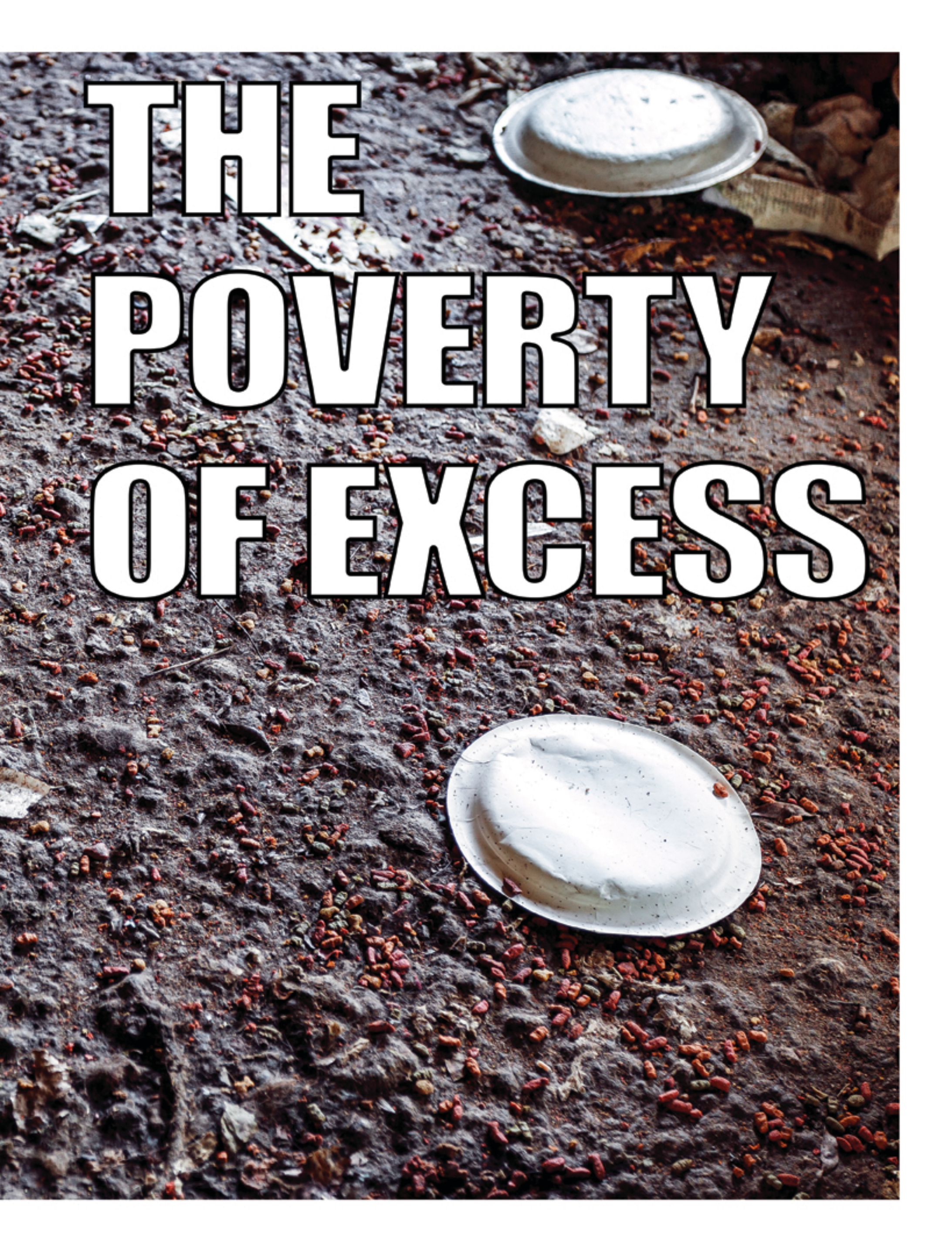


THE POVERTY OF EXCESS



The photographs in this publication were taken from 2011 to 2019 at four cat hoarders' homes in Ulster County, New York. All of these homes were occupied at the time of photographing and dozens of cats were rescued. Although the photos were taken to be used as evidence in animal cruelty cases, my intention was to document these spaces as part of my artistic practice which focuses on the relationship between self and environment. The project explores how surroundings both reflect and affect individuals and society at large. While these specific environments are shaped by mental illness, they are also examples of late capitalism's omnipresent influence with its emphasis on global production and overconsumption of inexpensive goods.

Hoarding is characterized by compulsive stockpiling and accumulation of everything from ordinary household items such as food and clothing, to furniture, appliances, electronics, and various collectibles. The inability to discard or part with any possession, including disposable materials and garbage makes everyday living difficult, but animal hoarding situations are particularly disturbing. Cat hoarders continue to acquire more and more cats and are simply unable to take care of them or clean up after them. Consequently, every surface in the house shows signs of neglect and extreme unsanitary conditions. Stains on the walls, endless clusters of flies and fresh cat food scattered on feces coated floors are typical.











Kitchens are particularly disconcerting considering that they are actively being used to prepare meals and store food. The juxtaposition of edible food such as fresh fruit surrounded by rotting vegetables is unsettling but commonplace. Although there is always an abundance of edible food, any uneaten or spoiled food is never disposed of. The pervasive decomposing organic material attracts endless clusters of flies and other vermin. The ability to amass these large quantities of food despite low economic status is evidence of how developed economies make excessive hoarding and waste possible.









Although it is easy to characterize the people that have created these horrific living environments as out of control and mentally unstable, it's important to remember that these are individuals with complex and distinct personalities. Despite the overwhelming visual barrage of every type of consumer item imaginable, certain familiar motifs emerge. Nostalgic items like stuffed animals, folk art, posters, memorabilia and family photos are scattered and isolated within the chaos, suggesting an attempt to curate memories and hang on to a sense of personal history and identity. However, any comfort these artifacts may provide is overshadowed by the sheer volume of possessions and waste. This overabundance of material goods becomes a marker of deprivation rather than a display of prosperity. A poverty of excess.















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