



# EXCESS — THE FACTORY

*Leslie Kaplan*

TRANSLATED BY JULIE CARR AND JENNIFER PAP



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EDITIONS

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## THE FIRST TWO CIRCLES

# *Excess — The Factory*

### INTRODUCTION

Leslie Kaplan was born in Brooklyn, but raised and educated in France. Beginning in January 1968, Kaplan worked for two years in a series of factories, but stumbled over the problem of how to write about such an experience. She claimed that “no discourse could speak the factory,” but that some words—free of the forms and expectations of discourse— could undertake to do so. As she put it, those words would have to be suspended, discordant, and open. Faced with the desire, or with the ethical summons, to write about an alienating and often hidden place in society, Kaplan wrote her first book: *L’excès-l’usine*, a book-length poem with a new strangeness that exposes what is unformed in the factory environment, and acknowledges the distance and separation that the environment creates

between people and objects. Kaplan's poetic voice moves and circulates through the factory with its heaps of wire, sheet metal, its assembly line rhythms, and its open yards. As such, she renders into poetry what is political life—the position of the workers in this factory and their isolation from the value of what they are producing. And yet, her poetry seems to discover and record a sharing of sense perception across the community and space of the factory.

Julie Carr and Jennifer Pap are working collaboratively, with Kaplan's ongoing input, to create a full translation of all nine sections ("Circles") of *L'excès—l'usine*. In fall of 2014 the three will meet in France to complete the work and to generate an extended interview and an introduction to the volume. *L'excès-l'usine* was first published in 1982 by Hachette/P.O.L. Kaplan has published over a dozen books of various genres with P.O.L., and her website contains a number of essays and brief translations in English ([lesliekaplan.net](http://lesliekaplan.net)).

## FIRST CIRCLE

The great factory, the universe, the one that breathes for you.  
There's no other air but what it pumps, expels.  
You are inside.

All space is occupied : all has become waste. The skin, the teeth, the gaze.

You move between formless walls. You encounter people, sandwiches,  
Coke bottles, tools, paper, screws. You move indefinitely, outside of time.  
No beginning, no end. Things exist together, all at once.

Inside the factory, you are endlessly doing.

You are inside, in the factory, the universe, the one that breathes for you.

The factory, you go there. Everything's there. You go.  
Excess—the factory.

A wall in the sun. Extreme tension. Wall, wall, the small grain, brick on brick, or cement or often white, sickly white or the crack, a little earth, gray. Wall, mass. At the same time, this sun. Life is, hatred and light. Life-oven, from before the beginning, whole.

You are taken, you are turned, you are inside.

The wall, the sun. You forget everything.

Most women have a marvelous smile, missing teeth.

You drink a coffee at the coffee machine.

The courtyard, crossing it.

Sitting on a crate.

Tension, oblivion.



You make cables near the window, cables of different colors. You roll them into coils. Light is there, space is soft. You come, go. Corridors, oblivion.

You make cables near the window. Extreme tension. The sky, and the cables, this shit. You are seized, gripped by the cables, the sky. There is nothing else.

All space is occupied : all has become waste. Skin is dead. Teeth bite an apple, a sandwich. You absorb. The gaze sticks to everything like a fly.

You work nine hours, making holes in parts with a machine. You place the part, bring down the lever, take out the part, and raise the lever again. There's paper everywhere.

Time is outside, in things.

The courtyard, crossing it. A factory courtyard's absolute nostalgia.

You walk between formless walls. Sheets of metal, soft and fat. What interest, what interest. This wire on the ground. No one knows the trouble I see. You go looking for something. You absorb everything. You go, you go down. You see others doing things. You are alone, in your gestures. You walk, you feel yourself walking. You are inside. You feel each movement, you unfold, you walk.

You eat caramels, your teeth are stuck together.

Before going in, you go to the cafe. You look at yourself in the mirror above the counter. The jukebox always plays *Those were the days, my love, ah yes those were the days.*

Barrels, wires, sheet metal piled up. Some are painted, red, yellow, blue, green. Parts and scraps, barrels, wires and sheet metal. You don't know, you can't know. You look at them passionately. You're rejected.

You wander in places without names, courtyards, corners, warehouses.

You stop, you go to the cafeteria. Then you come back. Teeth bite, the dead meat is swallowed. You don't eat. Where is the taste? You're penetrated by odors. Everything is already chewed up.

Inside the café, there's always that music. Music and dust, and the mirror over the counter. You drink your coffee while the music plays through, and you go. You pay your money and then you go into the factory.

You wear an apron around your body.

You are near the window. You make cables. Of course, you can die. The open window, the cables. The air moves gently, you float a little.

Often, you look at yourself in a mirror, a pocket mirror, a reflection. You look at yourself, you look at yourself, the image is always there.

You take your bike at five in the morning, still dark. You arrive. You see the factory, it's on the other side of the bridge. One would say it's on the water. You go there. Excess—the factory.

Barrels, wires, sheet metal piled up. Parts and scraps, the factory. The places are formless, there are many corners. In the courtyard some earth, some grass, and all that piled up scrap iron.

You take your bike at five in the morning. You leave. The bike is light, you grip the handlebars, and you go. When you arrive, the factory is hot. You are very cold.

It's there, entire, parts and scraps. The factory. There's no direction, it turns. And rises and falls to the right and to the left, of sheet metal of brick and of stone and the factory. And sound and noise. No crying out. The factory. Parts and scraps. Nails and nails. Sheet metal, understand? Soft and fat. Smooth and hard. You don't know, you can't know.

There's no image, ever.

In the courtyard, grass around the scrap metal. The grass grows very well, very green. The metal is piled up.

You drink, that's normal. Words open the infinite. God exists, the factory. No history. It is terror.

You don't know how to do anything.

You put together a gearbox.

You circulate between corners. What's a corner? Three lines. The three goes away. Three lines without the three. You are mad.

You eat a sandwich at noon by the Seine. You sit on a bench, feet swinging. The sky moves slowly. Barges pass. You eat the whole sandwich. It's the middle of the day, you go back into the afternoon.

You make parts at a machine for rubber parts. You sit. The smell of rubber. Next to the chair, a big iron basin. The smell of iron. You count all the parts one by one.

You are nourished with truth. There is only that.

You put on an apron every morning. You take it home on Fridays to wash it. Sometimes you forget the apron in the locker room for the weekend.

You talk; that's normal.

The workshop is full of white sheets, they hang, they overflow the tables, lie on the floor. Moving around is difficult. The sheets are very silent. A large mirror at the back of the workshop reflects them.

The boss is in the booth in the middle of the workshop. In the morning you punch in.

You have a name; yes.

All space is occupied. All has become waste. The skin, the teeth, the gaze. You move between formless walls. You move indefinitely, outside of time. In the morning, you punch in.

You read the paper closely, you search.

You have a wallet with photos inside.

At noon you eat in the cafeteria.

You encounter people, sandwiches, Coke bottles, tools, paper, crates, screws.

Women are there. You watch them.

There is no image ever. Nobody shouts.

You wear an apron around your body.

Women are there.

When you arrive at a new factory, you are always very afraid.



## SECOND CIRCLE

## SECOND CIRCLE

From the assembly line, you see everything.

Everything enters, everything enters ceaselessly.

Forced innocence. Pain has no profit.

You have your ten-minute break, you go down to the toilet.

The space is long, cylindrical.

You walk inside, you feel a little lighter. Walls, curved walls.

The line is on the left. You move along the aisle, you go toward the end.  
Immobile, carried forward, you walk.

The aisle is full, cluttered. Piles of crates, boxes. This and that, rectangles.  
You walk fairly slowly, you move, you move along.

Some tables are set up on the right, you pass by.

You move, you feel your legs. You feel your stockings, light.  
You wear a tight skirt, wool, and lady's shoes.

## SECOND CIRCLE

You go along the line, walking. Your feet are on the ground.  
You look at the colors.

You are in the factory, you go on.  
You unfold, you advance.  
You move your thoughts a little.

All this space, all around, curved. The factory is vast.

There is no image. You go down into the empty space, the toilets.

You reach the leader of the line.

She's a heavy woman, she has a grey bun.

You pass by, you look at her. You see her shape.

The woman is seated. Origin. The pieces arrive.

The woman assembles her parts, absorbed.

Thick body, held in. She is seated in her dress, on a cushion.

The cushion is crocheted. Next to her, you see her basket. Some yarn spilling out, strands, and some big needles.

## SECOND CIRCLE

The silent fat of the body. You are taken. You look at what has been placed there, hidden.

Time is elsewhere : only space exists, infinite, in your mind, and all life now, gathered and full like a dead stone.

You go down the big curved staircase, you go to the basement.

The stalls are bare, cement.

The place is massive, you enter.

The cement is moist, one would say it was mud. Poured cement, you feel it.  
Matter is really strong.

The walls are wide, damp.

Sick water on the walls, you don't like it.

Many stalls, side by side, separated. The white sinks stand out. Thick  
basement, fresh matter.

The walls are near, rough.

You play a bit with the faucet, for water.

You are there, weak, with no project.

You have brought a little mirror. You take it out of your pocket, it's a little round one.

You look at yourself attentively. You look for your features.

The face is white, the hair pulled back. You don't remember.

A hand holds the mirror, with the face inside. In a sense, the face is always ok. You don't remember, you know. You see the circles of sleep, when the constructions fall and rise up again, slowly, in silence.



When you go upstairs, you always pass the tall, beautiful, made up woman in the packing department. Colors, odors, blue and red. Enormous full woman, her big beautiful black hair.

She is standing, her legs spread.

You look at her. You see her legs.

Standing, spread, she moves.

She doesn't stop, she hammers. Her movements overflow and shift and shift, further.

You see her big eyes, open.

You pass her, you sense her body, and then you turn back.

At noon, you go to the cafeteria.

You cross the rounded street. The cafeteria is across the way.

Low houses, in a row. You don't like curtains, useless.

The sky is above, brown. Smoke floats, and on the ground, bits of tubing.

Sweet and lean little street, you are in it. There are lots of black women.  
Aprons.

You enter, you go to your seat. Tables and benches, and waxed tablecloths.  
The cloth has little squares, all the same, and it smells.

Childhood.

You sit down, you look around. Steaming dishes, stewed fruit. Oranges and bread, and oily salad. Elbows on the table, you look around.

Unbreakable glasses, big and round, the cutlery grey, flimsy. You often put little spoons in your pocket for the house.

You are there, in the bright frame of the cafeteria, sitting, and in your head there is the image, a young woman in the bright frame of the cafeteria, sitting.