
Shiloh Krupar’s *Hot Spotter’s Report* is an irreverent deadly serious critical engagement with the never-ending residues of war and militarism. It works by turns and all at once in several visual and literary genres–fable, play, poetry, “creative” non-fiction (including government reports), “regular” non-fiction (such as essays and academic pieces), photography, placards, and testimonial–in styles that encompass satire, camp, performance, argument, lament, and indictment. Krupar accomplishes *in* her text–stunningly, provocatively, furiously–the curious passionate engaged politics she urges us toward *through* her text.

*Hot Spotter’s Report* is a formidable accomplishment and funny too. Its form and content are inseparable in the ways they refuse the jeremiad and so fully embrace or enact the cataclysmic state of life or war as life along with its absurd entailments and remains. It opens new spaces to enter politics and inhabit its strange but hopeful terrains. I love any politics that calls for “persistent irreverence”, and agree that it has the hope of bringing more people in to feel and act on their responsibilities to one another and the world than the dismalism and sense of futility of apocalyptic environmentalism.

Shiloh Krupar’s project and arguments for what she calls “transnatural ethics” are recapitulated, rehearsed, and reflected in the book’s form–fables, performative (tapping...
into the work of Denver performance artist “Nuclia Waste”), visual, and alchemical (refracted through the art of James Acord who made sculptures of radioactive materials). Her politics are pithy, animate, ethical, irreverent, and performative in the ways they transform waste and the abjected into possibilities for action and engagement. Her satire and parody are portals to political action, entryways that may appeal to different people from those drawn by more traditional modes of political reckoning.

As I read and absorbed the book’s microcuries I kept thinking about whose fables these were, and the name Rumsfeld kept coming to mind. Appropriate enough that military fables would conjure George W. Bush’s Secretary of Defense. His pithily perverse or perversely pithy notion that “There are known knowns; there are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns; that is to say there are things that we now know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns–there are things we do not know we don’t know” was aptly linked by Krupar to a “forensics of not seeing”. If Aesop’s fables offer a moral to every story, military fables feature immorals, and Krupar brings these immorals to light brilliantly. How else to make sense and act in the face of the absurdities of turning Rocky Mountain Arsenal into a National Wildlife Refuge? The immoral there—which Hot Spotter’s Report exposes fabulously–might be if you find the “fun” in superfund all will be forgiven. Then there was the adjudication of claims brought by workers with long-term exposure to toxic chemicals and radiation through the flimflam of “dose reconstruction”. The immoral there might be that if you take uncertainty seriously you certainly won’t have to pay most claims, to say nothing of reckoning with the impossibility of compensation for the often slow-motion damages of nuclear exposure in the workplace. The “you” in these immorals is the US state as military-industrial complex, and the violent hubristic arrogant dishonesty of Rumsfeld’s
known unknowns and unknown unknowns is exact here. Through these fables Krupar exposes the treacheries, occupies the “environmental havoc”, and embodies the deep madness of the military-industrial complex, the residues of the Cold War, and the hypocrisies of the green wars in which we all live.

*Hot Spotter’s Report* inhabits those residues and their infinite historical geographies, and works them into possibilities just as infinite and probably just as fraught. It refuses the binaries of body-environment, nature-waste, spectacle-everyday, military-domestic, and quite convincingly delves into the space-time and spatio-temporalities of what is visible and invisible, and how that haunts environmental engagement. The politics, humor, and genre-bending of *Hot Spotter’s Report* brought to mind a few other texts with which it would be quite at home. Among them Thomas Pynchon’s over the top (not so) fictional account of techno-military culture and war, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973); the late Garrett Scott’s hair-raising film *Cul de Sac: A Suburban War Story* (2011), which scrutinizes the militarization of everyday life and the reworking of nature in people’s bodies with mordant humor and stunning insight; and Beatriz Colomina’s illuminating *Domesticity at War* (2007) which ingeniously reveals how military technologies developed in World War II were redeployed in the suburbs, at once ensuring better homes and gardens and disciplining the domestic frontier. Krupar tracks all of these grounds exposing the zones of sacrifice and accumulation that pock them at all scales from the radioactive red-orange glaze on Fiesta dishes glowing on dinner tables everywhere in the United States during the mid 20th century (the glaze was produced until the 1940s when the US government requisitioned all uranium for military use), through the suburban developments along the boundary of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal-turned-National Wildlife Refuge—look but don’t touch!—to the hotspot
Archipelagos containing plutonium and other weapons related waste that are buried under, discarded over, and raining down on the increasingly populated US West.

Krupar marks sacrifice across scale whether the body, the neighborhood or housing development, the region, the nation, the oceans, or the global, and dissects the corporate and state accumulation these sacrifices make possible whether in big science, big pharma, or the metastatic growth of an uncontainable military-industrial complex. Her wit is devastating, and a fitting match for the preposterousness of the biotechnologies of war and its sprawling before- and aftermaths, their calamitous clean ups, implausible environmental restorations, and criminally disingenuous individual restitutions, all of which she details meticulously and hilariously. Hot Spotter’s Report is an exemplar of “camp” as politics or as opening a space of or to enter politics. While the book performs its own campy critique (enriched by Shiloh Krupar’s performative presentations of its ideas at conferences and elsewhere), it also appraises the work of others mining similar veins of creative engagement with nuclear waste. The chapter on “transnatural ethics”, for instance, promises and delivers “persistent irreverence” as it examines the work of performance artist Nuclia Waste and sculptor James Acord. “Transnatural ethics” is a way to queer environmental politics and disrupt any sense that nature is pure or some untouched thing to which we might (want to) return. The creations of these artists, as detailed by Krupar, are alternative responses to radioactive waste whose quirky embodied aesthetics invite engagement in ways that straight environmental politics don’t, not just potentially drawing in people repelled by conventional environmentalism, but also exemplifying Krupar’s call for absurdist or irreverent “engagement with the world that emboldens creative action”. She argues that such curious acts are a way to be ethically “realistic and optimistic” in the face of a military-corporate state so vast and outrageous.
as to be potentially paralyzing and certainly beyond the reach of the “rational” detachment of “normal” science and its claims to truth.

Hot Spotter’s Report makes an extraordinary contribution to radical geography, political ecology, anti-militarism, and analyses of “the Anthropocene” both in the ways it lives in and makes newly alive the residues of productions of nature as toxic, and in the possibilities a “transnatural ethical stance” offer for confronting and making something else of the biopolitics of war which permeates everyday life and space in the US. By unhiding, unforgetting, and refusing the containments of what is uncontainable, Krupar refuses to live unquietly in a political economy and political ecology of disavowal, and the irreverent noise she makes is crazily beautiful and always compelling the making of something new.

References


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