The waste basket, like the latticed metal one depicted in fig. 1, holds trash. The image may depict an office worker, discarding a failed document, releasing the clench of the fist to let the detritus go; it could also be a composite image. The crumpled paper seems off. Now that I look again, it reminds me of the billboard Oranges on Fire, 1975, by Mike Mandel and Larry Sultan. (I finished reading The Grapes of Wrath for the first time last night, and it made me think of this image, red flames licking at the oranges against the blue sky. "And men with hoses squirt kerosene on the oranges, and they are angry at the crime, angry at the people who have come to take the fruit. A million people hungry, needing the fruit—and kerosene sprayed over the golden mountains.")

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My body produces waste, and the management of that waste has consumed the past three years of my life. Before the illness, I made photographs of myself pissing outdoors in places where I'd previously been hurt (the connection only became clear after the pictures collected). I don't have proper words for the hurt or the illness: to say that I was sexually harmed in public by a partner for years or that my employer accidentally poisoned me by failing to install proper ventilation, while also sexually harassing me does not come close. Those sentences do not contain everything, nor will they. The clinical description lacks the body's description. My mother refers to the removal of one of her nostrils and the surrounding cheek an amputation, and I bristle at this and privately think that language is failing her, as it fails all of us. Then I am sorting through her medical charts while she is recovering from fresh surgery and discover that her paperwork calls it an amputation as well. I apologize to her, and she is satisfied by her correctness.

The illness is nebulous too: incessant menstrual bleeding, dizziness, exhaustion. I stop trying to think about my piss because my entire day is measured in the hour increments between piss, between what I can accomplish before there is a need. Before this, I found delight in my piss. I played chicken with my bladder when preparing to photograph, and once I lost so spectacularly that I got sand in the camera's shutter release and had to explain to the basement camera repairman that I'd pissed myself. The pictures were playful for me. I pissed in a thrifted bowl, and a friend said, Remind me to never eat at your house.

There is no wastebasket in my office anymore. I have a tiny one from Daiso that I use for discarded lint from the dryer, the most flammable vessel in the house. I don't throw away Post-Its, which cover my desk and the bottom edge of the frame within reach of my desk; there are stacks and stacks of them piled up in boxes in the hutch. Also in the hutch: my photographic negatives from 2015 - 2021, neatly cut and sleeved, and 2022 - now, still in tightly coiled rolls from the lab; my notebooks from 2012 - now, exempting the current one; printed material in need of frames; an errant cat toy; my notebooks and readings from my final year of grad school. Writing this newsletter has been the most consistent form of writing I've produced this year; the rest of it has withered, or was withering anyway and withered further.

I don't think I will find anything useful in my waste from the past few years: the sentences I wrote while ill are sad, pitiful. I finished bleeding a week ago and yet I'm bleeding again. two - or three? - weeks ago, the thing that gets them to take me seriously: a blood clot the size of my hand, if my hand is laid out waiting for the holy communion, fingers straight. ... And when I sleep for twelve hours and wake up with the sweat slicked between my breasts, the skin already turning papery like an old woman's, the state will not be watching. ... Without the cup in, my body knows something is missing, twitches toward it. Sometimes there's a small intimation of a burp down there. Sometimes, after spending so long wiping, touching, cleaning, the skin around the hole feels shredded — of course there are scraps of me in the toilet. There are scraps of me everywhere. Everywhere. ... The jacaranda petals dust the ground in purple, and then they begin to rot, and once they've rotted and have been stepped on or jostled they leave brown shadows of their former bodies on the pavement. I typed up everything I had written in notebooks about the sickness, up until the point when I was referred to a lawyer; the introduction of the legal system into my body changed the sentences again. I became very afraid of evidence, something I had previously yearned for.

Most of the waste went straight into the toilet. I photographed the menstrual cup a few times, after it left a sludgy line of blood around the perimeter of the sink, and once or twice the blood inside the toilet itself, when it looked particularly like low tide in the summer, but they are useless, boring pictures. All of this could be considered waste from the illness: the unsatisfactory sentences and pictures, the stretches of time lost, the strange itchy pain between my legs as I sit and write this, as though I have ridden a bike for hours and hours. My friends assure me that I have written a book, that the words congeal into something more than the time spent in the bathroom.



I read Alphabetical Diaries by Sheila Heti this year. I liked it; I wanted to connect all of the sentences, I wanted to read it with meaning imbued. I liked it formally, and I liked it partly for the experience of time passing back over oneself, and I liked the sentences themselves. When I turned thirty, I began a daily five-year diary, and now that I am thirty-one, the sentences I write are affected by the sentence of the year before, and I have to try and write sentences that don't merely react to last year's sentences.

DRAWER 148 WAGON TO WATCHES

The artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles remains the New York City Department of Sanitation's only artist in residence, a title and unpaid position she's held since the late 1970s. In 1969, Laderman Ukeles wrote Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition "Care," a typed four-page document outlining her ideas for personal, general, and earth maintenance. "Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball of every revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?" Laderman Ukeles' maintenance manifesto is tied to her experience as a mother and artist, and an attempt to unite the two experiences within contemporary art. The following year, she wrote, "In women's hard-winning and new-finding of power and freedom, I do not want merely to adopt the blinkered classical male definition of artistic freedom: 'up up and away' i.e. off the backs of their unseen maintenance systems. Rather I want to use my freedoms to move not only 'up' and 'away,' but also 'sideways,' 'backwards,' 'through,' and 'around and around': to weave and loop and to loosen up existing structures: to see them."

From 1979 - 1980, Laderman Ukeles performed Touch Sanitation Performance, in which she shook the hand of all 8,500 members of the DSNY workforce over the course of nearly a year. She mapped out their districts, worked in eight- or sixteen-hour shifts, and thanked every single worker for keeping New York City alive. The job of a sanitation worker is one of the most dangerous in the U.S. (at the time of the performance, Laderman Ukeles referred to them as "sanmen," and the workforce was entirely male). The trash never stops. All maintenance is relentless — the maintenance of one's body, of one's home, of one's life.

My trash cans live in the alley, and there is a silent dance about them. The neighbors put their cans out too early the day prior to collection and block our car in. The neighbors toss bags of dog shit in the cans, which clump together at the bottom. Someone throws a dead rat, still attached to the trap, in our can. My partner and I flip the can on its side and use a long pole to extract the trap and the body, which is light, disintegrating in my gloved hands. I gather up what remains of the pelt, soft gray triangles. We bag his body and throw it, along with the pole, in someone else's unlocked dumpster.