A stylized, high-contrast illustration of a raised fist holding a banner. The fist is rendered in a grey, textured style with thick black outlines. The banner is white with the text 'RECLAIM YOUR SH\*T!' written in a bold, hand-drawn, sans-serif font. The background consists of a blue grid pattern with white lines.

RECLAIM  
YOUR  
SH\*T!

SARAH POPPY JACKSON



**Reclaim Your Sh\*t!  
Water. Beyond Value.**

**by Sarah Poppy Jackson**

**Illustrations by Kione Kochi**

**Published by Breakdown Break Down Press**

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**[www.breakdownbreakdown.net](http://www.breakdownbreakdown.net)**

**[brettbloom@breakdownbreakdown.net](mailto:brettbloom@breakdownbreakdown.net)**

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**Breakdown Break Down Press • 2019**



If I urinated and defecated into a pitcher of drinking water and then proceeded to quench my thirst from the pitcher, I would undoubtedly be considered crazy. If I invented an expensive technology to put my urine and faeces into my drinking water, and then invented another expensive (and undependable) technology to make the same water fit to drink, I might be thought even crazier. It is not inconceivable that some psychiatrist would ask me knowingly why I wanted to mess up my drinking water in the first place.

The 'sane' solution, very likely, would be to have me urinate and defecate into a flush toilet, from which the waste would be carried through an expensive sewerage works which would supposedly treat it and pour it into the river—from which the town downstream would pump it, further purify it, and use it for drinking water.

Private madness, by the ratification of a lot of expense and engineering, thus becomes public sanity.

The composting toilet springs from an elementary insight; it is possible to quit putting our so-called bodily wastes where they don't belong (in the water) and to start putting them where they do belong (on the land). When waste is used, a liability becomes an asset, and the very concept of waste disappears.

This of course, is the commonest of common sense.

—Wendell Berry in the forward to *The Toilet Papers*<sup>6</sup>





**W**hy do we defecate in drinking water? This is my question.

Why am I so passionate about this subject?

I grew up surrounded by the sea in the very southwest of Britain in Penzance, Cornwall, with water always present in my childhood.

As an adult, I spent three years living in South America, working on farms, boats, and in cities, where clean drinking water wasn't always available and therefore was extremely precious. I recycled grey water for flushing toilets. I used many compost loos. I vividly remember my first trip to a flushing toilet, whilst still in the airport when I returned to the UK. I had a feeling of sadness, disgust, and injustice as I watched litres of clean drinking water flush away without my control (from a sensor that triggered the flush as I stood up). From reverence to resource, from sacred to sewer.

The subject has gone on to inspire my academic research –MA in Economics for Transition at Schumacher College in Devon, UK; which in turn has informed this book, a global collaboration between American publisher Breakdown Break Down Press, Japanese-American artist Kione Kochi, and myself.

We are about to coarse through some huge topics in a playful and simplified way, enhanced by Kione's illustrations, to get your brain ticking, perspective altered, and imagination bubbling. If these ideas spark your curiosity, use the references to deep dive into further detail. However, the

point of this book is twofold: firstly, to get us talking about water, that currently, many in the Minority World<sup>1</sup> take for granted; and secondly, as global citizens, we take action to change a system<sup>2</sup> that is no longer fit for purpose.

We're in an era of climate breakdown, when resources need to be conserved and regenerated, not over-consumed and polluted. Globally clean water is becoming a scarcity,<sup>3</sup> and yet a flushing toilet is still considered developed and advanced.<sup>4</sup>

The news about our dire relationship to water grows as we prepare this book.

Some of the news in the headlines of 2019 were:

- ▽ 21 of India's cities will run out of groundwater by 2020 and 40% of India's population will have no access to drinking water by 2030
- ▽ Iran's tropical cyclone displacing 500,000 people
- ▽ Europe records highest ever summer temperatures
- ▽ Parts of northern England could run dry by 2035
- ▽ Southern Water fined £126 million for wastewater spills and deliberate misreporting
- ▽ Head of UK's Environment Agency, Sir James Bevan, says he wants to see wasting water become as socially unacceptable as blowing smoke in the face of a baby.

We drastically need to change our relationship to water. This book lifts the lid on our fascination with washing away our human 'waste'<sup>5</sup> with clean drinking water. Isn't it time to question the flush?



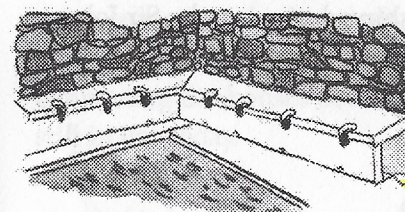
# PRE-FLUSH

Dealing with our human by-products is a process that is perhaps as old as civilisation itself. Yet it's something few want to discuss.

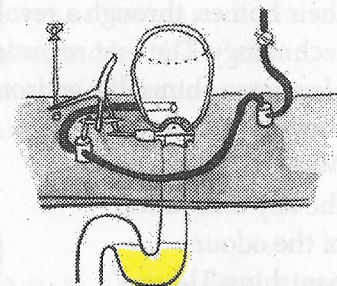
There is evidence of sophisticated sewage systems using water to remove unwanted 'wastes' as early as 3000 BCE in Mesopotamia.

In Europe, the Romans had large communal latrines with a shared 'sponge-on-a-stick', which I'm sure not many people would tolerate today. In mediaeval European cities, chamber pots were emptied directly onto the streets causing a stink.

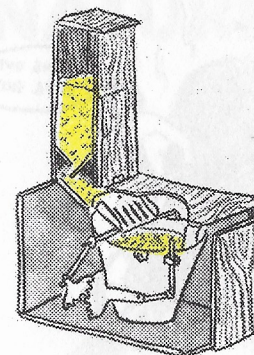
More recently here in Britain, there were out-houses—'privvys'—to make our daily deposits into buckets or cesspits, the contents of which were collected and sold to farmers on the outskirts of the city where the city's food was grown. Some historians say the job to collect the 'waste' was considered an honourable occupation, others say it was quite the opposite.



ROMAN LATRINE  
~ 800 BCE



ALEXANDER CUMMING'S WATER CLOSET  
INVENTED 1775



HENRY MOULE'S EARTH CLOSET  
PATENTED 1860



TOTO NEOREST NX2  
RELEASED 2018



# BIRTH OF THE FLUSH

London was the birthplace of the flushing toilet,<sup>11</sup> providing the richest in Victorian society with comfort and cleanliness in their homes, through a revolutionary 'out-of-sight-out-of-mind' technology. The first recorded flushing design was by Sir John Harington- himself a godson of Queen Elizabeth I—whilst the first patented 'Water Closet', with the key innovation of the odour-banishing 'U-bend', was by Alexander Cummings in 1775.<sup>12,13</sup> The popularity of the flushing Water Closet filled cesspits rapidly with the additional water content.

However, some still thought our 'waste' should be returned to the soil<sup>14</sup> and the indoor 'Earth Closet' designed by Reverend Henry Moule was also popular- a bucket and dry earth, in which the contents could be used as a natural fertiliser.

As the city grew quickly, so did the ability and associated expense of collecting the 'waste', which started to accumulate. Bacteria-filled drains overflowed, the Thames was polluted,



soils were saturated and contaminated water supplies, and thousands of people died of water-borne diseases such as cholera.<sup>15</sup>

The centralised grand-scale water flushing system designed by engineer Joseph Bazalgette,<sup>16</sup> was chosen as the most effective solution to the over-accumulated waste, and by 1870,<sup>17</sup> the biggest civil engineering project of the era<sup>18</sup> was complete, connecting the houses of the wealthiest to the sewage system still in use today.

# OUR REMOVAL FROM NATURE



Our 'waste' contains vital minerals for soil health including nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium; as well as organic matter. Nitrogen (N) is necessary to make proteins in plants and animals.



Phosphorus (P) is essential to plant growth via cell division, whilst Potassium (K) regulates water, nutrients and carbohydrates in plant tissue.<sup>19</sup>

In relatively recent times we have invented alternatives to speed up and replace nature's processes which we depend on for our agricultural systems—namely chemical fertilisers which are synthesised through energy-intensive, fossil-fuel dependent systems. We add these fertilisers to our soils which deplete natural fertility and wash off into our watersheds.<sup>20</sup>

When a compost toilet is used, our nutrients return to the soil and no fossil fuels are needed. Pathogens are eliminated through temperature and time.<sup>21</sup> This is a perfect 'closed loop'<sup>22</sup> system.

## IN CHINA, KOREA, AND JAPAN

In 1911, American Professor F. H. King when visiting China found that:

[O]ne of the most remarkable agricultural practices adopted is the conservation and utilisation of all human waste. The soils are naturally more than ordinarily deep, inherently fertile ... When we reflect upon the depleted fertility of our own farm lands, comparatively few of which have seen a century's service, it becomes evident that the time is here when profound consideration should be given to [these] practices ... In the Far East, for more than thirty centuries, these enormous wastes have been religiously saved and gathered from every home, from the country villages and from the great cities.<sup>23</sup>

## PROGRESS = FLUSH

The Victorian British invention spread across the globe along with the spread of the British empire and was a sign of industrial progress.<sup>24 25</sup>

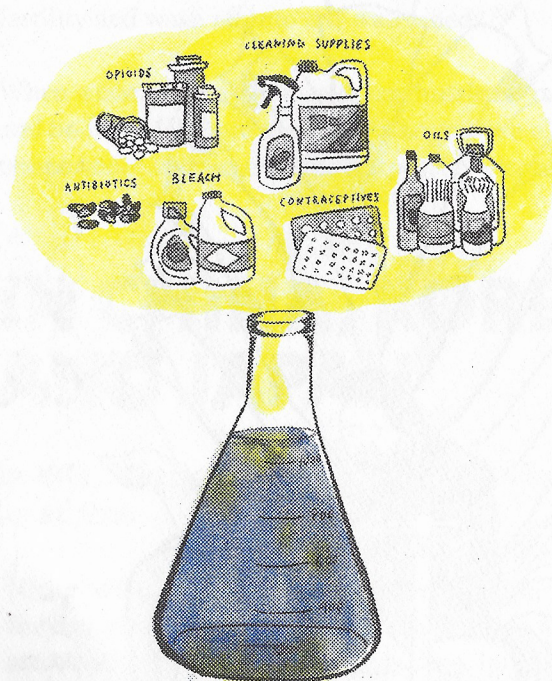




# TODAY'S SYSTEM

Up until the 1930s, the only man-made chemical in household water was soap. Today, the complex sewage system has to manage countless synthetic substances, body care and cleaning products, microfibers from clothes, pharmaceuticals (such as hormones contraceptive pills), and items that block pipes

such as wet wipes and tampons.<sup>26</sup>

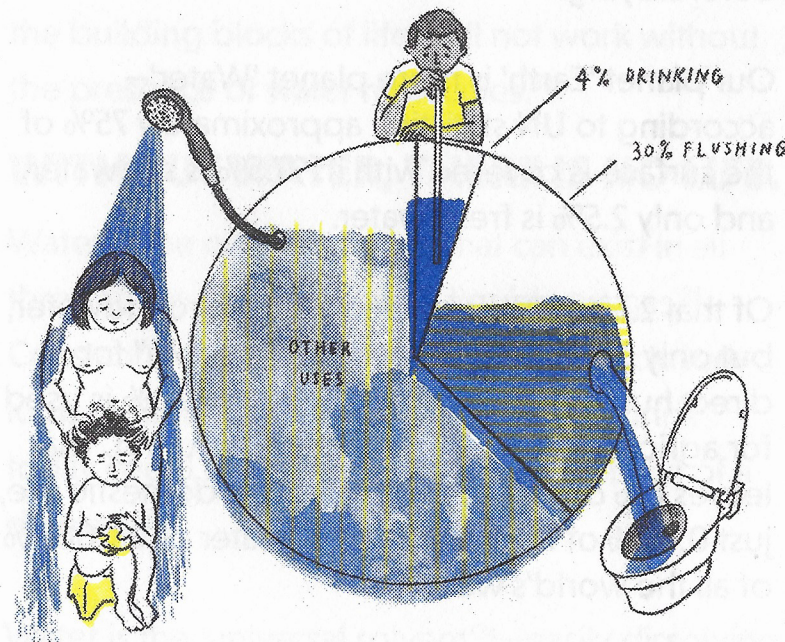


The UK has 12 private companies that monopolise the supply of mains water and treat 16 billion litres of wastewater per year. The maintenance of the centralised system

alone costs around £5 billion per year in England and Wales.<sup>27</sup> Customer bills increase to balance these costs. And perversely, shareholder value must be increased—for instance Bristol Water proudly tells its customers that 5p of every 48p income is taken as profit<sup>28</sup>—that is 10.4%! Is it right that a private company makes such profit, for providing a basic human right?

# CURRENT WATER USE

The UK average daily water consumption is 150 litres per person. Just 4% is used for actually drinking.<sup>29</sup> One third is flushed down the toilet.



THE AVERAGE DAILY WATER CONSUMPTION IN THE UK IS 150L



# WATER—THE FACTS

Right, now let's slow down, and think about water from a different perspective. You and I as humans are mostly water—approximately 60%. Our brains are 85% water and our blood 92%.<sup>30</sup> We cannot exist much beyond 100 hours without water before dying.<sup>31</sup>

Our planet 'Earth' is more planet 'Water'—according to UN statistics, approximately 75% of the surface is covered with it: 97.5% is salt water, and only 2.5% is fresh water.

Of that 2.5%, 70% is ice and 30% is groundwater, but only 1% of that is "readily accessible" for direct human use. Of that 1%—about 70% is used for agriculture and 22% for manufacturing. That leaves 8% of "accessible water" for domestic use, just 0.08% of the world's fresh water or 0.0008% of all the world's water.<sup>32</sup>

Water can be found in other parts of the Universe as widely dispersed gaseous molecules and as tiny grains of ice in asteroids and comets. It is thought likely that water came to the planet through a collision with one of these bodies from

space four billion years ago. Our earliest relatives spent the first 2.7 billion years living in water due to the exact conditions found on Earth to create life.<sup>33</sup>

We all spent the first nine months of our lives in amniotic fluid—which is mostly water. Enzymes, the building blocks of life, will not work without the presence of water molecules.<sup>34</sup>

## WITHOUT WATER, THERE IS NO LIFE.

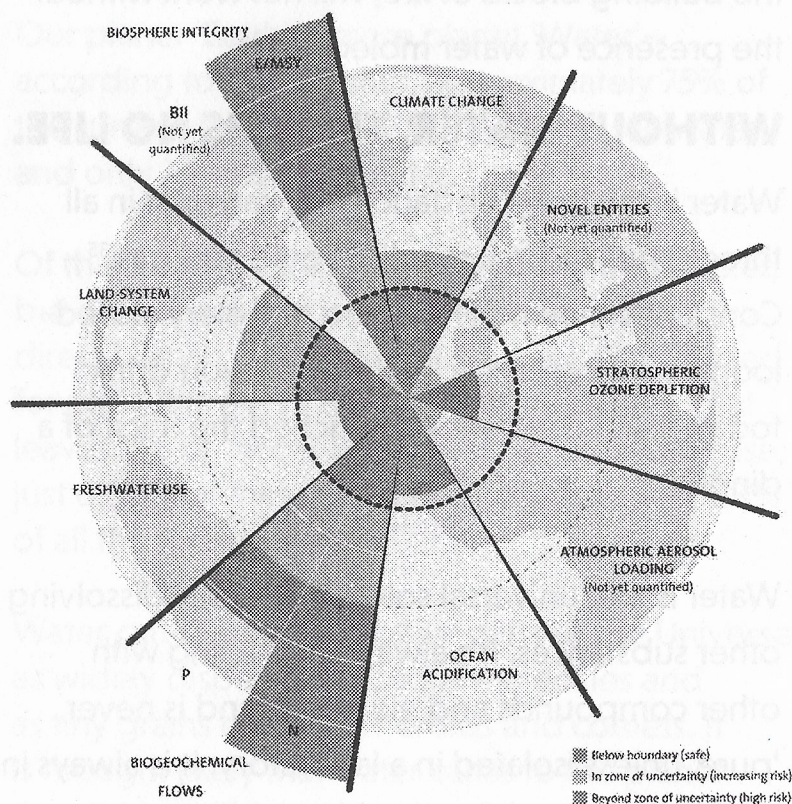
Water is the only substance that can exist in all three states naturally—solid, liquid and gas.<sup>35</sup> Constantly moving within the planetary closed-loop hydrological cycle, the water you drink today could have once quenched the thirst of a dinosaur!

Water is the 'universal solvent'<sup>36</sup>—easily dissolving other substances. It's always interacting with other compounds and elements, and is never 'pure' unless isolated in a laboratory. It is always in dynamic relationship with its surroundings.<sup>37</sup>



# STATE OF THE PLANET

Scientists at the Stockholm Resilience Centre have identified nine processes that regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth. Safe planetary boundaries for human survival have already been exceeded for the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, mostly due to the volume of chemical fertilisers utilised in agriculture—in turn polluting water and killing aquatic life.<sup>38</sup>



A nation that  
destroys its  
**SOILS**  
destroys itself

- FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

## STATE OF SOIL

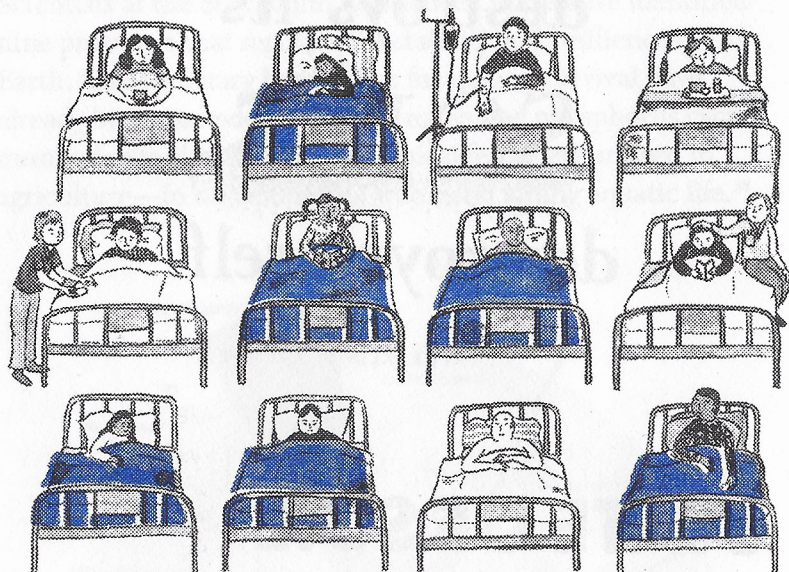
One third of the world's arable land has been lost since 1960 as a result of soil degradation.<sup>39</sup> This is mostly due to industrial agriculture—defined by high inputs of agrochemicals and fossil fuels, monoculture production, mechanisation and intensive livestock production.<sup>40</sup>

The UK is 30 to 40 years away from “the fundamental eradication of soil fertility” in parts of the country, the environment secretary Michael Gove warned in 2017.<sup>41</sup>

Imagine if Moule's Earth Closet had been the chosen toilet invention back in the Victorian times and that our faeces was never mixed with our water supply.<sup>42</sup>



# STATE OF WATER



1/2 OF THE WORLD'S BEDS ARE OCCUPIED WITH PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM ILLNESSES LINKED TO CONTAMINATED WATER

40% of the world's population lack access to basic sanitation services.<sup>43</sup> 20% live in areas of physical water scarcity.<sup>44</sup>

Half of the world's hospital beds are occupied with people suffering from illnesses linked to contaminated water.<sup>45</sup>

More people die annually as a result of polluted water than are killed by all forms of violence including wars.<sup>46</sup>

Take a breath in ... and out ... and read those last two sentences again.

I invite you to stop, and take a minute to ponder that, before you continue.

This is why the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were implemented. But can the SDGs be achieved? Goals number 6 and 15 cover specific targets for global water health and sanitation for all by 2030:

- ▽ Promote sustainable agriculture, ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- ▽ Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.<sup>47</sup>

We are nowhere near reaching these goals. Could this be due to who manages our water supplies?



# WHO OWNS WATER?

Take a moment to consider who owns water.

Multinational corporations such as Nestle and Coca Cola own land with water sources. This local, precious resource is redirected into a factory and turned into a commodity and sold for profit at the expense of the local community.<sup>48 49</sup>

The monopolised market of private water companies in England own the country's drinking water supply.

But isn't water a commons? It is part of the Earth and needed by all living organisms to survive.

*Commons are not just things or resources ... they're more accurately defined as a set of social practices, values and norms that are used to manage a resource.*

—David Bollier, Author, Activist<sup>50</sup>

The Water Wars in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 2000 ended with the people taking control of their own water supply after the Government tried to privatise it.<sup>51</sup> Welsh Water is a not-for-profit company with no shareholders, run solely for the benefit of the citizens of Wales.<sup>52</sup>

The Environment Agency says that only one of the nine major water companies in England is performing at the stipulated level, with most likely to miss the Environment Agency's 2020 targets.<sup>53</sup> Yet in the five years to 2018 they made an eye-watering £6.5 billion profit.<sup>54</sup> This is simply not acceptable. Are we safe in the hands of profit-driven monopolies? What is their

incentive to achieve the UN's SDGs?

The 2018 edition of the United Nations World Water Development Report stated that nearly 6 billion people will suffer from clean water scarcity by 2050.<sup>55</sup> So how can we conserve our precious, life-giving water?

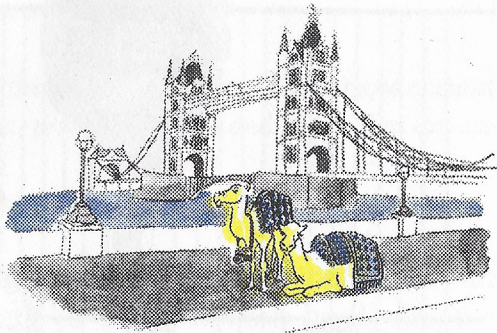




# CURRENT TRAJECTORY FOR THE UK SYSTEM

London's 150 year-old sewerage system wasn't built for the current population level, or the amount of land covered in tarmac, so contaminated sewage water has been overflowing into the Thames river.<sup>56</sup> Thames Water are currently constructing the 'Thames Tideway Tunnel'—a deep tunnel stretching across the city to collect the excess sewage. It's estimated cost is £4.2 billion, and is predicted to be fit for purpose for only 120 years.<sup>57</sup>

Yet with London drier than Istanbul and climate breakdown accelerating, is a huge, expensive engineering project with a 120 year shelf-life truly sustainable in meeting the needs of future generations?



Dr Tse-Hui Teh, lecturer at University College London, says we have to plan even further into the future—and think differently about how we approach waste water. "It's the same solution which was given in the Victorian era, it's the same logic, and I don't think it chimes well with our ecological systems."<sup>58</sup>

# HOW DO WE CHANGE SUCH A LARGE AND COMPLEX SYSTEM?

Systems thinker, Donella Meadows, researched the points to intervene in a system with the most potential for changing it. The top three—and my thoughts on how we might relate them to the water system—are:

- 1) The power to transcend the paradigm—this means a totally different way of how we understand and relate to, let alone use, water for our 'waste'.
- 2) The mindset out of which the system arises—in the case of the flushing toilet, it was a disease-ridden and polluted Victorian London, with no issues relating to water scarcity, climate breakdown or soil fertility.
- 3) The goals of the system—a private water company's goals are to supply water, dispose of waste and ultimately, maximise profit. What if water was publicly owned, a commons for the benefit of all? What would the goals of the system be then?



# THE EMERGENCE OF ALTERNATIVE SYSTEMS

Dr. John Todd, a pioneer in the field of ecological design, has been researching and implementing waste water technologies since the 1980s using biodiversity and simple natural processes that can clean black water<sup>59</sup> into clean water. One of their aims is to reconnect people with the nutrient and hydrological cycles, and reshape how we think about waste water treatment.<sup>60</sup>

Research from 'Zero Carbon Britain' reports the viability that energy will be produced through wastewater and anaerobic digesters, and the residues used for fertiliser for the land.<sup>61</sup>

Loowatt has invented a waterless toilet that meets the SDGs and is being used in Madagascar. Instead of a flush of water, the lever envelopes biodegradable film around the deposit and moves it into a compartment under the toilet, which is collected when full.<sup>62</sup>

In 2012, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation created the 'Reinvent the Toilet Challenge' to fund universities' research into the 'next generation of toilets'. The resulting inventions are high-tech. it's encouraging that research is being funded into new toilet systems, and yet, I hold some cynicism around the long term outcome of Gates' approach. If 40% of the world's population don't have access to basic sanitation, will an expensive, high-tech toilet be the solution? I asked the Gates



Foundation, in not wanting to mis-represent their endeavour: who is going to educate and pay for these new toilets to be made and distributed? Is the Gates Foundation planning on funding the entire process? They respectfully declined my request.

We know hi-tech solutions aren't always necessary. We can all make 'humanure'. The word, invented by Joseph Jenkins, means human excrement beneficially recycled by feeding it to microbes. "There is no waste involved. Because this idea is so radical in today's world, especially in water toilet cultures, there was no word for such an organic resource. I had to create one. Humanure." His book has everything you need to start composting your own.<sup>63</sup>



I use a compost toilet. I love the reciprocal relationship I have with the land because of it. It is a very simple design: a hole in the ground, a toilet seat cut into a wooden box, a roof and wall structure. I get to see my deposit and check all looks healthy. Occasionally I have to level the pile out: that's when I get to see all of the worms and insects busy helping to break my offerings down into compost. Once the hole is full, we dig another one. After the original pile has broken down, we use the humanure on the garden.<sup>64</sup>

*Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex.. It takes a touch of genius—and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction.*

—E. F. Schumacher, Economist

# NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

Grass-roots collectives are leading the way with inspiring, revolutionary action due to the severe droughts they are facing.

In California, 'Greywater Action' are training up the public in greywater<sup>65</sup> reuse, rainwater harvesting and compost toilet design.<sup>66</sup>

In Mexico City, Isla Urbana have installed 10,000 rainwater harvesting systems saving the use of 400 million litres of water from their already depleted supply.<sup>67</sup>

In 2018, Cape Town residents were limited to 50 litres of water per day and asked to the 'turn off your cisterns and save grey water to flush instead.'<sup>68</sup> We are now seeing grass-roots responses to localised climatological crises becoming the norm, rather than failed centralised approaches. This book is part of these grass-roots systemic response!

# WHAT IS NEEDED NOW?

*Our history has been shaped by water, our existence made possible by it, and our future likely defined by our relationship to it.*

—Neil Shubin, Paleontologist, Biologist<sup>69</sup>



# LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Community-based waterways in New Mexico, known as acequias have been managed successfully since the 1600s. They originally evolved around 10,000 years ago in Asia and then spread to Spain and the Americas.<sup>70 71</sup>

This practice has proven that a commons can fairly and sustainably manage community water usage within the ecological limits of a dry landscape whilst preserving wildlife and plant habitat, and conserving soil.

Gustavo Esteva, now a "deprofessionalized intellectual", previously a high-ranking government official working on development in Mexico, advocates the need to take back our power and manage our own 'waste' by disconnecting our bowels from any centralised public or private body. "Reclaim the shit from the state!"<sup>72</sup> cries Esteva! His enthusiasm clearly had a powerful impression on me!

But what does reclaiming our shit actually look like in practice? Let's imagine possible steps in England for example:

- ▽ First, we stop using drinking water in our toilet cisterns.
- ▽ Second, the water supply becomes publicly owned.
- ▽ Third, we return our nutrients to the soil.

*If we could see a watershed fully, we would treat water with as much reverence as our own blood, because that's actually what it is—the lifeblood of the planet and of all the creatures that live here, including ourselves.*

—Donella Meadows<sup>73</sup>

# LEARNING FROM OTHER CULTURES

Again, I invite you to take a few deep breaths in and out.

If water is quite literally LIFE—then how did we get to a point where we have so little respect for it, where we thought we could keep taking, but not giving back? We can learn from other cultures and history to get different perspectives.

There is a common thread in many indigenous cultures around the world, where relationships with a landscape have been held for thousands of years. The Kogi in Colombia, the Kichwa of the Amazon, and the Lakota of the Great North American Plains, all participate in a dialogue with the nature around them in a relationship of reciprocity.<sup>74 75</sup> Cultures such as these can often be found to have a 'cosmocentric' economy—democratic, egalitarian, regenerative and inherently sustainable.<sup>76 77</sup> On the other hand, a common thread in Western cultures, informed by the scientific worldview developed since the Enlightenment, sees us as separate.<sup>78</sup>

There are many people around the world, of different cultures and faiths, who believe that nature is organised, following sacred patterns which must not be disturbed; who honour and give thanks through ritual to the sacredness of life. I have had the privilege of experiencing such a ceremony in reverence



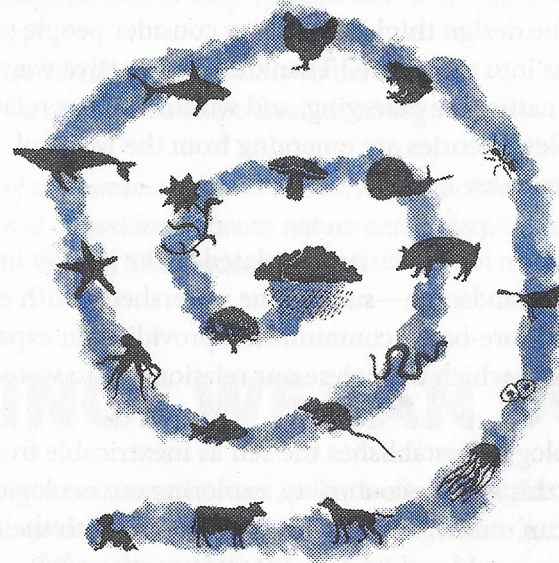
of water. It affected me profoundly and gave me an embodied experience into a different worldview.

In many Andean cultures, water is the essence of life and guides their cosmology. Water is the principle element that explains movement, circulation and forces of change. Their perspective of life is cyclical rather than linear.<sup>79</sup>

Close to where I live, is the Chalice Well of Glastonbury. People continue practices here for the sacred water, the origins of which are lost in the mists of time, tying ribbon to the nearby trees, and leaving offerings of food, flowers and coins. We find cultures revering the great rivers such as the Ganges (Ganga) and the Nile as divine beings.<sup>80</sup>

Yet despite our spiritual connections with rivers and water, and the timeless multitudes of generations that lived in harmony with them, can it be that our species has grown beyond the carrying capacity of the water cycle? Since the industrial revolution an extractive, growth economy hasn't been protecting the very ecosystems it relies upon. What rivers can we drink from now?<sup>81</sup>

# LANGUAGE AND METAPHOR



Describing water as a 'resource' implies we have power over it, rather than a relationship to it.<sup>82</sup> Yet from a systems thinking perspective, we are part of the ecosystem, not the controller of it. In nature, there is no such thing as waste. How can our human 'wastes' be re-imagined as a positive asset to be valued? What new words need to emerge?

## HUMANURE DONATION GIFT DEPOSIT



# THINKING INTO THE FUTURE

How can the design thinking of today consider people seven generations into the future? Thankfully alternative ways of looking at nature are emerging, and within this our relationship to water. New theories are emerging from the world of academia such as:

Bioregionalism identifies issues related to the human impact on parts of a landscape—such as the watershed—with ethics similar to nature-based communities, providing an expansive framework in which to analyse our relationship to water.<sup>83</sup>

Ecopsychology re-establishes the self as inextricable from nature. In this age of eco-anxiety, exploring our ecological-self is a way we can remember our interdependence with the more-than-human world and its deep interconnections.<sup>84 85</sup>

Theologian Mathew Fox, demands that we educate in awe again.<sup>86</sup> We need to share great stories of our existence—beyond the material shallowness of consumerism. Regardless of one's place of birth or religion, we can share stories that will nurture stewards for the planet—the stories of trees, animals, and—of course—water.

But we need more than just stories to inspire young people to absorb the sacredness of life. We need experience so that not only the mind, but the body and its senses understand. There is an innate appeal to our human nature through ritual, drama, ceremony, celebration, and pilgrimage—and through

this embodied experiences, a deeper and more profound understanding may arise.

Questions to ponder:

Can we imagine closed-loop systems that don't require high technology?

How do we return our nutrients to the soil?

How do we not contaminate fresh drinking water?

*The idea of the commons delivers a unifying principle that dissolves the supposed opposition between nature and society/culture.*

—Andreas Weber, Theoretical Biologist<sup>87</sup>

## THINGS WE CAN DO

In the short-term, we can start individually reimagining our relationship to water. You could start saving water by:

- ▽ Turn off the shower whilst you shampoo your hair.
- ▽ Take your first pee in the shower.
- ▽ Only flush after you defecate.
- ▽ Put something heavy in your cistern, so less water is used.
- ▽ Collect shower water to water your plants.

But you could go deeper than that:

- ▽ Research your local water catchment area and find the closest source.
- ▽ Help local water conservation organisations test the quality of your local river.
- ▽ Create your own rituals to honour the sacredness of water.



▽ Thank water before you drink it.

Beyond our individual actions, you can participate in more systemic changes by joining our campaign to ensure that new buildings no longer have drinking water in their toilets by signing our petition to change UK building regulations.

▽ Please sign here and share generously:  
[www.awordfromnature.com/water](http://www.awordfromnature.com/water)

We can learn from the new green industries that are thriving in California and Mexico, connecting rainwater harvesting systems to homes and buildings, while also redirecting grey water to keep it in a domestic system—these actions dramatically reduce potable drinking water use and can be recreated. This more effective use of rain and grey water could ensure that we no longer use fresh drinking water in our toilets.

In the longer-term, let's encourage creative collaborations between plumbers, engineers, ecologists, architects, planners, inventors, DIY enthusiasts and others, to imagine a future that is truly sustainable and regenerative for us and water, designing alternative systems with decentralised, closed-loop designs. For instance:

- ▽ Local anaerobic food and faeces digesters that create energy and fertiliser for the area it collects from
- ▽ Compost toilets where appropriate
- ▽ Water companies publicly owned: [www.weownit.org.uk](http://www.weownit.org.uk)

I feel so strongly about this issue, that I choose to live a low-impact life off-grid with a compost toilet. I'm not suggesting

this is what you should do, I simply want to open a conversation about this system we take for granted. I acknowledge that others have been campaigning to protect water around the globe for many years. I am adding my perspective and voice to the collective.

The climate is in crisis.<sup>88</sup> According to the UN, currently 80% of wastewater is returned to the ecosystem without adequate treatment.<sup>89</sup> To help us survive, we need clean water and healthy soils.

Water knows no borders.  
It is inside every living organism.  
It is inside of you and me.  
We are united by water.

This precious water is the same water that has ever been—it is a commonwealth. A commons that provides us with a way to reimagine our role within the planetary ecosystem. And we must learn to be in relationship with it because if we pollute it, we pollute ourselves.

We can start individually by taking moments throughout the day to remember our innate interconnectivity with water. We can talk about this book and share our thoughts with others. We can share the petition to change building regulations. We can collectively change by each taking responsibility.

How can we reconsider our core valuse as a society, with a deep care for water at the centre?

What rituals can you (re)create to bring awareness and the



sacredness of water into your life?

Cultural perspectives and traditions can and sometimes must, change, and it's time we reconsider the 'normality' of defecating in drinking water. Which when you stop and think about it, is beyond strange—it's public insanity.<sup>90</sup>

## NOTES

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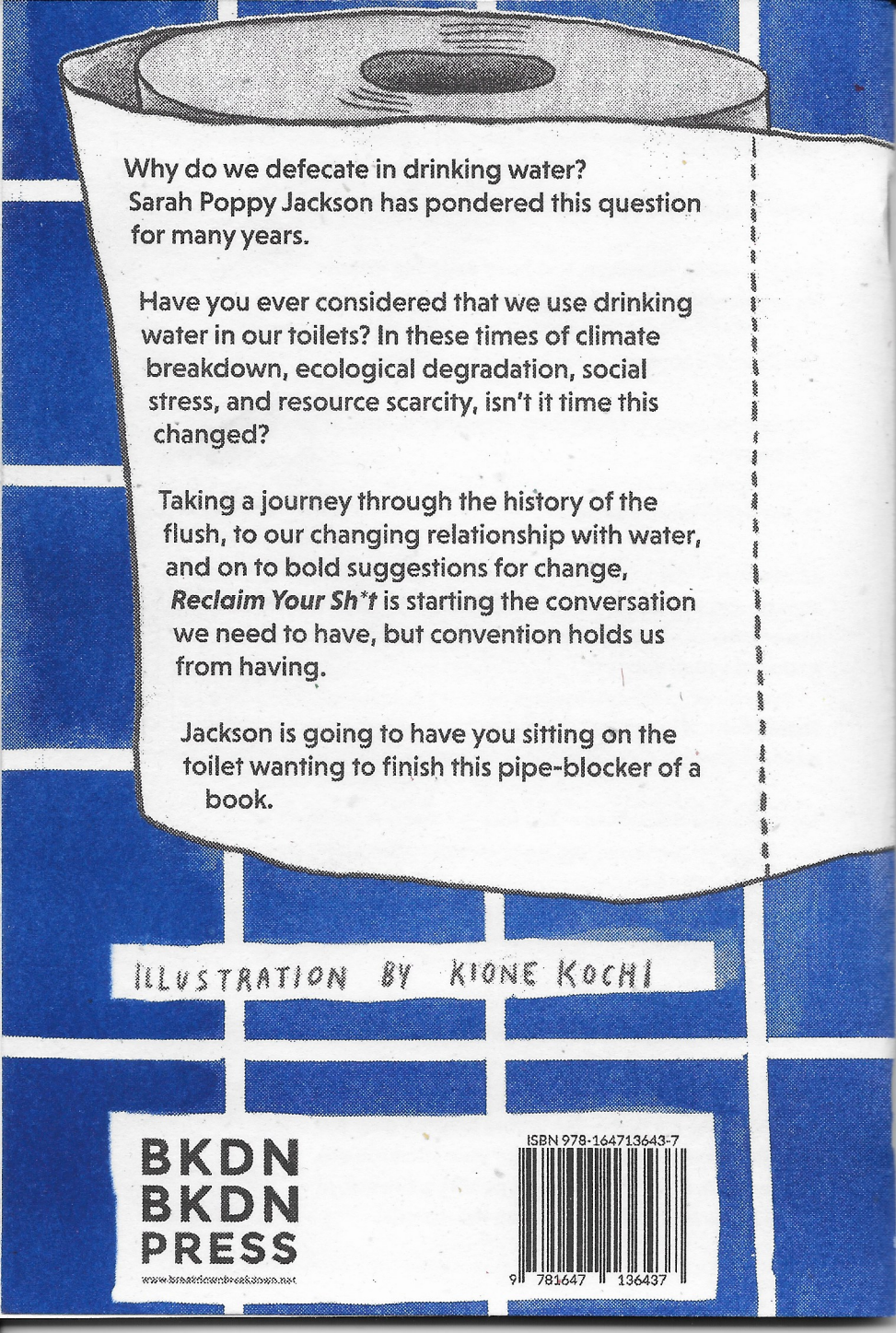
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Why do we defecate in drinking water?  
Sarah Poppy Jackson has pondered this question  
for many years.

Have you ever considered that we use drinking  
water in our toilets? In these times of climate  
breakdown, ecological degradation, social  
stress, and resource scarcity, isn't it time this  
changed?

Taking a journey through the history of the  
flush, to our changing relationship with water,  
and on to bold suggestions for change,  
*Reclaim Your Sh\*t* is starting the conversation  
we need to have, but convention holds us  
from having.

Jackson is going to have you sitting on the  
toilet wanting to finish this pipe-blocker of a  
book.

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