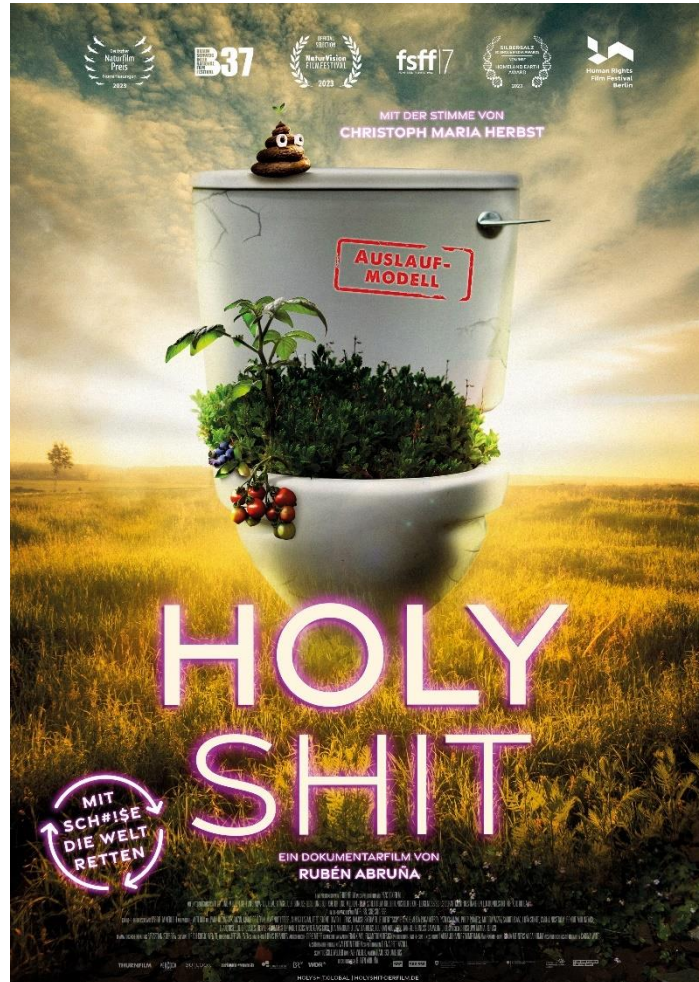


# HOLY SHIT



A documentary film by and with  
**Rubén Abreuña**

---

**German Cinema Release: November 30, 2023**

---

**Press kit**



## CONTENTS

ABOUT THE FILM	3
CREW (OVERVIEW)	4
INTRODUCTION	5
RUBÉN ABRUÑA – WRITER-DIRECTOR	6
DIRECTOR'S NOTE	7
THE PROTAGONISTS	8
THE BOOK TO THE FILM	13
CONTACT	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

## TECHNICAL DATA

Genre: Documentary  
Production Year: 2023  
Format: 2:1  
Length: 90 min  
Country of production: Germany

## ABOUT THE FILM

What happens to the food we digest after it leaves our bodies? Is it waste to be discarded or a resource that can be reused?

In search of answers, director Rubén Abruña embarks on an investigative and entertaining quest through 16 cities on 4 continents. He follows the fecal trail from the long sewers of Paris to one of the largest wastewater treatment plants in the world, located in Chicago.

The supposed global solution of using the plant's semi-solid remains as fertilizer turns out to be a real nightmare, because they contain toxic heavy metals and PFAS chemicals.

Can excreta be used to grow food and alleviate the impending fertilizer shortage?

He meets the Poop Pirates from Uganda, whose work and songs teach people how to turn feces into safe fertilizer. In rural Sweden, an engineer shows him a dry toilet that makes fertilizer from urine. In Hamburg and Geneva, he discovers housing complexes with localized wastewater treatment plants that are not connected to the sewer system and generate electricity and fertilizer from human excrement.

With his documentary **HOLY SHIT**, which will be released in cinemas nationwide on **November 30**, director **Rubén Abruña** brings a major taboo to the big screen and addresses a vital issue: wastewater treatment plants are overburdened, and increasingly release toxic residues into the environment. They are a 19<sup>th</sup> century solution for a 21<sup>st</sup> century problem.

In the end, the director finds different solutions for reusing human excrement that improve global food security, environmental protection, and hygiene, and mitigate the climate crisis, making it clear that the current situation must change.

## CREW (OVERVIEW)

Director:	Rubén Abruña
Camera:	Hajo Schomerus
Sound:	Ralf Weber
Editing:	Cécile Welter
Music:	Ulrich Kodjo Wendt
Executive producer:	Valentin Thurn
Co- producer:	Elena Pedrazzoli
Editors:	Jutta Krug (WDR), Martin Kowalczyk (BR), Urs Augstburger (SRF), Sven Wälti (SRG SSR)
In co-production with:	Peacock Film (Zurich), Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR) Petra Felber, Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF), SRG SSR
Supported by:	Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM), Deutscher Filmförderfonds (DFFF), Bundesamt für Kultur (BAK), Succès passage antennes (SRG SSR)



---

## INTRODUCTION

### A taboo must be put on the table!

We don't talk about it. Each one of us does it every day, yes, it's the big number 2, but no, we don't talk about it. We learn it from an early age. It is the great taboo that binds us all. And that's why we're so unsure of what to call it when we must talk about it. Caca? Poop? Shit? Bowel movement? Merde? Excrement? Feces?

But new times are dawning. The film **HOLY SHIT** makes it clear. Something is changing. All over the world, fecal matter is posing huge challenges for all of us. They are so great - as the images from the Chicago sewage treatment plant vividly show - that they hardly seem manageable. In a major city like Berlin, about 770 tons of feces are produced every day. In other words, about 31 large truckloads full of poop.

The film makes it clear: something must be done. We cannot continue to manage our waste the way we have done it for over a century. Wastewater treatment plants are overburdened, and, unfortunately, all too often their treatment work is minimal. They are a 19th century solution for a 21st century problem. Substances such as pharmaceutical residues, heavy metals, PFAS, and hormones, which really have no business being there, end up in the environment polluting soils and waterways.

Our excretions bring a load of problems that urgently need to be solved. And that's why we need to talk about what people don't really talk about: our shit and our urine.

But wait, we're not allowed to say "shit" in public! Another taboo. The literary scientist and author Florian Werner sees things differently. In his book titled "Dark Matter - The History of Shit" he explains that the word shit can be traced back to the Indo-Germanic root *skei-d-*. It simply means "to split" or "to separate": "In the original sense, then, shit was nothing more than something that was separated from the body, split off from it."<sup>1</sup> The word gained a negative connotation much later.

Since the construction of the sanitary system based on flush toilets, pipes, and sewers, common in many countries today, we have been able to get rid of our excreta quickly and far away from us. It was a great achievement in preventing epidemics. But things have come a long way since then, and human health can also be protected if we keep the poop in the loop by following the natural cycle of grow - eat - excrete - compost - grow again. Researchers have found ways to remove germs, drug residues, hormones, and pollutants from excreta so that they can be safely processed into plant fertilizer.

The use of container toilets and source separation toilets are two options that can help us conserve precious drinking water, protect waterways, and soils, and save energy. This is because conventional wastewater treatment plants require a lot of energy to clean the wastewater. In addition, nutrients that are essential for plant growth, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, must be mined or chemically made, in an energy-intensive process. Yet phosphorus and nitrogen are present in our excreta - and all we have to do is recycle them. Both options do not mix heavy metals and industrial compounds with human excreta, as is the case in conventional wastewater treatment plants, and can therefore enable the production of hygienically safe fertilizer from human excreta.

---

<sup>1</sup> Florian Werner, „Dunkle Materie – Die Geschichte der Scheiße“, München, 2011, S. 25.

One thing is clear: shit is not waste to be disposed of, but an amazing resource that can be reused. The film **HOLY SHIT** shows that. (Anna Marie Goretzki)

## **RUBÉN ABRUÑA – WRITER-DIRECTOR**



© 2023 ThurnFilm/Ralf Weber

Rubén Abruña's love for documentaries was born during his bachelor's degree in "Film and TV Production" at New York University, and under the tutelage of George Stoney and Jean Rouch. He further developed his passion by earning a Masters in Cinema Studies from the same institution. Since the early 1980s, Rubén Abruña has worked as a writer, producer, director, and editor of documentary films and broadcast journalism stories in New York, San Juan, Miami, and Zurich. In his films, he explores the relationship between people and their natural and built environments.

### **Awards:**

#### **As a director:**

- 2016 „Le roi cherche une toilette à louer“
- 2014 „La Casa Ausente / The Absent House“

#### **As an editor:**

- 2001 Winner of the "Wolfson Media Award" for "South of Brooklyn"
- 2001 Winner of the "Gold Award" at "The Aurora Awards Festival" for "What about Coral?"
- 1986 Winner of the "Blue Ribbon Award" at "The American Film Festival" for "The Battle of Vieques"

---

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

When I first sat on a dry toilet at my brother's house in my homeland Puerto Rico in 2000, I was amazed at the lack of bad odors. The human feces ended up being composted and used to fertilize a vegetable garden. In 2014, I completed the film "The Absent House," about his house, which is off the grid and contains three composting toilets. In the process of making the film, I realized that dry toilets have an undeservedly bad reputation compared to flush toilets.

For global food security, mankind is dependent on phosphates and potash fertilizers, whose deposits will become increasingly scarce in the coming decades, and on nitrogen fertilizers, which are produced using large amounts of natural gas and thus fuel the climate catastrophe. It is therefore evident that we must recycle the nutrients from our poop and pee and use them to fertilize our fields. I want to initiate a toilet revolution, a worldwide sanitation turnaround, and that's why I made the film **HOLY SHIT**.

It was clear to me that disgust is one of the biggest obstacles to getting people excited about the topic. The delicate subject therefore needed a touch of humor which I playfully injected to the story. Fortunately, times are changing, slowly but surely, and more of us are talking about our excretions without reservations and guilt. I am convinced that our protagonists will soon lead a new wave of innovative thinking, mainstreaming the idea that human feces must be recycled into fertilizer to grow food.

The waste of a living being is the food source for other living beings. That's the nutrient cycle. "Grow - Eat - Excrete - Compost - Grow Again". The last stage, the reuse of our excrements, has many more positive effects than just fertilizing our fields. It means we can significantly reduce fossil fuel consumption, conserve drinking water, protect the environment, generate energy, save lives, and mitigate the climate catastrophe.

My hope is that **HOLY SHIT** will spark conversations to begin a transformation process where human excreta is seen as a resource rather than waste, which in turn can help us reconnect with ecosystems and heal our planet.

**Rubén Abruña**

## THE PROTAGONISTS

### DR. PAUL ROZIN



Photo: © 2023 ThurnFilm/Hajo Schomerus

Dr. Paul Rozin, professor emeritus of cultural psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, is a world-renowned expert on disgust. "You get used to almost anything. You get used to the fact that you are carrying a gut full of shit as you walk around all the time. And you don't even think about that", Dr. Rozin says.

### FRED STONE



Photo: ©2023 ThurnFilm/Ralf Weber

Fred Stone, owner of Stoneridge Farm in Arundel, Maine, was the first farmer to expose the contamination of aquifers by sewage sludge, or biosolids tainted with PFAS. They contaminated the entire food chain, including his cows and the grass they eat. PFAS contamination has been widely identified throughout the U.S. and

Europe. Stone is still waiting for compensation for the destruction of his entire dairy operation. Some experts are already calling this crisis the toxic disaster of the century. Unfortunately, it's not going away anytime soon.

### DR. DAVID L. LEWIS



Photo: © 2023 ThurnFilm/Ralf Weber

Dr. David L. Lewis blew the whistle on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) manipulation of scientific data to legalize the use of toxic and deadly sewage sludge, also known as biosolids, as fertilizer. He has researched their human and environmental effects for decades and was able to link an increased incidence of autism in

the U.S. to the use of sewage sludge contaminated with heavy metals and industrial compounds, as fertilizer for food crops. He is the author of "Science for Sale: How the US Government Uses Powerful Corporations and Leading Universities to Support Government Policies, Silence Top Scientists, Jeopardize Our Health, and Protect Corporate Profits."



**ROBERT „SKIP“ BACKUS**

Photo: ©2023 ThurnFilm/Hajo Schomerus

The CEO of the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York, also directs the Omega Center for Sustainable Living (OCSL), an educational facility where people can take a closer look

at the environment and their wastewater. At the heart of OCSL is the Eco Machine™ (designed by renowned ecological designer and engineering pioneer Dr. John Todd), a local wastewater treatment plant that does not pollute waterways, is a net-zero energy system, and reduces pharmaceutical residues in wastewater by 95%. This is accomplished through a combination of constructed wetlands, aerated lagoons, organisms from all walks of life, and the sun.

**GIVELOVE**

Photo: ©2023 ThurnFilm/Hajo Schomerus

GiveLove is an organization dedicated to teaching ecological sanitation and composting of human excrement to produce much needed fertilizer, and providing affordable toilets to areas of high need and water scarcity. The film documents two of

their projects: In the slums of Kampala, Uganda, and in the village of Iremito, Kenya, among the Maasai.

**PATRICK MAVO**

Photo: ©2023 ThurnFilm/Hajo Schomerus



Patrick Mavo is the founder of the Ghetto Research Lab (GRL) in Kamwokya, the largest slum in Kampala, Uganda. For many residents, GRL is the epicenter of change, promoting the use of composted human waste from dry toilets, hygienic sanitation, water conservation, aquaponics, plastic reuse and more.

**SABIITI ISAAC**

Photo: ©2023 ThurnFilm/Hajo Schomerus



Isaac is a Ugandan pioneer who processes composted human waste from dry toilets into pellets to make them easier to transport and use. With GiveLove's support, he produces Green Plant, an organic fertilizer used by over 200 smallholder farmers.

**MODEM WIZZY**

Photo: ©2023 ThurnFilm/Hajo Schomerus



Kamwokya, Kampala, Uganda resident Mundende Moses, also known as Modem Wizzy, is a GiveLove compost technician who wrote, composed, and produced the song "Better use your compost." It's a call to compost human waste from dry toilets and teach others

how to do it. It's a catchy tune that you can't stop singing once you've heard it.

**POOP PIRATES**

Photo: ©2023 ThurnFilm/Ralf Weber



Every Sunday morning, the GiveLove Poop Pirates, or compost technicians, maneuver their cart along the arduous paths of Kamwokya, Kampala, to collect full containers from dry toilets and replace them with clean, empty ones. They also deliver sawdust, which prevents bad odors and keeps flies away. The containers are taken to the main composting facility,

where their contents are treated and turned into safe fertilizer for growing food.

**HAMISH SKERMER**

Photo: © 2023 ThurnFilm/Hajo Schomerus



Pioneer and entrepreneur Hamish Skermer is founder of Natural Event, which is changing the world from the ground up. For more than 20 years, the company has provided composting toilets to replace chemical toilets at more than 450 outdoor music festivals in 13 countries.

That's the equivalent of about 50 million toilet trips. While holding rich soil made from composted human excrement in his hands, he declares: "This proves that it's possible to turn shit into soil. There it is."

### CARL LINDSTROM



Photo: ©2023 ThurnFilm/Ralf Weber

Carl Lindstrom invented the world's first commercially successful dry toilet, the Clivus Multrum, in the early 1960s. He simplified it into one that doesn't smell, doesn't show the deposit, and prevents any feelings of disgust, calling it the "CompostEra." He has installed dry toilets in hospitals, universities, restaurants, resort parks, marinas, highway rest stops and military bases on every continent.

### ÉQUILIBRE COOPERATIVE



Photo: © 2023 ThurnFilm/Hajo Schomerus

In Geneva, Switzerland, a group of pioneers, members of the Équilibre Cooperative, received an exceptional authorization - the first one of its kind in the country - to build housing without the mandatory connection to the sewer system. Two separate buildings adopted different solutions to manage human excrement locally: one with dry toilets, the other with flush toilets. Both keep the nutrient and water cycles intact without polluting the environment.

### JENFELDER AU/HAMBURG WASSER



Photo: ©2023 ThurnFilm/Hajo Schomerus

The Hamburg Water Utility developed the Hamburg Water Cycle in Jenfelder Au, where vacuum toilets direct wastewater to a local system where a fermenter converts it to energy and fertilizer without going through the conventional treatment process. All the water will be recycled or sent to aquifers. The plant will manage the excreta of 2,000 people in over 800 homes, making it the largest of its kind in Europe.

**FINIZIO / FUTURE SANITATION**

Photo: © 2023 ThurnFilm/Chris Rowe



In 2019, with the support of German and EU funding, the company Finizio built the first recycling plant in Germany, (in Eberswalde, Brandenburg), to convert human excrement from dry toilets, mainly from outdoor festivals, into humus fertilizer. Finizio aims to build scalable and decentralized plants across the country.

**DR. JAEWEON CHO**

Photo: © 2023 ThurnFilm/Justin Lovett



At the Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology (UNIST), Dr. Jaeweon Cho has invented not only a urine-diverting toilet but also an experimental system through which people can earn money from their daily deposits. Ggool, which means honey in Korean, also known as Shitcoin, is the digital unit of the monetary system he created called "feces

Standard Money" or "fSM." This innovative idea, which can also serve as the basis for a universal basic income system, is presented in his book "Honey Money-fSM New Money for a New Society".

## THE BOOK TO THE FILM

orange●press

**ANNETTE JENSEN:****HOLY SHIT – DER WERT UNSERER HINTERLASSENSCHAFTEN**

Non-fiction book based on the documentary film of the same name, with a story by Sina Kamala Kaufmann

-----

Klappenbroschur, 224 S., with picture section

€ 20,- / ISBN 978-3-936086-8-50

Available from: 01.11.2023

Contact: [zustaendig@orange-press.com](mailto:zustaendig@orange-press.com)

Phone: +49 151-4055 8024

Holy Shit - in addition to climate change and the extinction of species, there is another global problem: fertilizer, chemically produced for 100 years, is becoming scarce and is destroying the soil. Meanwhile, we are using valuable drinking water to flush away the substances that agriculture so urgently needs. Recovering them via the sewage system is energy-intensive, expensive, and environmentally harmful. In short, it is not a solution.

But there are solutions. In her book *Holy Shit*, Annette Jensen makes the complex changing effects of our civilizational infrastructure easy to understand. She shows where we must and can change course - and where this is already happening.

Along the way, she tells the surprising cultural history of how we deal with the product of our digestion. She explains how the nutrient cycles, fundamental to life, have been destroyed and how this also leads to health problems on a grand scale.

The book ends with a "narrative from the future" by Sina Kamala Kaufmann, which opens a different view of the subject than the factual discussion of it does.

**Annette Jensen** was co-founder of the "Economy and Environment" department at the Taz, Berlin. She is a freelance journalist and author primarily about topics concerning transformation. She is a spokesperson for the Ernährungsrat Berlin.

**Sina Kamala Kaufmann** writes science fiction and is co-editor of the Extinction Re-bellion handbook *Wann wenn nicht wir*. The Tagesspiegel found her stories, published under the title *Helle Materie*, "disturbingly clear-sighted".

**The website**

(English, German, Spanish):

[www.holyshit.global](http://www.holyshit.global)**The card game „Holy Shit“**  
by Anastasia Bondar**The song „Holy Shit“**  
by Iris Lamouyette,  
soon to be released

Please get our **newsletter** if you want to know more about cinema releases and TV broadcast in Austria, Switzerland and other countries: [www.thurnfilm.de](http://www.thurnfilm.de)