

“Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be beautiful, or believe to be useful” (William Morris).

Periodically we are all besieged by the sense that we have acquired so much useless stuff. When we move house, when we are cleaning, when we are trying to find something, the difficult compulsion to simplify, to clarify, to trim, intrudes. The cupboard, the attic, the spare room, commercial storage spaces, all testify to our inability to house things we might still treasure, but cannot quite let go of. Op-shops, with their assorted accumulations of recycled detritus and ‘pre-loved’ goods, repositories of strange and dissonant memories, attest to our reluctance to really throw things away. Op-shopping has become a sport, the realm of the connoisseur, ever optimistic, who knows the true value of someone else’s rubbish, the thrill of discovery. For the less methodical, the vaguely nostalgic, a melancholy sense determines that there is no gold to be found anymore in those stale, smelly piles. Whilst we continue to gleefully produce waste in every-day life at unsustainable levels, and are largely defensive of our fundamental right to do so, it is remarkable that op-shops and charities now need to remind the public that, in fact, some things really *are* just rubbish. We possess a mania for recycling driven perhaps by the inability to ever concede the worthlessness of something we have once used, even loved. While there is comfort in the thought that someone might find use in that of which we have made use, it requires real determination to get rid of it all together. To cull we assume the character of an ascetic. In the pursuit of simplification we must sacrifice some things; valuable, maybe useful things. Thereby we seek to add value to that which we retain, yet a nagging doubt persists...

Eager participants in an interminable cyclical consumption, and the creation of waste, nevertheless, *we hate waste*.

Sex with someone else is ok, but it is nothing compared with the real thing...

The aversion to waste, particularly to that most heinous type, *human waste*, finds a most forceful model in the proscription of masturbation, its corollary shame. On Good Authority we have learnt that any sexual act (masturbation being one among many such as bestiality, homosexuality etc.) that does not propagate the species is sinful. However, over time, with the increasing secularization of society, the taboo of masturbation has ostensibly become diluted. With some distance from the early discoveries of Freud’s psycho-analysis we can laugh at the threat of castration, the masturbatory nostalgia for excremental experience, enuresis, and have arrived at sex education that tells us masturbation is ‘natural’, it is ‘ok’. The logic which now gives us permission to wank bears the same rhetorical form of the tautology that once condemned it: “you should not wank because it is a Sin”... “it is alright to wank



Kylie Wilkinson, *Flat Stanley Rises*, oil on canvas, 2002. Image courtesy of the artist.

because it is natural”. We dream Freudian dreams, yet the shame endures...

The relative scarcity of reference to masturbation in anthropological discussions of primitive societies might indicate that masturbation simply serves no purpose, use or function, as it were representing a kind of anti-sociability. In the context of the contemporary medicalization of despair in its various forms, we have sought to wipe clean the shame of this act with the consolation that wanking may fulfill a biological function yet. If today it is a greater transgression to waste time over potential humanity, masturbation simply allows us to get on with the day, to conduct more civil relations with the opposite (or same, as the case may be) sex. The inability of a subject to enjoy herself implies a perverse inability to identify with the enjoyment of the other, a refusal to participate in some kind of agreed upon economy.

The profusion, now, of pornography, destined for largely lonesome consumption, is symptomatic of the great Permission now granted. Never has the public appetite for and the benign Ether’s provision of titillating images seemed so synchronous. Never has sex seemed so pervasive, funny, earnest, excessive and boring. If the market is never wrong, consumers can be seen to seek legitimization through an appeal to the use value of pornography.

Portnoy’s Complaint *n.* A disorder in which strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature...  
(Philip Roth, *Portnoy’s Complaint*)



"To produce is literally to shit"  
(Dominique Laporte, *The History of Shit*)

Kylie Wilkinson, *Go On Go Off*, video still, 2002. Image courtesy of the artist.

In *The History of Shit* Dominique Laporte charts the tireless efforts of man to turn his waste to some account, to convert his shit into gold. From the privatisation of waste in 16<sup>th</sup> century Paris, its incorporation into the home, to the elevation of the hygienist as hero/chemist, Laporte relates that our aversion to shit is inextricable from the will to make use of it, to be purged *and* to turn a profit. Just as "to produce is literally to shit", for the artist, and more specifically the painter, to create is literally to shit. For painters this shit, this paint, this compulsion to create, offers a field in which to enact the magical transformation of shit into gold, to make something beautiful, something which *says something*, to tell stories; yet always attended by the fear and suspicion that this stuff is, always will be, just paint, just shit. For the painter racked by guilt there is always something else, more useful one could be doing...

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**account for concurrent feelings of attraction and demoralisation in parallel enterprises, without resorting to an insipid assessment of the relevance of painting pictures today.**

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**George Huon is a dabbler, resisting specialization in anything in particular, and as such, is fairly unproductive. He draws more than he writes, but draws less than he used to. He went to art school at the VCA in the 90s, and is currently studying architecture at RMIT. This piece was originally written to accompany an exhibition of paintings by Kylie Wilkinson at West Space, Melbourne in 2002. Partly in response to the Kylie's apparent ambivalence to her painting practice, this text was a somewhat clumsy attempt to plot or**