

In the Waste: On Blackness and (Being) Plastic

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Abstract: “In the Waste: On Blackness and (Being) Plastic” is an homage and response to Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Sharpe proposes wake work as an analytic to methodologically reorient Black living in the afterlife of slavery, a “past that is not yet past.”¹ *Waste* work here enters to explore the continuities of slave ships and plantations, genocidal clearings, toxic wastes, objects, and disposable lands, bodies, and bodies of water, providing an opening to re/consider the relationship between Blackness, Indigeneity, animals and (other) objects, namely plastic. If objects can co-conspire in one another’s disposability, how can these fraught relations of ejection be reconfigured on new terms? By tending to the multifold deaths and disposals that exist along the subject-*eject*-object continuum in the wake of the slave ship and the extractive, settler colonial state, I argue that otherwise ways of living and dying emerge beyond the linear ecocidal model, foregrounding possibilities that refuse disposability altogether.

Keywords: Blackness, Indigeneity, plastic, waste, environmental justice, disposability, animality, abjection, veganism, zero waste

Part I | A Preamble to Pollution

“plas·tic / 'plastik

noun

1) A synthetic material made from a wide range of organic polymers such as polyethylene, PVC, nylon, etc., that can be molded into shape while soft and then set into a rigid or slightly elastic form.

adjective

1) Made of plastic. “plastic bottles;” 1.1) Not genuine; artificial or unnatural. 2) (Of a substance or material) easily shaped or molded; 2.1) *Offering scope for creativity*; 2.2) *Exhibiting adaptability to change or variety in the environment.*”²

On a Bahamian beach, I watched the ocean regurgitate what had been plundered and reconfigured. Errant, weathered objects migrating at the whims of wind and water, destined for shorelines or the ocean floor. Balloons, toy soldiers, buoys, solo cups, fishing nets. All waywardly adrift. Bobbing on the littoral, unsure if of the land or the sea. Is it gravity that pulls them to the depths or their longing for return to the belly of

¹ Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Duke University Press. Page 15. Sharpe explains that “in the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present.”

² Oxford Dictionary. (2020). Plastic. In *Lexico*. Lexico. <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/plastic>. Emphasis mine.

the world,³ the bottom of the ocean from where they were once extracted? The position of the unthought and unseen.

Founder of the Bahamas Plastic Movement and 2020 Goldman Prize recipient, Kristal Ambrose, notes the ruinous impacts of plastic on island nations, whose geographic orientation amidst ocean currents renders them a sink for marine pollution.⁴ In the case of the Bahamas, both the Gulf Stream and the North Atlantic Gyre serve as conveyors of plastic deposition. My sensitivities to waste were heightened during a year and a half when I lived in Bimini, Bahamas as a media manager for a shark research field station. The South Island served as the open-air, unlined landfill for both the North and South Bimini populations. Whenever it overflowed, someone burned it to make more space, sending a massive plume of black and brown smoke that could be seen for miles, and, depending on the wind speed and direction, smelled too. The vast majority of Bimini's inhabitants lived on the North Island out of the smoke's trajectory, but the surplus of waste served as a constant reminder; not just of the inevitability of toxic plumes, but in the everyday and everywhere evidence of a tourist-tailored dependency on styrofoam and PET containers, cups, chip bags, wrappers, bottles, and straws. One could see such items, persistent in existence, both shiny and dull, entangled in mangrove roots, squashed alongside the road, half-buried under beach sand, and buoyantly bobbing on the water's surface. Plastic pollution was so prevalent that the number one complaint from tourists exiting Bimini according to the Ministry of the Bahamas was "litter."⁵ Tourists, in other words, complained about the very plastics that the tourist economy created. Plastics that underwrote and ensured their/our pleasure. Of the sixty-six thousand visitors to Bimini in 2013, nearly ninety percent came from the United States; seventy-six percent of these identified as white, thirteen as Hispanic, and just two percent of island tourists were Black.⁶

Plastic facilitated the tourist economy for locals and outsiders alike, serving as a short-term fix even while its post-transactional surplus undermined the very sustainability (both existence and environmental impact) of the tourist industry itself. Krelling et al surveyed tourists and beach users in Brazil's southern coast, concluding that stranded beach litter could reduce local income by as much as forty percent.⁷ In Bimini, waste arrived both consensually, through taxed imported goods, and uninvited, via ocean currents and cooler-stocked fishing yachts crossing the Gulf Stream from the US, culminating in a plastic paradise. It was in the absence of excess land, in an inability to maintain distance from waste nor the toxic fumes it creates, that I would become politicized into anti-plastic activism.

³ Hartman, S. (2016). The belly of the world: A note on Black women's labors. *Souls*, 18(1), 166-173.

⁴ Ambrose, K. K., Box, C., Boxall, J., Brooks, A., Eriksen, M., Fabres, J., ... & Walker, T. R. (2019). Spatial trends and drivers of marine debris accumulation on shorelines in South Eleuthera, The Bahamas using citizen science. *Marine pollution bulletin*, 142, 145-154.

⁵ Bahamas Ministry of Tourism. (2013). *Bimini Island Exit Survey* [Brochure]. Retrieved from <https://www.tourismtoday.com/sites/default/files/docs/stats/Bimini%20Brochure%202013.pdf>. Page 11.

⁶ Ibid. Page 12.

⁷ Krelling, A. P., Williams, A. T., & Turra, A. (2017). Differences in perception and reaction of tourist groups to beach marine debris that can influence a loss of tourism revenue in coastal areas. *Marine Policy*, 85, 87-99.

I write this as someone who had the privilege to grow up neither beside a toxic landfill nor a refinery linked to our global oil dependency, but rather in an area designated as “clean,” wooded, suburban, affluent. I write this as an Afro-European-descended someone who entered a hegemonically white field of Marine Biology (and Environmental Studies at large), only to realize the tools it provided were wholly inadequate to match the monumental eco-social challenges we face today,⁸ for the people and places and species I care about. (I believe it is possible to care about them all). I would need to unlearn environmentalism’s overemphasis on conservation and find enough ballast within me to question an overconfident, Western scientific method that seeks “environmental” solutions while overlooking the root causes of its problems, and thus, asking all of the wrong questions. To do this, I would need to find my Black sense of place. Growing up in California, I would follow my partner to their home state of Louisiana and learn that the waste currently strangling the islands in the Caribbean is inseparable from the waste-in-the-making that smothers other Black and Indigenous lives in the United States and elsewhere, such as those in the Chemical Corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, often referred to as Cancer Alley. This is the afterlife of slavery, or waste in the wake. It is from a place of both privilege and pain, and of attempted accountability, that I write this.

Borders Across Beings and Things

“What are the distances we need and what are the walls that will isolate and destroy us? How can we discern the differences between generative boundaries and destructive borders?”⁹ -Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*

Alexis Pauline Gumbs asks us these important questions in her latest offering to the world. Her love letters to orcas, manatees, spinner dolphins, vaquitas and so many others join a chorus of critical scholars who interrogate the persistent partition wedged between humans and animals set forth by colonization, genocide, and enslavement, a re-ordering of global socio-ecological significance existing along a racialized, specied,

⁸ To name a few, such eco-social challenges could be listed as: runaway climate change and exacerbated hurricane, wildfire, and flooding events; unrelenting plastic proliferation; the sixth mass extinction and threats to global biodiversity; the racial-gender-regional wealth gap; unprecedented wealth inequality since the Great Depression; racialized mass incarceration; racialized police brutality; military violence and nuclear bombs; sea level rise; environmental injustice; commercial overfishing, ghost nets, and habitat degradation; deforestation and clearcutting for monocrop economies; and cultural addiction and exportation of ecocidal consumer-producer complexes.

⁹ Gumbs, A. P. (2020). *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*. AK Press. Page 87.

and gendered spectrum with many intersections.^{10,11,12,13} Gumbs traces the overlapping geographies of whale exterminations and enslaved human kidnappings, of Caribbean monk seal genocide and the lubrication of plantation machinery with their blubber.¹⁴ Her lessons are a reminder that the rupture of the settlement-plantation¹⁵ was and still is wholly ecological, that the “ecological” was and will forever be social. *Undrowned* adjoins Blackness to its mammalian, oceanic, womb-like origins of connectedness; doing so necessarily unsettles the stepping stones that underwrote the hierarchical formation of Humanity, an eco-socially parasitic and extractive genre of being human.

Alice Walker asks us in the preface of Marjorie Spiegel’s *Dreaded Comparison*, a book on the continuities of cruelty across species: “What do we do with our heightened consciousness” in recognizing “the pain felt by human animals who are abused and the pain felt by non-human animals who are abused...as the same pain[?]”¹⁶ The human-animal delineation has always been blurred and context-specific, mediated through the *beastialized humanization* of Blackness.¹⁷ We might call this a *dreaded comparison* for many reasons: firstly, many white vegans have wedded the painful atrocity of African enslavement to animal captivity and slaughter in hopes to usher an agenda of animal liberation as detachable from Black abolition. They have claimed to care about animals while overlooking a system that built itself by oppressing Black human-animal life in parallel, constitutive ways. Many white vegans, perhaps until recently, had not considered that there are humans who will never quite be Human enough, paying little regard to their privileged positionality as “ethical consumers,” their unconscious anti-Blackness, and the racist-sexist-speciesist order that their ancestors established when colonizing Africa, Asia, and the Americas.^{18,19} (This world needs white vegans in this fight to be organizing empathetically, structurally, and reparationally.) Meanwhile, Black human mammals fall into the Black void between cares of the Human

¹⁰ Ko, A., & Ko, S. (2017). *Aphro-ism: Essays on pop culture, feminism, and black veganism from two sisters*. Lantern Books.

¹¹ Adams, C. J. (2015). *The sexual politics of meat: A feminist-vegetarian critical theory*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

¹² Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—An argument. *CR: The new centennial review*, 3(3), 257-337.

¹³ Jackson, Z. I. (2020). *Becoming human: Matter and meaning in an antiblack world* (Vol. 53). NYU Press.

¹⁴ Gumbs, A. P. (2020). *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*. AK Press. Page 139.

¹⁵ King, T. J. (2013). *In the clearing: Black female bodies, space and settler colonial landscapes* (Doctoral dissertation). Page 47. King writes, “The settlement-plantation simultaneously functions as a space that eliminates Native existence and produces the slave as non-human property. The settlement-plantation functions as a spatial unit that turns Black bodies into non-human bodies. The settlement-plantation also turns Black non-human bodies into property and into forms of space or spatial potential.”

¹⁶ Spiegel, M. (1996). The dreaded comparison: Human and animal slavery.

¹⁷ Jackson, Z. I. (2020). *Becoming human: Matter and meaning in an antiblack world* (Vol. 53). NYU Press. Page 23. Jackson writes, “I replace the notion of ‘denied humanity’ and ‘exclusion’ with beastialized humanization, because *the African’s humanity is not denied but appropriated, inverted, and ultimately plasticized in the methodology of abjecting animality.*”

¹⁸ Harper, B. A. (2011). Phenomenology of race and whiteness: Knowing, feeling, and experiencing the vegan ‘exotic.’ *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, 221-238.

¹⁹ Harper, A. B. (2016). Doing veganism differently: Racialized trauma and the personal journey towards vegan healing. In *Doing Nutrition Differently* (pp. 151-168). Routledge.

and cares for the animal under white supremacist supervision. Critical, decolonial, and Black geographic scholarship are making strides to undo this racial human-animal categorization.

But what are we to do with the category of the object as it relates to this human-animal under scrutiny? Objects who/that become agents of death in an era when human-made materials now outweigh the entirety of Earth's biomass, when global plastic makes up roughly double the aggregate weight of all terrestrial and marine animals combined.²⁰ Objects who/that are never in isolation but forever entangled with biota, with ourselves, accumulating in our bloodstreams and whale stomachs and bellies of the Earth.^{21,22,23,24} Such theoretical and material progress interrogating human-animal injustices--one might see this expressed in Black veganism and Critical Animal Studies--can not yet be said for the human-object interface as depicted in the circular economy and zero-waste discourse, despite the ubiquity of commodification, the apocalyptic futurity of plastic, and the necropolitical implications of oil-based environmental injustice. As such, I aim to stretch this dreaded comparison and ask: *what is the relation between Blackness and plastic?*²⁵ Such a reading of Blackness alongside disposable plastic objects may incite some well-deserved backlash, but I fear and feel this human-object wedge, too, is a "destructive border"--to use Gumbs' words--we must unsettle to live and die and refuse and reuse as the times increasingly compel us. My hope is that we, Black people, melanated people, colonized and mimetically colonizing people,²⁶ can see ourselves across the numbed pain of the inanimate, the always-already wasted and deathbound, and adapt accordingly in true plastic fashion.

²⁰ Elhacham, E., Ben-Uri, L., Grozovski, J., Bar-On, Y. M., & Milo, R. (2020). Global human-made mass exceeds all living biomass. *Nature*, 1-3. See chart on page 444.

²¹ Goodyear, S. (2020, December 16). 'It's a slow death': Camels are dying with masses of plastic in their bellies, study finds. CBC Radio. Retrieved December 20, 2020, from <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-the-wednesday-edition-1.5844355/it-s-a-slow-death-camels-are-dying-with-masses-of-plastic-in-their-bellies-study-finds>.

²² De Stephanis, R., Giménez, J., Carpinelli, E., Gutierrez-Exposito, C., & Cañadas, A. (2013). As main meal for sperm whales: Plastics debris. *Marine pollution bulletin*, 69(1-2), 206-214.

²³ Galloway, T. S. (2015). Micro- and nano-plastics and human health. In *Marine anthropogenic litter* (pp. 343-366). Springer, Cham. Galloway describes the health ramifications of micro- and nano-plastics increasingly found in human tissue.

²⁴ Cressey, D. (2016). The plastic ocean. *Nature*, 536(7616), 263-265.

²⁵ Davis, H. (2019). Life and Death in the Anthropocene. In *The Routledge Companion to Critical Approaches to Contemporary Architecture* (pp. 80-90). Routledge. Davis asks: "What new relations might we humans have to plastic if we thought of its emerging in blackness, from the black of oil, to the black of these balls?" referencing the 3.4 million black plastic balls that were placed in Los Angeles's Silver Lake and Elysian Reservoirs.

²⁶ Wynter, S., & McKittrick, K. (2015). Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? Or, to give humanness a different future: Conversations. *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis*, 9-89. Page 21. In conversation with Katherine McKittrick, Sylvia Wynter says: "[The *Time* report] thinks the causes of global warming are *human* activities, but they are not! The Masai who were (and are) being displaced have nothing to do with global warming! It's all of us--the Western and mimetically Westernized middle classes--after we fell into the trap of modeling ourselves on the mimetic model of the Western bourgeoisie's liberal monohumanist Man2."

Part II | Blackness and Plastic: Unpacking Human-Animal-Object-Subject Relations of Waste

“[Aereile] Jackson wasn’t ejected from the system: *she is the ejection*, the abjection, by, on, through, which the system reimagines, and reconstitutes itself.”²⁷ -Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*

Waste literature, often focusing on producer or consumer outcomes, fails to analyze the deluge of disposable, commodified objects alongside or enmeshed into the objectified, fungible Black human slaves and extirpated Native “savages.” Conversely; biopolitical and Marxian critiques of capitalism often deploy a “humans-as-waste” rhetoric with little engagement of the materiality of waste itself, foreclosing important possibilities that invoke consumer complicity and collective action.^{28,29} In the following sections, I attempt to read Blackness, Indigeneity, animality, and plastic objects as constitutive to one another and merge them through the material-symbolic axis of abjection.

Is plastic Black? Is Blackness plastic? Is plastic an accomplice in the subscription of premature Black death, and is Blackness, are Black people, complicit in the disposability of plastic that dispossesses ourselves? While Blackness and plastic both constitute a continual and obligatory ejection in the construction of a “clean, white, male, Human” world, both plastic and Black people perform acts of ejecting one another through noteworthy engagements. Ejection yokes the Manichean subject-object grammar of Blackness³⁰ to the objectified plastics--we can call their alterable, relational co-condition *blacksticity*--in such a way that dissolves their dyadic relationship by

²⁷ Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Duke University Press. Page 29, emphasis mine. Sharpe analyzes a scene in *The Forgotten Space--A Film Essay Seeking to Understand the Contemporary Maritime World in Relation to the Symbolic Legacy of the Sea* (2010), a film on global capital. She unpacks the existential, ongoing violences experienced by Aereile Jackson, as well as her uncared-for portrayal in the film, depicted as a ‘former mother’ who had lost her children to the state. Sharpe notes the glaring absence of Black people, of Africa, the Caribbean, and the rest of the African diaspora within the film, with the exception of Jackson, as well as the film’s failure to “locate *that* trade [of abducted Africans] as the key point in the beginning of global capital.”

²⁸ See Yates, M. (2011). The human-as-waste, the labor theory of value and disposability in contemporary capitalism. *Antipode*, 43(5), 1679-1695.

²⁹ Mbembe, A. (2011). “Democracy as a Community of Life.” In *The Humanist Imperative in South Africa*, ed. John W De Gruchy, 187-194. Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun Press. Page 188. In critiquing South Africa’s post-apartheid rhetoric of a pacifying humanism, Achille Mbembe describes the Black, Native equivalent of ejection on African soil: “Race in particular did not simply become a crucial, pervasive dimension of colonial domination and capitalist exploitation. Turned into law, it was also used as a privileged mechanism for turning black life into *waste* - a race doomed to wretchedness, degradation, abjection, and servitude.” Mbembe connects the Black Indigenous struggle beyond the framings of United States-centered enslavement and genocide. But Mbembe, like many who invoke the humans-as-waste rhetoric, does not further engage this metonymic, metaphoric comparison between Blackness and waste.

³⁰ Opperman, R. (2019). A Permanent Struggle Against an Omnipresent Death: Revisiting Environmental Racism with Frantz Fanon. *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 7(1), 57-80. Page 12. She writes: “The conclusion Fanon suggests is that it is impossible to achieve Black disalienation or decolonization without addressing the interlocking set of dualisms that structure the Manichean world.”

creating a subject-*eject*-object³¹ grammatical refrain that speaks to their naturalized, relational affinity through dispossession. Black life becomes tethered to the inanimate oil byproduct, in myriad ways, forming an *intimate monstrosity* as Pavithra Vasudevan asserts, and I will address later in this article. Thus, I want to sit with plastic and Blackness and this relationship: plastic in Black spaces, the always already-ness of oil-soon-to-be-plastic-soon-to-be-landfill-all-the-while-intoxicating and Blackness, their ubiquity, and Black *plasticity*. How does the figure of the Negro, in being placed at the nadir of the “Chain of Being,”³² in being/having been both subject and object, interact with, compare and relate to, shape, consume, and be determined by the *objects* that are plastic? When posing similarities and very clear distinguishing qualities between, I ask if plastic and Blackness are of the same stuff? These repeating, circular questions guide my movements in navigating a Black-and-blue ocean pummelled with plastics, coated with oil slicks, and battered with other extraction-derived ailments, as well as the on-land relations that make this so.

Enslaved and Exterminated: Human-Objects and Disposals of Coloniality

Tiffany King explores the unstable categorizability of the Black enslaved woman in her doctoral dissertation. She writes, “the Settler-Master is able to imagine the Black female form as land, property and sexual/reproductive capacity which denote spatial expansion.”³³ While Black women occupy a very specific, heightened experience of intersectional dehumanization, Black and Native humans more broadly have been uniquely positioned to straddle the line of human-animal-object-*abject*.³⁴ Deemed as property (like objects), reduced to reproductive and laboring capacity (like animals), and considered impediments to settlement (like *abjects*), Black and Native counterparts were respectively and uniquely objectified as valuable-fungible and exterminatable.³⁵ “Essentially, [Achille Mbembe] says, the slave is the object to whom anything can be done, whose life can be squandered with impunity,” Saidiya Hartman explains.³⁶ By collapsing the human category as is oft-done in race-averse analyses of plastic waste,³⁷

³¹ I would like to shout out UCSC Anthropology and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Professor Dr. Savannah Shange for giving me this useful feedback to incorporate after my symposium presentation during her seminar class, the Afterlife of Slavery. This grammatical refrain is substitutable, and I will continue to insert new words into it throughout the piece.

³² Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—An argument. *CR: The new centennial review*, 3(3), 257-337. Page 46. Wynter says, “it would be the “Negros” who would be consigned to the pre-Darwinian last link in the Chain of Being.

³³ King, T. J. (2013). *In the clearing: Black female bodies, space and settler colonial landscapes* (Doctoral dissertation). Page 56.

³⁴ Using animal/object/human/*abject* is merely a syntactical choice to destabilize the rigidity of each category, allowing for their substitutability.

³⁵ In fact, Black and Native people were complicit in the projects of exterminating and enslaving one another.

³⁶ Hartman, S. V., & Wilderson, F. B. (2003). The position of the unthought. *Qui Parle*, 13(2), 183-201. Page 188.

³⁷ Cressey, D. (2016). The plastic ocean. *Nature*, 536(7616), 263-265. While providing a noteworthy noteworthy synopsis of plastic waste, Cressey fails to complicate the story of plastic waste by referencing

³⁸ we miss a crucial opportunity to interrogate the violent birthings of the Human as an exclusive and yet malleable category that parasitized Black life and ensured Indigenous death through the logic of wealth-procurement and commodification, marrying both Blackness and Indigeneity to disposable, object-like status in order to realize itself as white, male, rational, and perpetually secure.^{39,40} In catastrophically imposing such a culture of transaction, this overrepresented genre of Humanity commandeered global eco-socio-political power, enabling the proliferation of *literal* waste, as well. Michif waste scientist and Discard Studies' founder and lead editor, Max Liboiron, deftly notes that "plastic is a function of colonialism."⁴¹

Where does our household trash go every week? Society's understanding gap⁴² of individual and collective wastes created,⁴³ and the impacts of such habituated discarding behavior, exist because of a buffered distancing, or invisibility, that ensures racial capitalism's continuation. Distanced *for whom*? Such invisibility obscures the slow violence of chronic poisoning and inundation experienced by all fence-line (and island) communities that bear the disproportionate burdens of business as usual commerce along nodes of the supply chain from extraction to ultimate disposal. This invisibilized waste mirrors the erased atrocity of Indigenous genocide from the United States' public, white memory, and the ongoing removal and erasure of Indigenous body-thought-behavior as a means to continue the commoditizing logic of the settler state and the ecocidal systems it produces as prerequisites for livelihood. How does this understanding gap of consumers from their/our landfilled waste compare to the perceptions of Indigenous existence as past tense and/or confined merely within reservations that are out-of-sight, out-of-mind? Both operating myths entail spatial fixes that remove and attempt to isolate unwanted impediments to progress, serving to suppress such unsettling truths that, if ever truly confronted, would call forth an accountability and abrupt stoppage to capitalism as we know it. Ironically, the attempted

a universalized humanity: "[Kamilo beach (on the tip of Hawaii's big island)] has been called the dirtiest beach in the world, and is a startling and visible demonstration of how much plastic detritus humanity has dumped into the world's oceans."

³⁸ MacArthur, E. (2017). Beyond plastic waste. Even the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, who receives my gold star for helping change paradigms from a linear, disposable economy to a circular, reusable one, references a wide-sweeping humanity, eliding the nuance of unevenly responsible and empowered genres within humanity in addressing wasteful transformation: "With more than 8 million tons of plastic entering the ocean each year, humanity must urgently rethink the way we make and use plastics, so that they do not become waste in the first place."

³⁹ Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—An argument. *CR: The new centennial review*, 3(3), 257-337.

⁴⁰ King, T. L. (2019). *The Black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies*. Duke University Press. Page 21.

⁴¹ Liboiron, M. (2018). How plastic is a function of colonialism. *Teen Vogue*, 21.

⁴² Clapp, J. (2002). The distancing of waste: Overconsumption in a global economy. *Confronting consumption*, 155-176. Page 3. Clapp describes the *understanding gap* as a mental distance, "a gulf of information, awareness, and responsibility between consumers and wastes. It is also interesting to consider the (social) distancing of waste and how COVID-19 adds new layers of analysis to disposability culture.

⁴³ Wastes in this sense are not limited to mere trash, but extend to include the wastedness of what-/who-ever else is entangled in the supply chain of commodification, including animals, slaughterhouse workers, field workers, waste workers, etc.

invisibilization of both waste and Indigenous presence that foreclose accountability only hastens the pace of mindless mass consumerism and a runaway climate, perhaps inevitably undoing the myth's desire and design; the past and ongoing atrocities of unwanted disposals now serve as reminders of the conditions of collective crisis, locally, oceanically, and climatically.

As the United States incrementally expanded into unceded Indigenous territory to cement its existence, such unilateral cultural suppression and attempted annihilation propelled a rupturing transformation in worldview relating to land, "clearing"⁴⁴ the stage for these multifold disposals to concentrate and accumulate in the subsequent centuries. In the case of Cancer Alley, it was cleared of its original Choctaw and United Houma Nation inhabitants as the landscape was reconfigured by disposable, enslaved Africans. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz reminds us that "once in the hands of settlers, the land itself was no longer sacred, as it had been for the Indigenous. Rather, it was private property, a commodity to be acquired and sold."⁴⁵ The genocidal clearing, thus, works lock-in step with the slave plantation to ensure a wholesale desecration of land (and beings on the land) in the name of racially-extracted profit maximization via commodification. It is here where subhuman-animal-object-objects collide into an entanglement of death, marking the beginnings of the era called by many names: the Anthropocene,⁴⁶ the Racial Capitalocene,⁴⁷ the Plantationocene⁴⁸, the Plasticene⁴⁹--all pointing to a door of no return.^{50,51}

Plantation Proliferation, Petrochemical Pesticides, and Human-Animal-Objects

Clyde Woods documents the metamorphic continuity from the sugar- and cotton-producing slave plantations to the waste-producing petrochemical plantations in the Deep South. The plantation bloc--those beneficiaries of the settlement-plantation⁵²

⁴⁴ Tiffany King discusses the strategic deployment of the noun "clearing" in US historical annals to manifest the myth of *terra nullius*, or unoccupied land, rendering the historical genocide (perhaps, "cleansing") that took place more palatable. Here, I am re-purposing the verb form of "clearing."

⁴⁵ Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2014). *An indigenous peoples' history of the United States* (Vol. 3). Beacon Press. Page 55.

⁴⁶ Crutzen, P. J. (2006). The "anthropocene". In *Earth system science in the anthropocene* (pp. 13-18). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.

⁴⁷ Vergès, F. (2017). Racial capitalocene. *Futures of black radicalism*, 72-82.

⁴⁸ Mitman, G. (2019, October 12). *Reflections on the Plantationocene: A Conversation with Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing*. Edge Effects. <https://edgeeffects.net/haraway-tsing-plantationocene/>

⁴⁹ Reed, C. (2015). Dawn of the Plasticene age. *New Scientist*, 225(3006), 28-32.

⁵⁰ King, T. L. (2019). *The Black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies*. Duke University Press. Page 9. This references the doorway of the slave-holding castle off the coast of West Africa to take enslaved people to the slave ship, where they would encounter the Middle Passage.

⁵¹ Whyte, K. (2020). Too late for indigenous climate justice: Ecological and relational tipping points. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 11(1), e603. This "door of no return" also references the potentially irreversible impacts of these historic eco-social atrocities, the surpassing of ecological and relational tipping points, as described by Kyle Whyte.

⁵² Tiffany King uses this grammatical refrain in her dissertation to intertwine Black and Native apocalyptic fates vis-à-vis white Humanity's self-actualizing parasitism.

and the plantation-turned-prison⁵³ and the sharecropping-derived surplus--organized annual policy, agronomy, and chemistry conferences for the southern elite to spearhead agricultural biointensification. These annual gatherings of the plantation bloc, enabled by the National Cotton Council⁵⁴ and the Delta Council organizations, ushered in the petrochemical turn,⁵⁵ an industrial-agricultural plantation model that would metastasize into monstrous neo-plantations worldwide via the Green Revolution, undoubtedly adding to an increasing tally of multi-scalar, multi-speciesed assemblages of subject-eject-objects, a global network of disposals.⁵⁶

In the US South during the widespread introductions of petrochemical use, pesticides and herbicides served as central technologies to replace and displace labor; the plantation elite used these chemical fixes to bypass their addressing the racial and economic justice demands of the Black freedom struggles in the Mississippi Delta in the mid-20th century.⁵⁷ Furthermore, such pesticide and herbicide drift resulting from the region's rapidly increased reliance on chemical agriculture threatened Black farmers' food sovereignty and ability to self-sustain, contributing both to their toxin exposure and economic dispossession.⁵⁸ Romy Opperman's analysis of Frantz Fanon's oeuvre is useful here in relating the continuity of wasted unwanted, from pests to people, in the early adoption of herbicide use globally. She writes, "Fanon names DDT⁵⁹ in the context of the French colonial government's attitude toward the colonized as a kind of contaminant or disease."⁶⁰ Here, the colonized humans and the unwanted insect "pests" exist coterminously as objects in the eyes of the colonizer. Opperman weds Fanon's

⁵³ Woods, C. A. (1998). *Development arrested: The blues and plantation power in the Mississippi Delta*. Verso. Page 129. Woods explains, "much of the Delta (cotton) production complex was physically constructed, sustained, and subsidized by thousands of imprisoned African American men and women."

⁵⁴ *NCC Officers, Board of Directors and Advisors*. (n.d.). National Cotton Council of America. Retrieved September 3, 2020, from <http://www.cotton.org/about/leadership/index.cfm>. One needs not look much further than the present, exclusively-white Board of Director profiles for the National Cotton Council to consider their racist 1938 origins in ensuring white male wealth accumulation and regional dominance at the exclusion and expense of the Black/Native/land/other/poor.

⁵⁵ Woods, C. A. (1998). *Development arrested: The blues and plantation power in the Mississippi Delta*. Verso. See chapter on Green Revolution.

⁵⁶ Weir, D., & Schapiro, M. (1981). *Circle of poison: pesticides and people in a hungry world*. Food First Books. On page 3, Weir and Schapiro begin the book by saying, "Massive advertising campaigns by multinational pesticide corporations---Dow, Shell, Chevron--have turned the third world into not only a booming growth market for pesticides, but also a dumping ground."

⁵⁷ Williams, B. (2018). "That we may live": Pesticides, plantations, and environmental racism in the United States South. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 1(1-2), 243-267. Page 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Page 5.

⁵⁹ *DDT - A Brief History and Status*. (2020, July 13). US EPA.

<https://www.epa.gov/ingredients-used-pesticide-products/ddt-brief-history-and-status>. According to the EPA, "DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane) was developed as the first of the modern synthetic insecticides in the 1940s. It was initially used with great effect to combat malaria, typhus, and the other insect-borne human diseases among both military and civilian populations. It also was effective for insect control in crop and livestock production, institutions, homes, and gardens. DDT's quick success as a pesticide and broad use in the United States and other countries led to the development of resistance by many insect pest species."

⁶⁰ Opperman, R. (2019). A Permanent Struggle Against an Omnipresent Death: Revisiting Environmental Racism with Frantz Fanon. *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 7(1), 57-80. Page 59.

astutely termed “atmosphere of violence” (atmospheric racism) in *Wretched of the Earth* to his description of colonized people living in “a permanent struggle against omnipresent death” in *Dying Colonialism*.^{61,62}

This petrochemical turn towards industrial agriculture via fertilizers and pesticides leaps out of the plantation model to reinscribe waste on a macrological scale, continually blurring the lines of human-animal-object-bject. Cleared land in the Midwest underwent iterations of removal (of Indigenous people--the Dakota Sioux, Illini, Ioway, Missouriia, and Otou tribes--of native flora and fauna, of small-scale settler farmers, of soil microbes) over the centuries to eventually settle into this present moment of monocropped and genetically modified corn and soy pervasion. Upstream soil erosion in the Midwest, resulting from cleared native habitats and decades of relentless, extractive land management methods, combine with excess fertilizer nutrient and pesticide pollution run-off to threaten Gulf of Mexico communities, economies, and ecologies downstream, positioned at the sink of the greater Mississippi River watershed.⁶³ Nancy Rabalais et al note an expanding “Dead Zone” in their longitudinal research studying coastal hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico each summer.⁶⁴

While not explicitly “plastic” (though this, too, races down the Mississippi River), this agro-petrochemical waste that flows into the Gulf Coast’s coastal oceanic waters is manufactured using the same petroleum ingredients, by the same petrochemical conglomerates, and often in the same locations like Cancer Alley.⁶⁵ Before the 2015 and 2016 mergers of the top six global agro-chemical and seed corporations, Monsanto, Dow Chemical, DuPont, Syngenta, and Bayer all operated facilities in the 85-mile stretch of Louisiana between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.⁶⁶ This concentrated region of petroleum refineries was formerly called “America’s Ruhr” (colloquially referencing Germany’s infamous petrochemical district) up until the 1970s as it allegedly produced sixty percent of the nation’s fertilizer and vinyl chloride supply.⁶⁷ The South

⁶¹ Fanon, F. (2007). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove/Atlantic, Inc. Page 71.

⁶² Fanon, F. (1994). *A dying colonialism*. Grove/Atlantic, Inc. Page 128.

⁶³ Pereira, W. E., & Rostad, C. E. (1990). Occurrence, distributions, and transport of herbicides and their degradation products in the lower Mississippi River and its tributaries. *Environmental science & technology*, 24(9), 1400-1406.

⁶⁴ Rabalais, N. N., Turner, R. E., & Wiseman Jr, W. J. (2002). Gulf of Mexico hypoxia, aka “The dead zone”. *Annual Review of ecology and Systematics*, 33(1), 235-263. Excess nutrient runoff into the coastal waters prompts a recurrent algal bloom that depletes the proximate levels of dissolved oxygen, creating temporarily lethal living conditions for organisms in the water column.

⁶⁵ Allen, B. L. (2003). *Uneasy alchemy: citizens and experts in Louisiana's chemical corridor disputes*. MIT Press. Page 168.

⁶⁶ MacDonald, J. (2019, February 15). *Mergers in Seeds and Agricultural Chemicals: What Happened?* United States Department of Agriculture. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2019/february/mergers-in-seeds-and-agricultural-chemicals-what-happened/>.

⁶⁷ Pasley, J. (2020, April 10). *Inside Louisiana’s horrifying “Cancer Alley,” an 85-mile stretch of pollution and environmental racism that’s now dealing with some of the highest coronavirus death rates in the country*. Business Insider Nederland. <https://www.businessinsider.nl/louisiana-cancer-alley-photos-oil-refineries-chemicals-pollution-2019-11?international=true&r=US#in-the-1970s-the-area-became-known-as-americas-ruhr-because-it-produced-60-of-americas-nitrogen-fertilizers-and-vinyl-chloride-and-a-quarter-of-americas-chlorine-22>. Vinyl Chloride is

holds fifty-five percent of the nation's Black population, and as a watershed, the Gulf of Mexico region incurs nearly triple the rate of toxic disposal release as the next most-concentrated region with pollution, the Great Lakes (respectively, the regions release 3,402 and 1,225 pounds of toxic waste per square mile).^{68,69} Eight of the nation's ten most-productive oil refineries exist in the Gulf South,⁷⁰ and the Gulf South Petroleum Administration Defense District (PADD) supplies and distributes 1,286 of 1,644 (78.2%) total million barrels of petroleum to the other four PADDs across the country, and 446 of 604 (73.8%) total million barrels of crude oil.⁷¹ The disproportionate regional crude oil extraction, petroleum production, and distribution based in the Gulf South renders majority low income, Black communities vulnerable to petrochemical pollution, plastic and otherwise. Thomas Davies considers this an example of slow violence, "a form of late-modern necropolitics, where communities are exposed to the power of death-in-life."⁷²

One might also recall the catastrophe of the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, resulting in over 113,000 tons of solid waste and 1,408,000 barrels of liquid waste that exposed Gulf Coast residents to adverse health outcomes from seafood consumption, increased air pollution, and contaminants on the beach and in the water.⁷³ (Do you remember when Dawn soapTM capitalized off this disaster by marketing its products with the tagline "Dawn saves wildlife," showing volunteers bathing oil-soaked marine birds with soapy suds?⁷⁴ Have you ever seen a Dawn soap bottle that was not contained within disposable plastic?⁷⁵ Do you remember when BP hired inmate labor to clean up the Gulf coast?⁷⁶)

among the most produced forms of plastic, and is known for its flammable and carcinogenic properties in manufacturing.

⁶⁸ US Department of Commerce, Rastogi, S., Johnson, T., Hoeffel, E., & Drewery, M. (2011, September). *The Black Population: 2010* (No. C2010BR-06). United States Census Bureau.

<https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf>

⁶⁹ *TRI National Analysis: Watersheds*. (2020, February 12). US EPA.

<https://www.epa.gov/trinationalanalysis/watersheds>. According to the 2018 TRI dataset, the Gulf of Mexico watershed region released 367 million pounds of toxic waste as compared to the Great Lakes watershed region, which released 218 million pounds of pollutants.

⁷⁰ Energy Information Association. (2020, January). *Table 5. Refiners' Total Operable Atmospheric Crude Oil Distillation Capacity* (Form EIA-820). <https://www.eia.gov/petroleum/refinerycapacity/table5.pdf>

⁷¹ *PADD regions enable regional analysis of petroleum product supply and movements*. (2012, February 7). US Energy Information Administration (EIA). <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=4890>

⁷² Davies, T. (2018). Toxic space and time: Slow violence, necropolitics, and petrochemical pollution. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 108(6), 1537-1553. Page 1540. Davies explores how petrochemical pollution brings "death-in-life," mirroring Achille Mbembe's description of colonized people who were "kept alive but in a *state of injury*."

⁷³ Osofsky, H. M., Baxter-Kauf, K., Hammer, B., & Mailander, A. (2012). Environmental Justice and the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. *NYU Env'tl. LJ*, 20, 99.

⁷⁴ *From Dishes to Ducks--We Clean Because We Care*. (2020). Dawn Soap.

<https://dawn-dish.com/en-us/dawn-saves-wildlife>

⁷⁵ Gunther, S. (2020, May 2). *The Sad Irony of Using Dawn to Clean Oiled Birds*. Treehugger.

<https://www.treehugger.com/the-sad-irony-of-using-dawn-to-clean-oiled-birds-4868687>

⁷⁶ Smith, J. C. (2016). Inmate Populations in a Disaster: A Labor Force, a Vulnerable Population, and a Hazard. Page 9.

Such omnipresent, environmental, and social death exists at the nexus of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and cotton-turned-petrochemical plantations. The oceanic “dead zones” and oil slicks and coterminous, carcinogenic deaths experienced by coastal, Southern, Black, Indigenous, and low-income communities are directly related to the wasted beings-things we collectively consume. Dale Pfeiffer describes the increasing and overlapping continuities of oil and agricultural industries in his book, appropriately titled *Eating Fossil Fuels*.⁷⁷ Raj Patel echoes this assertion by reminding us that “each calorie of food we consume requires an average of 5 calories of fossil fuels...for high-end products like beef this rises to an average of 80 calories.”⁷⁸

Buttressed by petrochemical refineries arising out of slave plantations, our modern food system cannot be analyzed without considering the multifaceted pollutions that co-constitute human-animal-object-objects. Only one-hundred thirty thousand out of seventy six million acres, or 0.17 percent, of the total soybean acres planted in 2015 were organically grown.⁷⁹ This means that 99.83 percent of domestic soybean production requires petrochemical intervention. It is worth mentioning, also, that nearly half of domestic corn--and more than seventy percent of soybean meal--production goes directly into feeding “livestock” for industrial animal agriculture.⁸⁰

Carol Adams underscores the objectification of animals not only by death-dealing technologies of mass slaughter, but also by “innocuous phrases such as ‘food producing unit,’ ‘protein harvester,’ ‘converting machine,’ ‘crops,’ and biomachines’” used regularly in the livestock industry.⁸¹ Livestock animals, once living, are physically and metaphorically rendered into disposable animal-objects through the logic of property, the absent referent of “meat,” and the fragmentation of their bodies: “After death, cows become roast beef, steak, hamburger; pigs become pork, bacon, sausage.”⁸² Of course, these animal products are subsequently packaged in plastic and transported domestically and globally using the same petrochemicals that permitted their existence in the first place, via chemical-intensively-produced food grains.

The meatified foodscape is a form of racializing health outcomes on the consumer end through diet-related disease, as well. Twenty seven percent of African American deaths in this country is attributed to preventable heart disease.⁸³ Breeze Harper reminds us of the personal, social, and environmental justice motivations for

⁷⁷ Pfeiffer, D. A. (2006). *Eating fossil fuels: oil, food, and the coming crisis in agriculture*. New Society Publishers.

⁷⁸ Patel, R., & Moore, J. W. (2017). *A history of the world in seven cheap things*. University of California Press. Page 188.

⁷⁹ Office of Communications. (2015, February). *USDA Coexistence Fact Sheets: Soybeans*. United States Department of Agriculture.

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/coexistence-soybeans-factsheet.pdf>

⁸⁰ Office of Communications. (2015, February). *USDA Coexistence Fact Sheets: Corn*. United States Department of Agriculture.

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/coexistence-corn-factsheet.pdf>

⁸¹ Adams, C. J. (2015). *The sexual politics of meat: A feminist-vegetarian critical theory*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA. Page 47.

⁸² Ibid. Page 47.

⁸³ Paige, M. L. (2009). “Thinking and Eating at the Same Time.” In *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, ed. Breeze Harper, 1-8. New York, NY: Lantern Books. Page 6.

Black divestment from industrial animal agriculture, as she explains, “Your consumption of unsustainably produced animal products may not only be increasing your chances for cancer, obesity, and heart disease, *you may be (in)directly oppressing and causing suffering to people who look just like you.*”⁸⁴ In the latter clause, Harper gestures to exploited factory farm laborers,⁸⁵ a profession with the highest rates of occupational hazards, comprised often with undocumented and/or formerly incarcerated persons, as well as impacted communities of color from the toxic wastes of industrialized concentrated animal feeding operations.⁸⁶ Might we recall the late environmental justice activist, Elsie Herring, who pointed to her mother’s house and said, “this is where they spray all their waste on us.”⁸⁷ She referenced Smithfield’s routine practice of spraying MSRA-infested hog manure on local crop fields adjacent to her community in rural North Carolina.

During the first wave of the COVID outbreak in the US, eighty-seven percent of the positively reported exposure cases in meat and poultry processing plants were experienced by racial and ethnic minorities, resulting in eighty-six early deaths.⁸⁸ Despite many red flag complaints and warnings of unsafe, overcrowded, and poorly ventilated work environments, on November 6, 2020, the USDA’s Food Safety & Inspection Service (FSIS) submitted a proposed rule to the Office of Management and Budget to *increase* chicken slaughter line speeds from 140 birds per minute (bpm) to 175 bpm.⁸⁹ The slaughter line, here, evokes materially and theoretically objectified death in both animal and human form. Invariably, at the end of the processing assembly line, humans weigh and place the cut “meat” into plastic bags that are vacuum-sealed and packaged for restaurant and store distribution, enabling consumption. Here, human-animal, animal-object, and human-object relations triangulate around one another through ejection. Human-subject-objects, as slaughterhouse workers, as proximate Black victims of environmental injustice from industrial animal agriculture and petrochemical production, and as consumers, are woven into the commodifying grammatical refrain of subject-eject-object-*abject* that is also inextricably entangled with notions of animality and objecthood.

⁸⁴ Harper, A. B. (2009). *Sistah vegan: Black female vegans speak on food, identity, health, and society*. Lantern Books. Page 25. Emphasis mine.

⁸⁵ Ribas, V. (2016). *On the line: Slaughterhouse lives and the making of the New South*. Univ of California Press. Page 49. (Ribas, 2016, pp49)

⁸⁶ Starmer, E., & Wise, T. A. (2007). *Living high on the hog: factory farms, federal policy, and the structural transformation of swine production* (No. 1434-2016-118875).

⁸⁷ Herring, Elsie [Elsie Herring]. (2014, December 17). *Spy Drones Expose Smithfield Foods Factory Farms*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayGJ1YSfDXs>. Steven Wing describes the prevalence of environmental racism in hog farm distribution.

⁸⁸ Waltenburg, M. A., Victoroff, T., Rose, C. E., Butterfield, M., Jervis, R. H., Fedak, K. M., ... & Honein, M. A. (2020). Update: COVID-19 among workers in meat and poultry processing facilities—United States, April–May 2020. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69(27), 887.

⁸⁹ Chapman, J. (2021, January 29). *Victory Achieved in Preventing the USDA from Worsening Slaughterhouse Conditions for Chickens, with the Help of the Animal Law Litigation Clinic*. Lewis & Clark Law School. https://law.lclark.edu/live/news/45131-victory-achieved-in-preventing-the-usda-from?fbclid=IwAR0UsMvgY-cgY4PS_gAjmLUOHijAmWIVON8EsW1km_ZgNU6klluFjnNo60Y. The Biden administration rejected this proposal.

Always Already Humans-As-Wastes: Alterable Human Materialities

In critiquing South Africa's post-apartheid rhetoric of a pacifying humanism, Achille Mbembe describes the Black, Native equivalent of ejection on African soil: "Race in particular did not simply become a crucial, pervasive dimension of colonial domination and capitalist exploitation. Turned into law, it was also used as a privileged mechanism for turning black life into *waste* - a race doomed to wretchedness, degradation, abjection, and servitude."⁹⁰

Membe connects the Black Indigenous struggle beyond the framings of United States-centered narratives of enslavement and genocide. But Membe, like many who invoke the humans-as-waste rhetoric, does not further engage this metonymic, metaphoric comparison between Blackness and waste. Zakiyyah Jackson astutely references the plasticization, this "beastialization and thingification" of Blackness in such a way that renders Blackness simultaneously object, animal, and sub/superhuman⁹¹; still yet, I find a need for us to collectively deepen our interrogation of Blackness and plastic in both the symbolic and very material senses.

In most waste discourses, the human-nonhuman boundary is too readily bisected through waste-as-external framings, not tending to the tenuous and blurry container of the Human and its Black/Indigenous "Others" as structurally-wasted and disposable beings-things them/ourselves. Early environmental justice literature disproportionately poses positivistic understandings of waste as contaminant, filth, and actants that penetrate and disturb bodily and community functioning. For example; Benjamin Chavis expounds on the national predisposition for toxic waste dumps to exist alongside African American, Latinx, and Indigenous communities, and Robert Bullard traces how African Americans in Houston are subject to disproportionate petrochemical toxin and hazardous waste exposure.^{92,93} Others, like Thomas Davies who was mentioned in the preceding section, point to less explicit forms of waste that operate insidiously via state and corporate collusion, perpetuating a *longue durée* of necropolitical, slow violence.⁹⁴ While waste and bodies interact permeably in these analyses to produce despair, disease, and early death for impacted communities, this approach prematurely assumes waste to be an *external* hazard separate from the bodies that it continues to dispose of and the bodies that dispose of it, rather than inherently fused through the magnetizing socio-spatial forces of abjection. I argue that focusing on the material disposable

⁹⁰ Mbembe, A. (2011). "Democracy as a Community of Life." In *The Humanist Imperative in South Africa*, ed. John W De Gruchy, 187-194. Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun Press. Page 188.

⁹¹ Jackson, Z. I. (2020). *Becoming human: Matter and meaning in an antiblack world* (Vol. 53). NYU Press. Page 1. Jackson continues later in the introduction: "Ultimately, I suggest that the normative subject of liberal humanism is predicated on the abjection of blackness, which is not based on figurations of blackness as "animal-like" but rather casts black people as ontologically plastic." Page 18.

⁹² Bullard, R. D., Mohai, P., Saha, R., & Wright, B. (2008). Toxic wastes and race at twenty: Why race still matters after all of these years. *Environmental Law*, 371-411.

⁹³ Bullard, R. D. (1987). *Invisible Houston: The black experience in boom and bust* (No. 6). Texas A&M University Press.

⁹⁴ Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press. Page 60.

commodity through the lens of its comparable Black, fungible subject-eject-object provides possible openings and pathways of disavowal.

The categorization of waste is a contestable, social project, as waste can take many shapes, forms, and meanings. To use the words of Sarah Moore, “waste is what is ‘managed as waste.’”⁹⁵ Material waste is physically produced through social, racialized relations of labor, commodification, and uneven consumption. Material waste is also often placed alongside necropolitically-wasted populations. Given capitalism is a racial project, labor itself is fundamentally linked to racialized notions of humanness that are oriented along axes of favor and disfavor.⁹⁶ This section draws from scholars who theorize the abjection of Blackness and Indigeneity from Humanity and situate this ongoing predicament alongside materialities of inanimate and animate wastes, understanding that particular bodies are disposed of well before “contamination” itself transpires. Through this process, “racism is rendered atmospheric (Fanon, 2004), ‘an all-encompassing and dynamic force field that distributes life and death unevenly’ (Mawani, 2015, 3), producing racialised populations as surplus.”⁹⁷ As repeatedly stated, Black and Indigenous populations have long been the ontological sink and site of (non)human disposability: as the nadir of the “Chain of being,” the embodiment of simultaneous personhood, animality, and objectified property; and also as “political orders” impeding the imperial project of modernity and the settler colonial apparatus, who, as such, must be either assimilated or eliminated.^{98,99}

McKittrick dislodges the naturalization of Black humans existing as the dysselected nadir in the afterlife of slavery. De-positioning the lowest link on the chain of humanity’s construction, the Negro slave, necessarily reconstitutes our imagination of *all* of humanity that has placed itself above this bottom rung. She insists that through *living* as human, one comes to revision this previously fixed socio-location “as verb, as *alterable*, as relational.”¹⁰⁰ Métis scholar Michelle Murphy gestures toward this *altered*

⁹⁵ Moore, S. A. (2011). Global garbage: waste, trash trading, and local garbage politics. *Global political ecology*, 133-144.

⁹⁶ Robinson, C. J. (2000). *Black Marxism: The making of the Black radical tradition*. Univ of North Carolina Press. Page 14. In the forward of this book, Robin D.G. Kelley writes, “capitalism emerged within the feudal order and grew in fits and starts, flowering in the cultural soil of the West--most notably in the racialism that has come to characterize European society. Capitalism and racism, in other words, did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of ‘racial capitalism’ dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide.”

⁹⁷ Vasudevan, P. (2019). An intimate inventory of race and waste. *Antipode*. This quotation includes the in-text citations directly from the text of her article.

⁹⁸ Simpson, L. B. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. U of Minnesota Press. Leanne Simpson describes Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous woman and two-spirit/queer people as political orders who “reproduce and amplify Indigeneity” (Page 41). In a similar manner to Saidiya Hartman, who expounds on Black exposure to premature death via state apparatus, Simpson provides an Indigenous accounting to premature death via the settler colonial nation state: “the bodies of women and 2SQ people as well as men are attacked through outright murder, imposed poverty, criminalization, assimilation, addictions, physical and mental illness, legislative disappearance, ongoing cognitive imperialism, racisms, and heteropatriarchy of Canadian society” (Page 42).

⁹⁹ See *Wastelanding* by Tracey Voyles and *The River Is In Us*, by Elizabeth Hoover.

¹⁰⁰ McKittrick, K (Ed.). (2015). *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis*. Duke University Press. Page 8. Emphasis mine.

human state by exploring the “alterlife”¹⁰¹ of chemical violences ushered in through settler colonial, plantation economies. This alterlife, she insists, “indexes collectivities of life recomposed by the molecular productions of capitalism in our pasts and the pasts of our ancestors, as well as into the future.”¹⁰² Such a recomposition gestures to a hybrid being that molecularly is both human and waste, living and dead, biotic and synthetic. Describing the high concentrations of PCBs in contemporary human blood, urine, and breastmilk, she asserts that “industrially produced chemicals like PCBs have become a part of human living-being.”¹⁰³

Informed by the Indigenous worldview of relationality, Murphy asserts, “We are part of the water. We are part of its tributaries. And, since the mid-twentieth century, we have become a part of PCBs too.” This dialectical, or perhaps, relational, fusion of humans and wastes--humans as chemically-wasted, and waste as human-bound and human-created--blurs the boundary between human/object, creating an alterable human condition that can perhaps unsettle the overdetermined Human that reproduces multiple objects and subjects of waste as outside itself. Black and Native bodies are “recomposed” by these synthetic chemical productions in a similar way that slavery and genocide altered their bodily and social arrangements. Murphy moves us beyond Eurocentric understandings of time, drawing our attention to a continuum that connects the past, present, and future altered humanities brought by iterations of settler coloniality. Humans-as-waste, in this instance, is simultaneously inevitable, predetermined, *and* alterable.

By exploring the precarity of Blackness in relation to aluminum as a manufactured commodity, Pavithra Vasudevan argues that the atmospheric racism of industrial toxicity “produces an *intimate monstrosity* that complicates¹⁰⁴ the subject’s relationship to racial oppression.”¹⁰⁵ Her research tracks predominantly African American workers in the Alcoa aluminum manufacturing facility in Badin, North Carolina, tracing the existential conundrum they face: while working at the Alcoa plant allows them to create a livelihood for their families, in doing so, they bring the chemical toxins from work to home, endangering their loved ones, which, thus, renders them “intimately monstrous.” Vasudevan and Murphy’s respective contributions of *intimate monstrosities* and *humans-as-PCBs* metonymically relate to one another. In both accounts, Indigenous and Black disposabilities are complicatedly entangled with

¹⁰¹ Murphy’s *alterlife* seems to play off the word afterlife (often used as the “afterlife of slavery”), but weaves in the chemical alterations to the human DNA and physiology.

¹⁰² Murphy, M. (2017). Alterlife and decolonial chemical relations. *Cultural Anthropology*, 32(4), 494-503.

¹⁰³ Ibid. Page 495. PCBs (Polychlorinated biphenyls) are a wide range of industrial pollutant that were heavily used from the 1920s until they were banned in 1979. According to EPA.gov, PCBs were used in electrical, heat transfer, generator equipment, and were plasticizers in paints, plastics, and rubber products.

¹⁰⁴ Macroscopically, this complication arises in a society’s paradoxical petro-dependence for business as usual survival and the impending ecological death (dioxins and climate change) brought by such petro-dependence. On a micro-scale, this complication exists in the bodies and households of Black workers in industrial plants like Alcoa, who work in order to feed their families (survive), but in working also bring toxins home via their skin and clothes in higher concentrations than the ambient atmospheric racism, and thus perpetuate this danger.

¹⁰⁵ Vasudevan, P. (2019). An intimate inventory of race and waste. *Antipode*. Page 3.

commodity-related toxins; these fusions birth alternative, or otherwise, possibilities of humanness in relation to the synthetic, chemically violent “productions of capitalism.” The after-/alter-life¹⁰⁶ frameworks of Black and Native (sub)human disposability provide *living* examples that can bypass rigid, dualistic delineations of waste-vs-human which prevail in environmental justice scholarship’s often damage-centered framework,¹⁰⁷ giving us new modes of existing in this waste-deluged era of racial capitalism overrepresented as the Anthropocene.¹⁰⁸ Early environmental justice assertions assume waste to be an external imposition on communities of color rather than an intimately concurrent deathdance of always-already disposals algorithmically fused into white supremacist commodification of everyone/thing unevenly. Perhaps in refusing this distinction between subject-object-eject, we can lay crucial groundwork to escape socio-material disposability altogether. What collective, caring interventions might we conjure up?

Part III | Defending the Dead, Refusing Omnipresent Death: Waste Work (in the Wake)

“What could I tell you that would help you remember how necessary you are in the time of disposability?”¹⁰⁹ -Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons on Marine Mammals*

An aspirational reimagining of Black disposability will require a greater attention to Black death and life alongside material wastes in the past, present, and future. Let us return to the ocean. In reference to NourbeSe Philip’s poem *Zong #15*, Christina Sharpe asks: “*What does it mean to defend the dead?*”¹¹⁰ To tend to the Black dead and dying: to tend to the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death?”¹¹¹ Sharpe proposes *wake work*, an unstopping practice of otherwise care that tends to and extends beyond the ongoing death of Black people preceding, (en)during, and after(living) the slave ship. Sharpe evokes multiple meanings of the word *wake*, though

¹⁰⁶ This is a grammatical overture towards bridging Black and Indigenous alterability through Humanist relations under the anti-Black, settler colonial United States.

¹⁰⁷ Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409-428.

¹⁰⁸ Vergès, F. (2017). Racial capitalocene. *Futures of black radicalism*, 72-82. Vergès writes, “The notion of the Anthropocene is ‘de-historicizing, universalizing, eternalizing, naturalizing a mode of production specific to a certain time and place,’ a strategy of ideological legitimation that blocks off any prospect of change.”

¹⁰⁹ Gumbs, A. P. (2020). *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*. AK Press. Page 59.

¹¹⁰ Philip, M. N., & Boateng, S. A. (2008). *Zong!*. Wesleyan University Press. Page 200. Emphasis mine. NourbeSe Philip writes, “‘Defend the dead.’ The Africans on board the Zong must be named. They will be ghostly footnotes floating below the text--‘underwater...a place of consequence.’”

¹¹¹ Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Duke University Press. Page 10.

its most poignant use to me is its reference to the “132 (or 140 or 142)”¹¹² slaves¹¹³ drowning in the wake of a slave ship named Zong after being jettisoned overboard. In the wake of the Zong, fungible, overthrown African slaves bobbed and thrashed before drowning into the abyss of the Atlantic, unlikely to reach the bottom intact.¹¹⁴ Sharpe explains that, despite their ongoing metabolization via continual nutrient cycling, sodium in human blood has a residence time-- “the amount of time it takes for a substance to enter the ocean and then leave the ocean”--of 260 million years. Of the approximated 14.65 million enslaved people who were packed like cargo during the 400 years of the transatlantic slave trade, a range of twelve to thirty percent are estimated to have died during this Middle Passage.¹¹⁵ Millions of dying, living, and already dead African captives in passage were tossed overboard in these centuries, now existing in the residence time of oceanic Blackness. NourbeSe Philip preempts Christina Sharpe’s wake work, compelled to “bring the stories of these murdered Africans to light--above the surface of the water--to ‘exaqua’ them from their ‘liquid graves.’”¹¹⁶

An estimated four billion microfibers of plastic per square kilometer coat the deep seafloor.¹¹⁷ Reading Philip’s aspirations to defend the dead through Waste Studies, I ask: what are the implications of Blackness, metaphorically sited at the bottom of the ocean in the afterlife of slavery, being shrouded by throwaway plastic in such an unceasing manner? Do they cohabitate, conspire? Are they one and the same? Or is plastic choking the belly of the world, the Black positions of the unthought, thrown overboard, forgotten, and unseen? What if plastic was longing to return to this womb of the world where it had also been stolen?

Before it became plastic, it was oil. And before that, the matter of life. You see, the object was once a subject. Algae. Plankton. Plantlife. Drowned detritus. Sunken biological bodies, decomposed, layered one after another, for millennia. Beneath the

¹¹² Sharpe’s nonspecific numbering of jettisoned slaves speaks to the nonchalant nature at which their masters deemed them disposable. What does a specific number mean when archiving any quantity of objects/subjects/non-humans deemed disposable?

¹¹³ I will alternate between using “slaves” and “enslaved people” to gesture to the flexible categorization of Black subject-object-objects living and dying in the wake.

¹¹⁴ Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Duke University Press. Pages 40-41. Christina Sharpe offers us insight from her colleague, Anne Gardulski. Gardulski explains to Sharpe that the ocean has a voracious appetite that scientists call “nutrient cycling,” making it unlikely any overthrown bodies would have made it intact to the ocean floor. Sharpe also mentions that slave ships were commonly stalked by pelagic sharks.

¹¹⁵ Curtin, P. D. (1972). *The Atlantic slave trade: a census*. Univ of Wisconsin Press. Page 275. Curtin writes, “Many of the trading records have been lost or destroyed, but enough has survived to permit at least an estimate of the percentage of slaves who died during the rigorous ocean voyage: about 12 per cent in French ships, contrasted with 17 per cent in Dutch and British ships; Portuguese losses in the early centuries ran about 15 per cent, but when the nineteenth-century abolitionists pressure forced the slave traders to take chances, the casualty rate rose to 25 to 30 per cent.”

¹¹⁶ Philip, M. N., & Boateng, S. A. (2008). *Zong!*. Wesleyan University Press. Page 202. The vast ocean of dumped Africans becomes a liquid grave.

¹¹⁷ Parker, L. (2015, January 11). *Ocean Trash: 5.25 Trillion Pieces and Counting, but Big Questions Remain*. National Geographic.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/1/150109-oceans-plastic-sea-trash-science-marine-debris/#close>

ocean's weight exists a pressure so immense that it can reconstitute solid into liquid.¹¹⁸ The earth and water's compression, consistent for the duration of a residence time, melt and mold this sedimented detritus to form oil, a *liquid grave* in the most literal sense. There is a reason we call oil a fossil fuel. Oil is both ancestral and ancestrally Black. Does that make plastic Black in part? In 2010, the world produced over 235 million metric tons of it, and an estimated 4.8 to 12.7 million of those entered the ocean.¹¹⁹ National Geographic reports that 269 thousand tons of plastic float on the surface via ocean gyres in countless forms--nylon fishing nets, children's toys, rubber tires, etc¹²⁰--but the buoyancy of oil in water is eventually counterbalanced by accumulating biofowl that gradually increases the debris' density. And so the naturally buoyant plastic inevitably sinks underwater. Can you relate? Much of the flotsam sinks below the surface into the abyss, soon to be forgotten by those who call them-/our-selves Humans. How might one "exaqua" or "bring light to" this multimodal liquid grave of subject-object-eject-objects, as Sharpe and Philip prompt us to consider?

But the majority of plastic does not end up in the ocean, despite the prevailing and depoliticizing tendency of waste literature to focus on this unfortunate outcome while obfuscating the relational ties between plastic and the plantation-settlement, and how plastic is interwoven in the story of environmental racism, racialized wealth accumulation, and an unmitigating mass consumerism. In the landfill, plastic, its primary and diversely toxic ingredient, becomes an agent of anti-Blackness and premature death. The landfill, plastic, and its chemical soup concentrate (known as leachate) are disposing forces for Black, Latinx, Native, and low income people who live in its adjacent afterlife.^{121,122,123} In such a way, landfills and the objects within them are not mere passive dumping grounds but rather subject-like actants in their porous mobility to contaminate beyond rigid confines.¹²⁴ After the plunder of oil extraction and refining, plastic lubricates our transactional economy (and widespread petro-dependency¹²⁵) before being wasted in an analogous way that Blackness is the omni-parasitized

¹¹⁸ National Geographic Society. (2013, January 14). *Petroleum*.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/petroleum/>

¹¹⁹ Jambeck, J. R., Geyer, R., Wilcox, C., Siegler, T. R., Perryman, M., Andrady, A., ... & Law, K. L. (2015). Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean. *Science*, 347(6223), 768-771.

¹²⁰ I was a citizen scientist on The Ocean Cleanup Mega-expedition back in 2015. I personally saw these items and more floating in the Pacific Ocean, thousands of miles from any land mass.

¹²¹ Chavis, B., & Lee, C. (1987). Toxic waste and race in the United States of America. *Commission on Racial Justice, UCC*. New York: Public Data Access.

¹²² Tchou, W. (2021, March 2). *Trash From All Over the Country Winds Up in Uniontown*. Sierra Club.

<https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2021-2-march-april/feature/trash-all-over-country-winds-uniontown>

¹²³ Zanolli, L. (2019, December 13). "We a™re just waiting to die": the black residents living on top of a toxic landfill site. The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/dec/11/gordon-plaza-louisiana-toxic-landfill-site>

¹²⁴ Hoornweg, D., & Bhada-Tata, P. (2012). What a waste: a global review of solid waste management. Furthermore, landfills are infamous contributors to climate change--anaerobic decomposition of organic material within them releases a conservative estimate of five percent of global methane and other greenhouse gas emissions.

¹²⁵ Williams, B. (2018). "That we may live": Pesticides, plantations, and environmental racism in the United States South. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 1(1-2), 243-267. Brian Williams argues that anti-Black racism shaped the politics of pesticide (a first cousin of plastic) intensification in the Deep South as extensions of the plantation system.

ejection--like the Aereile Jackson referenced by Christina Sharpe earlier--needed by racial capitalism through chattel slavery, cultural extraction, modern prison labor, and more recent marketing strategies for a lucrative, cosmetic diversity.^{126,127} Plastic, like Blackness, directly underwrites the entire global economy, only to be discarded once the value it encases is extracted and consumed. "We [black people] give the nation its coherence because we're its underbelly," says Frank Wilderson.¹²⁸

And just as dysselected humans are deemed wasteable (as human-objects), wasted plastics are imbued with life-like agency (as object-subjects). With biopolitical implications, nutritional and material sustenance is distributed unevenly through a global supply chain of plastic-packaged goods that are fated to become waste. Plastic can meter both life and death. During COVID-19, Instacart, DoorDash, GrubHub, and Amazon deliveries uphold a racial caste according to algorithms that prioritize the genre of *Homo oeconomicus* at the expense of predominantly low income, minority essential workers who, like plastic, 1) permit the flow of commodity exchange and 2) makeup the essential-disposal complex made necessary through racial capitalism's material, socio-theoretical, and laboral arrangements.¹²⁹ Blackness, positionally unique as ancestrally person *and* property, subject *and* object, disposable *and* also disposing, has a common cause with plastic. With only an eight percent recycling rate in the United States, plastic is the nadir of all consumable objects. The essential and quintessential throwaway.¹³⁰

I argue that, due to the evident entanglements of Blackness and plastic, using both terms somewhat expansively, the need for *waste work*, a corollary from Sharpe's *wake work*, now surfaces in a dire manner. *What does it mean to defend the dead?* And how might the *human-vs-waste* binary prevalent in waste literature foreclose a complicated kinship that exists between Blackness and Indigeneity and all other disposable subject-object-objects?

In *The Black Shoals*, Tiffany King deploys the *shoal*, a transient mixing of oceanic water and shifty sandbars, as an analytic that historically challenged slave ships from navigating and anchoring along the littoral shores of West Africa and the Americas. The shoal, constantly in movement, comprising both water and land, quite naturally resists settlement: "[it] forces a vessel to remain off shore—off the littoral—impeding it from reaching its intended destination."¹³¹ The shoal becomes useful here to consider how

¹²⁶ Summers, B. T. (2017). Race as Aesthetic: The Politics of Vision, Visibility, and Visuality in Vogue Italia's "A Black Issue". *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 4(3), 81-108.

¹²⁷ Summers, B. T. (2019). *Black in place: The spatial aesthetics of race in a post-chocolate city*. UNC Press Books.

¹²⁸ Hartman, S. V., & Wilderson, F. B. (2003). The position of the unthought. *Qui Parle*, 13 (2), 183-201. Page 187.

¹²⁹ Alimahomed-Wilson, J., & Reese, E. (2020, October 13). *It's a Prime Day for Resistance To Amazon's Ruthless Exploitation of Its Workers*. Jacobin.

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/10/jeff-bezos-prime-day-amazon-warehouse-workers>

¹³⁰ *Plastics: Material-Specific Data*. (2020, October 26). US EPA.

<https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/plastics-material-specific-data>. This statistic was taken in 2015.

¹³¹ King, T. L. (2019). Off Littorality (Shoal 1.0): Black Study Off the Shores of "the Black Body". *Propter Nos*, 40. Page 40.

prevailing waste discourse frames have “settled” rigid delineations between humans, nonhumans, and objects rather than offer a fluid continuum that threads through Blackness, Indigeneity, animality, plastic, and abjection, one that might open alternative possibilities of freedom from naturalized dysselection and ubiquitous commodification. I am reminded of Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ thought-provoking questions: *What are the distances we need and what are the walls that will isolate and destroy us? How can we discern the differences between generative boundaries and destructive borders?* King argues that a continental theory-bounded Settler Colonial Studies breaks open when it crashes into the “rock, coral, and sandbank of the shoal” of Black thought.¹³² Similarly, I propose that race-averse, Human-universalizing waste studies could meet their landfill doom when contending with the alterable, fungible, disposable Black and Indigenous Other.

King’s shoal here also alludes to archipelagic thought and adaptability, to an island epistemology that interrupts the hegemonies of the United States and Canada.¹³³ Perhaps we can learn from our youthful kin at the Bahamas Plastic Movement, positioned at the shoal of water and land, who under the vision and mentorship of Kristal Ambrose have mobilized collective, creative refusal to enact national policy changes that ban single-use disposals.^{134,135} My intention in tarrying between ocean and land, Black and Native, and material and theoretical relations of waste is to weave together a story of movement and interdependencies.

Waste work in the wake of the settlement-plantation seeks to flesh out the relation between extraction and ejection. It prompts us to eschew dualistic reductions of waste as non-living hazard and instead resurrect care for the always already deathbound Black-Indigenous-object-animal-plastic-object, intimately informing praxes to unmake racial capitalism and the numerous forms of disposability it necessarily predetermines through an orientation I call *blacksticity*.

Can the plasticity of time, the timelessness of plastic in its failure to decompose, the elasticity of Blackness, the violent processes of both embodiments’ transformations, and the comparable residence times of Black human flesh and ocean-deposited plastic in the wakes of the slave ship and the petrochemical plantation suffice to construct a troubled kinship? One might intuitively call plastic “white” rather than Black--something that is unnatural, imperiling the earth, out of rhythm with the rest of biota, running desperately from death and biodegradability, a creation for and by people who extract, consume, dispose, repeat, perpetually displacing externalities onto others while reaping the monetary profits...But I aim for something else in making this dreaded comparison.

What does it mean to defend the dead? What if, by defending the dead, we can care for those living who are already on the verge of immi/a/nent death-by-design?¹³⁶

¹³² King, T. L. (2019). *The Black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies*. Duke University Press. Page 19.

¹³³ Ibid. Page 196.

¹³⁴ *Breaking Plastic Dependency*. (2020). Bahamas Plastic Movement. <https://www.bahamasplasticmovement.org>

¹³⁵ *About the Ban*. (n.d.). The Government of the Bahamas. Retrieved December 31, 2020, from <https://www.bahamas.gov.bs/wps/portal/public/about%20the%20ban/>

¹³⁶ Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Duke University Press. Page 17. Christina Sharpe refers to Blackness as a *sign of immi/a/nent death* in the afterlife of slavery.

What if, by defending the dead, we can care for all of the necropolitically-overdetermined subject-eject-object-objects and breathe in them/us chances for existing as being-things on new terms? How else can we “shoal” shale?¹³⁷ Can we interrupt their inevitable disposal in our unmaking of *Homo oeconomicus*¹³⁸ imposed by capitalistic individualism? In the wake and undertows of racial toxicity, in tending to *blacksticity*--the fusion of Black Trash¹³⁹--waste work may provide a flightpath of collective care, refuse-al, and re-use out of the racist, cannibalistic, eco-cidal linear consumption pattern emplaced by a liberal humanism that insatiably devours, even while under the pretense of sustainability. What collective emergences can be birthed by such a refuse value? Waste work acknowledges the continuum of commodification birthed in genocide and slavery and privatized land, now seen through a supply chain of *intimate monstrosities* and racializing consequences via resource extraction, production, consumption, and disposal. When we contend with *blacksticity* as a relational framework, we may come to shoal or unsettle our own complicity in the inevitable disposal-making that exists along a continuum from object to abject to animal to (sub-/non-/other-than-)human to earth under racial capitalism. We shoal our own complicity in falling into the consumer traps laid out by an overwhelmingly white, individualist, liberal humanism, one that over-represents zero waste livelihoods as marketable aesthetics of sustainability rather than as essential praxes we must hastily collectivize towards in order to *alter* the scripted futurity of omnipresent (Black) death. Waste work in the wake. We see through the guise of green capitalistic efforts that merely displace responsibility on individuals while also holding ourselves, individuals and communities, accountable to the wastes we perpetuate. They may not be of our making, but we reuse and refuse them nevertheless and take to this task of building otherwise lives.

Concluding Capitalism with Circularity

When we unveil the anti-Blackness and Native genocide that is embedded into and enmeshed inseparably from the plastic-packaged commodity and all other commodified disposals, we can never unsee this. Our (sub-/non-/other-than-)human state is *altered*. And so, accordingly, we salvage our wasted and wasteful selves, internalizing our wasted- and wasteful-ness. When we *willingly* look through the framings of alterable humans-as-wastes, we see ourselves as the sacred waste¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ *Shale Gas Is Driving New Chemical Industry Investment in the U.S.* (2020, February). American Chemistry Council.

<https://www.americanchemistry.com/policy/energy/shale-gas/fact-sheet-us-chemical-investment-linked-to-shale-gas.pdf>. An estimated \$203 billion investments in infrastructure projects have been implemented in the shale gas industry, according to reports of the American Chemistry Council.

¹³⁸ McKittrick, K (Ed.). (2015). *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis*. Duke University Press. Page 19. Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick use this term to describe the new order of a wage-laboring Man as opposed to the native savage: “the virtuous breadwinner, the stable job holder, the taxpayer, the savvy investor, the master of natural scarcity.”

¹³⁹ Mills, C. W. (2001). Black trash. In *Faces of environmental racism* (pp. 73-91). Rowman & Littlefield.

¹⁴⁰ McDonald, B. (2015). Sacred Waste: Performance Pedagogy, Plastic Shamanism, and Ten Thousand Pieces of Trash. *Liminalities*, 11(4), 1.

that/who we always already are and were. We commit to defending the dead, these multifold disposals, as a defense strategy to resuscitate all subject-eject-objects' death into new life. We recognize the death pre-/over-determined onto Black-Native-animal-poor-womxn-product-object-plastic life and the earth as differentially singular. I contend that when we defend the dead, when we perform this waste work in the wake, we actually reinscribe a circular relationship to life and death that precedes and will supersede the Western myopic lens of the visible, provable livability. Waste work can help us account for and tend to the continuum of each commodity and its/her/his/their/our rapacious disposability enfolding by internalizing the undeniable truth of relationality. We see ourselves in the waste, and the waste in us. We "trust that all water touches all water everywhere."¹⁴¹ And water is an ancestor.¹⁴² (Did you know that plastic, too, is made of water?) Plastic carries trauma. Plastic is of the Earth.¹⁴³ And plastic also has spirit.¹⁴⁴

In defending the dead, we may *die living while living to die*,¹⁴⁵ and in doing so, perhaps engage in a process of *noiroplasticity*, altering scripted codes in our Black minds and beyond that can tend to the past, present, and future trauma of (after)living the wake of waste and waste from the wake of the slave ship in the nonevent of emancipation. More importantly, this waste work physio-spiritually evokes a linkage between land and water and body and commodity to harness the linear momentum of extractive colonialism and racial capitalism, lassoing them back into circular return. Perhaps, in embracing the framing of Black/Native-as-waste, rather than fleeing its inevitability, we can find a temporary loophole of retreat, a garretting of consciousness.¹⁴⁶ Doing so, we foreground our kinship with all other deathbounds:¹⁴⁷ the incarcerated

¹⁴¹ Gumbs, A. P. (2020). *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*. AK Press. Page 40.

¹⁴² Nelson, Melissa. [Melissa Nelson]. (2014, May 15). *Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89fsH20Bh44&t=932s>

¹⁴³ Orange, T. (2018). *There there: A novel*. Vintage. Page 11. In the Prologue of *There There*, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribal member and novelist, Tommy Orange, writes, "Everything here is formed in relation to every other living and nonliving thing from the earth. All our relations. The process that brings anything to its current form--chemical, synthetic, technological, or otherwise--doesn't make the product not a product of the living earth...Are we so different?"

¹⁴⁴ Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is Ceremony. Indigenous Research Methods*. Winnipeg: Fernwood. Page 90. Shawn Wilson's friend talks about a malfunctioning computer: "This machine here is made from mother earth. It has a spirit of its own. This spirit probably hasn't been recognized, and given the right respect that it should. When we work in a world of automated things, we forget that...everything is sacred, and that includes what we make."

¹⁴⁵ Somé, M. P. (1994). *Of water and the spirit: Ritual, magic, and initiation in the life of an African shaman*. New York: Putnam. Page 66. "Death is life and life is death. The dead live while the living die. Living or dying, we have joy." Priest Malidoma Somé shared these words on his recounting the mystic rituals and wisdom of the Dagara people in *Of Water and the Spirit*.

¹⁴⁶ McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic grounds: Black women and the cartographies of struggle*. U of Minnesota Press. Page 41. Katherine McKittrick traces the narratives of an enslaved African woman, Linda Brent, who hides in the 9'x'7'x3' attic of her slave master's home for seven years: "She claims that in the garret she is not enslaved and that her loophole of retreat is a retreat to emancipation."

¹⁴⁷ Ko, A., & Ko, S. (2017). *Aphro-ism: Essays on pop culture, feminism, and black veganism from two sisters*. Lantern Books. I tip my hat here to Aph and Syl Ko, whose contributions to Black Feminist Vegan theory in *Aphro-ism* deeply influence my work. They wrestle with Wynter's interrogations of Humanity,

animal-objects in zoos-aquariums, slaughterhouses, experimental laboratories (the ghost sacrifices, the absented disposals of Western educational, industrial agricultural, and medicinal tyranny);¹⁴⁸ the tossed electronics comprised of polycarbonate plastic, cobalt extracted via coerced child labor in Congo, and Malian gold;¹⁴⁹ the forgotten plastic bags shrouding the bottom of the Atlantic in the afterlife of their short-lived use; the desecrated rivers contaminated with industrial effluent from paper bleaching mills and agricultural run-off; the exploded mountaintops as consequential damage for cheap energy; the melanated island communities suffocating in tourist-and-ocean-brought plastic, adapting to rapid climate precarity; the melting glaciers as earth heats from our tampering with the “liquid grave,” that Black Gold¹⁵⁰ that will imminently become Black Trash. In embracing all of their death as our own, can an otherwise verb of altered humanning emerge to move us beyond a calculus that reproduces innumerable intimate monstrosities and “now collectively threaten[s] the planetary environment...,” as Sylvia Wynter articulates?¹⁵¹

The grammatical shoal of the subject-eject-object concept lies in the liminal space of simultaneous refusal and acceptance of (sub-/non-/more-than-)humans-as-waste. “*What do we do with our heightened consciousness?*” Alice Walker asks. To that, I suggest we aim for no more arithmetic of linearity and disposability. No more desecrating plastic, an ancestor who/that might be by millions of years our elder, but is nevertheless routinely disposed of in a matter of seconds or minutes. No more medicinal corporatism nor plastic-wrapped products that render extensions of earth into mere fungible commodities.¹⁵² No more complicity in animal sacrifice via assembly lines for “meats” and “milks” on land; these concentrated cesspools of death are directly related to the other “dead zones” in coastal oceanic waters as a result of nutrient and pollution runoff. Heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and now COVID are killing us; animal products have no fiber to unclog our collapsing arteries. Only plants can help with that.

pushing us theoretically and ethically to (re)extend Black beingness into the social construct of Animality through a vegan praxis, obliterating the categories altogether.

¹⁴⁸ Coe, S. (2018). *Zoicide: Seeing Cruelty, Demanding Abolition*. AK Press.

¹⁴⁹ Amnesty International. (2017). Time to Recharge: Corporate Action and Inaction to Tackle Abuses in the Cobalt Supply Chain. Page 5.

¹⁵⁰ Marrin, A. (2013). *Black Gold: The Story of Oil in Our Lives*. Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers. I aim here to wed the liquid grave referenced earlier in NourbeSe Philip’s Zong to crude oil extraction, connecting the Zong slave ship that jettisoned slaves into the Atlantic to the petrochemical practices of extraction and deposition. Black Gold references the lucrative and racializing interplay between Black enslaved people as value-producing property and Black oil as a profit-amassing resource with immense geopolitical stakes. The liquid grave, in this sense, gestures to the infamous BP Oil Spill of 2010 that devastated human and nonhuman life throughout the Gulf Coast. Additionally, it gestures to an ocean floor increasingly littered with death-dealing plastic. The liquid grave, Black Gold, and Black Trash can be materially and metaphorically woven together.

¹⁵¹ Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—An argument. *CR: The new centennial review*, 3(3), 257-337. Page 270.

¹⁵² Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions. Page 48. Writing this paragraph makes me think of the Potawatomi ethnobotanist, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and her plea for the return of a gift economy through the Indigenous concept of reciprocity. She writes, “Something is broken when the food comes on a Styrofoam tray wrapped in slippery plastic, a carcass of a being whose only chance at life was a cramped cage. That is not a gift of life; it is a theft.”

No more slaughter behind closed walls in the dark; if slaughter must take place, which I do not support but cannot necessarily control, perhaps there can be a witnessing and participating that confronts flesh consumers with an accountability to understand the magnitude of this action. Syl Ko powerfully iterates:

“when we say that ‘basically, we are animals,’ we feel what it means for racial ideology to implement the colonial concept of ‘the animal’ in order to bring destruction to beings all over the planet, human and otherwise. Our feeling is an epistemic resource. In Black veganism, we learn to trust that feeling and use it as a launching pad to theorize how the colonial tool of animality affects animals. The discovery is monumental: animals did not inform our notion of ‘animality’. ‘Animality’ informed our notions of animals.”¹⁵³

Despite the obstacles of experiencing systemic food apartheid and economic marginalization, African Americans are impressively the fastest-growing demographic of plant-based eaters in the country.¹⁵⁴ And yet, Black veganism alone does not unsettle the coloniality of commodification, remediate the racial wealth gap, confront the racialized labor exploitation of farmworkers, disrupt extractive, productivity-oriented relations to land through bio-intensification, nor meaningfully address the onslaught of plastics and other racialized wastes that are permitted even by vegan consumption, particularly as the movement becomes more corporatized. Oreos are vegan, yet the latest strike of Nabisco workers exclaiming, “We’re tired of being treated like trash,” evidences that these plastic-packaged consumer products are shrouded in many layers of disposal-making.¹⁵⁵ Black veganism does not necessarily reconcile with the fact that even plants carry spiritual subjecthood, agency, and sentience in their own rights, and that their mass-scaled production for transactional consumption is rooted in colonial, plantation logics. While Black veganism makes the case for a necessary politics for liberation and abolition, it is not immune from a corporate capture unless tethered to many other forms of divest-/reinvest-ments. But when the human-animal-object finds solidarity with the human-object-object, which is to say that, when Black vegan praxis adjoins with a zero waste politic, one’s orientation to racial capitalism is inherently altered. Can this be collectivized?

What do we do with our heightened consciousness? I have more suggestions: No more plastic purchases (balloons, flowers, any of them) for holiday traditions that further instill the racial(ly toxic) wealth gap. No more Black Friday death-deals that temporarily assimilate “American” Black folks into the “consumer human” category at the expense of Black and Indigenous people domestically and globally. No more Amazon deliveries. No more casting away waste to the landfill, the ejection we/they always already are. No more commodities, period, biodegradable or not. Dare we,

¹⁵³ Ko, A., & Ko, S. (2017). *Aphro-ism: Essays on pop culture, feminism, and black veganism from two sisters*. Lantern Books. Page 124.

¹⁵⁴ BBC News. (2020, September 11). *Why black Americans are more likely to be vegan*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53787329>

¹⁵⁵ Gurley, L. K. (2021, August 17). *‘We’re Tired of Getting Treated Like Trash’: Nabisco Workers Are Striking for Normal Hours*. Vice. https://www.vice.com/en/article/qj8akd/were-tired-of-getting-treated-like-trash-nabisco-workers-are-striking-for-normal-hours?fbclid=IwAR2r2zXy8gjmsl0Yu47lk_cb9QXviRjAxKpD0Nx3zVnLpU6RdktNpAV-l1w

alongside our Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous kin, reconsider our own complicity in the projects that uphold earth as inert, ownable private property. For wealthier Blacks who have managed to escape the pangs of poverty, rather than investing in extractive, ecocidal assets that reproduce individual exceptionalism and anti-Blackness both near and far, and rather than doubling down on the assimilationist, upwardly mobile consumer template as provided, there is an obligation to provide the seed funds in establishing community “commons” infrastructure that can serve as simultaneous entities of food, energy, water, housing, health, and educational cooperatives. What can we learn from Fannie Lou Hamer’s audacious Freedom Farm? Dare we challenge the distanced deaths-by-design of domesticity and, instead, consider the modern house itself as waste already-made and waste-in-the-making, particularly in a pandemic era when labor and consumption are increasingly, albeit, differentially, sited within one’s living quarters. Dare we consider the multifaceted consumer “goods” made necessary and ever-available for home living--and trash take-out--and the way grocery stores and their absences are complicit in subjectivating us unevenly into consumers of racialized waste, aisle after aisle, packaged commodity after commodity, plastic bag after bag.

Abroad, the late Wangari Maathai noted that African cities and environments have been increasingly plagued by accumulating waste and colored plastic bags--so much so that people jokingly call them their national flowers.¹⁵⁶ Plastic materially pollutes and structurally dis-/replaces Indigenous livelihoods. The pervasive anti-relational, convenience culture arising from plastic dependency pathologically “outcompetes” the biorhythmic cadence of Indigenous practices, those that were maintained primarily by Indigenous women; in Maathai’s native Kenyan ethnic group, the Kikuyu tribe, women weaved biodegradable baskets from sisol plants for the community to carry their respective belongings.¹⁵⁷ What other examples of local, Black and Indigenous ways of living-knowing are prevented by our dependency on plastic-packaged, globally-aggregated goods that can be purchased from big box retail stores? How might collectively refusing plastic, the profitable and polluting byproduct of oil, help re-foreground the Indigenous, relational, matrilineal and reciprocal practices that are otherwise suppressed by the fast pace of a waste-creating transactional consumer economy? Alexis Nelson Nicole and Billie Alexandria present an emancipating path forward through foraging that bypasses the pollutive constraints of commodification and reorients ourselves toward land relations.¹⁵⁸ And while he upholds consumer logic, Paul Hawken’s understanding of local, community-centered bulk goods distribution seems like an eco-socially and financially responsible model to transition into reuse.¹⁵⁹

Synthetics accumulate from this Human illusion; yet the Humanistic grasp for instant convenience and perpetual security comes at the expense of future survivability.

¹⁵⁶ Maathai, W. (2010). *Replenishing the earth: Spiritual values for healing ourselves and the world*. Image. Page 107.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 108.

¹⁵⁸ Greenlee, C. (2021, August 2). *How Black Foragers Find Freedom in the Natural World*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/30/dining/black-foragers-nature-alexis-nelson.html>

¹⁵⁹ Hawken, P. (1993). *The ecology of commerce: how business can save the planet*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. Pages 145-146.

¹⁶⁰ It comes at the expense of Indigenous futures.¹⁶¹ As such, I envision blacksticity to be a *reclamation*, but not a repetition, of our Black Trash, our Black Gold, and our possibilities of turning trash into treasure, which first requires seeing treasure in the trash. Kenyan Nzambi Matee follows the footsteps of Maathai to find a solution for their ubiquitous plastic waste; her company mixes mulched plastic with sand to make resilient bricks as paving stones.¹⁶² This is an incredible accomplishment of re-use. How can we also begin to turn off the plastic faucet when so many livelihoods now depend on it, just as so many lives are prematurely shortened by it? Re-use must be combined with refuse-al.

My hope is that blacksticity can seed visions of living and dying on terms that adjoin a larger community beyond the domains of extraction, non-consensual conquest, and disposal. As praxis, blacksticity might look like anti-consumer boycotts of divestment combined with Afro-Indigenous socialist farms and food forests, community markets, and cooperatives that support local veganic foodways and mutual aid. And values-based infrastructures that incentivize zero waste supply chains and cultures of reuse, politicizing the public in the direction of holistic community health and liberation beyond solutions prescribed by any packaged commodity. And collective movements that teach how to care for and repair broken beings-things in an era of omnipresent disposability, cheapened production, and planned obsolescence. But it might also take a different course, instead looking like folks stepping on the accelerator of death-dealing wastes to clog and break open the gears in the engine of racial capitalism, to then salvage the parts as centuries' overdue reparations.¹⁶³ I do not know how this plays out, but I find myself in this moment responding to Christina Sharpe's invitation into wake work.¹⁶⁴

Christof Mauch argues that "like archeology, [garbology] tells stories that would otherwise be forgotten."¹⁶⁵ What can listening to landfills teach us? Our deathbound

¹⁶⁰ Hovecar, J., & Sherman, J. (2020, August 30). *The plastics industry has exploited fears around COVID-19*. Hartford Courant.

<https://www.courant.com/opinion/op-ed/hc-op-sherman-hovecar-greenpeace-ppe-plastic-0830-20200830-b35lu5aaxfhphc3v5z3gawpji-story.html?fbclid=IwAR3srsb7E0B0i5PvEIVU4Beukxe-blT9g3nP0DtXORWjCMDMVLQujT8ayks>. John Hovecar and Jodi Sherman say, "we must not ignore the long-term impacts of single-use plastics on our health for a false sense of short-term safety pushed by polluters."

¹⁶¹ Estes, N., & Dhillon, J. (Eds.). (2019). *Standing with standing Rock: Voices from the# NoDAPL movement*. U of Minnesota Press. Page 8. Estes and Dhillon write, "to destroy the land is also to destroy the histories of the land, and thus limit the possibilities of a livable future."

¹⁶² Neira, J. (2021, February 9). *Kenyan Woman's Startup Recycles Plastic into Bricks that Are Stronger than Concrete*. Designboom.

<https://www.designboom.com/technology/gjenge-makers-recycled-plastic-bricks-kenya-02-08-2021/>

¹⁶³ Rueters, T. (2021, January 6). *Plastic garbage clogging Serbian dam threatens hydroelectric plant*. CBC.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/plastic-pollution-serbia-1.5863254?fbclid=IwAR3qo5SAj4GEXqKo-R4ts2c2x1eRLPhRqvU4UayeVCi8III5zwRQp3Jmqi0>

¹⁶⁴ Sharpe concludes the introduction of *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. "...it is also my hope that the praxis of the wake and wake work might have enough capaciousness to travel and do work that I have not here been able to imagine or anticipate" (page 22). She also writes, "We must become undisciplined" (page 13).

¹⁶⁵ Mauch, C. (2016). *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*. Page 6. Garbology, meaning the study of garbage.

ancestors are speaking, “a mess with a message,”¹⁶⁶ perhaps awakening us, perhaps haunting us with their unresolved disposal, whispering louder and louder until we no longer look away from the mummified tombs.¹⁶⁷ Katherine McKittrick describes a burial ground of enslaved Africans found in Lower Manhattan in 1991: “[it] tells us that the legacy of slavery and the labor of the unfree both shape and are part of the environment we presently inhabit.”¹⁶⁸ These buried ejections, the dead and the wasted, the Blackness and the plastic, are the absented presences who/that can no longer be unseen. Back in March of 2020, ABC news reported on the controversial \$9.4 billion Formosa Plastics Inc. project receiving a construction permit to build a state-of-the-art plastic fabric and antifreeze production facility on top of several known slave burial grounds in the African American community of St. James Parish, Louisiana, positioned in the heart of Cancer Alley.¹⁶⁹ There is an ancestral relationship between Blackness and plastic, however disharmonious, and we can listen for it to discover a care across/despite death. Interviewed in the above article, Sharon Lavigne of the RISE St. James environmental justice organization says: “Our ancestors are crying out to us from their graves -- they are telling us to not let the industry disturb their burial sites. Formosa Plastics...don't care, they just want to profit from St. James Parish.”

In more recent news, social pressures, combined with grassroots litigation efforts, successfully lobbied the Army Corp of Engineers to pause and review the permitting process for this Formosa facility.¹⁷⁰ The buried slaves, dead and disposed of, are now speaking, inserting their power through the living to shoal settlement of yet another necropolitical, death-dealing reproducer of waste. This is but one of many iterations that Tiffany King might describe as the “surplus of Black livingness—that exceeds black death, black suffering, and the black body.”¹⁷¹

Such livingness exists alongside the Indigenous-led #NoDAPL movement in response to the placement of the Dakota Access Pipeline, the “Black Snake” of death, that was re-routed to distribute oil through Standing Rock Sioux reservation lands. When interviewed in the midst of a groundswell of Indigenous resurgence, youth Water Protector Zaysha Grinnell says, “we are claiming the resistance that comes from our

¹⁶⁶ Yaeger, P. (2003). Trash as archive, trash as enlightenment. *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, 103-115.

¹⁶⁷ Boetzkes, A. (2016). Plastic, Oil Culture, and the Ethics of Waste. *RCC Perspectives*, (1), 51-58. Page 56. Amanda Boetzkes explains that a landfill is not a composter, but a mummifier, in such a way that garbage remains preserved indefinitely.

¹⁶⁸ McKittrick, K. (2013). Plantation futures. *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 17(3 (42)), 1-15. Page 2.

¹⁶⁹ Carrega, C. (2020, March 15). *\$9.4 billion plastics facility to be built on slave burial grounds, report says*. ABC News.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/94-billion-plastics-facility-built-slave-burial-grounds/story?id=69555811>. I

would like to thank my friend, Joan Katherine Garner, for bringing this news to my attention.

¹⁷⁰ Dermansky, J. (2020, November 5). *Anti-pollution Advocates Cheer as Army Corps Reviews Formosa Plastic Permit in Louisiana*. DeSmog.

<https://www.desmogblog.com/2020/11/05/army-corps-reviews-formosa-plastics-permit-louisiana>.

Fortunately, this massive construction project has been placed on pause for the interim by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

¹⁷¹ King, T. L. (2019). Off Littorality (Shoal 1.0): Black Study Off the Shores of “the Black Body”. *Propter Nos*, 40. Page 41.

ancestors,” alluding to an Indigenous livingness that exceeds the settler colonial efforts of annihilation.¹⁷² Energy Transfer Ventures and Phillip 66, companies that manage the Dakota Access Pipeline, have faced years of lawsuits for unpermitted construction of the Bayou Bridge Pipeline in Louisiana’s Atchafalaya Basin to connect midwestern crude oil for southern export.¹⁷³ This network of oil refineries and pipelines and plastic manufacturing plants exist in a system predicated on settler relations to commodified land and Black and Indigenous disposability. Man camps from oil rigs reproduce terrains of violence for proximate Indigenous womxn who are disproportionately murdered and disappeared, as violence on the land mirrors violence on the bodies.¹⁷⁴ In the context of the Bayou Bridge pipeline, Black and Indigenous communities such as the United Houma Nation and those living in St. James Parish bear the disproportionate brunt. The settler colonial landscape is a massive grave site of omnipresent death for Native peoples, for formerly enslaved Black peoples, for microbial communities, for dammed rivers, for bison, for throwaway objects in and beyond landfills, for all extensions of the living Earth that have been mistaken as inert commodity from this centuries-long demographic transition and transfer-theft of land-power into European hands-minds. *What does it mean to defend the dead?*

This decision to emphasize a commonality between Blackness and plastic through abjection is intentionally provocative; it may unintendedly reify the rampant disposable conceptions and experiences of Blackness and Indigeneity, hypervisibly extracted and/or invisibly disposed. But joining the (sub-/non-/more-than-)human to the animal to the object to the abject invokes a powerful spirit of relationality that implicates ourselves in the Indigenous “all my relations” manner, rekindling Blackness to Indigeneity to all of Earth circularly at a time when boundary-making has created false and lethal narratives of detachment. So if waste operates as a function-symptom of genocidal colonialism and plantational anti-Blackness, then visioning praxes of a waste-free society need to be included in movements of decolonization and abolition.¹⁷⁵ If land in this settler colonial headquarters of the Earth is rematriated to Indigenous stewards, does the nylon noose around Black people not uncoil? Can we remember and relearn diasporic movements that attune to seasons rather than consumer clicks via commercial convenience?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs compels our un-humanning through a deeper knowing of self/other. “I want to dwell on the difference between being (dis)placed, or what I am

¹⁷² Estes, N., & Dhillon, J. (Eds.). (2019). *Standing with standing Rock: Voices from the# NoDAPL movement*. U of Minnesota Press. Page 22.

¹⁷³ [Bayou Bridge Pipeline]. (2017, October 13). Bayou Bridge Pipeline - Trailer. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSvaEvhZARY>

¹⁷⁴ Konsmo, E. M., & Pacheco, A. K. (2016). Violence on the land, violence on our bodies: building an indigenous response to environmental violence. *Women’s Earth Alliance Native Youth Sexual Health Network*. Page 31. Melina Laboucan-Massinio (Lubicon Cree) says in an interview, “The industrial system of resource extraction in Canada is predicated on systems of power and domination. This system is based on the raping and pillaging of Mother Earth as well as violence against women. The two are inextricably linked.”

¹⁷⁵ Waste-free, meaning free from *all* of the wasted beings-things.

calling being mistaken for an ocean, and being ocean as praxis,"¹⁷⁶ she says. In a similar manner, I hope this piece can underscore the difference between being disposed of, or being mistaken as object-ject, and being *plastic* as praxis. Being plastic as praxis, or leaning into one's blacksticity, or performing this waste work in the wake of the slave ship, is not a call to apoptosis nor to self-ejection in the ways one may think, that revolutionary suicide marching in the inevitable and yet alterable fate of her-their-his-its-our-my wastedness. Rather, this waste work might be a subtle shoal, a *noiroplastic* reconfiguring of Black thought-behavior to unsettle the current logics that fix outcomes of racialized disposability and an ecocidal, individualist, racist, sexist mass consumerism and settlement predicated on petrochemicals. Maybe if we call the names of the dead¹⁷⁷ and collectively care for the discards, they will remind us how to refuse, how to die, and how to live and die otherwise. "What is possible if we cease to seem natural to ourselves?"¹⁷⁸ Are we plastic enough?

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¹⁷⁶ Gumbs, A. P. (2019). Being Ocean as Praxis: Depth Humanisms and Dark Sciences. *Qui Parle*, 28(2), 335-352. Page 336.

¹⁷⁷ McDonald, B. (2015). Sacred Waste: Performance Pedagogy, Plastic Shamanism, and Ten Thousand Pieces of Trash. *Liminalities*, 11(4), 1. Page 16. Bonny McDonald writes, "In a manic and celebratory tone, another plastic shaman instructs the audience to listen to the shadow people, those the dragon honors with work and with death in his great factories producing sacred waste. Dancers spin out into the audience proudly whispering names of the dead and at the same time handing out "sacred rattles" to each audience member."

¹⁷⁸ Gumbs, A. P. (2019). Being Ocean as Praxis: Depth Humanisms and Dark Sciences. *Qui Parle*, 28(2), 335-352. Page 336.

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<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-the-wednesday-edition-1.5844355/it-s-a-slow-death-camels-are-dying-with-masses-of-plastic-in-their-bellies-study-finds>.

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