**"Everybody's Business: Toilets as a Contested Space"**

**Conference at Humboldt University, Berlin**

**November 18-20, 2021**

Call for Papers

Located in domestic realms as well as between public and private spheres, toilets are secret and discreet, liminal, as much as eminently open political, and often contested spaces. They offer safety and comfort for ordinary physical necessities for the more privileged, open up room for diverse transgressive moves, and have been an issue of politics for centuries. Toilets facilitate movement through public spaces, significantly co-constructing social hierarchies such as gender, sexuality, 'race,' age, religion, and ability. Who has access to (public) toilets and who does not? Whose needs are served, and how? These questions are currently the subject of legal battles and controversial debates not only in the US. At the same time, restrooms are sites of potential and social interaction in which physical closeness and shared urges translate into intimacies at different levels. Toilet spaces are also culturally specific, the result of distinct practices: There are water cultures and paper cultures, with toilet paper users divided into "folders" and "ballers." Design and architecture impact on whether the use of restrooms is experienced as safe, relaxing, and even pleasurable – or its opposite.

The meaning of toilets is also psychological and emotional, as is attested by the toilet paper ‘shortage’ during the current Covid-19 crisis – not necessarily a German idiosyncrasy. Release of one's bodily fluids is correlated with a sense of heightened vulnerability. Psychoanalytically and culturally, feces are linked to conceptions of the abject and death – as well as to money and economics. Toiletries, bathroom design, and sanitation infrastructure constitute a huge (consumer) market. Finally, the ways in which we manage the disposal of bodily waste has enormous ecological repercussions. To discuss restroom space and toilets, then, is not only to engage with past and present practices, but also with possible futures. Accordingly, in 19 November 2001, the World Toilet Organization was founded and its inaugural World Toilet Summit drew global attention to what is considered a sanitation crisis. Thus, in one way or another, toilets – and their absence – figure prominently in our personal lives, in world politics, and in the arts and culture. Yet even though they frame an ordinary practice essential for well-being and survival, toilets and the multiple issues and questions they raise have so far received limited attention in cultural studies.

The conference takes the twentieth anniversary of the World Toilet Organization and of World Toilet Day in November 2021 as an occasion to explore the cultural politics of toilets and the topic of restroom cultures in a transdisciplinary, intercultural manner, inviting contributions from cultural and literary studies, history, sociology, and other pertinent disciplines. Possible issues for presentations include, but are not limited to, the following:

representations of restrooms in literature and film

restroom access for trans and inter

doing gender in the restroom

cripping the restroom

the role of toilets in LGBTIQ history

restrooms and 'race'

toilets and settler colonialism

(post)colonial perspectives on toilet cultures

restroom design and architecture

ecological dimensions of toilets and sanitation infrastructure

Please send abstracts of approximately one page via email to:

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Please send your abstracts via email to both addresses by February 28, 2021.