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# INTO ME / OUT OF ME

THIRD CHAPTER: WASTE AND VALUE

Klaus Biesenbach



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I am sitting on the bank of the River Ganges and I am stuffing everything I see into my head... I am eating it all, I just swallow it all down... I have a labor-like cramp, I feel as though my intestines are being prolapsed into the river... What is coming out of me is being washed away by the constant current.

I wake up, and my stomach turns. I slowly realize that I must have eaten everything in my hotel minibar and on the fruit plate the night before, after taking two Ambien to finally fall asleep. Malaria prophylaxis pills often induce nightmares and may lead to a lack of sleep that enhances the dizzy feeling of jetlag and disorientation that comes with traveling. I had just arrived in Mumbai and checked into my hotel room, well-equipped with all kinds of inoculations, antibiotics, and the knowledge to not incorporate, drink, or eat anything uncooked or carrying germs that produce high fever and brutal diarrhea in so many foreign visitors. I was even made aware of the risks of using tap water to brush my teeth.

My hotel room overlooked a large open urban plaza in front of the Gate of India. Through my alcove window I could see that swarms of pigeons flew their rounds directly in front of the hotel. By the law of centrifugal physics it happened that one pigeon's droppings splashed against the glass that separated indoors from outdoors. This rare coincidence of 'it happening' and ending up on my window drew my attention to the fact that all of these pigeons must continuously drop a lot onto this central area. I followed my curiosity and looked further down onto the plaza. I was shocked to see numerous homeless people and handicapped beggars sitting on top of and basically underneath the film of what that the birds had left there.

Re-reading the influential 1978 book, *The History of Shit*,<sup>1</sup> by Dominique Laporte, one might be tempted to irresponsibly summarize it into a description of civilization as the process of rarifying waste into value, or more plainly, making shit into gold. The paperback edition of Laporte's book has on its monochrome golden cover a simple oval white opening that inoffensively suggests the association of a bodily orifice as a portal into and out of the content of the book, between the front and back covers. Books are physically dry, and as the aforementioned book itself states, they do not really have a smell. Art often seems dry too, and it very rarely has a scent.

The purification implied in attempts to achieve ideals of truth and eternal beauty correspond with Freud's three parameters of the progress of civilization: "beauty, cleanliness, and order."<sup>2</sup> Those works that do have a natural odor are outstandingly unconservable, like Dieter Roth's sweet-smelling chocolate, or his rotting cheese works, for example. At his notorious 1970 exhibition at Eugenia Butler Gallery in Los Angeles, "Staple Cheese (A Race)," Roth packed



From top: WIM DELVOYE, *Cloaca*, 2000. Mixed media, 270 x 1160 x 170 cm. View of the installation at MuHKA, Antwerp. Courtesy Sperone Westwater, New York; SUBODH GUPTA, *Pure*, 2000. Video, 8 mins. Courtesy Apeejay Media Gallery, New Delhi. Opposite: PIERO MANZONI, *Merda d'artista* n. 78, 1961. Courtesy Archivio Opera Piero Manzoni, Milano. Foto: Bacci.

about 40 suitcases full of cheese; with time, flies and maggots assaulted the art works.

Just as Roth elbowed rancid cheese into the realm of art, perhaps the most literal translation of the shit-into-gold concept in an artwork is exemplified by Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* (1961). The 30-gram can of the artist's own human waste was transubstantiated into commodity, and Manzoni

determined its price according to the current market value of gold. Today its value surpasses the equivalent in gold, and as a rarified iconic piece, it could nearly exemplify the whole late 1960s/early 1970s methodology of claiming to liberate the personal and the cultural, the private and the political, and the physical and mental limitations of our concepts of modern life.



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TANIA BRUGUERA, *El peso de la culpa*, 1998. Performance. Courtesy Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas.

In 1965, Shigeko Kubota created a painting with a paintbrush attached to her vagina, and in 1975, Carolee Schneemann performed *Interior Scroll* and read from a piece of paper while slowly removing it from inside herself. Rudolf Schwarzkogler's actions suggested brutal physical self-mutilation, and in Otmar Bauer's 1970 film, *Otmar Bauer Presents*, the artist repeatedly consumed his own excreted bodily substances from a plate, onto which his reflexes catapulted them back out, over and over again.

Working almost three decades after Manzoni, Tom Friedman's *Untitled*

sculpture of 1992 literally placed a piece of feces on a pedestal. In its miniature scale, isolation, and perfectly spherical form, it became neat, clean and in this sense 'suitable' for the realm of art. With Wim Delvoye's *Cloaca* (2000), the excrement-producing machine, the process of digestion is completely mechanized; made of stainless steel, the contraption renders the means of excretion tidy and odorless.

In the wake of Freud's distinction between anal expulsive (reckless, defiant, messy) and anal retentive (withholding, meticulous, careful) dispositions, these works comment on the rigid standards by

which human waste can accrue value in society and in art. From Kiki Smith's unraveled *Intestine* (1992) made of bronze and *Digestive System* (1998-2004) made of ductile iron, to Michelle Hines's extreme diet and drawn-out extrusion documented in *World Record #4: Peristaltic Action* (1995), to Jonathan Horowitz's portable toilets *Pissroom and Shitroom* (2006) recently shown in the "Survivor" exhibition curated by David Rimanelli in New York City, and Lizzi Bougatsos's *Success!!!* (2006), a likeness of excrement made of plaster with paint and gold leaf, the biological left-over is a theme that continues to pervade contemporary art. As in Laporte's study, these works describe the vestiges of a living existence within controlled circumstances, once again making value out of waste.

Waste can be a weapon. In her 1997 performance *El Peso de la Culpa*, Tania Bruguera enacted an indigenous Cuban ritual of protest, in which a person would consume dirt to the point of fatality. To commit suicide is viewed as the ultimate act of resistance. Coinciding with the several-day-long symposium at the local National Gallery that had brought me to Mumbai was the 2004 World Social Forum, a counteractive response to the World Economic Forum. The World Social Forum took place in a large area frequently used for fairs, situated halfway between the city center and the airport.

On our way there, the shuttle bus dropped the curators off at a parking lot across the highway. Separating the fairground from the main highway was a little canal. On either side of it, little settlements had been constructed out of black plastic garbage bags as a shelter for local families, protecting against sun and rain. After jaywalking across the multi-lane road, we stood amidst residences and families' daily routines: children were combing each other's hair, and parents were busy washing dishes or preparing for a meal to come. So as not to intrude, we tried to move a bit aside toward the canal, until we realized that it was basically a river of raw sewage. The casually detached misery of the people we had tried not to disturb was positioned right up against the polluted canal — a literal cloaca of these slums.

When we entered the fairground, a stronger wind came up. Dust swirled through the air and one felt that it was unavoidable to breathe in the particles that made that wind so tangible. The recent memories of the little sewage river next to the fairground were becoming more present, and the curators were seen holding handkerchiefs in front of their mouths and noses to prevent all the little dusty particles from entering their bodies — but the dust was dry.

Modern life in economically stronger countries seems to be free of any unwanted points of contact with bodily fluids and other forms of physiological wetness. The white

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cubes of contemporary architecture and the refined cleanliness of metropolitan cities have banned anything visceral from our daily visual or olfactory repertoires. Different cities maintain different levels of sophistication of this absence: Tokyo is so clean that one is not even expected to touch the door handle in a taxi, and New York is fairly clean, while in Berlin there are traces of dogs left all around the city — which would seem to be nearly as scandalous for Tokyo as if there were corpses lying around on the street. Are there corpses lying around on the street anywhere still? (I had feared that I would see corpses on the street in India but even my malaria pills couldn't make me see that.)

At least nearly all bigger urban areas

have established systems where there is no more than the occasional delinquent occurrence of visible human waste in the city, in unguarded corners of parking lots or underpasses. In general there is no space for the humid nature of the human body aside from restricted, designated areas like the institutions of toilets, hospitals, pools, etc. This cleanliness has been manifested as a nearly hysterical phobia of germs. Entire industries are in existence based on this fear, sustaining the market of bleaching, disinfecting, and sterilizing everything all at the same time.

The setting of the World Social Forum alone proved its point. With an attendance of up to an estimated 100,000 persons at any given time, the reality was that this congre-

**From left: CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN, *Interior Scroll*, 1975. Courtesy P.P.O.W Gallery, New York. Photo: Anthony McCall; MICHELLE HINES, *World Record #4: Peristaltic Action*, 1995.**

gation of people wasn't just another Woodstock. The exhibitions held within the monumental World Social Forum didn't need to include any work about explicitly reintroducing the physicality of the body, since the larger context in which the exhibition was taking place was already devoid of this awareness.

The art works and documentations were successfully and not at all decoratively placed in the position of a visualization and



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comment on our global market and media spaces. The tension between the anticipation and active resistance was tangible, and the exhibitions discussed how to avoid simply adjusting to the ruling economic systems. The works confronted challenging topics like the post-colonial continuation of past patterns of exploitation, and also addressed ethnic, religious and human rights issues; among these were documentaries on the atrocities against Muslims in the state of Gujarat. These themes were essential in the various smaller shows that could be seen within the larger setting.<sup>3</sup>

Before I left, I saw the video piece *Pure*

(2000) by the Indian artist Subodh Gupta. In this film, the artist himself is standing under a shower, only the more he tries to get clean, the more he becomes covered with shit. Suddenly I felt embarrassed, as I began to see myself in this revealing image. I felt as if it was a caricature of myself, an ignorant westerner visiting and exoticizing this beautifully complex country. I could not write off this attitude as another side effect of my malaria pills... I realized that I was not afraid of what was in the other, but I was afraid of what was in myself. But once again, to end with a quote by Laporte, it's about "turning shit into gold."<sup>4</sup> ■

Above: JONATHAN HOROWITZ, *Pissroom and Shitroom*, 2006. Two operational portable toilets, vinyl lettering; below: TOM FRIEDMAN, *Untitled*, 1992. Feces (Ø 0.5 mm) on pedestal (51 x 51 x 51 cm).

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Notes:

1. Dominique Laporte, *The History of Shit* (London and Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002).
2. Sigmund Freud, et al. *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 41.
3. (<http://www.wsfindia.org/art.php>)
4. Laporte, 46.





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### Calculating Lightness

Explorations—of all scales, cosmic and micrcosmic—demand methods of gauging and surveying. To determine the number of atoms in a bar of gold or the velocity of the planets, we must ask “how long?”, “how much?”, “how many?” For the eight artists featured in *Bearable Lightness/Likeness* the answer to all of these questions is a lot. It is a whole lot of beads, sugar cubes, hot glue sticks, fasteners, push pins, and monofilament to be exact. Or rather inexact, for it is an uncountable number of these everyday goods that are strung up, glued down, and meticulously assembled in P.S.1’s second floor gallery. As to avoid a boring catalog of materials in the room, a tally of the many hours gluing, painting, and hanging, and a ledger of retail values—this isn’t the *Price is Right* after all—let’s settle on a sumless sum of goods, hours, and values.

As I’m not the first to apply such an exact rigor to detailed description, I refer to a letter by Isaac Newton (ca. 1692) in which the famed physicist loquaciously puts it:

if any Man shall take the Words, Number and Sum, in larger Sense, so as to understand thereby Things, which in the proper way of speaking are numberless and sumless (as you seem to do when you allow an infinite Number of Points in a Line) I could readily allow him the Use of the contradictory Phrases of innumerable Number, or sumless Sum, without inferring from thence any Absurdity in the Thing he means by those Phrases.

While the notion of innumerable numbers may seem like an oxymoron, Newton makes use of these phrases when calculating at a large scale. Like the infinite points that can be plotted on a number line, the sumless is not the result of incertitude, but rather the product of precision.

It is through the innumerable numbers and sumless sums that allows art to become so bearably and infinitely light. Todd Pavlisko’s assemblage of retail tag fasteners, Michele Kong’s strings of hot glue, Milton Rosa-Ortiz’s suspended cubes of sugar—all of these are constructed from what we see everyday, yet are from another ethereal world, free of the heavy earth-bound realm. As another astronomer and theorist, Galileo Galilei, wrote in his 1590 essay *On Motion*, “Now every day we observe with our senses that the places of the heavy are those which are closer to the center of the universe and the places of the light those which are farther distant.”

Galileo, who’s methodology paved the way for Newton’s mathematics, believed the natural place of heavy objects was closer to the earth (or sun as he would later advocate a heliocentric model of the solar system) while the lighter were lodged farther away, in the direction of the orbiting planets and the stars.

The “places of the light” can be so distant that any motion is imperceptible. Though the stars in the night sky seem static they are in constant motion, spreading further out as the expanding universe. Likewise these works are subtle and fleeting—the incense smoke in Sungmi Lee’s Plexiglas sculpture, the elusive erased drawing by Cory Wagner—

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suggestive of the crystalline spheres of medieval astronomy that support the constellations.

As we read in to these stellar bodies—the crabs, bears, and hunters of mythology—we search for connections and patterns that reflect more of ourselves rather than the heavens. The sense of discovery—of the body and society—is found in Louis Cameron’s bold palette based on commercial products, Andrea Higgins’ textile designs lifted from first ladies, and Suzanne Broughel’s mandala-like compositions. Even Johannes Kepler, Galileo’s contemporary and colleague, discovered earth-bound visions as he calculated the motions of the planets. Planetary motion, Kepler wrote in 1619, “comes about gradually by the linking and accumulation of a great many revolutions...just as by a great many circles of silken thread, linked with each other and wound together, the dwelling of a silkworm is made.”

Christopher Y. Lew

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## Gorchov Profile

On a sunny April day in his cavernous Brooklyn studio, Ron Gorchov took a break from painting to sit down for a conversation with Alanna Heiss and Eugenie Tsai about his artistic development ~~with Alanna Heiss and Eugenie Tsai~~. Gorchov began by recalling his attempts in the 60s to find his voice: “In 1960 I had a show, and although I didn’t really like the work — it was abstract surrealism — the show was a success. What really hit me at the time was the art of Jasper Johns and Frank Stella. I saw Johns’ first Target early on at Leo Castelli’s gallery and was really pretty unnerved by it. I wouldn’t say I loved it but it threw me. I wished I was thinking along those lines; I thought it was a new way to go.”

More concerned with those artists who “threw” him ~~rather~~ than his immediate contemporaries, Gorchov observed: “When I think of artists whose work challenges me — ~~— Richard Serra, Frank Stella, and James Turrell —~~ I want to put something in my work where I could challenge them. To me that’s an affectionate competition.” One of Gorchov’s friends was the painter Elizabeth Murray. “Elizabeth and I were really close in the early 70’s. She wrote me a really nice note about a painting I showed at Fischbach Gallery, and, on the basis of the note, we met shortly after. She and her work have always meant a lot to me. I admire the way she puts paint on, and also the force with which she could make an image. I think people could see how there’s a relationship between our work.”

Speaking of his own paintings and how he initiates them, Gorchov described his intuitive process:

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“I start my own work by making little drawings. It’s about putting something into the container of the field that I can move easily. It’s like an easy way to make sculpture, without having to think of the material. I ~~II~~ start by putting forms into a painting. Then ~~you~~ I hope the painting tells ~~you-me~~ what the next color is and whether the form should get bigger or smaller. I know this sounds haphazard, but it’s pretty intuitive and very improvisational. What I ~~m~~ looking ~~ing~~ for is a hook that doesn’t drive me crazy but keeps me working. It can’t be too big a hook, like a strong melody in music that you can’t get out of your head; it should be more like an elusive melody that you’ve never heard before and can coax out. ~~What I’m~~ looking ~~ing~~ for ~~is~~ something I’ve never seen before.”

Regarded as a painter’s painter, Gorchoy has always been a technical master:

“I started to paint pretty early because my mother painted. From a young age I had an aptitude for drawing and painting and wanted to be artist. For me, facility has never been a problem. What matters is ~~if it’s~~ putting that skill to good use. Having a big bag of tricks is great. The question is how you can limit the options. That ~~is~~ where I began to have problems with the rectangle and flat painting, as well as with the tendency to regard sculpture as having more palpability than painting. ~~I’ve~~ I have always looked at painting as an object.”

Gorchoy’s desire to pare down formal elements and synthesize categories is evident in a series he called stack paintings ~~which-that~~ he began in the early 70s:

“My early stack paintings are a synthesis of painting, sculpture, and architecture. When I made the stack pieces, I didn’t regard them as personal paintings; they were intended for some kind of public place. The stack pieces were my idea of sculpture meant to go in lobbies or similar spaces. They have to do with Modernism and Art Deco. I love Art

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Deco; I grew up with it. It reminds me of some of the props in old movies. The stack painting entitled *Entrance*, shown in 1979 at P.S.1, was a riff on movie palaces. It was my design for a marquee for a movie.”

Gorchov’s interest in synthesis extended to his next series of paintings that were executed on concave canvases shaped like shields or saddles, appearing at once abstract and anthropomorphic:

“The concave, shield-shaped canvases seem so much like sculpture but make anthropomorphic references. ~~but~~ The doubled painted marks ~~they~~ look like the eyeholes in masks, and ~~along with~~ the shape of the canvases ~~they~~ resemble torsos ~~make anthropomorphic references.~~ I regard the paintings as figures. The two marks correspond to something that always fascinated me: the armholes of the gowns worn by Archaic Greek statues known as kore. These female figures have a hieratic stance. But the armholes are very plastic and seem to offer a way into classical sculpture. The armholes are very free, much freer than the rest of the sculpture, and that really impressed me. I ~~had~~ had been drawing those armholes and eventually thought ~~I’d~~ I would put them in the painting. The idea was to synthesize. To me, that’s what abstraction is, a synthesis of images so that they are latent and not obvious – a process not unlike poetry. Poetry is not so obvious; there’s a reticence to it. And that’s what I think abstract painting can be.”

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### John Lurie Interview

P.S.1 Director Alanna Heiss sits down with John Lurie to discuss his exhibition “John Lurie: Works on Paper,” music, mimes, and late-night television.

Alanna Heiss: As an actor, musician, and artist, you are for the New York community a triple threat – or a triple prize. Have you found that those practices inform each other?

John Lurie: There is a similar place in your brain or psyche that you touch when something is going well. If as an actor you hit the moment of believing you are the character, that is the same feeling as when a painting is going well. I learned to find that creative spot in my brain through writing music and subsequently could find it quickly with painting. I can ignore the front part of my brain and find my intuition more quickly than if I had only painted.

AH: The titles of your pieces are essential, are they not? Words are very important to you. Are they important to you in writing music also?

JL: Yes, the titles usually fix the pieces. It's the same for the titles of paintings and songs, really. You want a title open-ended enough that people can have their own take on it – and yet it also finishes the work. Some of the paintings don't work without the titles, and I think that might be a failing on my part.

AH: That may be both a strength and a failing. In most work, these two things are coexistent. Have you ever written any poetry?

JL: Not since I was nineteen.

AH: Are you too cool to do that?

JL: Yeah, I can't imagine myself writing a poem. What would I do with it? I'm actually not affected by much poetry. Most poetry makes me react like I've seen a mime.

AH: About your works on paper specifically, you probably noticed that I am perhaps overly responsive to figurative work involving animals.

JL: Yeah, you really are.

AH: I went completely nuts in your studio. The animals in your work – the buffaloes, the rabbits, the horses – are recurring motifs. Could you talk about that?

JL: I don't understand how that happens. When painting I usually start with three colors in mind, make a mess, and see what I got. I even try *not* to make these dogs and wolves and birds. They just keep coming. I don't know what that is – maybe some primordial caveman deal? It's not a conscious decision. In fact, I think there are too many animals.

AH: When you were starting out in New York as an artist, did you have to decide between becoming a working musician or a working painter?

JL: I was painting as much as I was making music, maybe a little more. It was at that time in the late 70's when punk was big and everybody was doing something they didn't know how to do. But I actually knew how to play music. I studied and would practice every day. My apartment was



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fifty-five bucks a month, so I could finagle ways not to have a job and followed my day as it unfolded. Someone asked what's a good band to play on a Monday night at the Araz opening [DETAILS], and I said my band. My brother had just moved to New York and that's how we started [THE LOUNGE LIZARDS??].

AH: What's your best instrument?

JL: Saxophone. But I can't play any more because of my neurological stuff.

AH: You were a prodigy as a saxophone player, yes?

JL: No, I was a prodigy as a harmonica player. My sister bought my brother a harmonica when I was fifteen and I absconded it. Within six months I was playing with John Lee Hooker. I got really good on it really fast.

AH: You mentioned the neurological situation, so let's just talk about that for a second. You're suffering from a very bizarre ailment, which we think is Lyme disease.

JL: Pretty sure, yeah. But you start to going to neurologists and you realize no one really has a handle on what any of these neurological problems are.

AH: Has this had a significant effect on your production as an artist? Does it reduce the amount of time you can work?

JL: Actually, because I'm stuck in the house I'm probably working more. All the work on view was done in the last year and a half. I get these jolts of energy and I jump up and I'll have eight paintings. So I'm in a monastery in a sense.

AH: So in that case there has actually been a focusing, there's actually a restricting.

JL: Yeah, I was locked in. I could go out, but it was so uncomfortable for me. You have to imagine that you have taken too much LSD and there are people following you around scraping their fingernails on a blackboard. I didn't know what was going on, and doctors were telling me I had a year to live. So I started to writing my memoirs, and I was writing them in hurry. When I stalled, somebody bought me a bunch of art supplies and I couldn't stop painting. Mostly I work in the middle of the night, from midnight until seven in the morning. I was the only thing to do beside watch *Law & Order* reruns.

AH: We pretty much have the same schedule. You're up watching *Law & Order*, and I'm up watching the *Housewives of Orange County*. Recently I also re-watched on video the magical series that you did, *Fishing with John*. During the opening credits, there's some footage of a figure dancing on some sort of pontoon. You see only the back of the figure, but I realized after watching many times that it's you waving your arms around.

JL: I'll tell you the whole thing. Kazu Makino from that band Blonde Redhead and I, we were on vacation with James Nares and Glenn O'Brien in St. Barth's. I had just finished recording *Voice of Chunk*, so I was the happiest I'd been in a long time. I had bought Kazu this very nice summer dress. One morning I woke James up at six o'clock. I had caught two fish the day before that were stiff as a board in the refrigerator. I went on the edge of the pool and I made James film me as I danced with the fish.

AH: And you're wearing her dress?

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JL: I'm wearing her dress.

AH: Yes, you're so tall and with those really long legs, it's just like some magical creature coming down from another world. You're dancing there is so beautiful.

JL: Thanks!

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Kalup Linzy- Shades in Black & White

By Whitfield Lovell

Kalup Linzy has the soul of a true Southern country boy. Pure and unassuming, yet sharp and wise like the "old souls" of the "ole" Black South. He is an observer with a big heart and a hearty laugh. Carrying himself with quiet dignity, he only speaks when necessary. Yet he is also quick to snap at people when they get out of line.

He was reared in Stuckey, a small rural town in Central Florida. It was a community where mostly everyone was related. Distant and not so distant cousins, aunts, uncles, lived in wooden houses and trailers that were usually 20 yards apart. As a child he could run from one house to another where the same daytime soap operas played in each home. "When we were kids we would run in and out of people's houses to get some water and cool off from playing, and everyone watched CBS so we could find out what was happening on "The Guiding Light," and then catch up at the next house down the road."

It's no surprise that the earliest influences that Kalup Linzy had, the daytime soap operas, would become such fertile material for him to draw upon. The way that soap operas jump from house to house and family to family within loosely defined communities, allows us to observe the major and minor characters and their predicaments. In many ways Linzy had observed his cousins, his elders, his aunts and uncles, the people who inhabited his world, as they were the major players of his universe, steeped in a rich culture and immersed in their own major and minor predicaments.

His videos and performances are structured like "soaps," Spanish language "novelas," and 1950's Hollywood "tearjerkers." He lampoons and satirizes the various forms of dramatic imitations of life that many of us find so intoxicating. He deals with highly charged themes such as gender, sexuality, race, class, and popular culture. His takes on these issues are eloquently fused into his delightfully raunchy 'video/novelas,' such as "Conversations Wit De Churen," "All My Churen," and "The Young and the Mess." Multi-tasking as a writer, director, actor, and editor, his approach recalls the early styles of John Waters, Andy Warhol, and George C. Wolfe.

Kalup Linzy's work was actually more directly influenced by the African "video films" of Nigeria that he studied in graduate school at University of South Florida in Tampa. Directors such as Ken Oghenejabor, Kenneth Nnebue and Teco Benson created entertaining and commercially successful serials that dealt mostly with, and were watched by members of local villages. They usually ended them with a "cliff-hanger" so that the audience would return six months later when the next episode was finished. This is exactly what Linzy does with his episodes. He teases the viewer (in the slyest of ways) and makes them hungry for the follow-up.

I find his work to be so FUNNY! After a long stressful day I need only turn on one of his videos and I invariably laugh hysterically. I am so amused by the bawdy, over the top, vulgar language, and the absurdly crude, yet familiar ways some of the characters relate to one another. But also there is the disquieting way that trouble, conflict, turmoil, deep pain and even tragedy can seem humorous in such a genre.

In 'Julietta Calls Ramone,' the tragedy of Julietta's lover's murder (at the hands of his girlfriend) leads Julietta to call her boyfriend Ramone and end her relationship with him. "Our love has died. Ramone and Julietta are dead... Yes we is... We might not be physically dead, but on a spiritual level, it's gone..." She whines and moans and weeps and groans continuously, until Ramone is finally convinced. Meanwhile the audience is usually rolling in the aisle. Kalup has said, "In retrospect a lot of things that are sad or even tragic often can seem quite humorous. It's ironic how easily we can laugh at things that really aren't funny." It is among the best of Kalup



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Linzy's pieces from the "Black & White" series. Using multi-layered characters and subplots that weave through the works, he constructs powerful critiques of the laws of romance and desire, family and trust, truth and hypocrisy. He manages to go for the jugular with uproarious humor, while at the same time his keen sense of truth is unwaveringly present. We the viewers are forced to confront the ways we deal with our own yearnings and acknowledge the absurdity and the urgency of our own predicaments and the dirty little secrets that everyone knows.

Whitfield Lovell, visual artist

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WPS1.org Art Radio is the Internet radio station of P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center providing a 24-hour stream and on-demand archive of cultural programming. The station operates out of the historic Clocktower Building in lower Manhattan where a network of interlinked studios stream live and pre-recorded talk, performances and historic recordings to a world wide audience.

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Thought Crimes

By Lisi Raskin

Some of the most transgressive ideas in literature have their origin in the intimate thoughts of invented characters. In his novel 1984, George Orwell coined the term “thought crime” as a metaphor for the invention, fantasy and contemplation that removes its protagonist Winston Smith from a harsh, impoverished routine. A low-level functionary in a terror-based dictatorship that suppresses individual thought, continuously generates propaganda, and constantly revises the events of the present and past, Winston cannot help himself from noticing the inconsistencies and absurdities all around him, so the “thought crime” is inevitable. As a result, he lives with the chronic fear of being discovered as a thought criminal. The reader has full access to Winston’s deepest moral dilemmas and paranoia, a cycle that begins with his doubts about the party (a thought crime), continues as he keeps a journal (proof of on-going thought crimes), and culminates when he conspires to aid the underground effort against Big Brother (high treason).

Even though the thoughts and actions that Winston commits are only subversive within the harshly restrictive reality of a fictionalized fascist dictatorship, it is the spirit of subversion that elicits empathy on the part of the reader. Through this empathy, the reader becomes a witness of and in some cases an accomplice to the “thought crime”. For the reader, who must somehow straddle the world of the novel and the subsequent impact it makes on their imagination, transgressive thoughts create a partition, a line in the sand of reality, one that may be crossed at any moment, or gazed at for all time. The libidinal function of transgressive behavior and subversive desire was the foundation for French novelist Jean Genet’s preoccupation with the homoerotic. In Genet’s

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fantasies criminals, who are amoral by definition, usually enact homosexual tendencies. George Bataille calls the moment in which one deliberately loses themselves *eroticism*. It is this moment, the moment of the "thought crime" that interests me. In order to understand the elastic nature of the "thought crime", I will contextualize its mechanics within the imagination of the reader of a book and the passenger on the subway, charting its progress through the space and time of literature and transit.

When notions of *eroticism* and meditations on committing "thought crimes" are made manifest outside of the narrative structure of literature but are still contained within the realm of the readerly imagination, an expansion of the reader's consciousness occurs. In these situations, it is possible for the reader to become the actual protagonist of an imagined meta-narrative, and by association, the physical world, with its lush nuance, becomes the backdrop of this meta-narrative. This series of moments is loosely choreographed as follows: the reader disassociates from the book in front of them, they shift their focus to the interior world of their own imagination, and use the real world as a narrative place, a cohesive place from which they can create imagined scenarios. Bachelard calls this *suspended reading*, an oneiric state that occurs once the writer has seduced the reader's eyes off the page.

The New York City subway creates an exceptional environment for such seduction. Just as in the experience of *suspended reading*, riding the subway lacks any fixed point of spatial, temporal, or psychological orientation. Rather, the experience of the subway is firmly rooted in the unconscious; a limitless part of the mind containing memories, thoughts, feelings, and ideas that a person is not generally aware of but that manifest themselves in dreams and associated acts. Stimulus perceived on the subway can take on bizarre meanings that amplify the experience of panic, paranoia, hallucination, and euphoria. For example, the

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presence of a police officer can exacerbate feelings of safety, danger, suspicion, or reassurance, depending on one's relationship to authority. The same is true for the loudspeaker announcements that remind subway riders about the fact that their bags may be searched at any time.

The MTA's recent expansion of security measures recall Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* which when used in prisons created a dual consciousness among inmates: aware that they were potentially being watched from a central observation point, they became party to policing their own behavior. This dual consciousness is a very important component of the way *Suspended Reading* occurs on the subway. On the subway, a visible apparatus of video cameras and television banks record and play back meaningless hours of activity. This loop of constant surveillance (that may or may not be monitored) helps build the ethos of the subway environment into a tentative place with haphazard fixtures that is provisional, transitional, and observed. These elements and their connotations also form and dictate the type of expansion of consciousness that may occur in this subterranean non-site.

The mechanics of this expansion of consciousness first occurred to me on the subway in New York while I was reading Crepuscular Dawn, (2003) a book of interviews of Paul Virilio conducted by Sylvere Lotringer. In one passage, Virilio recalled a story about the ventilation fans that ceased functioning when electricity was lost during the bombardments of WWII. According to Virilio, this oversight caused French civilians to die on top of one another "...as in the subway." My blurred eyes left the page, as my daydream fog bridged the gap between Virilio's historical space and my actual space. Within my imagination, the subway became analogous to the bunker, crystallizing the fact that ontologically speaking, there is nothing in New York more similar to a bunker than a subway tunnel.



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I was, in essence, committing a "thought crime" because I was thinking about violence in a public space. I was contemplating the death of the people around me. My consciousness was split somewhere between occupying the oneiric position of my imagination, periodically reconnecting with the frank, black humor of Virilio and Lotringer's conversation, and then breaking with these places all together in order to moralize my own imagination. Within my own imaginary, this activity reshaped the form of the "thought crime", bringing it outside of the frame of the novel and into real and imagined time. My imagination became the site of the neurotic loop that had previously existed within the actions and thoughts of the fictional characters described in the earlier part of this essay.

Poignantly, this slippage of subject position became even more powerful and morally loaded when I looked up from Crepuscular Dawn and saw an anti-terrorist advertising campaign in the form of posters that read "If You See Something, Say Something." Immediately and again, I was along side of Winston Smith and for a moment the spatial, temporal, and psychological construct of the subway literally became the novel 1984. My head was swimming with Orwell's own slogans "WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH."

The very utterance of "If You See Something, Say Something" is powerful bait for the thought criminal not only because it mimics the Orwellian language of 1984, but also because it presents specific guidelines for both "good" citizenship (i.e., compliance) and "bad" citizenship (disobedience). It just so happens that the activity of "thought crime," though, is impossible for the video cameras and undercover police officers to detect, at least in our reality.

It is indisputable that catching the imagination in the act of committing a "thought crime" is compelling. Taking my cues from the literary models of Orwell, Genet, and the physical signs of the subway environment itself helped me to

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internalize the act of self-policing. It is this element of self-policing that makes the act of reading and contemplating the slogan "If You See Something. Say Something" while on the Subway incredibly titillating. Within this framework, the slogan itself becomes a moral bomb. It is possible to arrive at Bataille's notion of *eroticism* by talking emphatically about this experience. The act of talking about architecture, technology, and imagined explosions within a moving vehicle full of people is an activity that contains more promise of transgression than an actual act of violence because it functions according to the logic of a fantasy. The most important part of this type of imagination is that it lays the groundwork for other ideas to come into play, like empathy and critical discourse and a broadening of the subjective space of creativity.

Since 9/11, the slogan "If You See Something, Say Something" has become ubiquitous. In this climate, suggestion and suspicion become a function of outer life as personified by the State. But inner life, the life of the imagination becomes a mirror, a slippage in real time that provokes every person on a given subway car or platform to simultaneously become a thought criminal and thought policeman.

It is here that the conditions that created the character of Winston Smith become apparent. I have never been in such proximity to the intentions of Orwell as he sought to posit the mechanics of transgression and human desire within the consciousness of the reader. In the subway, a normal, law-abiding citizen can press their groin against whatever the furtive and unpredictable imagination can conjure up while suspended in the depths of the unconsciousness.