WASTELANDS, REVOLUTIONS, FAILURES

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WASTELAND (A POSITIONING)

My intent is to recognize the places we do not talk about, the places seriously forbidden so we may continue to live. An urge to intimately acquaint myself with sick earth, vomiting all over itself. To be horribly intertwined with the elsewhere, the waste pile I need to forget. To bring back to here what exists there, what I put there, what I leave there. My intent is to reveal the absence, the impossibility of boundaries, by falling repeatedly into my seepage. I return to the zoned-off areas of waste and the burdened bodies inhabiting these areas: abandoned mines, toxic piles of chat, nuclear weapons stockpile, man-made beach of bones, excavated fenced-off factory. It is here, without articulation, with sudden bodily experience, that I am an impossible subject recognizing my power. Existing in “a space polarized by norms,” it is the wasteland (the left-over) where I seem to escape the prevailing order (Tiqqun, 129). Even
further, I leave behind that which constitutes myself everywhere else away from this no-where. Empire, the totality of all apparatuses, is the force that attempts to create the homogenous self. Empire, founded on the splitting of all into binaries, is managing the crisis of being founded on this impossible subjectivity. Inside, I find more other than self. In confronting waste, the borders Empire depends on to contain me, to keep me on my knees in exchange for protection, are no longer there. There is no mark, no trace. I was hallucinating the existence of any border between my self and the world.

If I can hold myself in for one moment before fainting, the devastation within me is finally released into the devastation of the wasteland. The coming-together of sickness and the signifiers of death I am urged to surround myself with present “an end as well as a beginning” (End/Origin). I can embody the possibility for an-other order.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva tells me of the desire to confront this absence, to rub up against “the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be” (3). In her project, Kristeva introduces the concept of the abject, characterized as the space between ‘I’ and ‘not I’ or that which threatens the coherence of ‘I.’ Abject substances are identified as dirt, urine, menstrual blood, saliva, and that which points to the contingency of the human subject. The abject exists in the margins; that which cannot be seen on either side of the binary division. Our culture is divided into these binaries: natural/unnatural, clean/dirty, tame/wild, etc. Yet we know of more. An operation of the psyche, excluding margins wards off the threat on one’s own borders in order to constitute singular and group subjectivities.
It’s this realization that causes me to linger in the highway rest stop bathroom. Human waste, without industrial pollutants, is already taboo and confusing, as my excrement is at once me and necessarily removed from me, a startling reminder of my shaking boundaries. So I am startled “at the border of my condition as a living being”; I am in awe, I am nauseous (Kristeva, 3).

It is not a good survivalist practice to remain at the site of disposal, a post-shit hangout around my hole or the hole where part of me is flushed, seemingly forever, to a place I will never confront. When I stay, for no other reason and with no productive task, I am left to consider my loss and the strangeness of these places of loss. I temporarily inhabit the waste disposal system, a “non place,” where I see myself in the mirror and in the dirt under my fingernails.

Non places are theorized by Marc Augé as spaces that “cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (77). Augé asserts these spaces are prolifically created by “supermodernity,” the epoch we are living, where systematic emptying of the consciousness subjects individuals to unprecedented solitude.

Symptomatic of the intense fusion of technology and biology in a world of solitary individuality, a world capitulated to the temporary and ephemeral, these never fully completed spaces are like palimpsests. Examples include spaces of transit and travel, leisure spaces, and refugee camps.

In his book, Wasted Lives, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman confronts the “fullness” of earth, not in physical or human geography, but the tumorous swelling of “lands viewed as uninhabitable and incapable of supporting human life” (4).
Technological progress gives us “new means of survival,” such as the rest stop toilet, however simultaneously renders previous sustainability impossible. Economic progress breeds redundancy through the degradation of flourishing forms of life by constantly re-defining what pre-supposes the ability to “make a living,” a degradation leading to expulsion to the wastelands. Unemployable bodies herded to otherwise unusable land. These waste-bodies, “wasted humans” as Bauman writes, are “the ‘excessive’ and ‘redundant,’ that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized and an inseparable accompaniment or allowed to stay” (5). The ejecting of waste-bodies is inherent to maintaining an order. Economic progress, profit, a governing mode of life in the existing order, continues on much like I do when I leave my shit-hole instead of lingering. Economic progress has a desire for safe “disposal,” where waste is realized as “the midwife of all creation- and its most formidable obstacle” (22). The systematic expulsion of trash (bodies) is a vital part of Empire. An inharmonious relationship with Empire leads to an extinguishing and the deterritorialization of subversive bodies. This is political warfare, a taking-care-of otherness, through the blockade of life forces that are subversive for being visibly disposable within Empire. This is the “silent dying, dropping off of a minority population who wishes to elaborate life, experience, human-ness, in a culture that just isn’t interested” (End/Origin).

Pollutants from waste zones that we cannot fully dissociate from, the opposition of clean/dirty, and the complications presented by instances of environmental injustice cause us to question the boundaries of our own bodies. As we
begin to consume our industrial waste, the waste of modernity, flowing uncontrolled in the air and seeping into our water, the fallacy of boundaries is exposed in dangerous, terrifying ways. When I confront refuse, I am shown what I am not supposed to see, “what I permanently thrust aside in order to live” (Kristeva, 3). Waste, “the embodiment of ambivalence,” is necessary to formulate my self (Bauman, 22). Socially, the designated wasteland is necessary to create borders to live by in order to fend off anxieties.

Along with anxiety inherent to the construction of the self, Empire exists through crisis management; systems of control grow and harden in making a case for the need to protect our borders from the threat of otherness. Gregory Nava’s 1983 film El Norte portrays the status of borders and those bodies oscillating at state controlled borderlands. El Norte conceptualizes the refugee experience by linking the viewer viscerally and continuously to the bodies of Rosa and Enrique Xuncax, transnational subjects forced to transform their identities incessantly throughout time and space. Alienhood is defined by Katarzyna Marciniak as “a highly racialized rhetorical and disciplinary apparatus that classifies immigrants, refugees, and border crossers in relation to U.S. territory,” and as a “palimpsestic signification in American culture – meaning both foreigner and extraterrestrial creature” (Marciniak, xiii). This linkage along with encounters with other liminal subjects and spaces brings forth the multiplicity of those in ontological transit and various states of precarious identities. In the introduction to her book, Alienhood: Citizenship, Exile, and the Logic of Difference, Marciniak introduces the term “quivering ontologies,” which brings forth
“the intricacy – and the intimacy – of cultural mechanisms that put the exile on a precariously wavering border between being and not being a valid, culturally sanctioned subject” (Marcinak, 27).

*El Norte* carries a constantly shifting setting, opening with a breathtaking representation of otherness, vast indigenous land. Our introduction to the characters presents beautiful exoticism, wild dwellers clad with colorful traditional clothes. The idyllic mise-en-scène is quickly demystified, as anti-state resistance becomes apparent, transforming once pleasurable bodies into those who must be expelled from the system. The bloody assassination of men organizing resistance functions as a visual indication of a rupture of identity for Enrique and Rosa.

The American borderlands, such as Tijuana, materialize as prison cities where nothing is owned and everything stolen, holding piles of rejected bodies. These prominent wastelands remind us “when all places and positions feel shaky and are deemed no longer reliable, the sight of immigrants rubs salt into the wound” (Bauman, 56). As Bauman conceptualizes and Marcinak elaborates, the “compulsory confinement” that renders any escape impossible manifests in a placeless place, “marked by the quivering that suggests that an exile does not have a stable relationship to the new national space” (Marcinak, 33). The literal multiplicity of those inhabiting, crossing over, and returning to the slums of Tijuana is an inescapable occurrence. This ultimately refutes the racist xenophobic American position towards immigration; there is no homogenous enemy of American life. The re-ordering which produces prison-
cities as a faction of America’s state apparatus also produces the false notion of the homogenous “immigrant.”

The core threat of Enrique and Rosa’s lives, an ominous, omnipresent, hard to place controlling apparatus, only becomes more apparent as we are dragged though jarring confrontations with various visual cues – a severed head, abject poverty, toxic tunnels, L.A. squalor, immigration raids, death. We see in the film’s waste-bodies the product of controlling apparatuses. The jarring encounter with otherness unveils the presence of this system and its effects in all areas of life. When symbolic distinction is broken, we can no longer rely on a binary positioning of self/other. A homogenous immigrant subject simply does not hold.

The power of Empire is maintained through defining and then controlling its subjects. Therefore, this power faces a grave threat from beings that cannot be individualized into one clearly delineated and described mode of being. *Tiqqun*, an anonymously published and collectively written journal of political philosophy from France in the early 2000s, describes apparatuses to function by making this definition possible through the establishing of a norm, whether that be a certain way a person should act, look, feel, speak, or inhabit space. Apparatuses define people but also places, institutions, ideas, and everything that affects the flows of desire and capital. These norms set up a binary system in which those who are willing and able to inhabit the norm, thus being clearly monitored and defined by Empire, are allowed to survive; though this is only possible by inhabiting the stifled, controlled areas and channels allowed by Empire. There is an understanding in Empire that the other side of this
binary is a particular creation of otherness. Through the ordering power of the apparatus, the unwilling and unable become a homogenous figure: THE immigrant, THE criminal, THE slut, THE rebel…

We know apparatuses function on every level of society yet we cannot see them, document them or understand them without confrontation. “The established apparatus configures space such that the configuration itself remains in the background, as a pure given. From this it follows that what the apparatus brings into existence doesn’t appear as having been made by it” (Tiqqun, 183).

Why don’t I simply take what I need? I’m not sure I am able, each moment, to leave the norm – to be sent, thrashing to the other side. I desire neither the status of customer nor thief. Something untouchable, invisible is telling me silently that is all there is.

Of use to us in understanding the function of this invisible control are areas that have been subject to devastating environmental injustices such as post-extraction landscapes and other uncontrolled, abandoned, and hazardous sites. These can be traced or mapped to understand the function of apparatuses on forms of life.

Policymaking and resistance are reliant on discourse; therefore the structure and terms that are weaved throughout discourse are vital to understanding exactly who is silenced in this discourse. In A Thousand Plateaus, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri introduce order-words as “the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions…” (79). Language is a location of power; the homogenization of language is used as a system of exclusion, rendering policymaking and law inaccessible for many of the bodies it claims to protect. It inherently fosters obedience,
and stratifies bodies according to their place and validity in discourse. The establishment of linguistic constants controls in the most tangible sense the situation of space and the bodies within spaces.

In her article “From Wasteland to Waste Site: The Role of Discourse in Nuclear Power’s Environmental Injustices,” Danielle Endres analyzes the “naming practices, rhetorical exclusion, shifting the burden of proof, and strategic silence” by the federal government. The use of terms such as “wasteland” is a clear example of the capability of order-words to perpetuate instances of environmental injustice (Endres, 925). The perception of an area as a wasteland, preceded by its verbal designation as wasteland, becomes devastating, as the “setting of boundary and also the repeated inculcation of a norm” becomes the ruling understanding by the public and policymakers (Endres, 926).

Endres discusses Michel Foucault’s discursive formations, which are statements appearing across discourse that have order, making regularity and order or understanding of themes and concepts possible (924). Endres makes the case against these areas as lifeless and uninhabitable, asserting that the label itself has interpolated the sites becoming what they are. Further, these sites become areas of justifiable environmental disregard because of these labels (Endres, 930).

In his book, Culture and Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols are Connected, Edmund Leach writes, “a sign or symbol only acquires meaning when it is discriminated from some other contrary sign or symbol” (49). When approaching the construct of the natural world it is crucial to consider the symbolic ordering of verbal
categories we employ to describe it, as well as how we situate our flesh within it. Leach brings into question the binary of Culture/Nature, “where culture may be defined as ‘the way of life which we humans experience in our society’ and Nature is everything else” (72).

This binary linguistic system extends to other order-word pairs, such as wild/domesticated and natural/industrialized. These pairs are prime examples of Foucault’s discursive formations, in their use in specific linguistic arenas to communicate a particular, invariable type of space or spatial experience. Then through their use in wider arenas to describe that type of space, a word such as “nature” or “natural” becomes hardened, constant. On either side of the binary, the actualized experience of the world is dictated by the naming of spaces through these linguistic constants. Not only is the material existence of spaces near and far subject to this dictation, but also the relationship of my own body to these spaces. The importance placed on the hardening of language in Empire’s ever more separated circles of control exposes the intense anxieties over the inability to maintain the borders between spaces as actual and concrete. Just as the inability to distinguish the self and the other shocks the individual subject into a psychological crisis, Empire’s inability to secure the borders of the spaces that make up its body likewise triggers the necessity for the violent construction of ever harder, ever more isolating boundaries.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari contrast the linguistic constant to the “tensor,” an expression that “causes language to tend toward the limit of its elements, forms, or notions, toward a near side or a beyond of language” (99). The
tensor links words and phrases together, placing connections and bridges where the constant erects boundaries or walls. The simplest tensor is the word “and,” in that it is never a separation, only a chaining together, a combining of two meanings into a new and malleable signification. The linguistic constants developed by discursive formations function exactly to block this process. Notice the impossibility of saying a space is both wild and domestic, culture and nature, and the latent threat this statement carries within itself. The metaphoric distinctions in each word making up the binary are revealed as non-existent when the tensor “and” is inserted into a space. This can be seen clearly in instances of environmental injustice, as wastelands are necessary to industrial capitalism yet simultaneously destructive to life and therein must be rendered invisible. When a space is both a dumpsite (designated wasteland) and a home (what we maintain as inside and pure), inhabitants of this space are forced into exile, to leave a home in the instance of a corporate buy-out, to succumb to economic pressures. Perhaps those thrust into exile chose to leave instead of facing continued biological harm and are in turn stripped of place. These boundaries we cling to, not truly the solid markers we wish them to be, subject designated wastelands and their inhabitants to an ambiguous, abject existence.

Again, I shake. I am producing a lot of saliva, nauseous within the crisis of subjectivity as I confront the wastage oozing from my life experience. Acid mine drainage, by-product of coal extraction, is made visible by bad ground, toxic, awe-inspiring, hypnotizing seepage of magical metallic dirt. I spit on the seepage. I spit on myself. I spit outside the mine. I spit out the mine. This cannot stay inside me, I cannot
keep it out. Beside myself, in this confrontation at the waste-site, I realize I cannot separate my self while so close. So close to “the place which permits me to be” (Kristeva, 3).

The inhabitants of the areas of ambiguity, non places, the other side, are the wasted bodies that are ripped of all possible spaces of discourse to remediate the situation within which they are left to live or realistically, die. Lacking qualifications or expertise, the bodies with lived-experience for whom life is at stake are shut out, due to exclusionary systems and silencing tactics. *Tiqqun* explains:

The fact is nothing, the *how* is all. The proof is that facts must be *qualified* beforehand, in order to be facts. Spectacle’s genius is to have acquired a monopoly over qualifications, over the *act of naming*. With this in hand, it can then smuggle in its metaphysics and pass off the products of its fraudulent interpretations as facts. Some acts of social war gets called a “terrorist act,” while a major intervention by NATO, initiated through the most arbitrary process, is deemed a “peacekeeping operation.” Mass poisonings are described as epidemics, while the “High-Security Wing” is the technical term used in our democracies’ prisons for the legal practice of torture (82).

This quote from *Introduction to Civil War* is a mapping out of the disgusting reality of linguistic norms. Not a rare occurrence, of further use is tracing what is done in the face of structural inequality.

The Clean Air and Water Network, discussed in Karen Hoffman’s essay “Science-Based Legal Advocacy to Community Organizing,” was born, as many similar efforts, out of the need to monitor the regulatory system of the Environmental Protection Agency. This is due to failures of the EPA and associated agencies at the state and regional levels. The Clean Air and Water Network was integral in forming the Environmental Justice movement and its emphasis on the need to work toward
justice outside of “science based advocacy,” by “identifying local instances of undone or weak regulation” (Hoffman, 44). The organization empowered residents to take action against environmental injustice through community organizing, in comparison to previous organizations, which hired experts to do this work for the community (Hoffman, 55). This new practice was designed to change a “structural inequality in our society;” by challenging the political arena which systematically shuts out voices without “expertise” (Hoffman, 46).

Expertise, an order-word in itself, stratifies all bodies in any situation into their designated categories. The expertise described by Hoffman is the ability to analyze and utilize discursive formations in order to navigate the political arena. This places the expert within the hard boundaries erected by linguistic constants within a specific socio-political arena. The policy-maker thus agrees to remain within the boundaries mandated by the logic contained within their field, refusing the possibility of constructing new complex connections or combinations between linguistic territories. This designation of expertise works as a two-fold limitation. In one direction, the expert is given the right to speak, make decisions, and is trusted with the ability to create meaning in exchange for their agreement to produce output that does not threaten the specific boundaries erected around them. Likewise, those who do threaten to cross, combine or throw these boundaries into an uncanny oscillation have their rights ripped away from them, or simply never extended to them at all.

Necessary in understanding this dynamic is mapping which bodies occupy which side of these binaries and what happens when these borders are crossed. A map
of the Environmental Justice movement distinguishes between the policy-makers and the bodies surfacing as excess deaths as a result of apparatuses defending the hardened borders.

Stephan J. Scanlan’s *The Theoretical Roots and Sociology of Environmental Justice in Appalachia* outlines the Environmental Justice movement and marks the shift from an “ecocentric” movement to a more “anthropocentric” cause as the concerns for human well-being are highlighted (4). Scanlan demystifies notions of Appalachia as it is romantically prized for its “ruggedness and isolation,” and highlights its place in modernity and its transformation in the face of industrialization (3). Simultaneous to unequal distribution of environmental hazards is an overwhelming and devastating lack of institutional power and influence (Scanlan, 5).

Scanlan outlines policy making in response to understood occurrences of racial inequality by government agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, highlighting specifically the urgency of having affected people participate in the early decision making process, such as the decision of how a community’s energy is sourced as opposed to the late decision of how to remediate the harmful effects of a coal plant that was constructed without community input. This is specifically important for disenfranchised groups who are often left to react to irreversible situations. His writing on mountaintop removal in Appalachia is particularly clear in relation to capitalist exploitation of inhabitants in certain areas. The notion of “poverty amidst plenty” in Appalachia is “typical,” brought on by capitalist endeavors in a region teeming with natural resources and potential for life (Scanlan, 9). Aware of the
capitalist system exploiting resources and labor, simultaneous forms of “economic blackmail” and “internal colonialism” put bodies occupying these areas in a desperate position, unable to form opposition in the face of economic turmoil (Scanlan, 10,12).

It has been explicitly found that “communities of color face a disproportionate exposure to environmental health risks” (Callewaert, 257). In Robert D. Bullard’s article, “Overcoming Racism in Environmental Decision Making,” a thorough outline of institutional environmental injustice describes agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency as having blatantly “traded human health for profit” with minority communities repeatedly taking on the burden of externalized costs (644).

Robert Cox’s book, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, includes a section titled “Dismissing the ‘Indecorous’ Voice,” where he explains the backlash brought upon by public displays of protest. The concept of “indecorous voices” is framed as the institutional barriers set up between marginalized communities while voicing opposition at the state and federal level. Dismissal of these accounts suggests a “violation [of] a norm or appropriateness in speaking with government officials” (Cox, 256). This comes from the notion that “emotional” or close, lived accounts of injustice are not valid in public discourse. Tainted with pre-existing notions of the “aroused and possibly ignorant public,” governmental agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency are alienating to such community members because of the inaccessibility in technical forums, hindering abilities for direct participation (Cox, 257).
The voices of communities of color and voices of those holding lower socio-economic status are voices from bodies most affected by environmental injustices. The most marginalized, these “expertise-have-nots” are shut out of decision making in their own communities, and are therefore the most easily exploited. Hoffman asserts in her notes there is rarely a link between having expertise and our “capacity to acquire these forms of expertise” (Hoffman, 46). The community organizing strategy of The Air and Water Network works to undo the imbalanced structure of decision-making. Hoffman cites specific examples of disparity in language, as in legal hearings on pollutant permit limits, where the language used was “nearly incomprehensible to anyone but highly experienced practitioners” (50). The Network worked to acquire expertise useful in advocating in the regulatory arena, however, what the process could yield was limited due to constraints in data, time, resources, and the network’s ability to rectify internally the very problem they sought to confront. A disconnect surfaced between the network’s experts and community organizers. The work of the hired scientists always took priority over the newly engaged community organizing strategy. Hoffman makes an important point of this being “evidence that the work of scientists has a privileged status, even among people who wish to disrupt the inequalities between expertise-haves and expertise-have-nots” (58). Deeply rooted assumptions reign pervasive, displaying the need for a strong resistance.

The necessary resistance entails one being aware of these deeply rooted assumptions, awareness that these assumptions continue through the constructed linguistic apparatuses which order the battlefield into binaries including science/non-
science, knowledge/ignorance, expertise/expertise-have-nots, and objective/emotional.

As Hoffman points to in the privileged status of the scientist, there is a qualitative
difference between scientist and community members. Hoffman is reporting a failure
to erase this boundary.

It is the bodies that occupy the margins, margins such as the sacrificed zones of Appalachia, who are most exploited and systematically oppressed. The danger and power within liminal spaces is theorized by Mary Douglas in her book Purity and Danger: An analysis of pollution and taboo. Douglas writes, “the articulate, conscious points in the social structure are armed with articulate, conscious powers to protect the system; the inarticulate, unstructured areas emanate unconscious powers which provoke others to demand that ambiguity be reduced” (5). It is because of this marginal power that voices of the people are systematically shut out in contrast of those with “expertise” and further, first hand, lived experiences are deemed invalid due to their subversive power. Those outside the established social order, on the bottom of the hierarchy of capitalism in contemporary industrial society, are left with the burden of externalized costs. Any public outcry, collective or individual, becomes the “source of confusion and ambiguity,” in contrast to the current norm (Douglas, 8).

For example the protection of corporations ruling the energy market by gutting the earth of coal through environmentally and socially devastating practices such as mountain top removal. The shocking noise of protest, which we know to be profane, confronts our boundaries, makes us nauseous and concerned, and therefore takes on guilt.
Pollution is theorized by Douglas to have great power, as it transgresses the falsified boundaries with ease, even sometimes without looking back. A body that voices dissent, perhaps as an environmental watchdog, releases noise that calls attention to the leftover spaces. The one who calls upon others to look over the fence to the sites we need to forget in order to continue sustaining ourselves within capitalism, this body is recognized as a polluting person. Douglas writes, “a polluting person is always in the wrong” (11). The polluting person following transgression, or perhaps born polluted, is thrust into the margins.

Edmund Leach writes on the power in the seepage, presenting this paradox:
“(i) I can only be completely sure of what I am if I cleanse myself of all boundary dirt, but (ii) a completely clean ‘I’ with no boundary dirt would have no interface with the outside world or with other individuals” (62). Here, in understanding the oppositions, Clean/dirty = impotence/potency, a crucial point is made – that “power is located in dirt” (Leach, 62). Power is invested in those residing in dirt, eating the dirt, and confronting the impossibility of cleansing themselves of that dirt within Empire, within the current systems that perpetuate environmental injustices.

Filmmaker Sarah Kanouse’s essayistic documentary, Around Crab Orchard (2012), returns to the waste-site and questions the boundaries of an area constructed by the state apparatus. A fragmented array of precarious still and moving images, the film emphasizes the fabrication of boundaries around this specific site, with the odd position of being forbidden to film within that site. Kanouse engages her body to trace
According to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) webpage, Congress established Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in 1947 “with a mission to support wildlife, recreation, agriculture, and industry” (my emphasis). In addition to being a place for wildlife observation, hunting, and fishing, portions of the Refuge have been leased by the Department of Defense for the manufacture of munitions beginning in World War II. The unspoiled and the spoilage become one, as “prior to modern environmental laws, it was common practice for industrial facilities, including those on the Refuge, to use unlined landfills and dumps to dispose of the waste generated by their operations” (my emphasis). Contaminates include chromium, lead, arsenic, cadmium, PCBs, trichloroethene, and other chlorinated organic compounds. What are the operations of a refuge/landfill? With the tensor inserted, refuge and landfill, Crab Orchard is an impossible place, however designated by the USFWS and maintained by the EPA.

The film’s composition includes interviews with various community members, activists, and geologists. In a voiceover, Kanouse explains, “most people I asked to interview for this film hesitated then refused. They said they didn’t know enough, that they lacked documentation, that they couldn’t provide proof.” Many of the recorded segments of interviews function as a sort of grappling with information or lack thereof. The logic laid out in front of us is not the clear map that the Fish and Wildlife Service prints and distributes. Depleted uranium, a nuclear waste product of particular
concern for those living nearby the Refuge, is confirmed to be entering and leaving Crab Orchard. The unknown is a confirmed reason for the circulation of this material and the extent of groundwater and soil contamination. Kanouse’s interviewees struggle to find information, or even official acknowledgement of the lack of information. Diana Tigerlilly, a writer in southern Illinois, describes a community meeting in which she asked a panel of “experts” (representatives of government agencies and the manufacturers using Crab Orchard) about testing in the refuge for depleted uranium contamination. Tigerlilly recounts that as soon as she mentioned depleted uranium, she was “surrounded by five men in suits, all stumbling over themselves to reassure me that there is no depleted uranium.” The representatives from both the EPA and the Fish & Wildlife Service stated that no testing had been done, except “limited testing” in one area of the refuge, but that the uranium was not a “typical contaminant” and thus is “not a concern”. The representative from Primex, a weapons manufacturer known to be one of three U.S. companies which manufacture armor piercing rounds containing depleted uranium, claims that “The only depleted uranium that comes through crab orchard is shipped in whole and shipped out whole, and so there is no risk of contamination or waste,” ignoring both the obvious question of why the uranium enters the refuge at all, and the alternate testimony of Mark Donham, another interviewee. He states that the Primex facility was at one point the “highest generator of low level radioactive waste in the state” due to the use of sand for testing the munitions containing the uranium.
All interviews in the film point to an upheld constant – expertise. At once surrounded by men wearing suits, Tigerlilly never describes why these men are experts in terms of qualification, rather only states that they are designated experts by the organizations that they “represent.” Expertise is inherent in government and business. Kanouse avoids designating her interviewees during the film up until the last sequence, where we read names and titles written in lowercase over video of the people from whom the viewer has gained the most insight. The titles are written in lowercase letters and are related to anti-official positions: artist, activist, writer, performer, resident.

Tigerlilly’s anecdote demonstrates the power order-words have to manipulate actuality, to a point where qualified facts are manipulated or simply enunciated into non-existence. The phenomenon of men wearing suits is formulated in a common sequence:

i. Uranium is/was in crab orchard – actual fact
ii. Uranium contamination is not the norm
iii. “Experts” say there is no contamination
iv. Thus it is certain that there is no contamination

With the onset of part iv, there is no need to test. Despite the forensic evidence and knowledge that the Primex facility was factually producing radioactive waste, Primex is not required to divulge the purpose for or danger of the depleted uranium continually entering and leaving Crab Orchard.

Tigerlilly poignantly describes the situation in Crab Orchard, saying “I’m mostly just sad, because I feel like we look at things such as war or depleted uranium
or the economy as these separate thing as ors and not ands. They intersect, they’re all related.” The men wearing suits uphold this separation to maintain a norm, and to strengthen failing borders. The apparatus maintains the binary. The phrase “depleted uranium” contains within it an infinite multitude of complex possibilities for the reality of Crab Orchard and its surroundings. These possibilities, which threaten the symbolic order established by the local agents of Empire, formulate the phrase as a tensor. The mere utterance of the tensor prompts a violent response of the apparatus. Tigerlilly was not only confronted but surrounded. This attempted thrust of enclosure proves the fragility of borders made by order-words and expertise, illustrating the need to constantly contain and protect.

For various justifications, experts use the physical boundaries of the Refuge, hard borders delineated in the maps shown throughout the film. Another interviewee, David Havlick, a geographer at University of Colorado, describes the disparate understanding of this hardness: “The boundaries of the wildlife refuges I think are interesting because they are very porous in ways that we don't see. So the groundwater for instance, the boundary is meaningless. Groundwater contamination flows down gradient whether it’s inside or outside the wildlife refuge boundaries.” For a space to be wild in the United States, it must be designated, marked, and mapped. It must be held as a constant.

By using “expertise-have-nots” in her interview process, Kanouse calls down the need for validation of facts in order for a person to be heard. She returns to the bodies with lived experience instead of those with proper qualifications, asking “What
should we do with knowledge that makes us uneasy? Knowledge that never hardens into proof, but dwells in the register of rumor, impression, and hearsay?” Kanouse presents this knowledge as being often left unconsidered. She asks the viewer in her narration whether these claims have a right to be presented at all. She asks, “How are some voices authorized, and not others?” She speaks of uneasiness as a “kind of body-knowledge, a vague sense of something amiss. But it does not count as proof. It cannot authorize you to speak. It doesn’t tell you what to do.” Body-knowledge is much too powerful to be recognized.

Crab Orchard is not presented as a singular and fascinating phenomenon, but rather an underplayed, mundane reality of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Kanouse’s dedication to reveal these contradictory ideologies through storytelling and experimental visual cues presents “an activism of opening things up.” This opening up, the exposure of the fallacy of boundaries, the destruction of hierarchies and lack of transparency, begins to rupture the binary systems that govern us.

Whose voice is valid, welcomed, amplified? When are we told our outcries are triumphant and courageous or immature and uninformed? These questions, asked in Kanouse’s film, are in line with Jane Gallop’s proposal of Anecdotal Theory, which moves to dissolve opposing binary modes of thought, intervening in our adherence to separations such as “trivial vs. overarching” and “specific vs. general” with the intention of fostering a new type of theory which “honors the uncanny detail of lived experience” (2). This theory is created within a specific context, where emphasis is on the moment, making the theorizing accessible and alive within any thinking being.
Experiences in the social, in the real, are a powerful force for the most exploited bodies in situations of environmental injustice as a truly accessible form of knowledge. Of interest here are personal statements taken directly from daily life, alive in our social and private realms. The project of Anecdotal Theory is “making knowledge that better opens up to the real” (Gallop, 9).

It is the desire to “theorize from a different place” that asserts itself as an improvised space to speak from, as subjects oppressed under apparatuses have no way to manifest a “form of life.” In Introduction to Civil War, Tiqquen states that the Empire exists only as a way for power to negate forms of life, a “hostis.” Forms of life pose a distinct danger to power because of the disruptions they cause—people act on their own thoughts, beliefs, and experiences, rather than acting in the way power has deemed productive and allowed. Incompatibility with a prevailing order, enforced by these apparatuses, leads to a blocking of life force, an act of political warfare on the waste-bodies that cannot or choose not to participate in this order. The danger of this incompatibility is inherent in marginalized communities, ostracized to the edge of society and left to consume toxic materials or be further exiled. Not so easily seen is that this danger also exists in all forms of life due to their threat of disruption of order.

This is not a furthering of the academic attention on environmental injustices but rather a tracing of these systematically identified wastelands to expose the wasteland everyone inhabits due to the impossibility of maintaining the definite boundaries as required by the apparatuses that make up this hostis. Revolutionary potential exists in facing the jarring presence of this wasteland and wielding the
powers of the bodily experience of simultaneously existing and being prohibited from existing. This is the premise of a wasteland, to make the unwanted unknown, unseen, and unheard, as a way to strip away all of its polluting power. This is an impossible project, as all boundaries created by these apparatuses are porous, allowing the seepage of unwanted bodies and waste into the accepted zones. There is power when despite being intentionally made invisible, these waste-bodies find in Anecdotal Theory a platform from which to speak, causing a seepage of subversive voice to penetrate these failed boundaries.

The idea of Anecdotal Theory in conjunction with Tiqqun’s theories and an authorless pamphlet titled *End/Origin, Counter-Topography*, identify a need to invent alternative modes to create community and fight enemies from improvised and temporary platforms. The idea of “counter-topography” is a method by which we use the hidden, leftover space, which is seemingly non-existent and non-identifiable to gain revolutionary strength. To be both everywhere at once and entirely indefinable is necessary to destroy apparatuses.

I am shaking. But there is a way to quiet the heart, stop my uncontrollable shiver, a way to quiet the heart without solidifying. The porous nature of the Refuge boundaries strikes me, violently, to be true of all boundaries I know. The fumes that I breathe are me: I am gaseous, I am flowing. I am losing myself to air. Liberation is often described as a process of freeing, however I prefer an uncanny notion of relentless return, a rejection of healing. Beside myself, I pull back down to my body, away from the sublime. A becoming other of self, nothing can truly put me back into
my self. I is disturbed. I is divided. Look over my shoulders; my creeping moss hair
knows the power of disorder.
The evening before I left to drive from Chicago to California, Geraldine died in San Antonio, Texas. It was very simple. She was old, sick, and had decided to die, to be elsewhere. I changed my route, drawing a heartline through Natoma, Kansas, where she was raised in the dust bowl. I would see my father’s cousin in Kansas City and look through photographs of young Geraldine outside her grandfather’s homestead and graduating from Sacred Heart, ten years after being whisked away from Natoma by Sister Genevieve, who made bad girls sleep with skeletons. Before moving on through Kansas, I strayed a few hours south, to the place I always needed to go to but never thought I would. A place as beautiful and volatile as my insides: Picher, Oklahoma.
I have never happened upon others with Picher on the list of world wonders. There is a strange shyness in the confronting of my desire. Picher is number one on the Environmental Protection Agency’s list of Superfund Sites. Ghost town, former city/mine, site of unrestricted subsurface excavation; giant piles of toxic metal-contaminated mine tailings (chat). With sinkholes swallowing up homes, groundwater contamination, 34% lead poisoning in children, eventual evacuation and buyout, Tar Creek Superfund Site is the place we must forget.

My first sight of the piles in the distance, behind lush trees and unidentifiable ruins, gives me the feeling of urinating, driving along the dirt road. A relief I could never be comfortable with. The chat piles remind you of your insignificance like the sea will, with irreconcilable harshness. But here there are no dreams of serenely floating away, or even the secret, deafening pleasure of sinking into cold darkness. A body cannot go to the depths of a chat pile; a mind cannot go to the timelessness of slow death, a life of breathing poison. It is stationary death, crushed under decades of exploitation. I find some kind of solace in the mystic darkness of a sinkhole, magic dust slowly settling, but I know that’s only possible because I pass through a ghost town. I am not the displaced Quapaw Indian; I will not die in the house I was born.

It is said that nobody wanted to leave. There are almost no buildings left, not many roads, and in the hot summer the overgrown remains of Picher boast an incommensurable cohabitation of poison and foliage. I rub against the tall grass as an eerie stand in for the life before buyout. The Picher Mining Museum is still sort of there, off the road I drove in on. The screen doors hang open amidst creeping vines. It
is abandoned, left alone, not much inside except dry leaves and broken glass, but it is clear the museum held on until just before the exodus. I whisper hello into dark closets. I saw the grey sand dune chat piles first, but the Picher Mining Museum sign is the first marker, telling me I have passed over some invisible threshold within the Tri-State Mining district.

It is hard to know exactly when you enter or leave Picher, likely because of the irrelevance. What is a border when all is blowing through the air, running down stream? When I can pass through so easily and others are born poisonous? Smuggled subject, what is remediation when I hold the bad ground in my mouth, stomp around in my boots. Stained black windows are the shade of pollution. There is no guise of containment, nothing built up, nothing between us, nothing between us. Barbed wire decorated with NO TRESSPASSING signs covered in gunshot wounds.
When we arrived in Yuma the sun was setting, the concrete landscape cooling washed out colors, everything fenced in some way. A walled-in apartment, a walled-in back dirt yard, an enclosure filled with little boxes, carpet meeting tile, a half-wall. We drove from Ohio to see Anna, contained in all this, locking her door three times.

Anna and I have a love mixed into forest dirt, suicide contemplation and the levitation capabilities that come with inescapable emotional pain. If I close my eyes and imagine holding her, we are in the wooded area beside the highway. When we woke up in the morning, she took a sick day and the three of us drove west through the sand dunes and mirage like fields of greens. Buses shipping in field workers; border control, abandoned cars, check points.
We pulled up to Salvation Mountain – a manic monument to Jesus made by a Korean War veteran, and asked for a toilet. The thing is a heap, a giant pile that is more full of overwhelmingly innocent love than I could understand. SAY JESUS I’M A SINNER PLEASE COME UPON MY BODY AND INTO MY HEART. There was a film crew atop the mountain, and a woman modeling an Aztec print outfit for a photographer, walking back in forth at the straw/adobe/painted mountain’s foot. We wandered across sand, moving quick to stay afloat, towards two colossal abandoned military water tanks. One is covered in lanky figures performing the Kama Sutra, the other beasts of corporate greed. We rested around a trash-ridden fire pit, sprawled on shredded couches held together by the desert air.

Not much further is Slab City, a RV haven of wanderers once occupied by a Marine training facility. Population is in flux, responding to harsh weather unbearable to most for half the year. The depth of this wasteland is hard to fully grasp, years of human waste poured into holes, abandoned clothing in the winter breeze. Deep in Slab City, sprawling along an arroyo, we found East Jesus – a name attempting the notion of being far into nowhere – greeted by a sculpture garden of elaborate repurposed detritus. The common action of *throwing away* is helpless, hopeless when you live in the waste-site. East Jesus created some gust of wind, hands fashioning something separate from art, intentional life of bodies unfit for most systems. The side of a trailer greets us: NOTHING EVER HAPPENS. Someone is screaming over the loss of a robot-creature.
We drove away, back onto the road passing abandoned resorts that used to touch up against the Salton Sea. Lost paradise, man-made sea of bones, the sea is a vast uterus of death. The pungent smell still begs me to return, I can smell it in my bed sheets. Blurred mountains interrupt a hazy horizon. Flocks of birds feast on washed up fish. The high function of the Salton Sea: mass births poisoned by fertilizer run off, a shore inculcated into mass grave. Later those birds will birth their own entrails. Anna makes the birds fly, I run after her crunching the mounds of bones and dry barnacles. Wishing I could be what disintegrates at her feet.

I talked to Anna today, she happened to pass by the sea on her way to L.A. earlier this morning. She has been sleeping in her dirt back yard, enclosed by short thick walls. She keeps a can of mace next to her.
We wake up in a truck stop parking lot, inside of Grace Wilds, to find a foot of snow melting off of us, down our back. My bladder is bursting; I trudge through snow slipping in this unexpected Texan terrain. I pass the gift shop into the bathroom, have a hot piss, wash my face and armpit hair, and meet Keelan at the Dunkin Donuts next door. Regrettable load of sugar that will rot inside of me before making it back out here.

We drive through the snow-covered landscape. Maybe it is just my mind’s presets but snow has never looked so dry, so hot. I mostly sleep in the passenger seat, an uncontrollable slippage into dazed movement outside my body. When I wake up we are nearing Happy, Texas. We are here to visit the Attebury Grain Storage Facility, added as a Superfund site in 2008 because of carbon tetrachloride contaminated
ground water, seeping into multiple public and private water wells. We cross a thin layer of snow, over stray animal tracks, across a full parking lot. I fall very hard and look up. The facility feels like a skyscraper in a meadow, obviously in use but made stagnant by this Sunday morning apocalypse. We approach as outsiders, there are no fences, nothing to tell me where I should or should not be.

The facility is a quaint stop on our way to the transgressive show horse, Pantex Plant. 16,000-acre American nuclear weapons stockpile. I knew so little about the Attebury Grain Storage Facility out of laziness and lack of research, but I still do not claim to know about the Pantex plant out of purposeful trepidation. The concept of access falls apart here. The fenced off perimeter puts you at a distance so far if you stop concentrating on your immediate surroundings – train tracks, grass, sky – you might be convinced you are trapped on the outside. You will ask how do I get out? When of course you mean how do I get in?

I do not think I want myself to know I am there, driving along the perimeter, back and forth, gawking at the entrance, laughing. I read you must go through training before entering as an outside contractor; “visiting” entails a task, an invitation. Tours for the public are not conducted at Pantex Plant. Pantex is a high security facility. A few times, I jump out of the passengers seat, run towards the fence over the train tracks and turn for a photograph. It is natural to turn towards flesh in the presence of national security.
I never really write much when I am around at some place, some place I go to re-enter my body. If anything it is incoherent, violent writing that is scrawled so urgently it terrifies me when I look later. I have sat down here to expel it all, type it out. I do get nauseous in some other manner, dull unlike what I feel at a site. I shake and I tear up. I sit on full bowels. There is a letting go of myself, where I stop the resistance that holds myself in.

Theory arising directly from the waste-body is enacted within this thesis, but it is still is contained within academia, another apparatus. An exposure takes place as I write on the wastelands, waste-bodies, and theory from these zones, placing the leprous other within the distinguished boundaries of the academic institution. The action of living and theorizing as a person expelled from the system is a powerful,
subversive act, which has intentions of dissolving these boundaries we are placed outside of. Yet theorizing, writing, and art making can only stretch these boundaries because I am in the academic apparatus. This thesis is not creating another world for itself, and the apparatus ultimately absorbs it. I acknowledge a failure. The furthest we can go without action is simply critique, a negation. The positive, or the world building, requires material action. Without the positive, the negation is an easily filled hole.

There is a dissolving though; this is a failure in order to dissolve. When I say I shake, I am shaking on a chair under a desk. I rub myself against the chair and bang my thighs against the underside of the desk. My keyboard is covered in ash and I don't feel completely contained out here but confined in here. I forget to drink water.

Will I break from confinement before a smothering and succulent accolade? Juice running down my thighs, rubbing against my chair will not do it for me any longer and I have to write directly to Anna. To ask her where she is, receive a photograph of her in that place. What are you eating? Are your lips dry? I turn my cheek to the side, raise my shoulder, press against, and taste the salty edge of my armpit. The failure is in the writing process, but I no longer separate myself, I no longer adhere to the boundaries. I hope it is clear by now I do not need to be anywhere, as I reach down and in to find my hole bigger than I left it. I am leaving now towards Anna and I am bringing all of us with me.
To move through the wild like an awkward out of place alien, to stomp yet with guilt, to pick up then put down, to chop but only the dead, to broadcast the left-over, stumble upon the others’ shit, lifting a rock to find maggots to not be disgusted but instead intrigued. To collect but eventually leave behind, to cross only to come back, to return yet under new light, to fail as an ultimate goal. To bend causing an un-even snap, to cramp like a mean fence. To slap preventing a puddle or maybe making a puddle, God damn you. To lift in some lame attempt to push the earth away, Heat of friction swips of dry skin sweat, the rubbing against skin to non skin, too soft too smooth.

Why are the dead here?
Why are the dead here?
Why are the dead here?

Time and space relieved I am not here this is not me. I am never here this is never me. But this is your kind of landscape she said, burned snags, blood spilt on the forest floor. Ashes in a Ziplock bag. The shambles of our bodies as we joined – a return to the site of Trauma.
I am always here this is always me.

I sit half naked, vast meadow landscape of boulders. Dead hairless fetus carried around me in other’s mouth. Not dead. Cool reminder. Nude body press, against decomposing trees softer than my insides. Harder than my exploding puss-foot. I only leave my urine.

Abject baby brought as I spit on rocks, blood on my thigh. Still I seep. Urine on my pant leg disappears into air. Joins the flow – HUGE air flow. There is no place-name, I will not identify, this place this place, here, in me, the last place, last hope for experience.

Hole transfers to hole, filling up, with waste that allows me to make one hundred simultaneous feelings at once. I am blocked I am filled I release I let go. My I dissociates my I separates. I am above myself, sit with myself, collect myself smeared on paper, wrap myself, protect others from myself.

How do I explain this, so that you are not afraid?

How do I lighten myself, so that you are able to feel the heaviness of laying upon one hundred dead pine needles, so perfect to burn. This place, ready to burn. A helpful death.

~

Seepage.

Earth vomiting all over itself. I am sinking into the impossibly orange mud, not mud, bad ground. My hand is stained. I’m spitting, producing a lot of saliva. Miss the gap between my arm and torso, I seep all over myself.

Gunshots.

Shotgun shooting, I rip off my clothes, seep into soft metals. wboooom wboooom not at me not at me but at the earth.

I’m shaking, mine dripping post freeze, thorns. Rocks growing on steel barricade, white form floats delicately. The water won’t take it away water taking it all all over it.

Today I am not willing to fall in. I stay sitting on the coal fringe pressed against, scratching my throat on the edge by the road.
My leg falls asleep dead, still moving. My leg is the ground there is no ground. Soft earth, earth body undiminishing decay eternal rot.

Have I left myself here, was I thrown here? Order order reordering I am naked ducking behind mangled branches growing my hair. Subjunctive regulation I may not get out of here I may hurl.

Pulling out, ground caves. Falls upon into itself. itself itself itself eating itself. Can I eat you? Can I eat this? Eat my own vomit, try to expel (hold it in) pass it through again.

Maybe I’ll sneak. Sneak around the pile. Foam caught in the bushes.

Otherness clearing, down the road omen, Mother’s unreclaimed. Beside myself, without.

Thriving green sprouts laugh in my face IT’S SPRING YOU IDIOT I’ve come to collect my dead but it drops out of my hand, saturates my socks. I spit on the mine. I spit on me. I spit outside the mine. I spit out the mine.

H U N D R E D S of Gods in this beef
I pause piss pause, knowing of the “excess deaths”

~

Quivering skin. Quiet the heart without solidifying. Other before other, to find without proof, taking not wasting, time like a bag of blood. Can I look over your shoulders? I am evaporating I am floating I am losing myself to air.

Meaning coincides otherness, encountering others. Dry skin sweat, prickly neck. Recognize you, friend, true friend now truth. Mountains evaporate as above. Neither imprisoned, a return. A becoming other of self. Visit bottom, see all that leads to above.

Dead birds salt my bed. Each time we rub time lengthens, stories my own gratifying confusion. Forgotten chaotic distinction. Perception concurrent, debasing ground, I is disturbed I is divided, I remain, hold down push back.

HYSTERICAL SHOCK you give me other, put me back into myself.

Fuzzy full of blood, smooth plastic skin, fall, separate, dry, collect.
\textit{Sweet angel} myth of reality. Pull from me enter into me, \textit{my} fist into your \textit{cunt}. Membrane of progress, faces in the rocks, lost legs, absent sleep ask, waver into dream.

Bones?

Dry Paint?

I am lead (like) into a still lake. Creeping moss hair scraping back, peeling back, skin known to rash, one part here all parts elsewhere. Anecdote antidote

to vomit paint chips.
BFA THESIS EXHIBITION: WASTELANDS, REVOLUTIONS, FAILURES
February 27th - March 22nd at Majestic Galleries in Nelsonville, Ohio
OCCUPATION OF SPACE

I. WALLS

1. Study Photo: Marble Mountain Wilderness
   - impale, embrace, pile
2. Study Photo: Marble Mountain Wilderness
   - soft wood
3. Study Photo: Marble Mountain Wilderness
   - menstrual blood, violence
4. Study Photo: Marble Mountain Wilderness
   - urinate, seep
5. Study Photo: Taylor, Excess  
   - Bloomington, circular time, jujitsu, graffiti
6. Study Photo: Tooth, La Commune  
   - Black Hole Cinematheque, gravestones, free jazz
7. Study Photo: Robert Hurley  
   - Tarnac, psychedelic cowboy, shared sensation of being
8. Study Photo: Coco  
   - Ridgewood Queens, 1882 Woodbine, Nomos, boy scouts insurrectional manual
9. Study Photo: Westinghouse/ABB Facility
   - Bloomington, PCB contamination, excavation
10. Study Photo: Picher, OK
    - toxic chat piles, buy out, Quapaw territory
11. Study Photo: Pantex Plant
    - 16,000 acres, nuclear weapons stockpile USA
12. Study Photo: Salton Sea
    - man made sea of bones
Insurrectional Prepping durational performance, 55 minutes
II. Floor

Redundant Piles, Power Lines
III. Ceiling

1. Experimental Writing: Wilderness
2. Experimental Writing: Political
3. Experimental Writing: Wasteland
IV. Disconnected Back

Film (48:49)

For viewing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QeixCOo8pQ
V. Gaseous

Presence, Warmth, Insurrectionary Guests, Sharing of Thoughts
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