

“LIVING WITH OUR TOXIC LEGACY”: PARAFICTIONAL
PRACTICE AND THE NATIONAL TOXIC
LAND/LABOR CONSERVATION SERVICE

by

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ABSTRACT

The way in which land is used and developed by the United States government has recently, over the past decade, become a topic of interest to individual artists and collectives. The National Toxic Land/Labor Conservation Service (NTLCS) is one such collective that tracks government funded greenwashing projects. The agency's project consists of an ongoing website where it publishes site visits to government-operated animal refuges and active nuclear energy facilities. In this paper, I argue that the NTLCS's ongoing initiative to track, locate, and disseminate information concerning the United States' involvement in greenwashing projects is an effort to critique established historical narratives of the Cold War and its aftermath. In particular, this paper looks at how the NTLCS defines itself as a "wishful government agency" by discussing parafiction as an artistic practice.

Parafiction is defined here as an intentional performance of simulating fiction as fact. Parafiction has become a powerful tool for artists involved in institutional critique as a performative act of parody and subversion. In many cases, the performative act may go unnoticed as fiction. In such a case, the viewer is led to believe the performance is real. This friction between fiction and fact proposes the possibility of alternative realities to the one in which we currently live. By imitating the rhetoric of government agencies, the NTLCS seeks to expose the lack of transparency of the United States government on

issues of greenwashing and the ongoing effects of our toxic legacy. Greenwashing is a process of labeling a project as being eco-conscious when in reality, the project has minimal benefits to the environment. When a company or government exerts more effort on the image of being “green” than actually implementing an ecological perspective, one would consider it to be greenwashing. The NTLCS proposes the alternative to the current state of irresponsibility of our toxic heritage by placing the responsibility on itself and the public.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in the late 1960s, land art has held an uncertain place within the broader context of environmentalism. Environmentalists inside and outside the art world have often felt that the actions of artists such as Robert Smithson (*Spiral Jetty*, 1970) and Michael Heizer (*Double Negative*, 1969) were perpetuating the ecological destructions they were critiquing. Recently, art historians have unveiled a different narrative that shows the intentions of these artist being motivated by concerns with the dialectical relationship between landscape and the city.¹ This effort led to important developments in understanding historical land artists and contemporary conversations concerning the effects of human intervention in the landscape.²

¹ The dialectic between site and city is the inextricable link in which the barren desert cannot be divorced from the city. All sites are connected through production, an action that connects a site with its economy, and should not be thought of as “voids” to be seen as less important than cultural and economic capitals. My paper is arguing that by understanding the dialectical relationship between site and capital worth, the United States government and artists have approached many sites in the deserts of the West as voids to be taken advantage of. Furthermore, the United States government has exploited our countries misunderstanding of the dialectic in the hopes to erase their toxic past. See Robert Smithson’s “Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape,” in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flemin (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 157-171. Julian Myers-Szupinska, “After the Production of Space,” in *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, eds. Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 21-33. Lucy Lippard, *Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use, Politics, And Art in the Changing West* (New York and London: The New Press, 2014), 81-93.

² I believe the most impressive claims of how historical land art can be considered within the frame of contemporary artists engaged in the critique of land use is by Yates McKee. In his chapter “Land Art in Parallax,” McKee investigates historical land art and how land artists were interested “with the imbrications

Today, several artists, such as the Yes Men and smudge studio, have reflected on land use with similar concerns as their predecessors but in varying ways. These artists have approached land use in response to toxicity, demilitarization, and greenwashing. One such group of artists that has responded to this concern is the National Toxic Land/Labor Conservation Service (NTLCS). The NTLCS is, according to its creators, a “wishful [government] agency in the Department of the Interior (DOI) and was established by fanciful legislation in 2011 in order to attend to the domestic issues of environmental justice, labor, and human rights related to United States military activities.”³ Since inception, the NTLCS website has accumulated a range of information concerning military involvement with animal refuge sites, active nuclear plants, and a plethora of toxic sites across the United States.

The NTLCS was founded in 2011 by Sarah Kanouse, an artist and professor at the University of Iowa, and Shiloh Krupar, a cultural geographer at the Georgetown University, who are also the sole “members” of the NTLCS. Since 2011, the NTLCS has exhibited at the Wende Museum in Los Angeles, the 41 Cooper Gallery in New York, the Figure One Gallery in Champaign Illinois, as well as Moments Arts in Brooklyn where they exhibited with the Institute for Wishful Thinking, a collaboration of other wishful government agencies, in 2011. Krupar, prior to founding the NTLCS with Kanouse, published the groundbreaking and controversial book *Hot Spotters Report: Military Fables of Toxic Waste*, that laid the theoretical groundwork for the founding of the

of media technologies and terrestrial matter, the mnemonic, economic, and political inscription of territory, and the crises and conflicts surrounding ecological life-support systems at local and planetary scales.” See Yates McKee, “Land Art in Parralax: Media, Violence, Political Ecology,” in *Nobody’s Property: Art, Land, Space, 2000-2010*, ed. Kelly Baum (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 45.

³ Sarah Kanouse and Shiloh Krupar *The National Toxic Land/Labor Conservation Service*. The National Toxic Land/Labor Conservation Service. Web. April 5th, 2015. <http://www.nationaltlcservice.us/>

NLCS. *Hot Spotter's Report* was controversial not so much for the message, but for the way it was written. Krupar took the lead in Cold War critique by tightly bonding the current and long-lasting threats of the Cold War to toxicity that shook communities not only through what we now are aware of as radiation poisoning, but also the threat to the suspected hopes of workers that uprooted their families to move to desolate locations to work for nuclear and missile testing facilities. The promises of jobs to sustain families in these far-reaching communities quickly vanished as toxicity loomed over the manufacturing of nuclear weapons, particularly with the growing knowledge that nuclear waste was being removed from sites and being dumped in open areas without caution for the effects. Knowing the dire straits of the aftermath of such operations, Krupar resisted the conventions of academic writing by interweaving deliberative writing styles commonly seen in government and official reporting, like something one would read from the Department of Justice or any other government office investigating a claim, with a fictional agency that she imagined to investigate National Wildlife Refuge's converted from weapons arsenals and nuclear manufacturing facilities during the Cold War.

Where Krupar brings the ideological framework for the NLCS, Sarah Kanouse's artistic practice, with her interests in engaging the public with her work and environmental concerns, enables the NLCS to teach and activate communities effected by nuclear toxicity, conduct site visits, and design community events to encourage reactions and responses to the Cold War in creative and novel ways. In 2009, in a similar vein to her later work with the NLCS, she created what she calls "geographical imaginations" connecting the corn and coal industries in the piece *Region from Below: Power Plants*. In this case, geographical imaginations are maps that show the relationship

of activities, economies, production, and resources specifically to its geographical location. These are “imaginary” in the sense that the act of placing a resource or specific production to a map is a reference to the actual location and thus, the relationships one gathers from the correlations made through these maps are dependent on the maps highly subjective content. These maps, which have been exhibited at the University of Buffalo Art Gallery in New York, and the Mess Hall and the Smart Museum in Chicago, were accompanied by take-home quizzes that encouraged participants to reflect on their own relationship with the maps with prompts such as: “How have coal and corn futures shaped the landscape? What sort of future does the futures [contract] market foretell? Imagine something else.” Other prompts ask participants to make their own maps: “Map the dispersal of people from your city over a typical holiday weekend?” Each participant is asked to, then, develop new geographical imaginations in how they understand the landscape around them in relationship to market currents, resource availability, population, and the use of services. The intended message is to understand that individual experiences do not happen in a bubble, even the most mundane actions of flipping on a switch, but are involved in a highly intricate yet hidden network that effects everyone.

In this paper, I will argue that the NTLCS’s ongoing initiative to track, locate, and disseminate information concerning United States government involvement in greenwashing projects is an effort to critique established historical narratives of the Cold War and its aftermath. In particular, I will consider the NTLCS’s use of parafiction as an artistic practice. In discussions of parafiction, art historians have found it difficult to find an exact definition that fits neatly into the vast array of practices, encompassing both artistic practices and practices devoted to social and political reformation. Parafiction is a

somewhat contested term, but in this paper, I am using it to describe the intentional performative act of portraying fiction as fact. In doing so, the artist develops a small portal into an alternative reality. As Carrie Lambert-Beatty has argued, parafiction is rooted in the intersection between an imaginary place developed by an artist and reality. Behind these aesthetic efforts to develop parafictional work is the assumption of a viewer's trust in images that the artists can rely on to assist their viewers in experiencing fiction as fact.⁴ More than achieving "truth-status," as Lambert-Beatty states, parafictional practices recognize the limitations of power dynamics and the inability of entering into positions of power.⁵ By fluidly oscillating between utopian and dystopian fantasies of our future, parafictional practices seek to show life *after* revolution, regardless whether a revolution is meant to happen. These projects simulate the effects of immediate policy changes by putting the intended changes, though perhaps impossible ones, into practice. In other words, parafictional artists live in an imagined outcome of radical change by assuming the identity they are critiquing. They assume that the structure they are critiquing has accepted their critique and thus simulate this acceptance in performance.⁶

⁴ On the other hand, Kelly Baum, the curator of the exhibition *Nobody's Property*, argues for parafiction as a practice of critique of historical narratives and the construction of territory. Both definitions have several overlaps concerning the function and experience of parafiction. Mark Dorrian has also made the connection between theatre and landscape: "But equally intriguing is the power of theatre as a disconcerting representational domain poised between fiction and reality, a power heightened in theatrical installations occupying or creating ambiguously 'real' landscape conditions." See Kelly Baum, "Nobody's Property," in *Nobody's Property: Art, Land, Space, 2000-2010*, ed. Kelly Baum (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 10. Mark Dorrian, "Landscapes and Theatricality," in *Deterritorialisations... Revisioning Landscapes and Politics*, eds. Mark Dorrian and Gillian Rose (London and New York: Black Dog Publishing Limited, 2003), 188. Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *OCTOBER* 129 (Summer 2009): 54-56.

⁵ Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *OCTOBER* 129 (Summer 2009): 54-56.

⁶ Not to be confused, performance art and parafictional practices differ in their intentions. Performance is one of many parts that play into the production of a parafictional practice. Whereas performance pieces almost always prioritize the actions within an art context, parafictional practices will emerge in social and

Organizations such as the NTLCS open the art historical discourse in ways that require novel methodological and theoretical treatment. Situating the “wishful agency” within the discourse of art history further pushes the limits of what we, as writers of art, consider art in the continued difficult distinction between political activism and artistic practice. From the standpoint of art history and social activism, the pressing concerns of the NTLCS include: one, the lack of an identifiable art object; two, the redirection of conventional forms of political protests, either petitions, protests, or marches, to a new form of civil resistance; and three, the rewriting of historical narratives as a creative and critical act.⁷

It is true that performance art has contested each of these concepts throughout its short but incredibly impactful influence on art and social practice. With that said, approaching the NTLCS as solely an extension of performance art without more specifically contextualizing the project through parafiction would limit the understanding of the elaborate relations the project constructs. By simply blanketing the NTLCS under the category of performance art, the approach will run the risk of obfuscating an inclusive understanding of the wishful government agency, the agency’s critique of power dynamics formed through myths and historical narratives, as well as their efforts to model new forms of representation that effectively consider a new ethics toward toxicity. Not only does it homogenize the critical discourse of an emerging field of practices, it illegitimizes a majority of the work put into the agency’s fakethenticity, the quality of the

political spaces without an art context. Viewers are often, if not always, unaware of the performance as an art piece. See Claire Bishop *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verse Books, 2012). Luis Camnitzer, “The Tupamaros,” in *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*, Luis Camnitzer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 44-59.

⁷ This is not to say that these are the only forms of political protests. Subversion has also been a key method throughout history that the NTLCS undoubtedly takes advantage of.

group to be both legitimate and fake at the same time. This is a key component of the critique itself that a performance-based approach cannot entirely communicate. Part of the reason for this is that the NTLCS does not solely use performance as a means of producing work. Rather, performance is a portion of a larger project that heavily relies on the simultaneous interpretation of performance, video, website design, writing, community events, and gallery exhibitions of their projects. This paper, while arguing that the NTLCS is critiquing historical narratives of the Cold War, also argues that parafiction as a critical tool is the most effective way of dissecting the NTLCS and the agency's projects, not only for the reasons already stated, but for the content with which they are engaged.

As stated above, Shiloh Krupar, one of the co-founders of the NTLCS, laid out the groundwork for the NTLCS in an earlier project. Comprehending aspects of the NTLCS, particularly the agencies initiative to critique historical narratives, the novel ethics towards waste, and the use of government documentation, can best be seen through this early text by Krupar. However, this can only serve as a partial model for the larger project of the NTLCS. The chapter, "Where Eagles Dare: an ethnofable with personal landfill" in the book *Hot Spotter's Report*, outlines Krupar's fictional agency named Garbage to administer a report on the Rocky Mountain Arsenal and the sites conversion to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. This is a common theme in the history of greenwashing in the United States where a site of irreparable damage is converted into a natural habitat. In an interview, Krupar discusses how the Cold War is represented within the broader culture and why she needed to develop a novel approach to the growing field of literature on toxicity:

The book enacts a demand to work through some of the historical antagonisms and rhetorical investments of different positions inherited from the Cold War. The composite of social science writing, art, and political commentary attempt to *show* ways of critiquing – by participating in – the tremendous amount of representational remediation of the Cold War, whether the so-called “greening” of the military or the recent 2013 passage of a bill that would establish a Manhattan Project National Historical Park. In short, I can’t imagine tackling the Cold War legacy of toxicity – or environmental crisis and uncertainty more generally – without actively experimenting with form to some extent as part of the inquiry itself.⁸

In describing her approach to engaging with the Cold War legacy, Krupar identifies the experimental necessity of her book, namely the importance of adapting the literary form to reflect the models of representation she is addressing. These include the despondent nuclear memoir, exposé journalism, and “the popular presentation style and display conventions of government reports to experiment with the politics of documentary forms and the pedagogical and visual register of environmental governance and forensics.” Though she doesn’t use the term parafiction specifically, Krupar is suggesting that the experimental use of form in her text is novel in that she adapts the expectations of academic writing, rooted in factual, truth-based methods, in a way to critique the models of inadequate governance through the form itself. The form she adopts is a twist on the document, using the authenticity of the document as a vehicle to develop a fictional investigative agency to provide a report on the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, which will be discussed later in this paper.

This untraditional academic approach led Krupar to collaborate with Sarah Kanouse and form the NTLCS. What differentiates the NTLCS from other performance-based art practices is that the NTLCS highly replicates the representational forms of toxic

⁸ Shiloh Krupar, interview by Stuart Elden, *Society & Space*, October, 2013. <https://societyandspace.com/material/interviews/interview-with-shiloh-krupar-on-hot-spotters-report?iframe=true&preview=true/>

remediation to such a degree that the real cannot be distinguished from the wishful. Critiquing the Cold War's history, as well as critiquing the reification of the nature/waste, nature/human binaries that were enforced during the remediation process of arsenals to wildlife refuges, is the goal of the NTLCS. Parafiction allows an intricate query into how we interpret both the visual and literary processes of signification and how both, visual and literary documents, can be shaped in a collaborative effort. There is no hope in establishing a dogma for what can and cannot be considered parafictional, as each individual work demands a different approach to enabling the critique that the practice demands. There are, however, ways to use the ideas behind it to dissect specific projects. Resulting from this effort is an uncomfortable position between the assumed real departments, real representatives, and the wishful governments and fake representatives that are able to assert themselves into the real. Moreover, by establishing the make-believe as more genuine, plausible, and progressive, the distinction, and the necessity to distinguish, between the artificial and the authentic disintegrates. In the case of the NTLCS, this occurs through the very clear transparency of its efforts that the government has slandered over decades of greenwashing.

The name of the group, the National Toxic Land/Labor Conservation Service, does not mean to suggest a conservation of land in the pure, pristine, natural setting we are conditioned to expect. Rather, the NTLCS is a conservation service of *toxic land*. This may appear paradoxical at first; however, it informs the ideological problems within greenwashing, the binaries established between humans and nature, humans and waste, waste and nature, and how these approaches solidify an ineffective ethics towards toxicity.

By imitating the rhetoric of government agencies, the NTLCS seeks to expose several government agencies' lack of transparency on issues of greenwashing and the ongoing effects of our toxic legacy. The NTLCS, in stating that the Cold War never ended, proposes an alternative to the current state of irresponsibility of our toxic heritage and places the responsibility on itself and the public.

The first section of this paper will discuss parafiction and its application to the NTLCS. Throughout this part, theorists will be used to discuss the critical issues that the NTLCS engages with through a critique of historical narratives. Because there has been no writing on this group, a traditional literature review is impossible. The literature review has been replaced with steeper theoretical groundwork to establish how and with what the NTLCS frames its critique of historical narratives. Three components that I have identified in the project will be explained including the NTLCS introduction video on their homepage, the agency's critique of the politics of land use, and, finally, that the agency exists in, what I have called, a post-revolutionary state.

The second section focuses attention on a site visit conducted by the NTLCS at the Savannah Army Depot. Afterward, I draw comparison between this site visit and a similar report made by Shiloh Krupar in her book *Hot Spotter's Report: Military Fable of Toxic Waste*. I wrap this section up with an interpretation of the symbolic use of the eagle in both projects, and a close reading of Mark Nash's, a culture and film critic, article "Reality in the Age of Aesthetics" that serves as a way to further situate the differences between documentary, performance, and parafiction.

CHAPTER 2

ESTABLISHING A WISHFUL GOVERNMENT AGENCY

At the end of Lambert-Beatty's article "Make Believe," she acknowledges her inability to expose each layer of parafictional practice. She asks the reader: "Have I pulled back all the onion-skins of fiction?"⁹ In this claim, Lambert-Beatty underscores the creative process of parafictional practices. Engaging with parafictional practices becomes a process of tracing and critiquing the reasons for and methods of a parafictional practice. Peeling back the onion-skins then becomes an apt metaphor for the process of analyzing and writing about projects that consider truth as contestable. By looking at how parafictional practices develop their "truth-status," peepholes into the fictional universe become wider. Implied in Lambert-Beatty's statement is that there are two necessary approaches to grasping the workings of parafictional practice: how truth status is established and what ideology is critiqued in doing so.

In this section, I will be peeling back fact to reveal how the NTLCS constructs an image as a government agency that competes with conventional narratives of the Cold War. In the section following, I will perform a similar analysis by peeling back fiction to show how NTLCS Site Visits visually decode wildlife refuges and their relationship to

⁹ Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *OCTOBER* 129, (Summer 2009): 83.

our toxic legacy. In doing this, I realize I am framing the analysis as a dichotomy between fact and fiction. This dichotomy falsely presumes that parafictional practices can be cleanly separated into categories of fact and fiction, where actually the NTLCS frequently overlaps fiction and fact. Nonetheless, attempting to address fact and fiction separately remains a productive way of understanding the ins and outs of a practice without prioritizing viewer reception.¹⁰

On the homepage of its website, the NTLCS provides a video that details the issues and concerns the agency is claiming responsibility for, as well as providing exposition to its mission.¹¹ The video starts with a large airplane soaring below the camera and an ominous countdown that cuts to a mushroom cloud from an atomic explosion. A woman's voice is heard over the images: "There are many ways to tell the story of the Cold War." Video clips of John F. Kennedy addressing the buildup of nuclear missiles on the shores of Cuba, Richard Nixon announcing the withdraw of troops from Vietnam, and Ronald Reagan requesting Mikhail Gorbachev to destroy the Berlin Wall are shadowed by the mushroom cloud in the previous image. The voice-over continues: "But we tell it as a story of our present and our future." Taken within the context of the NTLCS, the varying Presidents' narratives present differing and often times competing interests and issues within the Cold War. Consistent through each is the idea that the Cold War's aftermath left its deepest scars on foreign sites, rather than in the United States.

The first few segments of this video proceed by representing historical events

¹⁰ How the viewer receives parafictional art is an important asset in the production of these works. Lambert-Beatty mentions this towards the end of her article, cautioning that revealing too much may invalidate certain artworks. I disagree with Lambert-Beatty here, in that only by understanding how parafictional practices construct their images can viewers understand and communicate their critique. Regardless, there are few examples of documentation on how parafiction is experienced without knowing that the practice is, indeed, parafictional. The documentary, *Couple in the Cage*, is one example. See Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena's *Couple in the Cage* (1993).

¹¹ "Introducing the National Toxic Land/Labor Conservation Service." <https://vimeo.com/48278483>

while simultaneously providing an alternative narrative. In this way, the video follows a tradition of critiquing historical documents that Mark Godfrey, an art historian and curator interested in the correlations between historical memory and representation, has argued can “invite viewers to think about the past to make connections between events, characters and objects; to join together in memory and to reconsider the ways in which the past is represented in the wider culture.”¹² Godfrey’s analysis proposes that by reading historical events through a contemporary lens, artists are able to ask questions about the ways a culture represented, and continues to represent, a particular time period.

I am arguing that parafictional practices, with a much larger set of critical tools, can contest historical narratives as misleading or incomplete. Evoking historical information as malleable to interpretation is a key aspect of the NTLCS. Many are familiar with the phrase “History is written by the victors,” which proposes a teleological, linear correlation between historical writing and history as it enacted. By investigating “the ways in which the past is represented in the wider culture,” the NTLCS conjures new possibilities and alternative histories to the master narrative of the Cold War.

The NTLCS highlights incomplete historical narratives from the Cold War in multiple ways. First, by establishing itself as a fictive government agency, its critique takes hold of authority without having it. This is only problematic in that many hope to be able to trust their government, though this may not happen in practice.¹³ Regardless of the ethical problems at stake, historical discourse has always held a narrative element that prevents it from being entirely objective. Historical discourse can never truly bring the event forward, but is limited to only recalling it as it may have happened. As Roland

¹² Mark Godfrey. “Artist as Historian.” *OCTOBER* 120, (Spring 2007): 143.

¹³ This has particular relevance during the Bush years in the wake of 9/11. See Naomi Klein, “The Year of the Fake,” *The Nation*, January 8, 2004, <http://www.thenation.com/article/year-fake/>.

Barthes posited, “historical discourse does not follow the real, it can do no more than signify the real, constantly repeating that *it happened*.”¹⁴ For Barthes, what happened in the past always remains there. Documentarians, photographers, and historians alike cannot escape from the fact that any engagement with an event will be through an interpretative lens. On the contrary, it is the mission of those invested in the real to develop its illusion of fact.¹⁵ By presenting itself as an agency of fiction, the NTLCS does not have a stake in confirming existing historical narratives, or establishing the “real” as I have been describing it. Self-identifying as a government agency allows the NTLCS to alter what, as Barthes suggests, signifies the “real” of the Cold War to the public.

Second, its mission is to establish the link between economy and territory.¹⁶ The video published on its website details the ways the United States government has taken and altered physical sites across the country to suit military and economic goals during the Cold War. The voice-over reconstructs the historical narrative of the Cold War as a contemporary issue: “The Cold War was marked by land expropriations, secret human radiation experiments, the inappropriate storage and disposal of toxic materials, lax safety regulations and the misguided promotion of all things atomic as family entertainment.”¹⁷

Altering the narrative to concerns predicated on ecological and labor abuse and away from military and scientific advancements reframes the historical Cold War conversation

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” in *Comparative Criticism: Volume 3: A Yearbook*, ed. E.S. Shaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 17-18.

¹⁵ Barthes, in “The Reality Effect,” is focused on the literary form of the reality effect, championing the work of Flaubert’s short story *A Simple Heart*. In this paper, I am looking at Barthes for an understanding of the sensation and creation of the reality effect, not the specific mechanics he identifies in Flaubert’s literary form. Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 141-148.

¹⁶ This is similar to how Emily Apter has defined the “aesthetics of critical habitats.” Apter defines critical habitat “as a concept that explores the links between territorial habitat and intellectual habitus; between physical place and ideological forcefield, between economy and ecology.” See Emily Apter, “The Aesthetics of Critical Habitats,” *OCTOBER* 99 (Winter, 2002), 23.

¹⁷ The National Toxic Land/Labor Conservation Service. Video. <http://www.nationaltlcservice.us/>.

to address the legacy of environmental issues communities live with in the present day. Many of these sites, those used by the United States government during the Cold War to manufacture ammunition and research nuclear weapons, are still monitored under the military state without proper compensation nor funding for proper remediation. This was a concerted effort, as stipulated by the NTLCS, constructed by the Department of Energy (DOE) and the DOI to mitigate cost and promote the military-industrial complex at the expense of neglected communities across the United States. Some of these sites will be discussed in the following section.

Third, the NTLCS exist as a government agency in what I have called a post-revolutionary state. By assuming that the DOE and DOI accept responsibility for the toxic military complex, the NTLCS imagines a post-revolutionary state that has been established to “take responsibility for our toxic legacy.”¹⁸ Its programs consist of visiting universities and communities to establish the causal links between the Cold War and the present day. This culminates in projects such as the Illinois Design Charrette where the NTLCS hosted a community meetup to discuss, critique, and visualize ways of conceptualizing of a Cold War that never ended. By bringing the narrative to local communities, the NTLCS promotes the understanding and critique of the Cold War as one embedded in what Henri Lefebvre calls “the production of space.”¹⁹

Though Lefebvre was not writing with narratives and contradictions of the Cold

¹⁸ The National Toxic Land/Labor Conservation Service. Video. <http://www.nationaltlcservice.us/>.

¹⁹ The title of Henri Lefebvre’s book. Importantly, Lefebvre explains that a space can be decoded: “Such a [produced] space implies a process of signification. And even if there is no general code of space, inherent to language or to all languages, there may have existed specific codes, established at specific historical periods and varying in their effects. If so, interested ‘subjects’, as members of particular society, would have acceded by this means at once to their space and to their status as ‘subjects’ acting within that space and (in the broadest sense of the word) comprehending it.” The NTLCS similarly approaches toxic sites to read the sites previous productive value in a process to ascertain the means it was used and what it produced. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholasn-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 17.

War in mind, his insights into how space is connected to value are important to understanding the costs at stake. Julian Myers-Szupinska succinctly connects Lefebvre's text to contemporary concerns when he says that society has to recognize "the central importance of reclaiming for collective ownership the spaces that production and speculation hope to enclose."²⁰ Speculating speaks to the potential value of a space that is never achieved. For example, owners of an empty lot can retain the space's lack of production in bureaucratic limbo. By doing so, the lot's value is never fixed to a particular use and is continuously speculated upon. This pertains to the NTLCS when the agency explains to communities about local sites that are owned, or were previously owned, by the military and how their value has shifted since the Cold War. As a tactic to exist in a post-revolutionary state, the NTLCS approaches land use as a concept to be critiqued and understood *as if* the government has assumed responsibility for exploiting land where spaces have been stripped of their productive and speculative value.

²⁰ Julian Myers-Szupinska, "After the Production of Space," in *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, eds. Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 30.

CHAPTER 3

PERFORMING FICTION AS FACT

In this section, I will continue my analysis by detailing some of the specific projects of the NTLCS. This section will address how the performative action of depicting fiction as fact is used as a critical tool to investigate military involvement in National Wildlife refuges. Where the previous section was concerned with understanding how the NTLCS establishes itself as a “wishful government agency,” this section will follow the agency’s site visits at the Savannah Army Depot. Furthermore, I will be addressing the chapter “Where Eagles Dare” from Shiloh Krupar’s book *Hot Spotter’s Report: Military Fables of Toxic Waste* that was first published at the same moment the NTLCS was established. As mentioned previously, Krupar is one of the co-founders of the NTLCS and her chapter involves a fictive agency, named The Environmental Artist Garbage Landscape Engineers (EAGLE), that was commissioned to provide a detailed report of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. In both site visits, the agencies present a visual decoding of the information used to by state agencies to create the “greenwashing” illusion of promoting natural habitats and environmental restoration.

The visit to the Savannah Army Depot was conducted by Sarah Kanouse and several graduate students in 2013 through a tour given by Alan Anderson, the only Fish

and Wildlife Service employee at the site.²¹ The entry on the agency's website details the history of the site as an "ammunition testing, storage, and recycling facility" from 1919 to 2000. At that point, the Army left and gave the responsibility to Fish and Wildlife to decontaminate. This process of re-territorializing the contaminated property left 3,000 acres to Fish and Wildlife while another six thousand acres awaits reaching satisfactory levels of decontamination before it will be transferred over.

Even in its present state, the 3,000 acres currently in possession of Fish and Wildlife is in dire straits. Storage facilities with munition and TNT litter the refuge. The refuge house forty-seven threatened and endangered species. The only two listed in the *Environmental Assessment and Interim Comprehensive Conservation Plan* are the Higgin's eye pearlymussel and the Bald Eagle. Furthermore, jobs and economic fruition were suspended by the rapid process of the Army leaving the site, creating tension between a public that threatens Anderson with responsibility for the current decline, Fish and Wildlife's attempts to remediate the territory, and the Army's overbearing control over the area, regardless of the Army's hands-off approach.

This Site Visit addresses how military areas such as these fall under the bureaucratic maneuvering that allows for such relaxed abilities to disassociate with toxic sites. In summarizing its analysis of the Savannah Army Depot, the NTLCS concludes that: "Because cleanup is mandated only for levels of contamination that threaten human health, the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] and the Army's favorite way of dealing with it is to remove the people from the land. The conversion of a base to a restricted-access wildlife refuge is an efficient way to accomplish this, since the health of

21 The National TLC Service, *Of Bomblets and Birds: A Visit to the Savanna Army Depot*, The National TLC Service, April 23, 2013. <http://www.nationaltlcservice.us/2013/04/savanna-army-depot/>.

the wildlife is not a major factor in determining how much contaminated land must actually be cleaned up.”²² This quote is particularly effective in identifying the results of greenwashing in demilitarized territories such as the Savannah Army Depot. For a smaller cost, the Army can convert a toxic site into a National Wildlife Refuge because it will require less money to accommodate the territory to the standards needed to preserve wildlife. As the NTLCS has identified, this process has adverse effects for the surrounding community. Local communities remain with the toxic side-effects from the site, and are placed at a disadvantage from the lack of job opportunities for which the area was initially designed.

Through this example and the rest of the report, the Lost Mound Unit, the organization that is the proprietor of the wildlife refuge assignment at the Savanna Army Depot, exemplifies the intersection of several outside institutions. These institutions disable the local community and the Fish and Wildlife Service from establishing serious improvements to a tortured landscape by establishing greater rifts between the community and the actions at the Lost Mound Unit. Yates McKee, an art critic and writer who frequently writes about land use politics, highlights this as the broader issue of place through deterritorialization. Following Deleuze and Guattari, McKee defines deterritorialization as “the inscription of the physical terrain of the earth into expanded networks of media technologies, policy regimes, and political economies that constitute all sites as nodal points of historically uneven and politically contested exchanges, flows, and displacements.”²³ Seen this way, the purpose of these investigative site visits is to

22 The National TLC Service, *Of Bomblets and Birds: A Visit to the Savanna Army Depot*, The National TLC Service, April 23, 2013. <http://www.nationaltlcservice.us/2013/04/savanna-army-depot/>.

23 Yates McKee, “Land Art in Parralax: Media, Violence, Political Ecology,” in *Nobody’s Property: Art, Land, Space, 2000-2010*, ed. Kelly Baum (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 46.

highlight the different processes at work and how they intersect beyond the gated-off physical terrain of the site into the local community. This project, if executed over other territories facing similar issues, can, and should, shed light on how the restrictions of local Fish and Wildlife Services impact the local community.

The last sentence of the NTLCS Savannah Army Depot site visit entry is exemplary for this exact reason: “If the former depot does not quite look like what you'd expect from a wildlife refuge, it also does not look like the ‘privileged and effective environment for managing your products and raw materials’ promised on the [Foreign Trade Zone] FTZ website. That it is both should prompt us to re-evaluate our expectations and become better able to respond to a world of complex and overlapping fields.”²⁴ In this excerpt, the NTLCS is discussing the company Riverport Railroad that offers lucrative railcar storage and switching services. This process allows owners of railcars, either empty or filled with a product, to store their railcars at the Savanna Army Depot through Riverport Railroad and not pay taxes, as a result of being a FTZ, on the products being stored for a daily rate. If a company has a product that has dropped in value on the market but does not want to pay high taxes on it, they can pay Riverport Railroad a daily fee to house the railcar and the product to escape incursions from taxes. When the products market value has risen, they can quickly bring the product back on the market to sell it. The way a site that promotes itself as a wildlife refuge, and simultaneously as a production facility, shares similarities with parafictional practices having aspects of both fact and fiction; the two do not combine easily, often creating unsettling observations. By exposing the absurdity of how the Savanna Army Depot is

²⁴ The National TLC Service, *Of Bomblets and Birds: A Visit to the Savanna Army Depot*, The National TLC Service, April 23, 2013. [http://www.nationaltlcservice.us/2013/04/savanna-army-depot/..](http://www.nationaltlcservice.us/2013/04/savanna-army-depot/)

run, the NTLCS expands the discourse of how the land is currently used in relation to how it was. The NTLCS reference's the site's history as an ever-present concern that remains hidden in the mists of rhetoric designed to confuse and shape incorrect information.

Another example of a site report similar to the NTLCS report on the Savannah Army Depot is Shiloh Krupar's EAGLE project, an exposé project detailing the legal hurdles taken by the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, located near Denver, Colorado, during its period of transformation from weapons manufacturing facility with a significant toxic legacy to a National Wildlife Refuge. This change, like many other military facilities that were adapted in an effort to reconcile the toxic aftermath left at sites with heightened productivity during the Cold War, is examined through artifacts that can be found at the site as well as a trail of legal documentation detailing a sites conversion process.

The report starts with a message from the Field Office of Authorial Remediation, stating that "the EAGLE collective had been working for decades at the Arsenal [Rocky Mountain], documenting demilitarization and remediation" and also claiming the collective's "long-standing connection to the U.S. military."²⁵ The Field Office of Authorial Remediation is a fictional department, one we can presume is attached to the U.S. government, and is most likely a fictionalization of the Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC). In the report that follows, EAGLE details the history of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, as well as annotations to the report that correspond to critical readings of the history of the site. I will briefly summarize the military history of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal following up to its conversion and remediation as the Rocky

²⁵ Shiloh Krupar. *Hot Spotters Report: Military Fables of Toxic Waste*. Minneapolis: Quadrant, 2013. 29-31.

Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge (RMANWR), and then address the critical points of EAGLE as an alternative means of parafiction. Through this, I hope to further emphasize how and why parafiction has been readily adapted as a means to discuss land use practices.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal was established in 1942 under President Roosevelt in World War II. The area, roughly thirty square miles and approximately ten miles northeast of downtown Denver, was initially commissioned for the design of chemical weapons, including chlorine, mustard gas, lewisite, and, ten years later, the production of GB nerve gas in response to the growing concerns of the Cold War. The Army then sought assistance from Julius Hyman, Shell Chemical Company, to provide support for costs and maintenance, further adding pesticides, insecticides, and herbicide production at the site. After the death of six thousand sheep due to a nerve gas spill in Dugway Proving Grounds, Utah, as well as growing local concerns over the dumping hole well known as “the sink,” where 243 gallons of waste were disposed of, the demilitarization of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, known as Project Eagle, began in the 1970s.²⁶

Krupar makes clear that distinguishing between waste and nature is the root of the conflict when she states that “The extraction of waste through on-site burial and off-site dispersal ordained the site’s rhetorical ‘return to nature’”. For Krupar, waste is understood by the government as a material unnatural to nature and a problematic asset to be disguised or physically transplanted away from nature. Krupar states “Rocky Flats is natural and contaminated; these are not mutually exclusive conditions of existence. However, discourses of the cleanup advocated the binary equating of ‘nature’ with

²⁶ Shiloh Krupar. *Hot Spotters Report: Military Fables of Toxic Waste*. Minneapolis: Quadrant, 2013. 33-39.

‘clean,’ and ‘waste’ with ‘contaminated’ and therefore ‘not natural.’”²⁷ The Rocky Mountain Arsenal, prior to being relabeled as *nature*, had to go through a conservation process that would bring it back to nature. These blurry definitions of what nature can and cannot be only serve to fortify unrealistic binaries that Krupar and Kanouse would work to extinguish through the NTLCS.

In 1986, twenty bald eagles were found in the Rocky Mountain Arsenal. This find amidst the Project Eagle’s mission to remediate the Rocky Mountain Arsenal sparked interest in effectively, cost and time wise, returning the site to nature. A pristine image of nature was the goal of the conversion that would obscure a toxic legacy. Reclaiming the bucolic image heavily endowed to the history of American landscape motivated a practice prioritizing a return to nature that would encourage public interest and prevent repercussions. This image, as many fail to realize, is indebted to a long historical interest in idealizing nature in the United States. Through the canon of representation of American landscapes, particularly the Hudson River School and the inception of the National Park Service in 1872, the experience and image of nature began to demand certain expectations that the National Wildlife Refuge conversion process latched onto. Through studying the expectations of experiences at National Parks, the experience of nature could be produced artificially at toxic sites. Through the joint effort of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal Remediation Venture Office, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Shell, and the U.S. Army, pressure was placed to have President George H. W. Bush sign the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Act. The parallels between the agency name EAGLE, Project Eagle, and the eagles being found at Rocky

²⁷ Shiloh Krupar. “Transnatural ethics: revisiting the nuclear cleanup of Rocky Flats, CO, through the queer ecology of Nuclia Waste,” *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 19, no. 3, (July 2012), 307.

Mountain Arsenal, serve as a critical framework for EAGLE:

The bald eagle serves as an important cultural boundary ‘object’ for humans that negotiates toxicity, value, the symbolic health of the nation, and legal-regulatory processes with ecological relations. Under the wing of the bald eagles, a much less extensive and less expensive cleanup took place at the Arsenal. The land had only to be fit for animal habitation, avoiding the more costly remediation required for human residency or usages involving more comprehensive human contact.²⁸

Put simply, the bald eagle has become iconic of United States government proactive interest in protecting and preserving the natural landscape. This project has reaped great wealth for the United States government to symbolically assure the public that the government is restoring toxic sites across the United States. For example, this can be seen at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge that developed its remediation program surrounding the bald eagle while simultaneously abandoning other animals, to the point of eradication, as well as the local community.

The focus on the bald eagle was particularly attractive because of the eagle’s obvious association as the national symbol, as well as its endangered species status during the conversion of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal into a National Wildlife Refuge. In fact, the Bald Eagle was only recently removed from the endangered species list in 2007. Preserving the bald eagle can be seen as simulating the preservation of a national identity associated with the American dream, perseverance in the face of greater odds, and the establishment and security of democracy: key concepts associated with Cold War anxieties over the Red scare, the threat of communism and espionage throughout the Cold War, and everything other than democracy.

Yet it’s also important to note that the politics behind the bald eagle are fraught, both as a symbol of national identity and as evidence of the successful remediation of the

²⁸ Shiloh Krupar. *Hot Spotters Report: Military Fables of Toxic Waste*. Minneapolis: Quadrant, 2013. 42.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. Not only was this a cost-effective process, being cheaper than nearly any other possible animal to preserve at the new National Wildlife Refuge, but the bald eagle also holds symbolic importance as I have stated.²⁹

Krupar's analysis of the RMANWR extends beyond the use of the eagle as a national symbol to interrogate our cultural understanding of nature imposed by history and government influence over it:

Waste and industrial residues of the former plant, such as workers who are now the anachronistic 'living remains' of the site's industrial ecology, demand an understanding of nature as porous. However, as the wildlife service rids the area of noxious weeds and re-seeds roads with native grasslands, the spectacular projection of the site as an ordinary natural landscape publicly orients an understanding of the area as clean/purified by technology rather than as always already 'technonature,' a complex commingling of waste and nature, the social and ecological.³⁰

What nature is and how nature is produced and represented is difficult to unpack from the shackles of its historical rhetoric. Krupar recognizes this tendency to preserve a comfortable identity of nature through the remediation process. Rather than dismissing it, she carries the point further to acknowledge the overlapping fields that have been a part of nature's construction. To distinguish between pure and tampered nature is to miss the point. The vastness of our influence over nature is severely understated through the efforts to hide our waste.

Above, Krupar states that the eagle is a "boundary object." Thus far, I have associated this with the difficult boundaries between preserving an endangered species and the symbolic and political value of establishing a product of nature. Border objects,

²⁹ Shiloh Krupar. *Hot Spotters Report: Military Fables of Toxic Waste*. Minneapolis: Quadrant, 2013. 43-47.

³⁰ Shiloh Krupar. "Transnatural ethics: revisiting the nuclear cleanup of Rocky Flats, CO, through the queer ecology of Nuclia Waste," *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 19, no. 3, (July 2012), 310.

as I will establish in the remainder of this section, are fundamental to NTLCS and EAGLE when they develop images about complicated government involvement in National Wildlife Refuge conversion. Both EAGLE and the NTLCS use the image of the eagle to point out the controversial position of the endangered species in relation to toxic remediation. Furthermore, the United States government has made a clear use of the Bald Eagle as a way to encourage interest and pacify dissent when considering the impact, or lack thereof, at National Wildlife Refuges. What I aim to accomplish in this comparison is that parafiction is not only a concept to be applied to the NTLCS or EAGLE, but is also a significant component of how the government operates.

Mark Nash, a culture and film theorist, has written about the ways artists can engage in social practices through the idea of border crossing. Rather than the physical migration from one country into another, border crossing is defined by artists who “create a scenario that partly relies on existing social realities” and “enter a social realm in order to generate works of art.”³¹ Nash, in the beginning of his essay “Reality in the Age of Aesthetics,” quotes Jacques Rancière, a French philosopher who has written extensively on the connections between politics and aesthetics, and whom I will quote here for his importance in explaining Nash’s theory:

The fiction of the aesthetic age defined models for connecting the presentation of facts and forms of intelligibility that blurred the border between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction... Writing history and writing stories come under the same regime of truth.³²

The quote by Rancière presents the complexities behind the ever-increasing difficulty in distinguishing reality from fiction. If writing fiction, and writing history,

³¹ Mark Nash, “Reality in the Age of Aesthetics,” *Frieze* 114 (April 2008): 119-124.

³² Quoted from Mark Nash, “Reality in the Age of Aesthetics,” *Frieze* 114 (April 2008): 119-24. Original citation: Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Continuum, London, 2006, p. 38.

read here as fact, both engage with aspects from one another, fact borrows from fiction and fiction borrows from fact, then this presents a difficulty in the process of deciphering out truth. Nash recognizes this dilemma. However, he reminds the reader that a long history of post-Structuralist theory has argued that distinguishing “between reality and its representation” is a moot point in contemporary art practices that are engaged in, what he calls, “border crossing.” Border crossing can be understood in similar terms to how I have been defining parafiction. Nash defines it as when an artist “crosses back and forth between the domains of reality and fiction.”³³ I would argue that this can be taken further, along the lines of Lambert-Beatty, when we situate parafictional practices as existing as both fiction and fact.

This may initially appear as a pedantic approach to semantics, but it carries significant differences when we see that Nash is considerably more vested in documentary filmmakers and media-based artists that explore the violent and politically tense moments of forgotten histories. In describing Jeremy Deller’s piece *Battle of Orgreave* (2001), in which the artist reenacted a battle from the Great Miner’s Strike of 1984-5 in the U.K., Nash states:

The importance of Deller’s work is that it encourages these memories to resurface while asking questions about the history and legacy of that struggle today. There artist’s agency here, such as it is, involves presenting us with the possibilities of alternative memories and histories.³⁴

Deller’s work presents the viewer with the possibility of revisiting history from varying vantage points in the hopes of creating awareness. The work, and much of the work Nash looks at, exists within a film or a video that has a clear temporality, meaning the work has a beginning and an end that a viewer can clearly distinguish. In the projects

³³ Mark Nash, “Reality in the Age of Aesthetics,” *Frieze* 114 (April 2008): 119-124.

³⁴ Mark Nash, “Reality in the Age of Aesthetics,” *Frieze* 114 (April 2008): 119-124.

I have been mentioning, this is not the case. For the NTLCS and EAGLE, the agencies do not simply present the alternative, but exist in them as if they were reality. Rather than the work being easily compartmentalized into an object, the projects I have been mentioning exist more so through the immaterial and the idea of entering into an alternative reality. In the case of the NTLCS, they exist, wishfully, within the Department of Interior to provide the funds and resources for the remediation and growing awareness of the toxic legacy of our industrial-military complex. I propose that beyond “border crossing,” parafictional practices “exists on the border” by living as if the alternative history they propose is real.

For the U.S. government, the use of the eagle as a “border object” can be thought of in similar ways. Rereading Nash’s definition of “border crossing” is useful for considering how the NTLCS reflects government practices. By replacing “artists” with “the government” in Nash’s statement that “artists create scenarios that rely on existing social realities” (which would read as: the government creates scenarios that rely on existing social realities), the actions of Arsenal conversions into National Wildlife Refuges becomes more politically and economically motivated, rather than motivated by the health and wellbeing of the people. Establishing the Bald Eagle as a reason to convert the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, as opposed to the reality that there is a liability to human safety, the U.S. government participates in the same vein as the parafictional. This is, quite frequently, the issue with many greenwashing practices. As opposed to assuming accountability, institutions and governments merely present themselves as advocating for a politics centered on ecology. The reality, as the NTLCS and EAGLE have shown, is that the politics follow the most economically sound solution while simultaneously

developing an image of resolution that has surfaced as a result of our toxic legacy.

It is this paradox that makes parafictional practices remarkable, particularly those that attempt to appropriate the institutional rhetoric they are critiquing. The paradox I am speaking of is that the NTLCS emulates institutions by developing programs in response to institutional responsibility. As opposed to taking responsibility for the full conditions of decommissioned Arsenal's, the U.S. government can easily situate the conversion process as one motivated by the environmental security of a specific species, regardless of the toxicity that will remain to endanger human lives in the area. For the NTLCS, this only serves to obfuscate the dire environmental concerns of the affected communities.

In this section, I have compared the two fictional agencies, EAGLE and the NTLCS, to show two distinct approaches on how agencies engage with greenwashing projects. Unlike EAGLE, the NTLCS capitalizes on the limitations of solely addressing an academic audience by including the public in site visits, design charrettes, and website posts that encourage laymen to learn about their community.³⁵ Posts skew away from the precise and specific information provided in Shiloh Krupar's book to make room for interpretative stances that reflect on the agencies' grassroots approach to tackling the issues that come along with our toxic legacy. Furthermore, taking EAGLE and putting it into action through the NTLCS actualizes the ecological approaches of EAGLE into material form.

³⁵ Sarah Kanouse has a list of projects prior to working on the NTLCS consisting of field testing kits and blueprints for FM radio hijacking. The NTLCS marks a significant departure in her practice, moving from guerilla tactics that provided tools to individuals without a clear investment in community to one where community, though partially artificial, is the criteria rather than the symptom.

CHAPTER 4

WHERE PARAFICTION MEETS REALITY

Throughout this paper, I have been framing several theoretical currents within the NTLCS. Most prominent is my discussions of parafiction and how this mode of production has been utilized by the agency to direct attention to environmental issues across the United States in relation to the aftermath of the Cold War. Fear and anxiety over the threat to capitalism and democracy underscored the tensions of the Cold War during its time, alongside the potential of nuclear fallout. The NTLCS, recognizing these tensions, tunes their ideology to the ramifications of the hidden labor behind the construction of nuclear weapons. In doing so, toxicity and the continuance of the Cold War into the present day through toxicity become the new historical traumas of the Cold War.

Historical narratives have been abolished for newer, fictitious, yet, plausible realities that we, those viewing and reading the work of the NTLCS, will undoubtedly use to question previous accounts and narratives of neo-liberal greenwashing projects and the relationship between the US government and land use. These narratives are based in accepting guilt for previous generation's inconsistencies and inability to accept

responsibility for the current toxic wasteland that lays afoot. Above all, the NTLCS shows that there are a multitude of directions history may take. One could say they are reversing time, playing out the idealistic point of view of a transparent, self-forgiving government that understands the damages done and is ready to resolve them through a novel approach to transnatural ethics. This ethics would be far-reaching, and to some implausible as it would require a degree of honesty from a position that is fast growing to be one synonymous with a lie. At its heart, the NTLCS is a cry of civil disappointment, completely and entirely abandoned by a government that has lied so often that everything stated is shrouded in doubt. I cannot help but compare our state to the soured relationship accidentally or purposefully formed by the trespasses of infidelity, broken promises, and deceit that leaves its victims in perpetual doubt of value or willingness to trust. Often in such cases, both parties fail to take accountability for the fallacy. The NTLCS stresses this stake in responsibility, where many have abandoned their role for arrogant and dismissive complacency.

Projects such as these will continue, I imagine, but with different criteria. Environment and landscape have been the predominant areas of concern for parafiction. The works of the Yes Men are among the best examples. This should be no surprise as landscape, how we imagine it and how we use it, has often been rife with an uncertainty within our imagination and in practice. As Christopher Salter and William Lloyd, two professors at University of California focusing on literary uses of landscape, have pointed out:

Landscape is what lies between our mind's eye and our horizon as we explore the spaces of our real world and of the artificial worlds we encounter in art. It is an expansive and broadly inclusive concept, generous as to scale and content. Landscape encompasses the abstractness

of spatial distributions and the concreteness of intimately known places, emphasizing in each instance the creative actions of mankind in forming and ordering the settling for its activities.³⁶

For Salter and Lloyd, landscape possesses an inherent quality of malleability under the pressures of civilizations' desires. It is a space of ongoing construction that inherits the creative and imaginary from civilizations' cultural, economic, social, and political status in physical form. What is at stake, what I am proposing through the work of the NTLCS, is that through parafictional works, artificial worlds can be manifested in the real world as a form of revolution and protest that have lasting efficacy. Recently, Carrie-Lambert Beatty has adapted her discussions of parafiction to environmental issues in a lecture at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City titled "Some Things to Know: Parafiction and Climate Change." The program description classifies parafiction as a "historic cultural shift, from a time when skepticism of official truth claims was intrinsic to progressive politics, to one when widespread cynicism and manufactured doubt threaten both democracy and the planet itself."³⁷ By introducing the parafictional into the realm of the real, groups and agencies such as the NTLCS perform as if the change we desire from our governments and institutions are feasible, actual realities.

Going forward with parafictional projects, and the broader category of visual culture, the question needs to be asked continuously if there are other possibilities, historical, contemporaneous, that as a society people can choose to adopt in the face of unsatisfactory performances by the powers that be. One such group, *The Institute for*

³⁶ William J. Lloyd and Christopher L. Salter, *Landscape In Literature* (Washington: Association of American Geographers, 1977) 2.

³⁷ Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Some Things to Know: Parafiction and Climate Change*, 2016. https://www.guggenheim.org/event/29th-annual-hilla-rebay-lecture?utm_source=artedu&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HRLecture29%5D

Wishful Thinking (IWT), collaborates with other “wishful agencies” to conceptualize prospective government institutions.³⁸ The objective of the IWT is to provide a democratic model of exchange between policy makers and artists. Artists that have interests in social change are asked to propose a potential government agency that would be responsible for conducting the desired changes. Of the thirty-two groups listed, over half of them are focused on environmental issues. This should be noted as it exemplifies that the discourse of land and environmental art will manifest through geographical imaginations, policy play, and the performance of alternative realities. Other realities that are not the textbook, teleological definitions of the historical narrative can and should be accepted through a concentrated and practiced effort of critique and rebellion in opposition to the normative as a way to re-conceptualize society’s historical archaeology that is passed through as certain, absolute truth. The NTLCS offers this as a promising form of civil resistance going forward in a world more than ever aware of its stake in the fake.

³⁸ <http://www.theiwt.com/>

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