesis proposal defense for *Flush* (then titled as "Coprophilia") can be seen in the Appendices section of this paper.

Appendix A: Film 199 (Research in Film) Thesis Proposal



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES

Bachelor of Arts in Film

ROLAND LINGATING CARTAGENA JR.

*Coprophilia*

Thesis Proposal

Film 199 TYZ

Prof. Eduardo Lejano Jr.

University of the Philippines Film Institute

College of Mass Communication

Date of Submission:

December 10, 2019

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<sup>2</sup> To avoid confusion, the original page numbers of this thesis proposal have been replaced to maintain continuity with the whole thesis paper’s page numbers as seen in the upper left corner of each page.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Money is the de facto determiner to almost all material and certain social claims. This holds true where a society is beset in capitalism. In this vein, I envision a film that stems from such a reality: that money is being transacted as a bypass or fix to certain bars, charges, and processes to the sole advantage of its benefactor. Concomitantly, money becomes the dominant enabler to claims of multifarious privileges and access—the command of bribery.

My filmic representation of the matter is not without an attitude. Where conditions allow for abuse and exploitation to run aground, upper-handedness is more or less preserved. This mechanizes a system that is simultaneously ugly, vile, and inane for the bereft yet blessed and gracious for the exceptionally monied few. How does the film identify with such opposing views of money, and more so, to what end?

The film is an expression of critical sentimentality towards operative bribery, and as such, it aims to elaborate the notion of ill-obtained money and undress its latency without denying its pragmatism or provision. By showing a negative view of backhanded money vis-à-vis the positive, the film positions itself in a somewhat passive-aggressive stance, but ultimately feeds from indignance towards the former as the source for much of its criticality.

On the one hand, the academic value of the film is underpinned by its experimental nature. The film's use of scatology as a device to abject bribery is arguably not a novel case. Notwithstanding, the film's form and style distinguishes itself from works that bear a similarity, most especially when it is placed among the breadth of filmic forays created for and within an artistic-academic setting. The film contributes to the body of work in scatological art and serves as a potential source for studies relating to the matter. Its artistic value, on the other hand, rests on the disposition of its spectators; value held, if any, may or may not thus rely on the intentions herewith elaborated.

## II. SYNOPSIS

An anonymous affluent person has a bowel movement and defecates money in a toilet. Upon discharge, the feces is flushed into darkness, marking the beginning of its journey. Where it would pass—through dark, grimy passageways—images alluding to various events symbolically appear: weaseling out of criminal liability, such as relief from incarceration, eluding death penalty, and winning at court trials; admission into university and other institutions of learning; winning awards, prizes, and distinctions; being elected or appointed into positions of power; silencing journalism; gaining priority, such as cutting through long lines, bypassing traffic violations, affording reservations within a system of first come first serve basis, having access to resources otherwise restricted... and so forth. As the feces reaches the mouth of the canal leading to the sea, it does not plunge into the watery depths. Instead, it soars high and above into the heavens.

The time of the film is linear and presents no dialogue. It is part animated (stop-motion) and part live-action. The former is opted in creating the underground sequence that composes the middle and majority of the film, whereas the latter is used for the beginning and ending scenes. The form of the film is narrative animation. Its genre may be categorized as horror, black comedy, satire, animation, experimental, or avant-garde depending on analysis. Total running time estimates from seven to 10 minutes. Coprophilia comes from the Greek words *kopros* (excrement) and *philia* (liking or fondness). Denotatively, coprophilia is the “attraction, usually sexual, to defecation and feces” (Online Etymology Dictionary, “Coprophilia”).

### III. DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In lower middle class homes, a toilet bowl is usually afforded. Our rented house happens to have one, but it was a toilet without a self-flushing mechanism. To flush the toilet, one had to manually pour a bucket of water or two until all the articles in the bowl are drowned. In general, the manual-pour system was tolerable, and had to be, since there was no other option. As our stay in the house prolonged, the toilet bowl gradually became more and more difficult to flush. In the past the water was clear after a single pouring, with the toilet gurgling and guzzling all the excrement in one quick gulp. Now, even after a second pouring, the water is only capable of sinking slowly downward, causing remnants of urine and shit to float around. To drown everything, one had to use a plunger and forcefully pump the contents of the toilet every time one had to flush, which apparently helped the water recede. The whole process was long and of course, tiring.

This account became the source from where I took off to develop my film. By relating my experience with a social ill that is similarly foul and exasperating, I attempted to connect my issue with one that society succumbs to. The focus of money in the practice of bribery is a personal choice, coming from the realization that while some people do not possess the privilege of having a quick and easy toilet session, there are others whose extreme privileges are used to abuse and exploit. It interests me that among people who do not have the money to fix their toilets are those who have so much as to be able to fix what are not supposed to be, in the moral sense. This is only exacerbated by the fact that, as stated in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Many acts of corruption are not unlawful. Bribery, a paradigm of corruption, is a case in point" (Miller, "Corruption"). *Coprophilia* is an artistic expression against corruption that specifically targets bribery. The film represents it as an unjust act, a surreptitious crime, and aptly, a site for abjection.

## IV. FRAMEWORK

The film's scatological narrative is not without meaning. The opening scene references to the Filipino idiom *Tumatae ng pera* (shitting money) which loosely denotes to having wealth. The feces and its excursion stands as a metaphor for backhanded money and the assets it is able to corrupt, respectively. The last scene where the feces flies to the sky is, likewise, an affirmation of the buying power of bribery, where entry into Heaven is permitted in exchange for money. Within the film lies, among others, a principal irony: that the exercise of bribery is advantageous and favorable, yes, but at the same time it is literally shit and transacted within a filthy system that is the sewer.

This concept is anchored to Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory on Abjection. The abject, as interpreted by Kristeva in her seminal essay, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*, refers to the conflict caused by that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). This conflict arises from a person's premeditated notions of subject (that which is part of oneself) and object (that which is excluded from the self), where the blurring of distinction between the two, the "I" and "Other," causes an internal destabilization. This eventually leads a person to perceive the instigator of the abject as a threat, and consequently reject it. Kristeva's abjection, therefore, is defined to be the process of encountering the abject and extricating and salvaging one's sense of self out of it.

To confront a corpse, for example, induces a breakdown of subject and object within the state of its human spectator, in that the body, once alive and once a subject, summons us to identify with it. But reeking of death, the antithesis of life and living, the corpse impels us to be repulsed. In the same manner, human excreta, having been once a part of us and once again a subject, relates to us as a bodily effluvium. But having been separated from our self and having become an object rather than subject, we disassociate ourselves from it. This continual process of opposing thrusts, of exclusion and inclusion, is what constitutes the phenomenon of the abject.

As with the given example, the film uses the image of human excrement as its source for the abject. But feces per se is used in association with bribery, the issue in focus in the film, thereby extending abjection towards it. By virtue of presenting a site for abjection—the feces—as a symbol, that which it represents, i.e. ill-obtained money, likewise becomes a source for abjection. What is regarded as obscene is not anymore simply human excrement; the human practice of bribery also becomes one.

## V. SCREENPLAY

FADE IN:

- 1 INT. BATHROOM – DAY 1
- A PERSON walks into the illuminated room, barefooted. Calmly, the person unrobes and squats on the toilet to take a dump. Plop. A solid wad of money, sizable, plunges into the bowl. The person cleans and flushes the toilet. The FECES spirals in the water a few times before it is consumed into the depths.
- 2 INT. CANAL – ANIMATION 2
- The feces splashes along a slanted canal as if on a slide. It finally lands on a larger canal, this one with little to no turbulent flow. As it follows the course of the canal, objects come the feces' way.
- First, a series of institutional buildings overarching the canal appear: an elementary school, a high school, and a university. The feces passes through the buildings one by one, garnering diplomas as it exits each. Suspended medals appear next, the sash loops of which the feces leaps through, like a seal performing tricks. Simultaneously, picture frames holding certificates of recognition appear on the background. The scene culminates with a passing trophy, into which the feces jumps.
- There is a brief calm as the feces drifts along the canal's current. Adjacent to it is another canal, packed with waste that inhibits movement. Bars of iron further allow little to no flow, whereas the canal where the feces passes has no such blockage.
- The feces passes by cages containing other feces. It also escapes from being sliced as it is fed into a guillotine and other executionary machines. Thick sheets of metal loom into the feces' direction, causing it to halt in its excursion. Above the feces is a beam balance scale consisting of two plates, one of which the feces jumps into. On the other plate is a

gavel, which weighs significantly less than the feces. As the feces' stay in the plate prolongs, the sheets slowly rise, permitting the feces to move onwards. On its way the feces passes by three electoral candidates, their ballots suspended on top of the heads of each. Where the feces passes, there is a surge of increase in the number of ballots per candidate, and decreases just as quickly when the feces is not anymore near. By the time the feces has gone away from the candidates, it hops between piles of ballots, each one taller than before. Suddenly a crown crashes down upon the feces but does not destroy it. The feces continues to move, pushing the crown along until the headpiece sinks.

The feces continues to drift but this time along a series of speaking lips and staring eyes. The feces enters the lips and eyes and seals them shut afterwards. The feces also passes by a computer with text being typed shown in the screen, making it malfunction and shut down.

Lastly, the feces passes by a paradise-like forest, subsequently laying waste in its path, causing all what is behind it to be covered in grime and fire.

3 EXT. SEA – DAY

3

The feces is ejected out of the canal and skims the dirty seawater briefly before taking flight. It soars higher and higher until it is no more than a speck that disappears into the sky.

FADE OUT.

## VI. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND ARTISTIC WORKS

The 52nd volume of *Art Journal* suffices to give an overview of scatology as has been used in Western artistic and societal practice. The articles within its pages include, among others, the excremental liturgy of ancient Aztec civilization (Klein), a historical account of the erotic imagery of enemas and its supposed hygienic use during the seventeenth- and eighteenth century (Dixon), a discussion of select literature and artists that have employed scatological themes in their work (Weisberg; et al.), as well as including in its final article a survey of contemporary pieces whose references can be traced to scatology (Malen).

Of the many scatological works of art that exist, Italian artist Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Shit* is notable in that it is among the few that "address the subject of scatology so directly" (Silk 65). Packed and sealed in ninety cylindrical tin cans, each purportedly contains 30 grams of Manzoni's own excrement. *Artist's Shit* proposes the irony of waste turned into luxury.

In cinema, coprophilic themes pervade Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò or The 120 Days of Sodom*. Excrement is among the many fetishes demonstrated in this film about class and sexual exploitation. While only beholding fecal matter briefly, Alejandro Jodorowsky's *The Holy Mountain* contains a significant scene that demonstrates the association of feces with money, and thereby with power. The scene shows the manipulation of feces of the Messiah-like protagonist which, after stages of metamorphoses, turns into solid gold. John Waters' trash film *Pink Flamingos* is another that contains a short scatological scene. At the end of the film, a dog's turd is immediately consumed after it is expelled from the animal's anus. The consumer, Divine, holds the title of "the filthiest person in the world" (01:31:02-01:31:08) after having dealt with a couple who made attempts to sabotage her.

In the field of stop-motion, British animator Robert Morgan has made films that may be appropriately described as grotesque and abject. His notable short films, among others, are *Tomorrow I Will Be Dirt*, *Bobby Yeah*, *D Is for Deloused*, and *The Man in the Lower-Left Hand Corner of the Photograph*.

VII. PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

Pre-production	Onset
Shot listing .....	December, 2019
Budgeting .....	December, 2019
Sourcing (collaborators, equipment, production design) .....	December, 2019
Conceptualizing: production design .....	December, 2019
Conceptualizing: sound design and music .....	January, 2020
Scheduling, logistics, and permission acquisition .....	January, 2020
Production	
Live-action shoot .....	February, 2020
Set construction and lighting .....	February, 2020
Stop-motion shoot.....	February, 2020
Post-production	
Editing.....	April, 2020
Foley and sound mixing.....	April, 2020
Visual effects .....	April, 2020
Color correction and grading .....	April, 2020
Export .....	May, 2020
Archiving .....	May, 2020

The months indicated are estimates and may not reflect the schedule that will be followed throughout the course of filming. Furthermore, the months indicate only the onset date—the time each agenda will have begun, with no date as to when each will be finished considering the flexible and unpredictable nature of film practice. All agendas may begin inception early, mid, or late into the month.

VIII. BUDGET PROPOSAL

Production design and set materials.....	PHP 10,000
Food and refreshments.....	PHP 5000
Transportation.....	PHP 1000
Miscellaneous .....	PHP 1000
Contingency .....	PHP 3000
Total.....	PHP 20,000

As with the Production Schedule, the above projected costs are estimates and may not accurately reflect the actual expenses that will be had throughout filming. Budgetary constraints maintain PHP 20,000 as the maximum allotment for the film, with a high probability of spending for a lower total cost.

*Production design and set materials* account for all spending allotted for the acquisition of locations, properties, and set dressing, the construction of the animation set and lighting, and all consumable materials for the production.

*Food and refreshments* account for spending allotted for meals, snacks, potable water, and related supplies for the cast and crew.

*Transportation* accounts for spending allotted for car fuel, commute, and other fees related to logistics and delivery charges.

*Miscellaneous* accounts for spending allotted for other expenses not covered in any of the above categories.

*Contingency* accounts for spending allotted for emergency and will be reserved for only such purpose.

## IX. FACULTY CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The thesis defense was attended by a panel consisting of, at the time of my turn, ten faculty members: Prof. Patrick F. Campos, Prof. Yason B. Banal, Dr. Grace J. Alfonso, Prof. Nicolas A. Deocampo, Prof. Sari Raissa Ll. Dalena, Prof. Robert L. Rownd, Prof. Roehl L. Jamon, Prof. Eduardo J. Lejano Jr., Dr. Arminda V. Santiago, and Prof. Shirley Palileo-Evidente. Five minutes was allotted for the presentation proper while the time for the faculty's feedback was indefinite.

I presented my proposal from start to finish without any disruption. After delivering, the first to comment was Prof. Yason Banal, who found the film's concept to be interesting and the framework appropriate. He ended with a question regarding the visual references I have shown for my film—Adam Pesapane's *Bacardi Submarine* and *Wild Horses Redux*, and Jan Švankmajer's *Dimensions of Dialogue*—as to whether or not it was intentional that these references were “sugary” as opposed to the tenebrous atmosphere of my film. I answered by admitting that I had difficulty looking for specific stop-motion films that had a similar journey-like narrative with obscene themes. Prof. Banal suggested looking into the works of Roxlee and Robert Morgan which might prove useful. Subsequently, Dr. Grace Alfonso suggested seeing the dark, 3D black-and-white animation short *Salamangkero* by Reginald Vinluan. The last to comment was Prof. Sari Dalena who agreed with Prof. Banal's feedback. She suggested *Putting Trono* and Monty Python films as references and mentioned that my film reminded her of the toilet scene in *Trainspotting*. Prof. Dalena ended by advising that I could consider making my statement clearer by simplifying the film. Her concern is that I may have “masyado maraming sinasabi” (too much to say) that the film might turn into a “diarrhea.”

No comments followed Prof. Dalena. Only the three mentioned faculty members spoke during the feedback portion. In general, my thesis film was well-received and the proposal was defended adequately. I intend to see all the films that the panel has suggested, to reinforce or inform the concept and style of my film. As for Prof. Dalena's advise, I consider her word since it may, in economic terms, lessen the difficulties that may be encountered during the production process.

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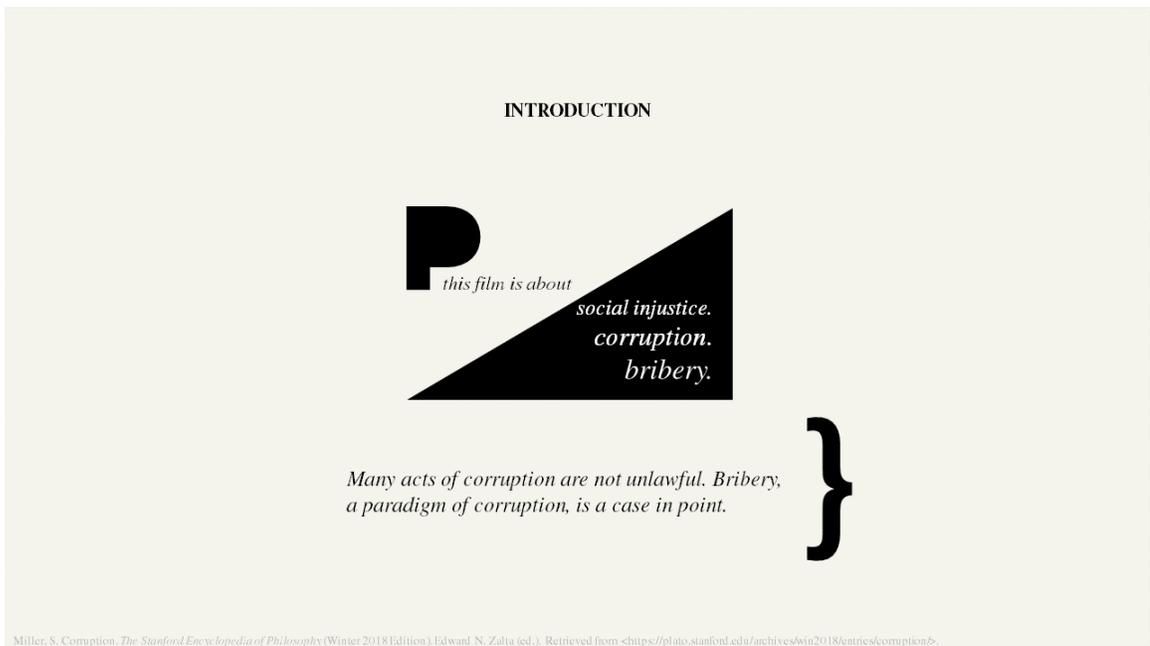
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*Wild Horses Redux*. Directed by Adam Pesapane, PES Productions, 2017.

Appendix B: Film 199 (Research in Film) Thesis Proposal Defense Presentation



**STORYLINE**

Like a Rube Goldberg machine, allusions  
conjure as the feces passes by dark, grimy  
passageways

*“Tumatae ng pera”*

An anonymous affluent person has  
a bowel movement and defecates  
money in a toilet  
Upon discharge, the feces is  
flushed into the depths

Eluding criminal liability  
Admission into institutes of learning  
Winning awards, prizes, distinctions  
Being elected into positions of power  
Silencing journalism  
Gaining priority: cut through lines, bypass traffic  
violations, making reservations, access to restricted  
resources... etc.

As the feces reaches the mouth  
of the canal leading to the sea,  
it doesn't plunge into the wa-  
ters. Instead, it soars high  
above into the heavens

**FRAMEWORK**

**JULIA KRISTEVA's theory of**

**ABJECTION**

*psychoanalytic theory*

**JACQUES LACAN & SIGMUND FREUD**

FRAMEWORK

**POWERS of HORROR:** *an essay on*

**ABJECTION**

*psychoanalytic theory*

**JACQUES LACAN & SIGMUND FREUD**

FRAMEWORK

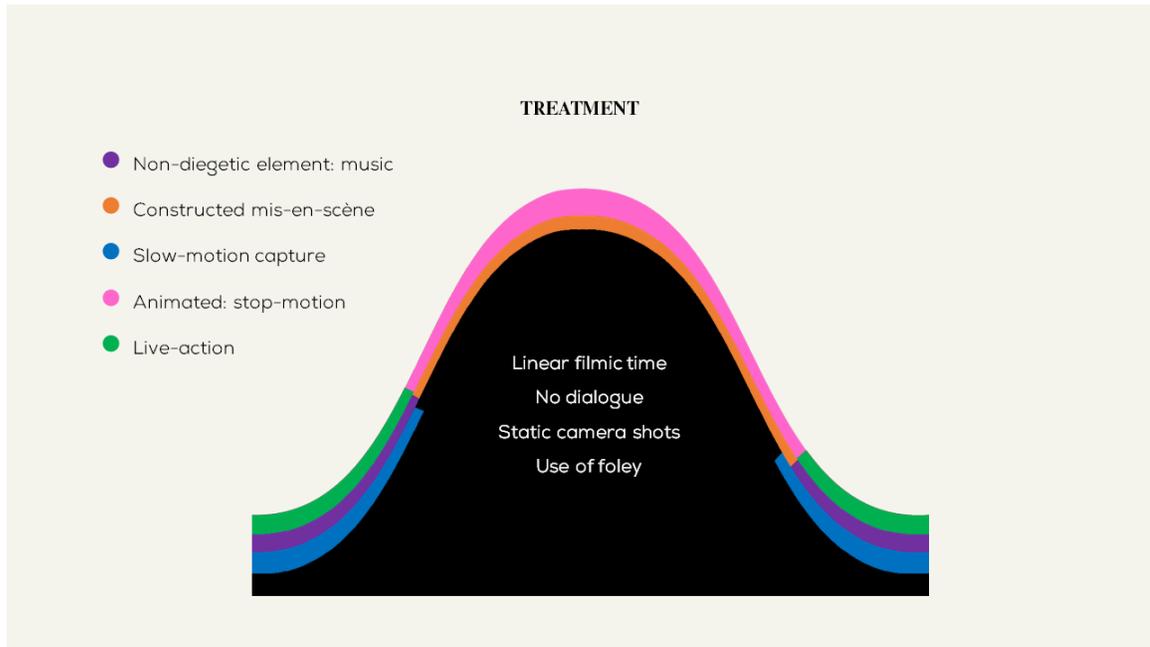
**POWERS of HORROR:** *an essay on*

**ABJECTION**

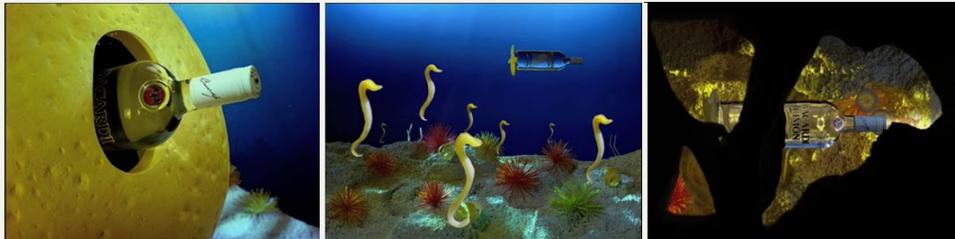
*Kristeva, Julia, 1982, p. 4:*

*What disturbs identity, system, order. What does not  
respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the  
ambiguous, the composite.*





**BACARDI SUBMARINE** (2009) dir. Adam Pesapane "PES"



**WILD HORSES** (2017)



**DIMENSIONS OF DIALOGUE** (1983) dir. Jan Švankmajer



## Appendix C: Second Revised Screenplay

FADE IN:

- 1 INT. STORAGE AREA 1
- In the corner of two walls, a storage closet is unlocked open by a CLEANER. It contains a mop, a broom and other sanitary items. The cleaner promptly puts his belongings inside and takes out the mop before locking the closet shut.
- 2 INT. OFFICE FLOOR 2
- The cleaner continues to mop. Meanwhile, a HIGH-RANKING BUREAUCRAT arrives and enters his office. Not for long, he goes out to use the restroom.
- 3 INT. RESTROOM 3
- The bureaucrat takes off his pants, shoes, and underwear. He lifts up the lid and squats atop the toilet to take a dump. Wads of crumpled bills slide out of his anus. They plunge unceremoniously. The bureaucrat gives a last push and a few coins come out as well. He proceeds to clean with tissue.
- 4 INT. OFFICE FLOOR 4
- The cleaner carries on mopping. Another BUREAUCRAT MUNCHING ON A BURGER goes up to the restroom but finds it locked. He leaves. Just as he had gone, a flush is heard. The door to the restroom opens. Out goes the high-ranking bureaucrat to return to his office while in goes the cleaner to sanitize.
- 5 INT. RESTROOM 5

The cleaner checks the place. He sees nothing too dirty. He is about to put down the toilet lid when he does a double take: a 1000 bill is floating in the toilet water.

The cleaner immediately locks the door. He takes out the bill, washes it by the sink and sticks it at the hand-dryer. After drying, he takes an inspection. The doorknob behind him rattles. The cleaner quickly pockets the money.

6 INT. OFFICE FLOOR 6

Outside, the burger-eating bureaucrat is in front of the restroom door. After waiting a second or two, he goes away in frustration. As soon as he had gone, the door opens and the cleaner moves out.

7 INT. STORAGE AREA 7

The cleaner is headed to the storage closet when he passes by another cleaner, CLEANER B, counting 1000 bills in his hands. The cleaner stops in surprise. Noticing, Cleaner B hastily hides the money and stares at his fellow cleaner. The cleaner waves his hand. Cleaner B breaks into a fast walk, ignoring him. The cleaner figures...

8 INT. OFFICE FLOOR 8

A female bureaucrat has just gotten out of the restroom. The cleaner comes in and replaces her.

9 INT. RESTROOM 9

The cleaner digs his pocket and takes out a screwdriver. Using the tool, he sets out to remove the flush lever of the toilet by attempting to pry it away. With a

clatter, the lever finally dislodges. The cleaner picks it up and pockets it before steering out.

10 INT. OFFICE FLOOR 10

The cleaner resumes mopping distractedly. Moments later the burger-eating bureaucrat returns and finally enters the restroom. The cleaner's gaze follows him inside until the door closes shut.

11 INT. RESTROOM 11

The bureaucrat eats his burger while squatting on the toilet. With a grunt, loads of crumpled money intensely erupt out of his hole. The bureaucrat finishes his burger and wipes his buttocks clean. About to leave, the bureaucrat is puzzled to see that the flush lever is missing.

12 INT. OFFICE FLOOR 12

The door of the restroom swings open to reveal a disgruntled bureaucrat. Wafts of odor briefly escape from inside. The bureaucrat voices his concern to the cleaner and leaves. The cleaner quickly enters the restroom and closes the door.

13 INT. RESTROOM 13

Feverishly, the cleaner puts on his gloves and at once begins to collect the money exploded in the toilet. He puts them in a plastic bag. Behind him the doorknob is left unlocked.

14 INT. OFFICE FLOOR 14

The high-ranking bureaucrat comes out of his office and heads to the restroom.  
He reaches for the door.

15 INT. RESTROOM 15

A gasp is heard. The cleaner whirls around to see a face fixed in outrage and disbelief.

16 INT. JAIL 16

The cleaner is locked behind bars. With him are all his fellow cleaners.

17 INT. RESTROOM 17

The bureaucrats use the restroom regularly without an issue. However dump after dump after dump, their insoluble excreta begin to accumulate underground. Soon enough, the septic tank could tolerate no more... The high-ranking bureaucrat tries to flush the toilet which seemed to have stopped working. After repeated attempts, the toilet finally gives in. It spews an avalanche of money and shit. The bureaucrat flees in horror.

18 INT. OFFICE FLOOR 18

Outside, regurgitated waste spread all over the office.

19 INT. JAIL 19

The cleaner is staring blankly when someone taps him from behind. It is Cleaner B. He points to a hole in the ground the others have excavated to escape. They move out.

## 20 EXT. ROAD 20

At the other end of the hole, the two cleaners climb out to find their fellow cleaners waiting.

## 21 INT. OFFICE FLOOR 21

Everywhere, chaos reigns as the waste seem to take a life of its own, drowning everything that squirmed in its wake.

## 22 EXT. COMPANY BUILDING 22

Pent up, the building ultimately lets out a groan and ejects sewage and bureaucrats out of its every pore. The bureaucrats wriggle in the muck getting their bearings. Meanwhile, the cleaners arrive to pick up as much filthy money as they can.

FADE OUT.

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