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## (verifica incerta) ... into the hole

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“Lean over the bowl and then take a dive.  
All of you are dead. I am alive.”

—Philip K. Dick, *Ubik*, 1969 (152)

This final essay is not intended to be a conclusion to the volume, but rather a sort of examination of the research presented here and their consequences. It is a *Verifica Incerta*, an “uncertain verification”, like the famous 1964 movie by Italian artists Gianfranco Baruchello and Alberto Griffi, screened for the first time at La Cinémathèque Française in May 1965 and presented by Marcel Duchamp, to whom it was dedicated. (153) A montage of reflections, a fragmented speculation, inspired by all the previous texts, which strives to reflect on these texts and declare what is missing, what has not been possible to include in the limited space and time of this book’s production.

Following this spirit, the best way to begin this verification is perhaps to quote a couple of sentences from *Ubik*. (154) In his radical, controversial novel, Philip K. Dick declares that the bowl, the toilet bowl, is the edge of the interface between reality and imagination. Only by putting his head in the urinal (155) can the protagonists of the novel (and us) understand where the truth lies, what is the real world and what is the projection of our brain imagination. With such a clear/dirty statement, Dick graphically explains how, regardless of whether we are alive or dead, believers or non-believers, through the hole that confronts us every day when we open the toilet bowl, we realize that

152 Philip K. Dick, *Ubik*, (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 76 153 For the history and the meaning of this liminal film, see Umberto Eco, *Postille al Nome della rosa* (Milano: Bompiani, 1983). 154 Philip K. Dick, *Ubik* (New York: Doubleday, 1969). For the interpretation of this book, see Philip K. Dick’s biography by Emmanuel Carrère, *Je suis vivant et vous êtes morts* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1993). 155 In the book, two different graffiti are evoked: one with the toilet and the other with the urinal.

there is a hidden universe outside of us; a universe that makes our daily lives possible and comfortable and at the same time reminds us of the traces of our darkest ancestral anxieties.

This aspect is highlighted in one section of Josiane Imhasly and Beka & Lemoine's exhibition: the projection of the famous *Trainspotting* sequence in which Ewan McGregor—who later became a Jedi thanks to this scene—plunges into the most putrid latrine of Edinburgh. We have an outside and we have an inside, and on the bowl, we expose our (invisible) interior and we look at our (psychological) interior. (156) Following the trail of what our body expels, entering the universe beyond the hole, can mean descending into the things that progress has hidden from us in the sewers of our big cities, in the subterranean Paris of *Le Miserables*, in the parallel Vienna of *The Third Man...* With modernity, what was predicted in the collective latrines of the ancient Romans has become a universal condition, even in space stations. Before inventing the holes scraped in the ground, humans were still animals that defecated or urinated on the ground. Everything was on display. Jerries and chamber pots did not change the condition. But the invention of the U-tube to avoid odors and the connection to the sewer system gave rise to a parallel universe that now stares at us. Aren't snakes and reptiles crawling out of the bowl one of the most distressing suburban nightmares? But since 1917, a bowl (or at least a urinal) has ceased to be a bowl...

156 Jean-Luc Nancy, "On the soul" in *Corpus* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). This lecture was given on April 8, 1994, at the Regional School of the Fine Arts in Le Mans, after a colloquium on The Body. The text was previously published in the acts of the colloquium, *The Weight of the Body* (Le Mans: Beaux-Arts, 1995).

### Close/Open that door!

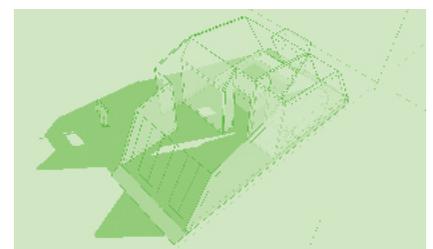
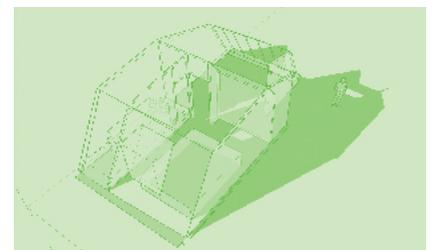
"Does architecture interest you? Not at all!"

—Marcel Duchamp, interview by Michel Sanouillet, 1954

As might be expected, several essays in this book discuss *Fountain*. They focus on the attribution of the work of art and its crucial role in making the bathroom an instrument of artistic and social criticism. Nevertheless, there is another Duchamp project involving the bathroom: *Door, 11 rue Larrey*. Its relevance in the context of this volume is crucial. Not only because it is connected to a space dedicated to cleaning and washing the body, but precisely because it is undoubtedly attributable to the French artist. The more historians tend not to attribute the overthrow of the urinoir to Duchamp, the more this door increases in relevance for evaluating the surrealist work on the bathroom. Not only that, *Door, 11 rue Larrey* is in fact an element of a larger architectural project. In other words, it is the only architecture that the French artist designed and was built on the basis of his indications.

In general, analyses of this work have focused on the dialectic between language games and domestic objects. (157) They celebrate and discuss an oxymoron, the irony of the realization of an apparently impossible condition, that of a door both closed and open which, as Duchamp himself says, "caught the French proverb 'A door must be either

157 Bernhard Siegert and John Durham Peters, "Doors: On the Materiality of the Symbolic," *Grey Room* no. 47 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 6–23.



opened or closed' in flagrante delicto for its inexactitude". However, there is perhaps no more functionalist episode in Duchamp's career than this. Although the exact sequence of actions and choices in the renovation of his tiny studio remains unclear in all the reconstructions published to date, the work of art is designed to allow a more reserved use of the bathroom for the artist's young bride in their home/studio.

"Il n'y a pas de solution parce qu'il n'y a pas de problème" (There is no solution because there is no problem), as Duchamp used to say.

The renovation involved the entire transformation of the small apartment including the creation of a bathroom before the couple became engaged, and then the construction of the door as an act of modification, completion, addition and adaptation. The solution is anything but anarchic or dysfunctional. It is not a "Bachelor Machine". On the contrary, we are looking at a perfectly functional space (the small recess for the bathtub), resolved with a concise and effective proposal, and then adapted to the needs of a "married couple". As the artist himself states explicitly (158), it is the person who visits or listens to the description of this home/studio, substantially devoid of the artist's works, which leads to the interpretation of the renovation as a Dadaist type of intervention.

If the urinoir is an extraction, the door is an insertion. This door was extracted only at the end of its functional life when, in the 1960s, the artist recovered it to raise its profile at international exhibitions. Duchamp transformed an

158 "In Paris I was living in a very tiny apartment. To take full advantage of the meager space, I thought to make use of a single door which would close alternatively on two jamb-linings placed at right angles. I showed it to some friends and commented that the proverb 'A door must be either open or closed' was thus caught in flagrante delicto for its inexactitude. But people have forgotten the practical reason that dictated the necessity of this measure and they only think of it as a Dada provocation." Marcel Duchamp, edited by Serge Stauffer, "Interview mit Michel Sanouillet (1954)," *Marcel Duchamp: Interviews und Statements* (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 1992), 50.

architectural object into a gallery object, not so different from those that Gordon, the son of his friend Matta, soon produced in New York: a reuse quite similar to the one described in a chapter of this book, Rotor-Decostruction. Although some aspects of the project still remain obscure, the biography of Lydie Sarazin-Levassor is an effective verification of the many surrealist mythologies built up around *Door, 11 rue Larrey*, starting with the first "publication" of the work of art in the magazine *Orbes* in 1933, and then in *Médium* in 1953. (159)

"He had scraped away at the walls to get to the bare plaster and fitted a folding screen made of thin strips of wood by the front door to cut off any undesired visitors from the rest of the room. It was north-facing studio with a typically large window-space. A smaller window gave onto the roof to the south, and Marcel had fitted the bathroom on that side, having had to raise the floor by two or three steps in order to permit the water to drain, as our outlet pipe led straight onto the roof and into the gutter..." (160).

Mis à nu par sa mariée, Duchamp becomes... architect. The lifting of the floor, the drainage into the gutter and the other solutions speak of a non-overturning functionalism, an inventiveness that always opens up new possibilities, pushes for innovation, to obtain more useful and comfortable conditions from the existing technical order. The image of this door as something "always open" expresses better than any other surrealist invention the quality of the bathroom: a space of technological concentration which highlights social codes... to which Duchamp had to adapt

159 In 1933, Jean van Heeckeren and Jacques-Henry Lévésque commented on "La porte de Duchamp" for the first time in the Parisian review *Orbes*. "When you open this door, to go into the bedroom, it closes the entrance to the bathroom, and when you open this door to go into the bathroom, it closes the door to the studio..." "Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée" seems an irreducible truth. Nonetheless Marcel Duchamp has found a way to construct a door that is open and closed at the same time." Jean van Heeckeren and Jacques-Henry Lévésque, "La porte de Duchamp," *Orbes* 2, no. 2 (Paris: Summer 1933): XIV. An extract from the journal *Orbes*, was published in the magazine *Médium: Communication surréaliste, Nouvelle série* no. 1 (Paris: Editions Aroanes, 1953), 11-12, with a new diagram illustrating the door mechanism. In a conversation with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp reports on the fate of the door. In 1963, Duchamp purchased the door from his landlady for about \$20 and shipped it to the United States, where it became part of the Mary Sisler collection. See Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 78. Since then the "Porte de Duchamp" has been a work of art. In 1965, it was displayed

himself, adding a door to allow his young wife's privacy. For these and many other reasons, the bathroom—much more than any other room in the house—is a space of subversion and progress (in a positive sense, which we wish to support here) for contemporary design as a solution to human problems.

### Toilet: A Love Story

"Until the problem doesn't get personal,  
no one's willing to fight find a solution."

—Narayan ("Naru") Sharma, *Toilet: A Love Story*, 2017 (161)

Some of the essays in this book that reflect on *Fountain* have described dialogue and gender conflicts. A re-reading of *Echec matrimoniale* (the original title of Lydie Sarazin-Levassor autobiography) between Marcel Duchamp and Lydie Sarazin-Levassor would be useful to understand this theme better. Therefore, it seems necessary to take up the theme of the bathroom as a place of dialogue/conflict of conjugal coexistence on the horizon of social progress in low and middle-income countries. For this purpose we are helped by a splendid film released just as we were organizing the seminar: *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha (Toilet: A Love Story)*, a sarcastic Bollywood comedy co-produced, among others, by the protagonist and great Indian movie star, Akshay Kumar. (162)

in New York as part of the exhibition *Not Seen and/or Less Seen of/ by Marcel Duchamp/Rose Sélavy, 1904–1964*. Under the heading of *Door: 11, rue Larrey*, it was entered as no. 426 in the catalog of Duchamp's works. See Arturo Schwartz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, vol. 2 (New York: Delano Greenbridge Editions, 1997), 717. Number 507 in the *Critical Catalogue Raisonné* is a reproduction of a drawing by Duchamp of the door. Schwartz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, 778. 160 Lydie Fischer Sarazin-Levassor, *Un échec matrimonial: Le coeur de la mariée mis à nu par son célibataire même*, (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2004), 67–68. 161 *Toilet: A Love Story* (original Title: *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha*) is a Indian Hindi-language film of 2017. Directed by Shree Narayan Singh, co-produced by Neeraj Pandey and Akshay Kumar, this comedy-drama stars Bhumi Pednekar and Akshay Kumar.



The movie is based on real facts and tells the story of Jaya (Bhumi Pednekar), an educated girl who goes to college and marries Keshav Sharma (Akshay Kumar), a man from another village, and moves in with his family, as is customary. The first morning after their marriage, she learns that her husband's family does not have a toilet in the house. The only way she can relieve herself is to join the village women, who get up every day at 4 am to defecate in the fields while it is still dark (for privacy reasons). And then they wait for sunset to use the fields again. She is horrified but the villagers, including her in-laws, firmly believe that having a toilet in the home, where there's a kitchen and a prayer room, is unclean. Keshav makes a couple of temporary adjustments to fix the problem. First, he takes Jaya to a neighbor's house which has a portable toilet for a bedridden elderly woman, and then to a train that has a seven-minute stop at the village railway station, but one day she is locked up in the toilet and the train leaves the station. After arguing with her husband and giving him an ultimatum - no bathroom, no wedding - she decides she has no choice but to leave the man she loves and returns to her parents' house. But Keshav sets out to win her back. And that means changing his mind about the need for sanitation. Not only that, she also plans to change the community's toilet position as well. The plot is quite complex and Keshav's attempts mostly clash with the reluctance of his father to acknowledge the importance of having a toilet in the house. Keshav starts to build a toilet, but the father arranges to demolish it while Keshav is asleep. The man, a very religious and superstitious priest, only realizes the

problem one day when his old mother falls on the threshold and injures her hip as she is going out to defecate. She shouts vehemently that she absolutely cannot walk to defecate in the fields and that she must use the bathroom which, in the meantime, Keshav has re-built in the courtyard.

At this point, the interminable delays and complexity of the state bureaucracy replace the father's opposition and the solution seems impossible. Jaya files for divorce at a local court citing the unavailability of a bathroom in her husband's home as the main reason. Although the case receives a lot of media attention and politicians and concerned government departments act to speed up the construction of toilets in Keshav village, nothing changes... until the Chief Minister's officer suspends the right to go to the toilet during working hours for all public employees of the relevant offices until they solve the problem. Then Keshav's brother, Naru, declares the moral of the film: "The file which went nowhere in 12 months, got sanctioned in 12 minutes. That's when these officers learned their lesson... Until the problem gets personal, no-one is willing to fight for a solution." The story thus has a happy ending, Keshav and Jaya return to live together and in the final credits, women and men are seen lining up to use mobile toilets at the edge of the village while the construction of permanent toilets goes ahead.

A week after the film's release, Indian courts granted a divorce to a young woman on the grounds that her husband hadn't installed a toilet in their home, causing her much agony during their two-year marriage. Before the end

credits, the movie mentions that it is based on the story of a woman from Madhya Pradesh who refused to return to her husband's home because he did not have a bathroom. The story shares some similarities with an actual event in which 19-year-old fled her husband's home in 2012 when there was no bathroom. In addition, the director Praveen Vyas sent a legal notice to the producers claiming that the film plagiarized scenes and dialogues from his documentary *Manini*—financed by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting—based on the same topic. Whatever the case, the truth is that it is the sarcastic comedy tone that makes *Toilet: A love Story* particularly effective and convincing to highlight India's open defecation problem.

Because of poverty and cultural and religious prejudices in rural areas, people still do not have this basic service. There are strong gender impacts related to outdoor defecation. The lack of safe private toilets makes women vulnerable to violence. Women are at risk of sexual harassment and rape as they search for places for defecation in the open where they can be secluded and private, often in the dark. Reports of assault in or near areas where women openly defecate are common. Lack of privacy has a particularly broad effect on their sense of dignity. They face the shame of having to defecate in public so often that they wait until sunset to free themselves, when the risk being attacked after dark is even greater.

The film is a comic drama about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission), a legislative battle to improve India's sanitation conditions, with a focus on diminishing defecation in the open in broad daylight, particularly in provincial India. Akshay Kumar dug a toilet in Madhya Pradesh to promote the film, and in an interview declared that if open defecation in India stopped, 30% of rapes would not happen because this 30% happens when women go into the field to relieve themselves. (163)

Since the inception of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, rural sanitation in India has increased significantly from 39% in October 2014 to over 92% at the end of August 2018. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself called the movie a very good effort to promote the program's message, and even Bill Gates,—whose Foundation shared with his ex-wife is engaged in a sanitary improvement program through toilets—listed the film as one of six good things that happened in 2017. (164)

Despite these tributes, the film has remained virtually unknown in Western countries, but has been a huge success throughout Asia. When it was released in China, it beat competition by the Disney production *Marvel Avengers: Infinity War* and other Hollywood blockbusters. In fact, the self-censorship structure of the Indian movie industry, which avoids gory scenes and topics, makes it particularly effective for programming in poorly democratic Asian and Islamic countries in general, where similar sanitization programs are underway such as the Go Wash program

163 Joginder Tuteja, "Exclusive Akshay Kumar Interview—I Am Doing All I Can to Make Sure That Toilet—Ek Prem Katha Is Seen by One and All," *Desimartini*, <https://www.desimartini.com/news/martini-shots/archive/akshay-kumar-interview-toilet-ek-prem-katha-here-is-what-akshay-wanted-to-name-the-movie-article59388.htm> accessed November 17, 2017. 164 Neetu Chandra Sharma, "Gates Foundation award seen as boost to Swachh Bharat Abhiyan," *LiveMint*, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/gates-foundation-award-seen-as-boost-to-swachh-bharat-abhiyan-1569432677658.html>, accessed September 25, 2019.

in Bangladesh or Fresh Life in Africa. In other words, sometimes it is not necessary to be iconoclastic to achieve extensive success in the field of social promotion and women's emancipation. All you need is to engage directly with the problem-solving process. (165)

### Le propre et le sale in details

"I do not like ducts, I do not like pipes. I hate them really thoroughly, but because I hate them so thoroughly, I feel that they have to be given their place. If I just hated them and took no care, I think that they would invade the building and completely destroy it."  
—Louis Kahn (166)

As the essays by Eva Gil and Joel Sanders shows, practiced and built architecture can be useful in helping and discussing the social issues related to bathroom and toilets. Over the course of history, architects and artists connected to architecture have not only proposed projects but have often been aware that the evacuation issue could allow them to question their activity and the professional dimension of the discipline.

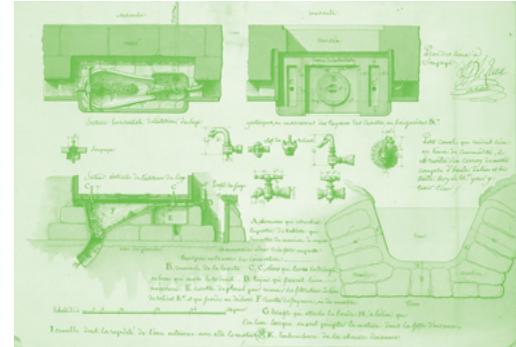
165 With regard to the difficulty of considering the toilet and its elements as "cultural objects," it is important to mention here the destruction of Branislav Nikolić's sculpture Endless Column, created for the Survive Work exhibition in Čačak, Serbia in December 2019. It was a 5-meter-tall sculpture composed of 11 ceramic toilet bowls in the shape of a pillar that juts into the sky, whose declared references were Brancusi and Duchamp. The intention of the artwork was not provocative. The artist did not want to scandalize with a brutal or ironic intervention. Instead, he wanted to create an object that produced plastic and aesthetic qualities through the reuse of everyday objects trouvés. Nevertheless, it provoked many reactions as soon as it was opened, and one night it was destroyed by unknown agents. The paradox is that the selection of the artist for the realization of this work was made on the basis of the Audience Award of the 27th Nadežda Petrović Memorial, which was approved by 10% of the population, a large number for a small town like Čačak. 166 Louis Kahn, quoted in *World Architecture I*, London, 1964, 35.



In the visual arts, the illustration of the bathroom is larger and more crucial than we think. Two outstanding examples come to mind: Francis Bacon's dazzling *The Black Triptycs* and *The Women's Bath* and *The Men's Bath* woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer. This helps us to realize that the tradition of architectural drawing of baths and toilets is as vast as it is little studied. (167) The first figure that comes to mind is the master of the art of engraving, Giambattista Piranesi, who proved that bathrooms, toilets, sewers and human evacuation could be used to magnify and also to reduce the importance of architecture. Amongst his immense output we can find detailed studies in sections, plans and technical diagrams of the Cloaca Maxima in *Della magnificenza ed architettura de' Romani*, and the frequent repetition of small characters intent on pissing on the ruins of some of the most important monuments of the Eternal City (such as the famous Veduta della Basilica e di Piazza San Pietro, published in *Vedute di Roma*).

In this volume there is little space for illustrations and discussions of the technical drawings. Nevertheless, we believe that it is important to briefly mention this universe and how useful the study of its critical contribution could be, with at least two examples of the intriguing images that we found during our background research for this book. The first one is a plate in a series of drawings held at the Bibliotheque Nationale of Paris, showing the interior of a palace in Paris. The interiors depicted in the drawings are part of a project for Hôtel de Montholon (the building is at 23, Boulevard Poissonnière, previously Boulevard Montmartre), a commission given to François Soufflot le

167 The purpose of this book is not to make the iconography of the bathroom and toilet theme in art, but it nevertheless seems appropriate to point out that this theme inevitably involves interior design. One of countless examples illustrates this aspect: the emblematic (self) portrait of Lee Miller in the bathtub at Adolf Hitler's apartment in Munich. Numerous essays have been written about this image, but no one seems to have noticed that the bathroom designed by Gerdy Troost is aligned on Prinzregentenstrasse, a few steps away from the Hofatelier Elvira, the famous photography studio design by August Endell, the first husband of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, "the Dadaist Baroness" who probably invented *Fountain*. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Lee Miller never met, but they certainly would have had a lot to tell each other about the subversion of gender roles in the 20th century, in the realm of... the toilet.



Romain (nephew of the builder of the Pantheon) and executed by Jean Jacques Lequeu for wealthy magistrate and later president of the Parlement of Normandy, Nicolas de Montholon. The ineffable Lequeu used pen and wash to draw a colorful *Plan des lieux à soupape* (the name used for the toilet at the time in France, deriving from the valve that activated the drain mechanism). The plate features two plans and two cross-sections of the toilet, numerous details of the taps and a series of texts describing how the different elements work. In the horizontal and vertical "sections of the interior of the seat", ink and wash are used for a detailed description of the feces and swirls of water as the matter is impelled towards the pipe and the bottom plane is cleaned. This is probably the most detailed and "artistic" illustration of a toilet that exists, or at least that has remained. If Le Corbusier had known about these drawings, he probably would not have complained about the luck of Ledoux in not having to cope with piping, and presumably not even Kahn would have come to dislike so intensely the pipes that inspired him for the Richards Memorial Laboratories. (168)

Looking at more recent times, we would like to mention a series of figures produced by Bethold Lubetkin and Tecton Group for the Highpoint One in London, one of the first iconic modernist building in England. These drawings were probably by Gordon Cullen, who at the time was working in Lubetkin's office. One of figures is dedicated to the bathroom and explains that, "most of the fittings were specially made for the job, not for snobbish reasons but

168 Reyner Banham, *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment* (London: The Architectural Press, 1969), 249.

due to the helplessness of manufacturers who ignore simple solutions for standard products". (169) Sketches and details compare the solutions attempted in Highpoint One for toilet paper holders, toilet bowls, washbasins and taps to standard ones. The captions illustrating the drawings indicate that smooth and rounded profiles, surfaces protected from water, hidden pipes and adjustable elements are more rational because they are "easy to clean". In the case of this wealthy residence in West London, the insistence on cleanliness comes not only from the hygienic vision of the 1930s, but from a "participatory approach", which does not resolve architecture into a simple aesthetic fact. Cleaning the interior furnishings is a daily activity that must be considered as much as the function. "Forms follows... dirt and cleaning", Lequeu et Lubetkin-Cullen would say. (170) However, Highpoint One's images remind us of the most serious gap in this research, the discussion of the conditions of bathroom attendants and cleaners in relation to architecture. This gap has recently been addressed by several film-based denunciations and committed artistic reflections such as the documentaries by Polish film-maker Pawel Lozinski and *Maid in America* by Anayansi Prado (2004), and the fictional movies *Dirt* directed by Nancy Savoca (2003). (171) If this is an ethically terrible gap in our work, it nevertheless helps us to realize just how much remains to be studied in the realm of the research issue which we wish to promote with this book.

169 John Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin: Architecture and the tradition of progress* (London: RIBA Publications, 1992), 199–201. The RIBA Drawing collection also includes a series of sketches related to this project for an exhibition panel illustrating the problems and solutions connected with designing for the elderly (a man shown lowering himself into a bath, a couple unable to operate a complicated boiler above their bath), which indicate an earlier consideration of problems that are still widespread and topical today, but have not yet been fully assimilated into the practice of design. 170 Georges Vigarello, *Le Propre et le Sale : L'hygiène du corps depuis le Moyen Âge* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987). 171 Katarzyna Marciniak, "Foreign women and toilets," *Feminist Media Studies* 8, no. 4 (Routledge, 2008): 337–356. Tara Atluri and Emily S. Davis, "The Intimacies of Globalization: Bodies and Borders On-Screen," *Camera Obscura* 62, vol. 21, no. 2 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 33–73. On the relation between bathroom attendants, cleaners, racism and architecture and interior design see: "You Marxist, I Clean Toilets. Racism, Labor, and the Bathroom attendant," *FRAME: a journal of visual and material culture* 1 (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2011): 69–95.

**INTIMACY EXPOSED**

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