Inside it was dim, except for slashes of sunlight. They weren’t coming from
the windows—those were covered with blankets and newspaper—but
through holes in the floor and the kicked-in walls. There was a worn, brown
vinyl loveseat recliner with a Rugrats blanket thrown over it. Next to it were
two plastic lawn chairs, one supporting a dusty space heater. An old, fat TV
lay facedown on the stained carpet and a ripped piece of drywall, a four-by-
eight particleboard panel, and a leather tool belt lay nearby. So much to take
in.

A frosted ceiling light fixture cradled a pair of pliers, a circuit board, washers,
screws, a butter knife, AA Duracell batteries, a spout shank and T-connector,
an electrical plug, and a toothbrush. Beside it lay a New International Version
Holy Bible and a gas mask. There were six PVC-coated, three-inch lengths of
copper wire, the plastic lid of a Maxwell House coffee can encrusted with
white powder, and an issue of Popular Mechanics opened to a True Value
advertisement: “Master of All Things Hardwarian.” All of it lay on a wooden
coffee table.

Nearby on the kitchen bar sat two severed metal forks. All of their prongs
were curled except for the middle ones. Fuck you. Next to the sink, there was
a camping stove, a red canister of Coleman Camping Fuel, a roll of blue PVC
tubing, a Phillips screwdriver, and a gallon milk jug filled with water.

A red outdoor Midwest Waste bin had been tipped over, and spilling out
were orange-tipped syringes, empty blister packs of Walgreens Wal-Phed,
used coffee filters, an aerosol can of Prestone Starting Fluid, an opened Curad Instant Cold Pack, and crushed cans of Dr. Pepper and Monster Energy Drink.

This was the kitchengaragelivingroom.¹

In a methlab, the edges are blurred. Work and play, inside and outside—life, anti-life, and non-life—the differences are suspended.²

Mass consumer products and the chemical industrial apparatuses that make them possible mediate everyday living and dying. They do not constitute a background or infrastructure, or even a completed past implied by use of the term postindustrialism. They are hereish and nowish in the quasi-events of an ongoing alchemy.³

Meth floods the brain with dopamine, activating the “seeking system,” the areas of the brain that yield a sense not of consummatory pleasure, the satiation of desire, but of anticipatory pleasure, derived from sensing awards yet to come.⁴ Mindbodies are here while simultaneously elsewhere, futurebound: temporally and spatially diffused and always arriving.

This is like hope, but hope exasperated: the feeling of a better life to come, despite everything, the same feeling that keeps the production and consumption of meth on schedule. This industry of hope is an earlier form of industry turned inside out. Progressivist-industrialist hope promised that the good life would come from hard work and the consumer objects it produced. At this far edge of late (cottage) industrialism, hope is produced while consumer products are decomposed to become chemical potential. In an alchemical ontology, all matter in its becoming is what matters—sometime, somehow.

Notes

1 The opening passages of this essay are drawn from Jason Pine, The Alchemy of Meth: A Decomposition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).
3 For Povinelli, a quasi-event is “a form of occurring that never punctures the horizon of the here and now and there and then and yet forms the basis of forms of existence to stay in place or alter their place. The quasi-event is only ever hereish and nowish and thus asks us to focus our attention on forces of condensation, manifestation, and endurance rather than on the borders of objects.” See Povinelli, Geontologies, 21.

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