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Christopher A Lang: I am 4th year PhD student in Environmental Studies. My doctoral research aims to reframe notions sustainability by intersecting food and waste studies, environmental justice, consumer behavior, and critical race and ethnic studies. As a Black/biracial scholar-activist and (former) marine biologist, I was deeply excited to receive notice of this particular call for submissions that interrogates power, Blackness, ocean health, and more. I have a wide net of interests and passions connecting human and non-human eco-social relations that span water and land.

In the Waste: On Blackness and (Being) Plastic

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 waste 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 bodies, providing an opening to re/consider the relationship between Blackness, animals and (other) objects, namely plastic. If objects can co-conspire in one another’s disposability, how can these fraught relations of ejection be re-configured on new terms? By tending to the multifold deaths and disposals that exist along the subject-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, perhaps ones that refuse disposability altogether.

Keywords: Blackness, Indigeneity, plastic, waste, environmental justice, disposability

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

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.”

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

Founder of the Bahamas Plastic Movement, 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 would burn 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, 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 prevailing that the number one complaint from tourists exiting Bimini according to the Ministry of the Bahamas was

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

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.

“litter.”⁵ Tourists, in other words, complained about the very plastics that the tourist economy created. Plastics that underwrote and ensured their 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 percent 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 (meaning both existence and environmental impacts) 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.

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 (Black, biracial) 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 today⁸, for the people and places and species I care about. (I 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

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.

8 To name a few, such eco-social challenges could be listed as: runaway climate change and exacerbated hurricane, wild-fire, 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.

that seeks solutions while asking all of the wrong questions. I would strive to peel back layer after layer of my colonized mind and develop a Black sense of place. The waste currently strangling the islands in the Caribbean is inseparable from the waste that smothers other Black and Indigenous lives in the United States and elsewhere, such as those in Cancer Alley. This is the afterlife of slavery. It is from a place of both privilege and pain, and of continual learning, 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 9 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, speciesed, and gendered spectrum with many intersections.¹⁰¹¹² Gumbs traces the overlapping geographies of whale exterminations and enslaved human trafficking, of Caribbean monk seal genocide and the lubrication of plantation machinery with their blubber.¹³ Her lessons are a reminder that the rupture of the settlement-plantation¹⁴ was and still is wholly ecological, that the “ecological” was and will always be social. *Undrowned* adjoins Blackness to its mammalian, oceanic, womb-like origins of connect-

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

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

14 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.”

edness, necessarily unsettling the stepping stones that underwrote the hierarchical formation of Humanity, which is at its core, eco-socially extractive.

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[?]"¹⁵ *Dreaded comparison* because white veganism claimed to care about animals while overlooking a system that built itself by oppressing Black human-animal life in parallel ways. Because white veganism wedded the painful atrocity of African enslavement to animal slaughter in hopes to usher an agenda of animal liberation as detachable from Black abolition. Because in the amnesia of privilege, white veganism did not consider that there are humans who will never quite be Human enough. Because white veganism paid little regard to white supremacy-turned-white-privilege, systemic anti-Blackness, and the racist-speciesist order that both established since colonizing the Americas.¹⁶ Because white veganism does not understand "how important blackness is to the libidinal economy of white institutionality."¹⁸ Or does it? Meanwhile, Black human mammals fall into the black void between cares of the Human and 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.¹⁹ Objects who/that are never in isolation but forever entangled with biota, with ourselves, accumulating in bloodstreams and

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

16 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.

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

18 Hartman, S. V., & Wilderson, F. B. (2003). The position of the unthought. *Qui Parle*, 13(2), 183-201. Page 17.

19 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.

stomachs and bellies of the Earth.²⁰²² Such theoretical and material progress interrogating human-animal injustices--one might see this expressed in Black veganism and animal rights efforts--can not yet be said for the human-object interface as depicted in the circular economy and zero-waste movements, 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? 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" 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 people²⁴, can see ourselves across the numbed pain of the inanimate, the always-already wasted and deathbound, and adapt accordingly in true plastic fashion.

Part II | Blackness and Plastic: Unpacking Human-Animal-Object-Abject 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."²⁵ -Christina Sharpe, *In the*

20 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>. Camels in the United Arab Emirates

21 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.

22 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.

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

24 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 Katherin 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."

25 Ibid. Page 29. Sharpe analyzes a scene in *The Forgotten Space--A Film Essay Seeking to Understand the Contem-*

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 humans-as-waste rhetoric with little engagement of the materiality of waste itself, foreclosing important possibilities that invoke consumer behavior and collective action.^{26,27} 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? And 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 ejection in the construction of a “clean, white, male, Human” world, both plastic and Black people perform acts of ejecting one another through this very subject-eject-object engagement. Ejection yokes the Manichean subject-object grammar of Blackness²⁸ to the objectified plastics-

porary 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.”

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

27 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.

28 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.”

-we can call their alterable, relational co-condition blacksticity--in such a way that dissolves their dyadic relationship by creating a subject-eject-object²⁹ 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*. 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-soon-to-be-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,”³⁰ in being/having been both subject³⁰ 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 ocean filled with plastics, 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.”³¹ 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-ject.³² Deemed as property (like objects), reduced to reproductive and laboring capacity (like animals), and considered impediments to settlement (like disposables), Black and Native counterparts were respectively and uniquely objectified as valuable-fungible and exterminatable. “Essentially, [Achille Mbembe] says, the slave is the object to whom any-

29 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 After-life of Slavery. This refrain is substitutable, and I will continue to insert new words into it throughout the piece.

30 Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its over-representation—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.

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

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

thing can be done, whose life can be squandered with impunity,³³ Saidiya Hartman explains. By 33 collapsing the human category as is oft-done in race-averse analyses of plastic waste,³⁴ 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.³⁶ In violently rolling out such a culture of valued objecthood, this overrepresented genre of Humanity commandeered global eco-socio-political power, enabling the proliferation of *literal* waste, as well. Max Liboiron deftly notes that “plastic is a function of colonialism.”³⁸

Where does our household trash go every week? Society’s understanding gap³⁹ of individual and collective wastes created⁴⁰, and the impacts of such habituated discarding behavior, exists 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 fenceline (and island) communities that bear the disproportional

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

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

35 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.”

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

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

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

39 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.”

40 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.

tionate burdens of business as usual commerce. This invisibility also mirrors the erased atrocity of Indigenous genocide from the United States’ public memory, and the ongoing erasure of Indigenous body-thought-behavior as a means of continuing the settler state and the ecocidal systems it produces as prerequisites for livelihood. As the United States incrementally expanded into unceded Indigenous territory to cement its existence, such unilateral cultural suppression and attempted annihilation propelled a rupturous transformation in worldview relating to land, “clearing”⁴¹ the stage for these multifold disposals to concentrate and accumulate in the subsequent centuries. 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.”⁴² The genocidal clearing 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 of called by many names: the Anthropocene,⁴³ the Racial Capitalocene,⁴⁴ the Plantationocene⁴⁵ --all pointing to a door of no return.⁴⁶

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, who were beneficiaries of the settlement-plantation⁴⁷ and the planta-

41 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.”

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

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

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

45 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/>

46 King, T. L. (2019). *The Black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies*. Duke University Press. Page 9.

47 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.

tion-turned-prison⁴⁸ and the sharecropping-derived surplus, organized annual policy, agronomy, and chemistry conferences for the southern elite through the National Cotton Council⁴⁹ and the Delta Council organizations to spearhead agricultural biointensification. These annual gatherings of the plantation bloc elite ushered in the petrochemical turn⁵⁰, 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.⁵¹

Pesticides and herbicides served as central technologies to replace 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.⁵² 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 toxicity exposure and dispossession.⁵³ Romy Opperman's analysis of Frantz Fanon's oeuvre is useful here: "Fanon names DDT⁵⁴ in the context of the

48 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."

49 *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.

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

51 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."

52 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

53 *Ibid*. Page 5.

54 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

French colonial government's attitude toward the colonized as a kind of contaminant or disease."⁵⁵ Here, the colonized humans and the unwanted insect "pests" exist coterminously as subjects in the eyes of the colonizer. Opperman weds Fanon's 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*.^{56,57}

This petrochemical turn through 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, 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. Soil erosion, resulting from cleared native habitats and decades of relentless, extractive land management methods, combines with excess fertilizer nutrient and pesticide pollutant run-off to threaten Gulf of Mexico communities, economies, and ecologies downstream, positioned at the sink of the greater Mississippi River watershed.⁵⁸ Nancy Rabalais et al note this expanding "dead zone" in their longitudinal research studying coastal hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico each summer.⁵⁹ While not explicitly plastic, 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.⁶⁰ 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

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."

55 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.

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

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

58 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.

59 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.

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

Orleans.⁶¹ This concentrated 61 region was formerly called ‘America’s Ruhr’ (after Germany’s infamous petrochemical district) up until the 1970s as it allegedly produced sixty percent of the nation’s fertilizer and vinyl chloride supply.⁶² The South 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).⁶³ Eight of the nation’s ten most-productive oil refineries exist in the Gulf South,⁶⁴ and the Gulf South Petroleum Administration Defense District (PADD) supplies and distributes 1286 of 1644 (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.⁶⁵ 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. 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.”⁶⁶ One might also consider the catastrophe of the 2010

61 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/>.

62 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>

63 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>

64 *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.

65 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>

66 *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>

67 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

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.⁶⁸

Such omnipresent, environmental, and social death exists at the nexus of racial capitalism, colonialism, and petrochemical plantations. Dale Pfeiffer describes the increasing and overlapping continuities of oil and agricultural industries in *Eating Fossil Fuels*.⁶⁹ 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-object-objects. It is worth mentioning that nearly half of domestic corn, and more than seventy percent of soybean meal, production goes directly into feeding livestock for industrial animal agriculture.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ 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.⁷² Livestock animals, once living, are physically and metaphorically rendered into 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.”⁷³ Of course, these animal products are 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. 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-ab-

of injury.”

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

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

70 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>

71 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>

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

73 *Ibid.* Page 47.

ject that is also entangled with notions of animality.⁷⁴

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."⁷⁵

Membe connects the Black Indigenous struggle beyond the framings of United States-centered 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.

In most waste discourses, the human-nonhuman boundary is too readily bisected through waste, not tending to the tenuous and blurry container of the Human and its Black/Indigenous "Others" as structurally wasted and disposable beings-things themselves. Early environmental justice literature disproportionately poses positivistic understandings of waste as contaminant, filth, and actants that penetrate and disturb bodily and community functioning. 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.⁷⁶ Similarly, Tracy Volyes recounts the ways that the rhetoric of "barrenness" had been strategically employed on the desert land upon which Diné Nation reservation exists, justifying the arrival of uranium mining sites that compromised native tribal community

74 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. Elsie Herring [2:46] explains the recurring injustices her family and community experiences living beside a hog farm manure lagoon.

75 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.

76 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.

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

health.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ 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 commodity through the lens of its comparable Black, fungible subject-object-eject 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.'"⁸⁰ Inversely, material waste is physically produced through social, racialized relations of labor, commodification, and uneven consumption. Given capitalism is a racial project, labor itself is fundamentally linked to racialized notions of humanness.⁸¹ 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."⁸² 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 property; also as "political orders" opposing the imperial project of modernity and the settler colonial apparatus, who, as such,

78 Volyes, T. B. (2015). *Wastelanding: Legacies of uranium mining in Navajo country*. U of Minnesota Press.

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

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

81 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."

82 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.

must be either assimilated or eliminated.⁸³

McKittrick dislodges the naturalization of Black humans existing as the “dysselect-ed” --ones marked inferior in the struggle for existence--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-lo-cation “as verb, as alterable, as relational.”⁸⁵ Métis scholar Michelle Murphy gestures toward this altered human state by exploring the “alterlife”⁸⁶ 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 ances-tors, as well as into the future.”⁸⁷ Such a recomposition gestures to a hybrid being that mo-lecularly 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.”⁸⁸

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 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

83 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).

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

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

86 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.

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

88 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.

that reproduces multiple objects and subjects of waste as outside itself. Black and Native bod-ies 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 com-modity, Pavithra Vasudevan argues that the atmospheric racism of industrial toxicity “produces an intimate monstrosity that complicates⁸⁹ the subject’s relationship to racial oppression.”⁹⁰ Her research tracks predominantly African American workers in the Alcoa aluminum manufacturing facility in Badin, North Carolina, tracing the impossible 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, thus rendering them “inti-mately monstrous.” Vasudevan and Murphy’s respective contributions of intimate monstrosities and humans-as-PBCs metonymically relate to one another. In both accounts, Indigenous and Black disposabilities are complicatedly entangled with 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-life⁹¹ frameworks of Black and Native (sub)human disposability provide 91 living examples that can bypass rigid, dualistic delineations of waste-vs-human which prevail in environmental justice scholarship’s often damage-centered framework,⁹² giving us new modes of existing in this waste-deluged era of racial capitalism overrepresented as the Anthropocene.⁹³ Early environmental justice as-

89 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 concen-trations than the ambient atmospheric racism, and thus perpetuate this danger.

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

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

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

93 Vergès, F. (2017). Racial capitalocene. *Futures of black radicalism*, 72-82. Vergès writes, “The notion of the Anthro-pocene 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.”

sertions assume 93 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?”⁹⁴ -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, future. In reference to NourbeSe Philip’s poem *Zong #15*, Christina Sharpe asks: “What does it mean to defend the dead?⁹⁵ 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?”⁹⁶ 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 its most poignant use to me is its reference to the “132 (or 140 or 142)”⁹⁷ slaves⁹⁸ 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.⁹⁹ Sharpe explains that,

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

95 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.’”

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

97 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?

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

99 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.

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.¹⁰⁰ Millions of dead and dying African captives 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 ‘ex-aqua’ them from their ‘liquid graves.’”¹⁰¹

An estimated four billion plastic microfibers per square kilometer coat the deep sea-floor.¹⁰² 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?

Before it became plastic, it was oil. And before that, the matter of life. Algae. Plankton. Plantlife. Drowned detritus. Sunken biological bodies, decomposed, layered one after another, for millennia. There is a reason we call oil a fossil fuel. Oil is ancestral and ancestrally Black. Does that make plastic Black, at least in part? In 2010, the world produced over 235 million metric tons of it, and estimated 4.8 to 12.7 million entered the ocean.¹⁰³ National Geographic reports that 269 thousand tons of it floats on the surface via ocean gyres in countless forms--

Sharpe also mentions that slave ships were commonly stalked by pelagic sharks.

100 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.”

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

102 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>

103 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.

nylon fishing nets, children's toys, rubber tires, etc.¹⁰⁴—but the buoyancy of oil in water is eventually counterbalanced by accumulating biofowl that gradually increases the debris' density. Much of the flotsam sinks below the surface into the abyss, soon to be forgotten by those who call themselves humans.

Beneath the ocean's weight exists a pressure so immense that it can reconstitute solid into liquid.¹⁰⁵ The earth and water's compression eventually melt and mold this sedimented detritus to form oil, a liquid grave in the most literal sense. 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?

Plastic, a primary and diversely toxic constituent of the landfill, 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 afterlife.¹⁰⁶ 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.¹⁰⁷ After the plunder of oil extraction and refining, plastic lubricates our transactional economy (and widespread petro-dependency¹⁰⁸) before being wasted in an analogous way that Blackness is the omni-parasitized ejection, like Aereile Jackson, needed by racial capitalism through chattel slavery, cultural extraction, modern prison labor, and more recent marketing strategies for a lucrative, cosmetic diversity.^{109,110} “We [black people] give the nation

104 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.

105 National Geographic Society. (2013, January 14). *Petroleum*. <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/petroleum/>

106 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.

107 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.

108 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.

109 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.

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

its coherence because we're its underbelly,” says Frank Wilderson.¹¹¹

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, in this way, can bring both life and death. During COVID-19, Instacart, DoorDash, and Amazon deliveries uphold a racial caste according to algorithms that prioritize particular Humans' survival needs despite the disposal of every-thing/-one else.¹¹² 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 in 2017, plastic is the nadir of all consumable objects, the quintessential throwaway.¹¹³

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 slaves 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.”¹¹⁴ The shoal becomes useful here to consider how 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

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

112 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>

113 *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>

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

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.¹¹⁵ 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.¹¹⁶ 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 and William Simmons have mobilized collective, creative refusal to enact national policy changes that ban single use disposals.^{117 118}

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-ject-animal-plastic-object, intimately informing praxes to unmake racial capitalism and the numerous forms of disposability it necessarily predetermines through the condition 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

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

116 Ibid. Page 196.

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

118 *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/>

those living who are already on the verge of immi/a/nent death-by-design¹¹⁹ What if, by defending the dead, we can care for all of the necropolitically-overdetermined subject-ject-object-jects and breathe in them chances for existing as being-things on new terms? How else can we “shoal” shale?¹²⁰ Can we interrupt their inevitable disposal in our unmaking of *homo oeconomicus*¹²¹ imposed by capitalistic individualism? In the wake of racial toxicity, in tending to *blacksticity*--the fusion of Black Trash¹²² --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 refuseful 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 deposition. 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 trap laid out by an individualist, liberal humanism. 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 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,

119 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.

120 *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.

121 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.”

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

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 waste¹²³ that/who we always already are/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 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."¹²⁴ And water is an ancestor.¹²⁵ (Did you know that plastic is made of water, too?) Plastic carries trauma. Plastic is of the Earth. And plastic also has spirit.¹²⁶

In defending the dead, we may *die living* while *living to die*¹²⁷, and in doing so, perhaps engage in a process of neuro(noir-o)plasticity 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 non-event 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, lasooing them back into circular return. Perhaps, in embracing the framing of Black/Native-as-waste, rather than fleeing its inevitability, we can find

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

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

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

126 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."

127 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.

a temporary loophole of retreat, a garretting of consciousness.¹²⁸ Doing so, we foreground our kinship with all other deathbounds:¹²⁹ the incarcerated animals in zoos, slaughterhouses, experimental laboratories (the ghost sacrifices, the absented disposals of Western educational, agricultural, and medicinal tyranny);¹³⁰ the tossed electronics comprised of polycarbonate plastic, cobalt extracted via coerced child labor in Congo, and Malian gold;¹³¹ 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 Gold¹³² 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..."¹³³

The grammatical shoal of the subject-eject-object concept lies in the liminal space of

128 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'x7'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."

129 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, pushing us theoretically and ethically (re)extend Black beingness into the social construct of Animality.

130 Coe, S. (2018). *Zooicide: Seeing Cruelty, Demanding Abolition*. AK Press.

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

132 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.

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

simultaneous refusal and acceptance of sub/non/more-than-humans-as-waste. “*What do we do with our heightened consciousness?*” Alice Water asks. No more arithmetic of linearity and disposability. No more desecrating plastic, an ancestor who/that is millions of years old but is routinely disposed of in a matter of seconds or minutes. No more slaughter behind closed walls in the dark. No more complicity in animal sacrifice for “meats” and “milks” and medicines and other plastic-wrapped products that render extensions of earth into mere fungible commodities. As 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.”¹³⁴

Black veganism alone does not unsettle the colonality of commodification, the racial wealth gap, nor the onslaught of plastics. But when the human-animal-bject finds solidarity with the object-bject, one’s orientation to racial capitalism is inherently altered. *What do we do with our heightened consciousness?* 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 casting away to the landfill, the ejection we/they always already are. Synthetics accumulate from this Human illusion; the Humanistic grasp for instant convenience and perpetual security comes at the expense of future survivability.¹³⁵ Blacksticity is a *reclamation*, but not a repetition, of our Black Trash, our Black Gold, as well as the possibilities of turning trash into treasure. My hope is that it can seed visions of living and dying on one’s own terms. Blacksticity might look like anti-consumer boycotts of divestment. Or Afro-socialist farms, markets, and cooperatives that support local veganic food producers. Or values-based infrastructures that incentivize zero waste sup-

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

135 Hocevar, 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-hocevar-greenpeace-ppe-plastic-0830-20200830-b35lu5aaxfhphe3v5z3gawpjli-story.html?fbclid=IwAR3srsb7E0B0i5PvEIVU4Beukxe-bl9g3nP0DXORWjC MDMVLQu-jT8ays>. 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.”

Page 128

ply chains and cultures of reuse, politicizing the public in the direction of holistic community health and liberation. Or a collective movement that teaches how to care for and repair broken beings-things in an era of omnipresent disposability, cheapened products, and planned obsolescence. Or maybe it’s folks stepping on the accelerator of death-dealing wastes to clog and break open the gears in the engine of racial capitalism and then salvage the parts as centuries’ overdue reparations. I do not know how this plays out, but find myself in this moment responding to Christina Sharpe’s invitation into wake work.¹³⁶

Christof Mauch argues that “like archeology, [garbology] tells stories that would otherwise be forgotten.”¹³⁷ Our deathbound ancestors are speaking, “a mess with a message,”¹³⁸ perhaps awakening us, perhaps haunting us with their unresolved disposal, perhaps whispering louder and louder until we no longer look away from the mummified tombs.¹³⁹ 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.”¹⁴⁰ These buried ejections, the dead and the wasted, the Blackness and the plastic, are the absented presences who/that can no longer be unseen. 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, despite being on top of several slave burial grounds in the African American community of St. James Parish, Louisiana.¹⁴¹ There is an ancestral relationship between Blackness and plastic, ¹⁴¹ however disharmonious, and we must listen for it to discover a care across/despise death. Interviewed in the above article, Sharon Lavigne of the environmental justice organization RISE St. James,

136 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).

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

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

139 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.

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

141 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.

Page 129

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.¹⁴² 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."¹⁴³ The settler colonial landscape is a massive grave site of omnipresent death for First Nation peoples, for formerly enslaved Black peoples, for microbial communities, for roaming bison, for throwaway objects in and beyond landfills, for all extensions of the living earth that temporarily became inert commodity from this centuries-long demographic transition and transfer of land-power into European hands. *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 unintentionally reify the rampant disposable conceptions and experiences of Blackness and Indigeneity, hypervisibly extracted and/or invisibly neglected. But joining the human to the animal to the object to the abject invokes a powerful spirit of relationality that implicates ourselves in extending empathy and respect or apathy and desecration to everything and everyone around us, rekindling Blackness to Indigeneity to all of Earth at a time when boundary-policing has failed over and over. Alexis Pauline Gumbs compels our un-humaning through a deeper knowing of self/other. "I want to dwell on the difference between being (dis)placed, or what I am calling being mistaken for an ocean, and being ocean as praxis,"¹⁴⁴ she says. In a similar manner, I hope this piece can underscore the difference between being disposed of, or being mistaken as object-abject, 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

142 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.

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

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

wastedness. Rather, this waste work might be a subtle shoal, an internal loophole of retreat to unsettle the current logics that fix outcomes of racialized disposability and an ecocidal, individualist mass consumerism. Maybe if we call the names of the dead¹⁴⁵ 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?"¹⁴⁶ Are we plastic enough?

145 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 shaman¹³

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."

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