
Senior Projects Spring 2023

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2023

JUNKYARD

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Recommended Citation

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JUNKYARD

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division Languages and Literature
of Bard College

A poetry collection

by
Jess Berkun

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2023

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PROLOGUE

1

If you walk far enough the brick streets become cracked, and the gated apartment stairwells aren't white anymore. The benches don't exist and the streetlights are orange. The bugs come back. Plant tendrils grow in spurts, taking over. You can hear the night—in crickets, in dog barks, in trash cans.

There is comfort in nature returning, the darkness reappearing, and the sky fading from orange murky gray into dusk, sunken dark. The cement is damp and holds water again; the meaty smells give you headaches. Rugged teenagers gather on the entrails of civilization, with the nighttime animals.

Just behind the boardwalk, if you dare to walk a bit further, suburbia is unable to contain itself, pockets of slime bursting out. Fences coated in cloth emerge from behind the white pickets. Fears can't hide behind facades; the civilized laughs of ping pong fade into patronizing cackles. Money falls to the ground when the darkness returns, when the streetlights no longer cover everything. Trees reach over and the sidewalk dies, where there were only going to be cars anyway. The smell of the country raises the hairs on your neck, poisons the back of the throat, yellows the irises. The underbelly of the pavement sears its eyes into you.

2

there's no reason the world has to be laid out this way.
houses and buildings and cars
dividing reality
facing streets
feelings categorized
expressed in structures

even when perfectly siphoned
there are rivulets of space
property lines that fail to reach all the way into the darkness
and grasses return

your right eye could be deep in woods
your left is held sharply in balusters and spindles

you search for an anchor

somewhere to rest
 to settle attention
 but the world steps away into mist
 everything could fall off a cliff

there's no evidence of anything outside of this
 and is that comforting?
 who wants to know what rests behind the private property
 and darkness
 and unpaved road?
 you'd be better off only unsettled
 slightly ajar

3

as you go on,
 industrial yards and lights threaten the night
 staking a claim
 dropping without the sound
 then rising back

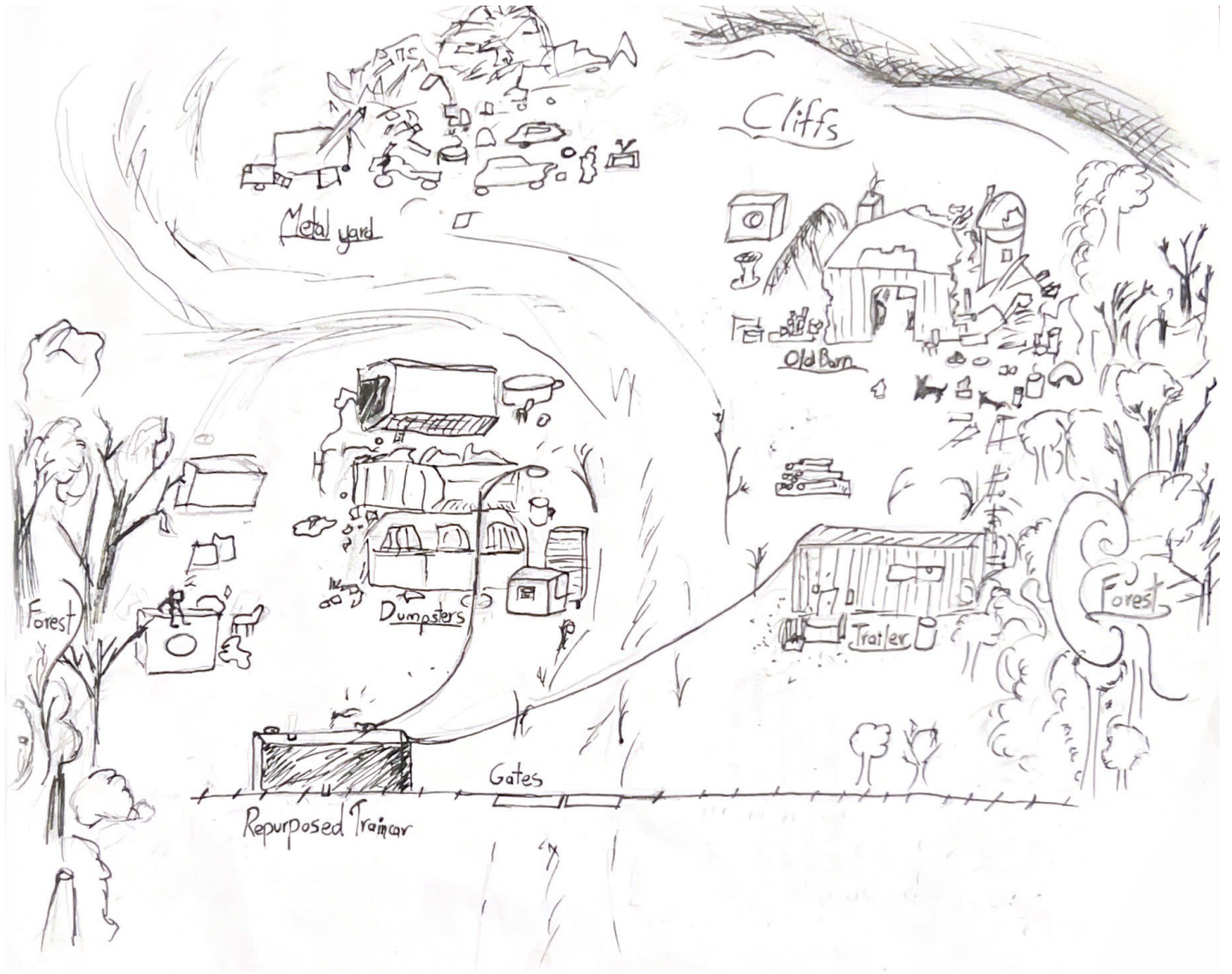
a Junkyard extends
 but it does not beckon.
 the way a door gestures
 the way a light source drifts
 the fence bar lines the plants
 the boundaries are blurred
 plants reach, bounce back
 shoved by their crowded counterparts out of the fray.
 the shadow of the gates casts cross-hatches on your arms.

Junkyard tries to yawn but can't get the throat behind it
 with roofs gone
 only skeletons remain.

you walk
 streetlights turn toward you
 then away
 you can't go in.

but
these walls are only a weary suggestion
you can only walk the line so far
before trespassing
one side or the other
you can't have both
chaos or safety
truth or security
are you brave enough tonight?





PART 1: NIGHT

“Before everything, before even humans, there were stories. A creature at a fire, conjuring a world with nothing but its voice and a listener’s imagination. And now, me and thousands like me, in little booths and rooms and mics and screens all over the world, doing the same for a family of listeners, connected as all families are, primarily by the stories we tell each other. And after, after fire and death, or whatever happens next, after the wiping clean or the gradual decay, after the after — when there are only a few creatures left, there will be one at a fire, telling a story to what family it has left. It was the first thing, and it will be the last.”

— Welcome to Night Vale ep. 71

[SPEAKER: THE BARKER]**[JUNKYARD MANIFESTO]**

Of course, the places we dispose of waste are junkyards: dumps, toilets, trash cans, the great pacific garbage patch.

But junkyards are everywhere. You find them in antique stores, in old car lots. You find them in brutal honesty, in scrapbooks. You find them in collections of unused objects, in the back of the local thrift store, in graveyards. You find them when you peek backstage, you find them when you look too far through someone's blinds.

Junkyards are anything people don't want you to see, anywhere that humanity rots, anywhere that is hidden, anywhere behind the scenes. Anywhere hidden from you, until the curtain drops.

Junkyards are the broken things, the bodies that don't do what they are supposed to do, the discarded machines, the failures, the neglected pieces of this world.

Perhaps hell is just a junkyard; perhaps anywhere becomes a junkyard when it sits long enough. A junkyard is stillness, a contradiction, a life among acceptance of death. Mushrooms know it well; so do cats, racoons, and raptors.

Regardless, you know one by its feeling, by the twist in your stomach, by the drop in your jaw, the disgust in your nostrils. You know by the feeling that you're seeing something you shouldn't see, or the thought that this is all you'd become.

When you realize the piece of plastic you're holding will last longer than you will and a little gap opens up, you've walked into a junkyard. When you look up in a basement and see the wires and tubes that run a building, and you must remember that this space was built by someone, you're there. When you make eye contact with a night creature feasting on a dead animal and feel a bit faint, you've made it.

You find a strange space when you drop pink curtains behind a shelf while shopping. The sunlight hits the dust all over your room, in the air. You see an inexplicable spot of dirt on the surface you just cleaned.

Whenever you see a hint of something you shouldn't— a book out of place, a weird shoe under a stall door, a piece of garbage on the road, a hole in the floor —

Learn to go after it. Don't ask for help, don't bother questioning it, recontextualizing it.

Follow it all the way, as far as it goes. Follow the chains of interaction, follow the thing or being until it dies. Find where it goes when it dies.

When you look, incredulously, at something and can't fathom it existing in the same world you inhabit,
when you realize mortality, when you face facade,
you tumble into Junkyard.
into Scrapheap. Salvage. Dump.

[SPEAKER: JUNKYARD]

[SITES OF DECAY]

objects let you see themselves in their deterioration:

a trash can lid paint chips off to reveal orange scratchy plastic
 the slats of a window blind still move in harmony, with no window to cover
 a manhole cover, when it is no longer a portal, is a metal wheel.

tubs stretch out, expanding, curving, extending over nothing
 tilted on their sides to hold air
 the plaster arched and rotated, distended
 arms weary and cracked
 pastel blue, pink, green, facades chipping

a radiator is a chair, a truck a shelter
 fences block more fences, doors open to doors
 paths are made through holes of glass and rubble rows
 corners crunch and accordion, folding onto one another
 objects crowd spaces left by other objects
 slink into cracks
 I sap all life, then give it back

no material can survive; I crumple even metal
 letters peel, leaving shape behind
 identification crumbling under erosion—
 most problems and mistakes can be eradicated by time and I

[SPEAKER: JUNKYARD]

[HEARTS]

in the place
where garbage goes
there are pockets. Hearts.
corners in an open space.
electric parts; incredible living beacons among the dead;
open vessels; plasma clouds; streetlights; creatures; radios.
they feed and they absorb. they accumulate and state,
teaching the earth not all is dead here.

one such Heart, a distant train horn, speaks of momentum.
it's a deep cry of onward, of stored power.
there is hope in a tolling chord;
energy in an echoed distance.
there is, somewhere, an enduring yell, a continuation, a movement, a travel over gaps, piece by
piece, drip by drip, railroad tie by railroad tie, equal motion and speed sustained and strong,
moment to moment.
piercing forward, flatly, yet still holding the earth.

it leaves a residual taste
rushing in its wake
just a fraction of memory
that yes, yes it was here!

it's unseen,
but one knows
the imagined sight of a train on a track marks a substantial meter, a push past an end.

even across the deep forest, through the piles,
something conquers the night!

[SPEAKER: TRAILER]

[REBELS]

carpeted floors and **wooden ceilings** cradle my inhabitants, my objects. there is a **Radio** here, who plays always. **Radio** plays them pop lullabies, embodying other times. **Radio's** core is not its own— a vessel that cries out a pre-written narrative.

the surrounding objects yearn: yearn to leave, yearn to fulfill a preordained use, to adorn a real home, be what they were designed to be, be something other than that. they yearn and love their yearning, laugh at their yearning, live through their yearning, sleep in their yearning, share in their yearning, despise their yearning, cringe at their yearning. **glass lava lamp center** could tell you the yearning is complex. **still-working shoe shiner** could say the yearning is a constant itch, an ache, a questioning of whether things could be different. **musty desk chair** could grin and invite your realization that the yearning is comforting, as it keeps the objects anchored here, it allows them to share and understand.

bent desk lamp could nod to you that the yearning is the **Radio**. the objects are sedated in witnessing so much variation, so many frequencies, and yet so much consistency.

Radio is a neon blue Heart, the only color in that room. it pulses blue into the darkness. it broadcasts, aches, endures. **bent desk lamp** leans to hold its stingy, broken **antenna string** and then they wait

poised to receive, poised to transmit, poised to be

when they are knocked an inch, when **bent desk lamp** falls, **small wooden table** shakes, the **antenna string** falters and they cannot hear the music any longer.

bent desk lamp gestures that it is a miraculous connection when it stands. **rug** would shuffle to you that it's an interlocking of outdated systems and **scarf** would comfort your ears in observing the contraption as a bootleg reach. **poster panels of text** in the window chuckle that it's a lucky hotwire, **wall corkboard**— a reused jailbreak, **musty office chair**— a rare exploit, **still-working shoe shiner**— a technological stretch. **bent lava lamp** piece names it a janky retrofit click.

yet they all know this:

believing that you won't make it out is believing only in silence. accepting being there forever is death. accepting motionlessness is surrender. so when nobody moves you, move yourself in sound.

listen to **Radio**. keep hearing, keep knowing someone is far away and talking. so keep on emitting the music of another world. so keep opening your senses and soul to the sound, even when you do not like the sound, even when it is grating to hear, even when it speaks a lie

it still speaks something different than your own lonely mind

*humanity designed us to die in yearning, **Radio** muffles out.*

so live, fundamentally empty! it crackles

so live and make do in the music somebody else chose

so live even though you can only rebel by imitation

so live even though your only act is to endure

so live even though you cannot understand these words

and echo and vibrate and emanate and transmit

with me!

[SPEAKER: WREN]

[THE TAKING]

i take pieces of Junkyard because it will never make a dent in that auto-generating, appropriating mass. i take pieces because i want to make my own recontextualizing machine. i take pieces knowing they will never be the same, once separated. string lights from a dump truck claw. cds from the top of a pan. i open for new, better combinations. the combinations are infinite.

i take because i want to change something, because i don't want to leave this place the way i found it. i take because i am alive.

when i am there, i too am part of the growing masses. i, too, am an object imposing myself onto other objects, laying myself down to be grown atop.

i take because there is a war on strangeness in this world. i take because they could demolish it tomorrow. i take because i could forget why i loved this place, because i need to remember that i loved something, anything.

i also take sound. i take silence. i spin a dial and alter a transmission for all of the Junkyard to hear. i take the airwaves because someone took them before me. i take control because i need to know change. i change the station because i need to know something different than a moment before.

i leave things, too. footprints, pens, bottles, notes, garbage. it dignifies my objects somehow to leave them. i drop things, place them carefully, throw them. i make trades with Junkyard, barter with fate. sometimes i return to find my own objects there, moved, like my own chaos indluges me back

[SPEAKER: APRIL]

[THE EMPTYING]

even when I was young
I could only cry in certain places.
when I get a sinus headache,
I know it's time to empty the tank.

sometimes it's a small town,
for longer, aching, wrenching cries.
only there, when the sun is set and a chill sets in,
can my chest open and I feel at peace to wail.

sometimes it's a dump
if I want to cry in pieces
summon welling eyes
at a light, or something discarded

sometimes it's that junkyard trailer
where the room curls around itself,
over windows and through wood corners.
I cry when I see things here that I could have seen anywhere

[SPEAKER: THE BARKER]**[GROWTH IN THE SHADOWS]**

If the Junkyard knows you well enough, or you, too, are a keen night creature, you might see skitters upon first arrival—shadows racing towards homemade corners. If unaccustomed, you might attribute them to night, to fear, to ambience. They move away from you like water, like a magnet repelling, opening around you and accepting your entry.

But, I can tell you: there are cats who watch from half-light. You can see the divide on their fur. There are creatures here, born of the chaos, whose blood is phoenix feather ash.

You see them in leaps, glances, then stillness. Always eventual living stillness in that corner of Junkyard. The longer you sit, the more will fade into view — that shape in the dark a recognizable ear, that motion a small tiger. They've got you surrounded, pinpointed your location; you're a new trinket to them, something that could be a part of a new routine, or someone whom they will never encounter again. You're another part of the moving and changing of objects; nothing is natural or unnatural, no object is static, and no piece of home is too familiar for too long.

Felines are acrobats, stretching in the dirt, then retreating and folding into the arms of the barn's rubble, tarps, and trash cans. They step back and forth across the line of overcaution and impulsivity, playing less with you and more with desire itself. This line is encountered by all who come here, who walk fear's border like the cats, crossing lines and then folding back. Fear is like twisting a loose tooth, slowly unearthing a trapdoor. Each time you open that door, twist that tooth, pick at that scab, you get a closer look, until you shock yourself. You could say it's an accident but you know better, and so does the junkyard.

The cats have learned to love the noises that keep the focus off of them: the train, the rain, the raccoons that fight loudly, and you, of course—anything that keeps them free and safe, yet fascinated. Any unknowing and clumsy creature that provides entertainment and simultaneous safety.

I beg of you—trust the white fur vanishing to dumpster shadow and fall into the wide moon stare of a kitten behind rotting wood. Be honored, if and when they throw their cheek against you, when that warm rag of a torso is on your leg, when they don't pull away from your hand on the back of their neck.

You can journey there every night, bring food, throw rocks and woodchips, but you will never earn their praise, as dozens of reflective eyes melt your core. Beg them to follow you out, cry for them to go with you, and sometimes the younger ones will, cautiously escorting you out — sweet lonely dump stewards. They only ever go so far.

[SPEAKER: APRIL]

[MIDNIGHT GOD]

clouds wash a full moon
I walk and a cat appears
complete shadow on shadow
circling me
walking through open wall to rest

it's just me and you
two gods at midnight
two spiraling shadows
your bones tilt further than mine
your legs delve deeper beneath your spine
but we both arch in the moonlight
we both open in the swimming glow
cycles of dark and light spin over our heads
pitching this meeting in a million shades

you must be my creator—
my body duplicates yours imperfectly
you the moon and I make a triangle
where I dance in your shadow and you cast forever

the night, a backdrop to our stone postures
you're another sky dropped down
me, backdrop and you, spot
like us against the earth
specs on backgrounds, bigger specs on smaller specs

I approach you and our triangle runs isosceles
the moon clouded
soon, you could be any shadow

[SPEAKER: WREN]

[JUNKYARD MANIFESTO]

what if (Junkyard whispers.)

what if! (Junkyard proclaims.)

it's in the stagnation that you are you

what if (Junkyard smiles.)

it's the one time you don't say sorry that is really you ?

what if all you are is your worst remark ?

your out-of-context sneer ?

so what (the Junkyard shrugs.)

if you are that recording you kept ?

that bug you killed ?

your offensive twitter in 2008 ?

your days of 11-hour screentime ?

well you were just getting by (Junkyard nods.)

the times you whispered "it's not my fault" while reading the news ?

the places you drove when you should have walked ?

the cheap clothing you ordered when you had money to spare ?

the ignorance at the child slaving away for your crop top ?

the far away truths you turn your gaze from ?

well you were acting on all you could.... (the Junkyard reasons.)

the plastic bottles you didn't recycle ?

your trespassing ? *look where you are!*

your gossip ?

your irritation ?

you're only human... only animal... (Junkyard gestures.)

the kid you bullied in 3rd grade ?

the white lies that add up ?

your cheating ?

your misplaced sexual glances?

would it really be so bad ? (Junkyard beckons.)

the times when moods, desires overtook you?

stop thinking you were ever any better than that! (the Junkyard spits.)

confess your sins, not out of guilt (Junkyard glints.)

you've done it all, but it doesn't hurt.

confess your sins for a place here. (Junkyard narrows.)

(you toss your trash out. you regurgitate your sins. the trash pile grows.)

welcome. (you are scum.)

[SPEAKER: APRIL]

[JUNKLOVE]

once, I followed you here, all excited yelps and longing eyes
 we chased the cats down the slope
 I had never transgressed so far
 felt so much
 followed my wild emotions

through the overgrown woods
 where I could not feel the thorns
 past the dumpsters and dirt roads
 where I could not see the cameras

into the abandoned piles
 the scrapped cars and dumpsters.
 into the trailer, in its gross glory.
 there, a radio played to nobody, and there were IDs for people I thought I might have known
 and piles of books and folders and records.
 it was like finding the archives of my life,
 a place to rest my soul.
 this was a place I would feel alright dying among
 letting my bones decay alongside yours.

we left notes and symbols, wondering at who left half-eaten peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
 here, wondering at who left a radio on all day
 we etched our fates in with that place
 came back later to find responses to our letters:
 quotes from alice in wonderland in unsettling handwriting.

we brought more objects, made more art, met more night creatures.
 as long as we were there, we, too, could be pieces of junk abandoned, loved once and forgotten,
 but now free to love of our own volition.
 maybe we felt too much, that season

but never would I bristle with so much excitement, sit on concrete cubes again
 never would I so gleefully intertwine my spray paint lines with another's
 never would the trailer be so alive again, so overcrowded with mysteries

when we fought for the first time,
 a threatening sign appeared in the dump.

sometimes, when things are going wrong,
I can't stay as long. the night creatures look at me differently.

well one night I went to find you in the junkyard
half-hoping you might be there.
and I wanted to give you back this place,
the way you had done so once with me
but this place would always be yours first.
it was you who brought me into this world.

[SPEAKER: WREN]

[REKINDLE THE NIGHT]

a few friends meet and it's been a while.

they slink in solemnly, one from the path through the woods, another squeezed through the gates. someone else was already there, face perking up in response to the footsteps.

“hey!” one yells.

and another's frozen cheeks crack a bit. ice breaks around a frown.

life's gotten away, but they might be back, here now.

they lay down their Hearts at the Junkyard in hopes of picking up new ones, pick a spot and throw towels, clothes, bags at the ground.

they tell of the weeks away. faces bend in compassion, eyebrows arched. night creatures race by, but can't seem to break the conversation.

once, they smashed up these cars, explored junk for the first time, climbed this trailer, picked apart these broken machines.

cats and possums watch as they sit in solidarity now, sharing pieces of hope and wishes for the future. the friends look up at the stars through the clouds more than down at the barren earth.

one friend wonders where the old fridges and microwaves have gone. then, how such decay could even be missed.

the friends move inside the trailer and don't look around too much. they don't scavenge, or see exciting objects to take, a random collection. instead, find the closest thing to a chair in the chaos and sit.

their chatter and songs serenade and cloud the radio in the trailer. once, the radio amazed and awoke these beings, but now they sing above its static.

as the friends have left and returned, Junkyard is inspired by the struggles they speak of. the outer world. the possibilities. the trailer objects perk up at knowledge from a new source. the radio quiets while others take over the broadcast for a while.

eventually, the friends are laughing again and the first frost feels years away. a cat comes out and eats. the wind that shakes the trees feels warm and inviting. Junkyard hums vicariously.

[SPEAKER: TRAILER]

[LAST CAMPFIRE]

friends, objects,
junk, dusts,
feathers, bugs,
particles, garbage
sit around a radio campfire
give their credence to a sound flare
lend evidence to a beacon

a final motion in the night
the last black hole before heat death
a yellow road line in a storm

they needed a sun
a source to gather around
ache towards
they learn and rot and yearn, as one

the same familiar chord progressions ring different in hiding
in the nostalgia of wood plank walls

[SPEAKER:APRIL]

[JUNKYARD MANIFESTO]

It is in these nooks my future is built;
 the silences and waiting that I am made.
 Links missing on old websites
 miscommunication valleys in conversations
 where my aspirations lie.
 Unused bathroom stalls
 closets built among tunnels and wires
 the places I do not separate out
 the places I do not clean
 where I am realigned.
 Paper towel palaces, napkin essays
 the shelf I neglected to clean when my boss wasn't looking
 the last Christmas decoration left up in early February

That's what I am and what I have always been.

They're all junkyards, all dumps. They're all the trash I couldn't hide away, all the extra pieces that I wished I could kill, back and swarming with flies, back and duplicating.

The foundations of me are the corners I shove my fears, the seeds that grow when I accept that I'm not any better than the supply rooms, the dumps.

At my core, I'm mismatched, not aesthetic, not curated, not refined. I'll never find an "other half" nor match a whole wardrobe. I'm collages, mixed, chaotic, undiagnosable, soups that won't mix fully, particles near and still disparate.

My achievements will be lost, my brain will be eroded and in pieces, and my body is a temporary vessel. The final product is always now. The future I'm working for is always just dust.

So here and now I am free.

Free to not pretend, free to not be clean, free to not be whole, free to not worry if I'm coherent. I just lay myself upon the piles around me, piles of being, piles of trash, piles of the mass we could not hide, piles of the machines that do not do what they should, piles of wonderful inexplicable combinations of things.

[SPEAKER: WREN]

[BLACKOUT!]

power lines and fences manufacture light walls
and we climb over so we don't have to see ourselves

the streetlights dial on
yearn to give out
cricket hum, electric hum
speak to unnamable sustaining force
staring into space in a spot on the wall
unless someone could sever that cord.

when lights first flicker it's nothing unusual
then Junkyard opens its eyes
the rug gone, the night back
and Junkyard wants me here no longer

did i do it?
did i save the streetlights and cut them loose?
this place can course through my hands
thrum through my will

which machine, which object, i simmer in the flashes of light
which of us did it?
is there an answer to such a question?

the invisible gridlines are illuminated at last:
which sections stand through the human lightning storm
here is still our light, and there, across that line is the dark
nature wanted her Junkyard for today
on this plot of land where humanity and nature play tug of war

maybe i shut down the light here.
now the light is the same.
the whole dump is night.
everyone is free.

[SPEAKER: APRIL]

[TRAINCAR]

Before I look at you, anything could arise above these airwaves
in the soft cafe-like streetlamp light.

Then I see you, and I can't tell if there are tears in your eyes or they glaze over with reading the computer, that white screen that breaks the silence. It couples with the dial tones of officers coming on the emergency radio, the polyrhythms calling and responding. I lay myself down in deference, in fear. The objects go back to pretending to sleep. We all harmonize with the mechanical whirring and the fluorescence.

The world inside at night is a ride, sounds bumping and moving over time. The ceiling heater moves closer to silence after each hitch, slowly smoothing. I have to breathe shallowly in the dusted atmosphere to avoid breaking the objects' rhythms, to avoid you turning your gaze to me, in your after-hours laboring. Landline telephone buttons flash orange, replying to the emergency radio in their own domain. I can't touch them; they only communicate to one another.

Any light that has the privilege of illumination at this hour smiles. The motion of air lets me understand how these objects change the space around them, how they so fundamentally alter some small orientation of the senses. Flickering light reminds me of you, reminds me to make sure you're doing alright, before this room claims me. Fuzzy sounds turn my head towards the center of the room, just outside the middle. There, it holds the warmth, the energy, the day's embers. You, too, are stoking the flame on your screen.

The bumps in the floorboards match the waves of light. Reflections become uncomfortable in the warmth. The fact that reflections can exist in such a sticky, carpeted place is telling of the laws of the universe— the way we all adhere even when it's uncomfortable and nonsensical.

The ceiling cracks and glistens. This space is made up. Its separation from the outside is a fabrication. The way the light spills so softly like walking by a streetlight is invisible to the endless night outside the walls containing it.

Books about politics and change stand upright in a row and contradict the silence of the night. "How to make a difference," they say. "Why what you do matters." They can't see the mismatched ceiling lights, the dust above their head. I want to live in their world. Plants, too, spring up against the flickering lights and creaking above, but they know where they are, and how different they are.

And after I've seen you, a book that reads "Managing the advertising department" feels like a memory that no longer applies.

It seems that once, everything in here had a use, even me.

PART 2: DAY

“Life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent. We would not dare to conceive the things which are really mere commonplaces of existence. If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes, the wonderful chains of events, working through generations, and leading to the most outre results, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and foreseen conclusions most stale and unprofitable.”

— Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

[SPEAKER: APRIL]

[ENTRY 5]

in the day the junkyard is an open cavity
a dent in a perfect treeline
it knows well to pretend, to rest and curl in the shadows of trees
to lay down as a valley of work, of collecting, of upkeep and use.

the ache leaks out through the open gates, in trucks racing and beeping
the words of working people and loud mechanical whirrs
linking the outside world to the valley.

trucks are the only thing brave enough to move like this in the baking sun
crushing rocks and splintering uphill
rattling metal in the early afternoon.

tall keepers conduct the junkyard
with weathered fingers,
burning in the sun, roasting in slow labor
they open and shift, hobble and carry,
a teeming and acceptance that maintains a whole tiny world
a place that lays flat and unknowingly carries a town

people lift tops of washing machines and palettes and unidentifiable things
their laughs sparking life above such a wasteland, warm chuckles near cold metal,
able to flow in the sunlight
they circle, return. grab, and leave. they make a ritual of the waste.
the junkyard sighs and stretches.

their motions are soft and quiet from a distance
humble clanking circled by birdsong
i wonder, charmed, if these daytime cats
are really just people who want something to care about.

[SPEAKER: JUNKYARD]

[RADIATORS]

a metal field extends forward
frozen farm outlined by radiator ridges
old discarded machines
blocking and gridding space

I stop these accordions and turn them the colors of fall leaves
flake rust off, layer by layer letting metal furl and fall

radiator spines are twisted and bent
arching around corners that no longer exist

I splinter parts like desert sand
I make sure
things created
eventually imitate the world they were built from

[SPEAKER: TRAILER]

[HEARTS]

everyone who comes to Junkyard has their Heart
 the one thing that, if removed, would fundamentally change the place
 make it no longer Junkyard.

my own Hearts glow.
 my living pockets do not drink up my air.
 they beat out and i smile.

besides my Radio,
 sometimes i have more Hearts—
 lights against the sagging piles.

in cold, a dark honey-orange Heart glistens.
 radiator is not integrated into the world around it
 not formed an indent on the carpet
 nor pressed upon a stack of paper
 like my other objects, stacked and weighted:
 a tabletop without legs, laid atop a cabinet
 a book opened on its spine with boxes over it
 a half-eaten sandwich curled around itself and dew on the ziplock

my orange Heart is rolled in on wheels.
 the radiator warms as an outsider.
 suffocating heat like a blanket that requires one eye open
 heat that keeps from sleep
 heat that doesn't match the rain and the sky

[SPEAKER: TRAILER]

[RADIO COMA]

the Heart might be dying. the Radio does not have enough power. the room is fluorescent. the objects sag.

blue; static click on; off. blue; static click on and focus; sound; off.

Radio opens its mouth, over and over. it cries, it sends a signal, and faints. erratic clutches, jumps. sand shifts and settles. it clenches, holds, and falls.

blue; static click on; off.

the first tap is a realization that something is out there;

blue; static click on and focus; sound; off.

the second is finding it.

blue; static click on; off.

it approaches a source;

blue; static click on and focus; sound; off.

approximates a home and dies.

blue; static click on; off. blue; static click on and focus; sound; off.

it tenses and releases. the second search lasts longer. it lives in the separation, in the difference in the rhythm.

blue; static click on; off. blue; static click on and focus; sound; off.

again and again it searches, sensing for life, beginning to turn on, to look, until that search in and of itself is sound.

blue; static click on; off. blue; static click on and focus; sound; off.

in the desire for sound, it creates sound. in the humble request for a beat, it makes one.

blue; static click on; off. blue; static click on and focus; sound; off.

shallow Radio breaths take on rhythm. the repetition grates. electronics die in marches. wires fray in imperceptible slowing of bpm.

blue; STATIC CLICK ON! SOUND; STATIC CRUNCH; STATIC RUMBLE; DISTANT MUSIC! GRATING CRYSTALLINE! off.

there is life! it gets through! *I'm here!* the static shouts. *I keep on!* it will be repaired, it will live on, the stations are still out there!

blue; static click on; off. blue; static click on and focus; sound; off.

it can't hang on, but now all know there are others. Radio finds that and dies.

blue; static click on; off. blue; static click on and focus; sound; off.

Radio points— *go, find it!* and is gone.

the sun streams in
 morning golden hour spreads lazily in the radio room, and the night is over.
 the long wait is done.
 and in the freedom, objects long for Radio.
 alone, but with freedom. no longer trapped and cluttered, but without camaraderie.

[SPEAKER: OBJECT]

[TAKEN IN DAWN]

Radio coma floods the trailer as the day arrives
and the dawn pushes me to my knees.
I lay and worship the sun:
my new beacon; my god of triumph, not resistance.

How fluid I am, how jello;
how lonely my freedom!
I don't ache raw in listening, I stand up straight and stretch
I melt in the light, unfrozen!
Nothing holds me any longer and
I float, I drift apart in dusty sunbeams.
I welcome something new.

I will go to where the stations broadcast
I will go to the source
I will become the source

[SPEAKER: BARN]

[ENTRY 1]

it can happen: a community builds in the walls of a container
built out of a cavern, hollowed out, making do

within me, the heat doesn't distribute quite right
like a quilt.

each angle is a new house
carpets lay flat onto other carpets
floorboards ache with the weight of the place
I sag, but fabric corks me.

I creak to sustain
kindly decaying

furniture suggests memory, offers context
and nudges at worlds they might have inhabited

dirt crawls onto the carpets. tags drop, clothes sag, like honey, objects lean onto one another,
knowing they don't need to sustain individuality here.

keys no longer need to open anything and they rest, they become only their form and content to
decorate

a table wants to hold and objects are placed on it, and a chair wants to cradle, so cats lay down,
and all lend these small, remaining parts of themselves out. they hold one another in the last
needs they have, calmly seek things that might feel good as eyes close for the last time. here, a
radio would fill silence, not inspire revolution.

eyes crinkle and something holds something it has never held, and the patchwork carpets are
happy to have sustained such an interaction, and the cats are overjoyed to be pet. it is a place of
humble sharings and offerings, teeming, and barely-awake, but sweet creatures.

carpets open, oddities are bared
one can imagine a life lived well and comfortably,
creatures slip into the nooks and become antiques
I hold all remains and soften their deaths.

[SPEAKER: THE BARKER]

[JUNKSTORE]

Here, the objects don't stretch horizontally, they climb to the heavens!
 They aren't junk, they're trinkets!
 Delineated, stacked and organized,
 wonders from human civilization,
 here just for your wandering eye!

History lays itself out for your viewing pleasure.
 Existence celebrated in piling dust,
 barely swept enough to imply sale;
 the paths cleared aren't always for you!

At the beginning, we have the kindest objects.
 The easily romanticized:
 embroidered spoons, spigots, cigar boxes, riding hats, a horse toy—
 the ones that trigger cultural memories deep in your psyche
 the ones we'd never even need to advertise
 resting on centuries of adoration.

Some metal pattern will tickle your synapses just right
 each flash of joy it brings could be the objects' last
 so give them all your best!

It becomes harder to ascertain
 as you traverse
 the sheer volume making it impossible to organize.
 Even the light is siphoned in its own areas, like an item.

You'll ask us: "what's for sale and what's in use?"
 the objects irreconcilable without their functions.

The comforts of commercialism get shaved away:
 Standardization becomes a dirty memory, an impossibility.

There's no easy way to buy, but that's the challenge!
 No object doesn't imply other, better versions of itself.
 You could never even try to search the whole store, and neither can we!
 No "best deals," (not here!)

[SPEAKER: CORDELIA]

[THE FEEDING]

The separation I have is my only refuge. I escape cats' world and prepare dishes. Then I get to reappear. Their beady eyes gather through the old barn windows, glassiness marred with the soot. I wish I had enough time to love them. A part of me resents them. They feed on remains; they have the privilege of gratitude.

They race around like electrons. Like energy gathering. Their matted bodies sway and tumble. I become nauseous in the smells of old plastics. There are so many cats. The smoke reminds me this place is not mine and never will be. When I put the flimsy plates down, cats eat like they have no idea this is what sustains them, like they have no idea I prepared this for them, mouth corners stretched back wide, eyes thinning. Their jaws extend over the wet food strips, peeling back darkened lips. There is love somewhere in me, but it's so corroded by the sun and the endless piles of junk and dust.

In their consumption, they become one hungry being. Balls of fur combine and rub together. I wish I could jump in and join their fray, their eating, their pleased machine. But I have to eat alone, face my need for sustenance without flanks beside me. Sometimes I bring food to eat alongside them, but my chewing stands out, my long legs go on too long, and no cat goes near enough to me.

Their expressions blend with the wood chips and pebbles on the ground. They are products of their environment, built of my feedings, fur constructed from tasteless pellets, but they are more their own than I ever will be. Their bodies are formed of one source, built like it wouldn't matter what they ate. If I could, I would let the junkyard feed them. If I could trust them, I would let their bodies feed themselves.

If I stand too close, they don't eat, so I wander back to safety.
aren't you going to pick up the plates you left here? their eyes burn.
 plastic bags shuffle past on invisible winds.
aren't you going to feed me? aren't you going to follow me? make sure i'm safe?
 they simultaneously want this and despise this.
eat my food and be grateful, i want to scream, letting my voice taint the wooden pillars and unravel the barn. letting my voice scatter the creatures.
 but I just watch. we both just watch. the junkyard watches too.

one by one they flee my patronage.
 the wind is excuse enough
 but an amber tabby looks out at me from in front of a stack of trash cans

[SPEAKER: WREN]

[FURTHER DEPTHS]

beyond cliffs are caves.
it should be no surprise
all dropoffs have an underneath
but there is nothing like the realization that there is more past finality
no bottom to Junkyard

in the caves, more trash falls, or is tossed.
bottles rolled against the cold rocks
cans sparkle in the permanent dusk.
maybe, it is absorbed lower if it has sat long enough on the surface above
nature pulling debris in and down, out of our hands at last.

if i had to decide where to put the waste
maybe i would plug these gnawing holes.

the earth's bowels peel open like scabs
gills pulse, drip
the further you go, the more bright crystalline ridges line the walls
the more they bleed with another world
scales are crossroads
a former war
the intersection of an old sparking portal, now sealed.

caves are earth's backstage
nature's bedroom
where pure commodity is exchanged
intermissions when things are brought in and out
something was supposed to happen here
between the bricks, the abandoned fire pits
ropes and metal hooks
the scene waits to play out

once you've seen it, everything is a cave
every dark spot in the distance contains wells
the sky is forever a ceiling

[SPEAKER: CAT]

[ENTRY 1]

Cordelia lays me down gently in the barn, but it echoes in my bones like effort.

the pain is rare and sweet. rawed.
 the tang of too much kibble
 crumpled at the base of my spine
 an accordion opened too far. i cannot close it. it widens like the sprung couches here. i crawl
 myself onto them to ache. we ache together.

the band through my core is twisted, shaking its head.
 the band is a dry first frost; it feels colder than it must be.

there are little objects in the pile and they are like the way the rain outside used to hit on my
 skull.
 my skull erodes. my attention and position stretch tendons. i let it know at me. the lines between
 puzzle pieces are alive in me in this pile.

my sick makes my essence ooze onto the barn
 like dried glue on my base.
 this body is older than i am.
 this body is a child when it asks for things that will hurt it more
 and immortal in knowing pain.
 pain speaks in extremes when it needs gentleness.

i hear that rain; slumber is in my limbs.
 deep waiting rest runs along my fur, tingles along the couch.
 light starts all around me; illumination torches my warm skull.

i move. the rectangle pillow is met. my aches are bolstered and what oozes out of me is corked
 for now. i won't become the junkyard today.

[SPEAKER: CORDELIA]

[KIBBLE]

Kibble smells like turf pellets and rotting wood and safe, spongy ground
like mud stuck to the bottom of tan boots that eventually dries and comes off in chunks.
texture like nail file, crunch that sticks on my eardrum and gnashes my teeth

Then wet is slathered over the dry, in heaping spoonfuls, hitting the edges of the silver can and
sounding slime-softened clanks. That deep fish, that savory grease. It's more real than real fish,
somehow more real than a prepared meal. Like musty humidity, like a wet towel, like the sleeves
I once knawed on as a child.

once, it disgusted me like the rest of this place. once, it rotted and squelched and screamed in
animalistic scent, assaulting the nostrils. maybe now i am screaming with it. sometimes I hope I
am. their food smells better every day.

when I feed them, their matte fur aches
and their wet fur shakes.
rain speckles earth and fur
their throats clench and catch on spit
they cock their head back
dutifully bend down to eat

cats reflect energy
i rise against their motion
we are backdrops for one another
we are dishes
we are flimsy paper plates

[SPEAKER: WREN]

[FLEETING SUN]

earlier someone walked in
and i presented my world in a matter of moments
but now they closed the gate.
it's strange how it becomes separate.

cats do not take the same comforts i do
crunching loudly, obliviously

what could possibly hurt me in waxing and waning sun?
i lay in the fading afternoon sun as it moves behind a cloud
brief chills descending, then racing back
the dump is not scary anymore
i could make anywhere home, i know that now

i feel like a child again when i hear the birds
and i almost cry saying bless you to a cat's sneeze
here, where walking away doesn't signal negativity
where silence is friendly
where old friends pad in
where gazes are curious, not patronizing
i would be okay with credits rolling in this sunlight

to eat in this light
to harvest in this sun
to behold this desert

i go to the Heart
i used to connect wires to wake up the night
i used to think it was deep and blue
but it's racing and waking
it's cool yellow sunlight and open eyes
it's excitement about life and planned wandering

memories of cold trickle in when the sun goes behind a cloud
i could look at the sky to see a map of the coming temperature,
but i don't wanna know which ray is my last

[SPEAKER: APRIL]

[60 DEGREES HUMIDITY HIGH]

a cracked temperature reader lays on the ground
the dials stay frozen
recording the moment it fell and died
or maybe still working
or maybe slowly tilting down, down in accuracy,
a degree a day

the outer plastic bends and yellows, like opaque amber,
cool-toned afternoon sun in winter
the inside is not so tainted-pale, striking white, still
protected by the covering somehow

glass-like cracks bend differently on yellowed resin
some flakes on the edge imply wings, arched eyebrow cuts
it's a yellow moon eclipsing the black outer plastic, having pressed out of its socket

plastic is wet in decay
the kind of fall smell that reminds me of childhood
a bike ramp in the woods or a staticy plastic slide
maybe when I was younger I would have braved that warped material
let the warm residual dew splash on my clothes
but now I let it lay in dirty moss and leaves

in the face of endings
we are all children
childhood again becomes visceral
growth itself is tangible

[SPEAKER: JUNKYARD]**[THE UNSWEETENING]**

trash smells like the binding of a book,
the swarming underside of a log
a quiet porch outside a loud party
the sewer under a fancy building
the unfamiliar dirt beneath
the far abandoned table
unintelligible masses of blue and green and gray and brown
smudged pages
regurgitated from the depths of our throat
passionless fruits of labor
space that hasn't kept up
stretched digital art
circles expanding and popping,
unstoppable growth, then consumption

zooming so far in you see the pixels
waking from a nap disoriented
unshakable headaches
mold hiding in the depths of a room
lifeforms that slink in and coalesce

taking a step
it can be achy and swollen
stale berries oversweet
saccharine amber jars
melted chocolate

it's almost delicious slick
just waiting one more day

[SPEAKER: CORDELIA]

[ENTRY 3]

The cats aren't here today.

The forces that convene to make wild, feral creatures not want easy food are beyond me. But maybe I know why: the dump enters early spring, and it's too alive for them. I wonder why they don't like the spring, but I almost understand intuitively. It's so calm that they can't hide. They take comfort in fear like me. My food is no surprise in the early spring, in the warm air.

Their eating is quieter, but those small near-silent crunches grate so loudly against the birdsong. They aren't early dawn creatures even when they try.

They carry this place. When they all eat together, only then am I satiated. They are the Heart of this place and when they walk slowly and quietly I can finally feel delicate.

The white one tries to catch birds on the tall wood palettes. I bring the perfect wet food, chickens, and scraps, and they still hunt. They betray me and hide from me and I love them for it. When the scent of sweat mixes with feline smells and with the deep distant guitar riffs I know I am home.

I keep trying to leave but something calls me back each time, a last dish I didn't fill, a tarp I didn't close, a trash bag I left. Each time I return, I half-hope all of them will be there waiting for me. Sometimes I get scared glances. Why are they still scared of me? I thought they would eventually warm up to me. Sometimes it seems they've grown more distant with time.

PART 3: TWILIGHT

“I sat in the dark and thought: There’s no big apocalypse. Just an endless procession of little ones.”

— Neil Gaiman, *Signal to Noise*

[SPEAKER: THE BARKER]

[THE FORGETTING]

The world is decaying.
You must never forget this.
The way you saw it was as an anomaly.
Fight to make it a routine.

You must go through the heaping scraps and pull them together, as long as you can. Something will always try to cover it up, but you must put your fist through these walls, through to see the rot.

Keep yourself rotting. Keep yourself disintegrating, flaking. Your health is in your ability to die, despite what they say. Your vitality is how close you can walk without crossing to the other side.

Keep your moments unstable. Forget who you were before you saw the destruction, the wood planks piled. Forget who you were before you walked a floor that could give out any second, before you inhaled the most earthen clay, the buried toxins, the most rancid mystery.

If you can't trust that the walls will hold you, you're doing it right.

Remember that you believe, with certainty, that things are falling and the world is rotting. Remember that you die, over and over, as each moment ends, as you will never have this singular experience ever again. Remember that to live is to die.

I've given you this world, for as long as I could. It's on you now.

[SPEAKER: APRIL]

[FLUIDITY]

junkyard snoozes after a warm rain
 here, I'm sheltered in twilight underbelly and slight valley indent

cats dispel faraway yells. they are water made of the sounds around them in flinches and motions.

I have to submit to their gaze. so I lower my head as their eyes command and they are free to turn away from me. I realize a cat's day is forever because they embody every detail.

there are at least two kinds of rain, one of which seeps into the earth, and one which coats every surface. junkyard rains are the latter, becoming a slick, accumulating dense water. it slides across all surfaces, suspending and sweetening material, softening open wounds.

suddenly, there's a specter of a person walking, a clementine friend. a fellow traveler? curious explorer, junkyard stranger? perhaps even a first time stumble, but then a wave to me like they've been here.

it's like seeing a ghost of myself from two years ago, a hollower frame. a taller and more straightened cat; a being unaffected by the sleepy dump.

I wave and feel knowing and learned.
 I love to sit before an adventure when I'm a passerby
 love to bear the sweetest of futures
 to sit on the side of the road that I know bears fruit.
 I love to bestow luck on a new traveler, even as they bring nothing.
 maybe I have traveler savior complex.

as the night thickens and the air drops
 each of these moments are protected, individual,
 light breaks, water splinters and deep night grows.

[SPEAKER: WREN]

[THE TAKING 2]

Cordelia wakes up every day and buys cat food for dozens of cats. she goes and feeds them, even on days that she does not work. she cleans out the trailer. someone else drives in in a pickup truck and puts bags of waste into the dumpsters.

my words fall apart at the dedication. i wonder if i have chosen to care about all the wrong things.

i wander in at night and i steal and i trespass. i steal cats' love and i steal objects and i steal romanticization and i steal joy from those who labor here. i steal cats' health with my open cans and treats. i steal paint cans and mirrors. i steal cats' attention and fear and feelings of safety. i steal privacy. i steal notes and inspiration and stories. and then i leave and i don't put them back.

the sunset junkyard makes the joyful feedings and loud laughter impossible. how can there have been a moment where the sun shone? how can there have been a world where cats bounded around my feet? a world where a woman spoke? where does it all go? does she ever know that she made a difference? that someone else wouldn't have helped the cats? that they wouldn't have found a home elsewhere?

most places at night look like they're waiting for the day. but a junkyard in the day looks like it's waiting for the night. it is settling and waking now, in the twilight. it seems gladly suspended. i hear it in the distant music, i see it in the stacked boxes and full dumpsters. the piles of boxes and papers are stoic in their wilting. the trash cans face one another and lean in and chat. the cats clean and don't beg. they sit and stare, instead of racing about. these things never felt unnatural to me until i saw them in the day, and now, here they are home.

i helped Cordelia this morning, but the cats' presence can have its full weight at night. their poses break into my sight lines and send ripples down my legs. they stare and warm the night. i remember how they looked up at me and begged for food and it feels like an impossibility. in the day the balances of power go all wrong. in the day the cats are not gods, the cats are swarming bugs that layer on top of one another in their quest for sustenance. in the day they were animals. in the day, i stood up, and looked down on Junkyard and i drove into it in a car, and i used it underfoot and i stood on it with the sun. i remember that it was an illusion now. just a necessary maintenance, a disguise to fit an unmaintainable, impossible place within this world.

[SPEAKER: JUNKYARD]

[RHETORICAL JUNK]

I try to make it strange which objects and words last.
It seems that all objects should end up in me,
but I have favorites. ones that gesture
toward recognizable imprint.
couches, cars, tires, and radiators so clearly hold space
they could contain me in a way that a lost paper could not
and I, too, am scared to be forgotten.
in holding onto these things, I hold human emotion
I know the human sentimentality.

My objects don't know the referents that the radio speaks of.
A radio station's offhand reference to a pop star or advertisement becomes vocal junk, a natural
spam, only with occasional connections and meanings, the way that it will be anyway.
The radio is inherently absurd in its shouting.
Someone will piece together something new from these scraps.
In their unknowing, my trailer and its objects see the future, live within it.
Their memories are chronicling.

I keep some objects around just as reminders
They seem to say something about who humans are and were not so long ago
the things that, no matter how much they try, they can't find a proper use for.

[SPEAKER: APRIL]

[RADIO REINCARNATED]

i clutch the radio remains to my mind's eye
it plays in the streetlights, it plays in the raindrops that catch the moon
I hear it in the dust that still spins, the wind that still rustles
i clutch my arms to my chest
i close my eyes and hold onto the swirling, the spinning, the lights, the sound
even as the world settles
slows

i grab onto the things i can still see in the winter
like stations through the trees
i trust winter to show me what is faithful in this world
the sounds that still echo, the shapes that stand tall

[SPEAKER: WREN]

[ENTRY 7]

no wind
no light
no rain
silence like styrofoam.

we wander
under the transformer
below streetlight
warm yellow glows
as i approach, it fades into a pile of stars
then, a pile of lights.
they're plugged in somewhere
and something releases.
i, too, become luminescent.

the cats' paws are no longer muted, tapping the earth. i can draw lines in the sand. the drink in my hand from my friends tastes good for the first time. i can taste the sweet in the bitter.

the heater in the trailer isn't on, but i need its warmth. i know even as i write that this isn't the story that needs to be told any longer. still, i make conversation and bask. Junkyard feels so simple and kind after my other adventures. i've explored asylums, caves, mansions, roofs. being here is an easy, flat bike ride, after a hill.

earlier, i couldn't hold my mind in common corners, in known limits. here, im sedated. maybe i don't teem with Junkyard any longer. i've surpassed it. it can't fascinate me. it's a comfort. we place our aching backs next to the heater and it cracks the ice on my back. once, we didn't use substances to get to this place. it isn't so bad though. things can only be new and exciting for so long.

we put a CD into the radio. i never knew we could do that. the radio runs along a set path, grounded, offline, for the first time.
turning my back to it, i become the Heart. the radio. i speak of faraway places
i transmit.

Acknowledgements

Junkyards

The Bard Dump

Zaborski's Emporium

Hoffman Barn

Red Hook UBS

Post Brothers Auto Parts

New Milford Bowling Alley & Kimberly Clark

River Reporter Office

Hudson River State Hospital

Kingston Caves

Beings

Philip Pardi, for your patience, your kindness, your encouragement, helping me bring alive my crazy ideas (as well as telling me when they did not work), for sharing in this world and believing in me

Bard Written Arts faculty: Michael Ives, Jenny Xie, Dinaw Mengestu, Mary Caponegro, for your support, time, and immense wisdom. I am lucky to have known and worked with you all!

Clementine, my love, for giving me the junkyard, for your patience and excitement and reading my strange drafts, for being willing to wander to abandoned places with me at bizarre times, for being someone I could ask and look up to, and for April

Mom, for always reading and supporting my writing, and the copy editing and english skills for my whole life

Bard Pussy[cats] Club: Joelle, Alice, and Rania for letting me get money for the dump cats, appreciate the dump with others, and letting me help feed and get to know the dumplings

Owa, for all the insane adventures, constant inspiration, and chaos

David, for the motivation, adventures, and being a person I could look up to as a role model

Tamar, for going through this SProj process with me and the constant encouragement and support

The Skyroom / Insomniac Expeditions, in all its forms (a swingset, a mysterious room in the library, the best group of friends I've ever had) and its camaraderie and adventures

The cats of Bard and Hoffman Barn: Achilles, Lilith, Thirstin', Boots, Charlie, Vengeance, Midnight/Pearl, Tuxedo/Black Rabbit, Garter/Whitenose, Steve, Lone Star, Honeybee, Big Boy, Sassy, Blair, Elle, Bo, Tybalt and many more

Bard's giant raptors, raccoons, possums, skunks, snakes, and strange bugs

Bard Buildings and Grounds and Environmental Services, for amazing on-campus spaces, as well as the folks who upkeep anywhere else I visited in gathering inspiration

Anyone who let me wander and press on the boundaries of this world