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Electrolux

I turn the earth more clay than soil and exhume an Alton brick, a heavy reminder that only a few miles south of here one finds magnolia trees, a humid climate, and the subtropical confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, that gateway to both escape and riot. Here, though, the earth is dry black cracks. Coneflower, seedum. bee balm. salvia: all attempts to bring monarchs, bees, hummingbirds, migrants bulking up on nectar before their primordial flight to Central America and beyond. For hours I pull hair-like roots, networks of crab grass, white, prehistoric grubs, rusty nails, and then I wash all of my clothes in our Electrolux washing machine. Lux for light, white, bright... spin cycle. For decades. the Electrolux headquarters stood on the corner where Main meets Walnut. Before that, the site was home to the Mennonite Sanitarium which included a surgical suite, the autoclave room, an eye bank, a child care center. and a birthing room which in 1918 welcomed George Lincoln Rockwell, founder of the American Nazi Party. Now, it is an empty lot that faces an out-of-business gas station that fueled the dream of Route 66, which today is just a distant fume. Our new garden

is kidney-shaped, a figure eight. The sprinkler ticks away the hours during which the black cracks will join with peat to create earth that is habitable. Later, I stare at the water in my frontloading machine as it rises to submerge the soiled clothes and I remember my days in laundromats before buying this machine, the perfume of fabric softener strong as sweat. As the earth gets hotter, we go to public pools, cold ripples of chlorine killing every germ in the kiddie splash pool. Just a few inches of water is enough to sit down or crawl on all fours and race like a crab to catch my son. As we approach the tiny water slide,

we arrive at a man sitting by the pool's edge with a baby. He sports a sleeve of tattoos on each arm: a German flag, an Iron Cross. SS bolts of lightning, the hand gesture that once meant *ok* but now also means white power, and the Wolfsangel, ancient runic symbol meant to protect the wearer from wolves. I crawled toward his body which registered first as father then as Nazi and saw that he was not alone. that other fathers were with him. covered with ancient appropriations, and I wondered which algorithm they might be using to rank my son's dark skin. Later, when I told a friend,

she wasn't too surprised. In 1974, George Lincoln Rockwell was murdered by one of his own outside of a laundromat, and after his death. American Nazis came to the Mennonite Sanitarium to lay a wreath by his birthplace and march the street. The marches fizzled once Electrolux bought the land. My Electrolux, though, is a marvel. The whites are whiter than I've ever seen. but there is no joy here, no way to talk happily of washing and whiteness.

When I look back at the poems that I published in *SRPR* nine years ago, I see that they provided the foundation for what was a shift in my work towards longer, more discursive lines and a more explicit engagement with politics and history in my own life. "Electrolux" is a part of that shift as well. In my recent work, I continue my explorations of politics and cultural memory with a particular focus on the history of colonization, technology, and ecological crisis. This poem foregrounds the intersection between technology—the washing machine—and the history of the place that created it—a fairly ordinary place that gave rise to one of the most prominent Nazis in American history.