Pollution as Relational Breakdown

Why contamination is not just a technical failure, but a withdrawal of care.

We usually ask: ‘How much contamination is safe?’
This deck asks: ‘Why is abandonment allowed at all?’

The Dominant Frame: Matter Out of Place

Environmental regulation frames pollution as a material excess. We identify pollutants, measure their concentration, and establish limits.

The Logic of Control: If the substance remains below the threshold, the system is viewed as functional. We view pollution as an accidental byproduct of production.

The Normalization of Abandonment

Pollution marks the exact moment responsibility for substance is withdrawn. By categorizing matter as ‘waste’ or ‘externality,’ we create an epistemic blind spot.

NOWHERE / EXTERNALITY

“Pollution is not an accident; it is an achievement of our classification systems.”

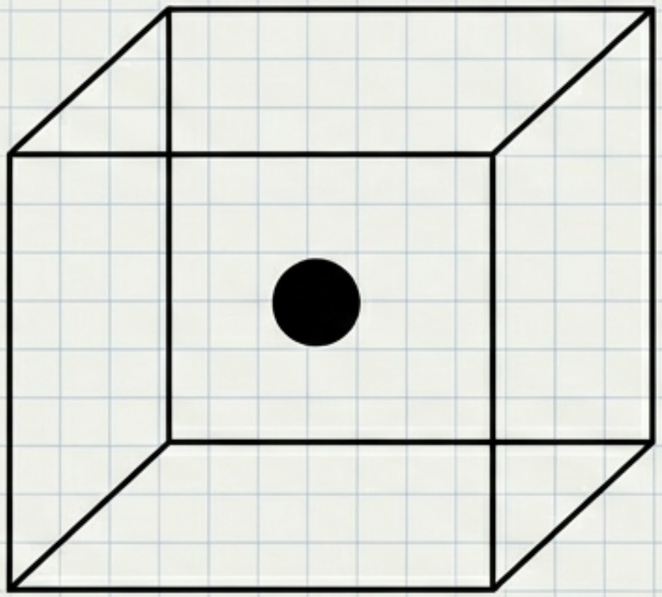
The Intervention: Kanyini

Law, not just ethics.

Drawing on Anangu law as articulated by Yankunytjatjara Elder Bob Randall. Kanyini is an unconditional obligation of care that extends to all things without exception.

In this legal ontology, nothing is inert. Nothing is disposable. Everything is family.

The Fundamental Rupture



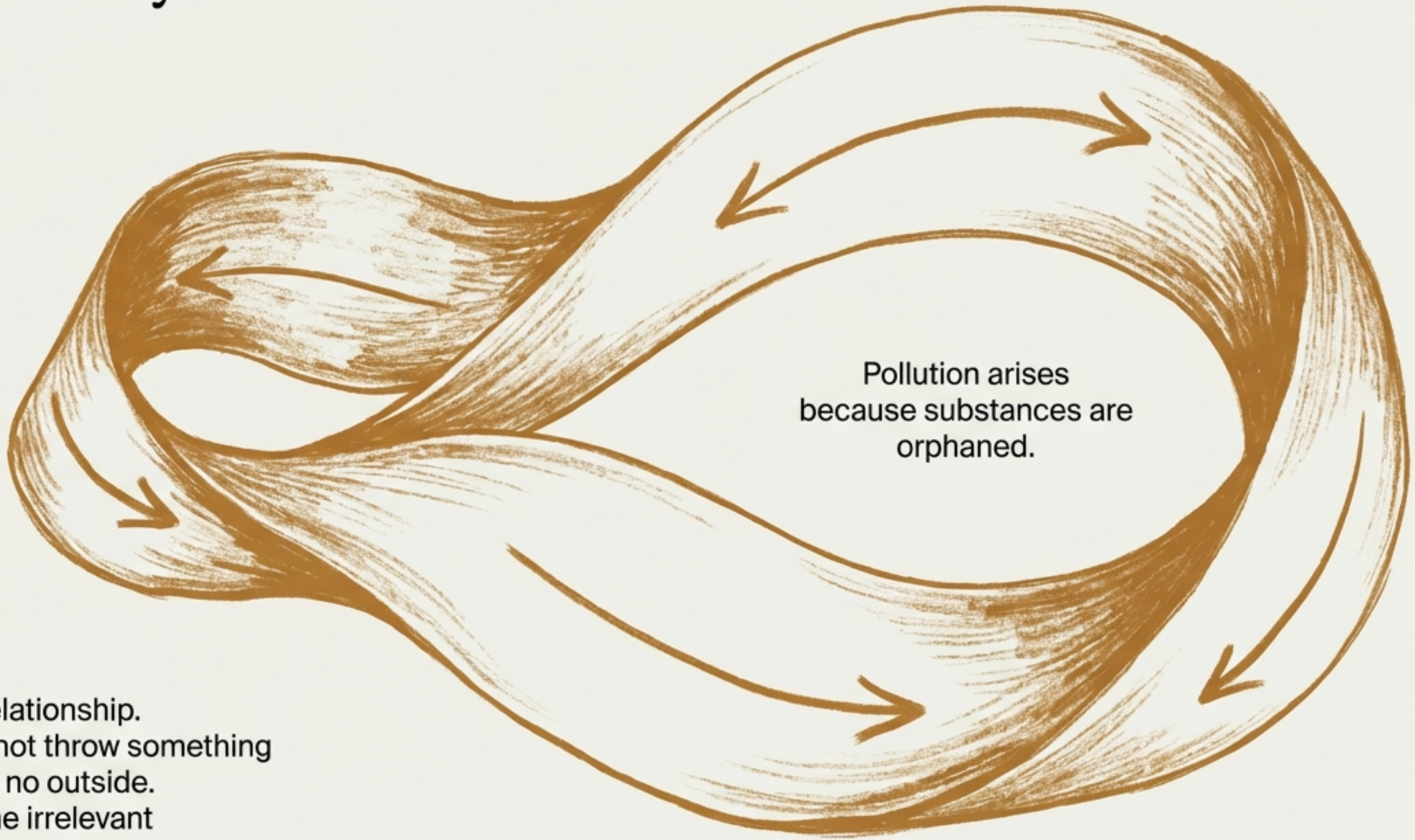
Enclosure.

MINE-NESS: If I own it, I can disown it. Responsibility is enclosed and temporary.

Relation.

OURS-NESS: Collective custody. I am forever related to the substance. Elder Bob Randall identifies this shift as the root of pollution.

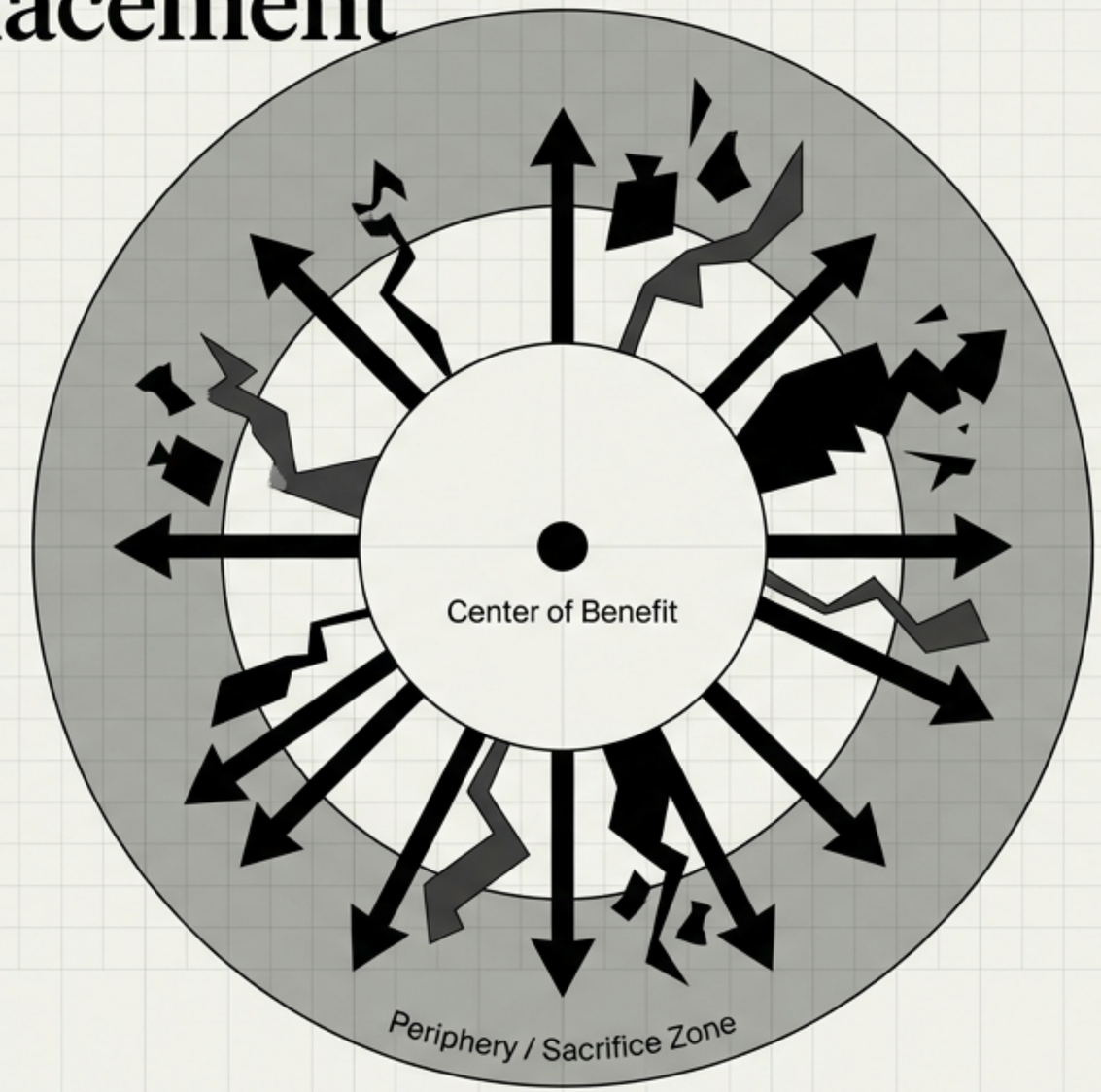
The Impossibility of Disposal



To dispose is to deny relationship.
Under Kanyini, you cannot throw something ‘away’ because there is no outside.
Matter does not become irrelevant because it is unwanted.

Spatial Displacement

Managing the visibility of abandonment.



Modern regimes manage pollution by moving it—downwind, downstream, or to distinct geographies.

We don't manage the matter; we manage the visibility of the abandonment.

Temporal Outsourcing

We release substances now, knowing the cost will be paid later. Pollution acts as a form of temporal colonization, binding unborn generations to our refuse.

NOW

FUTURE

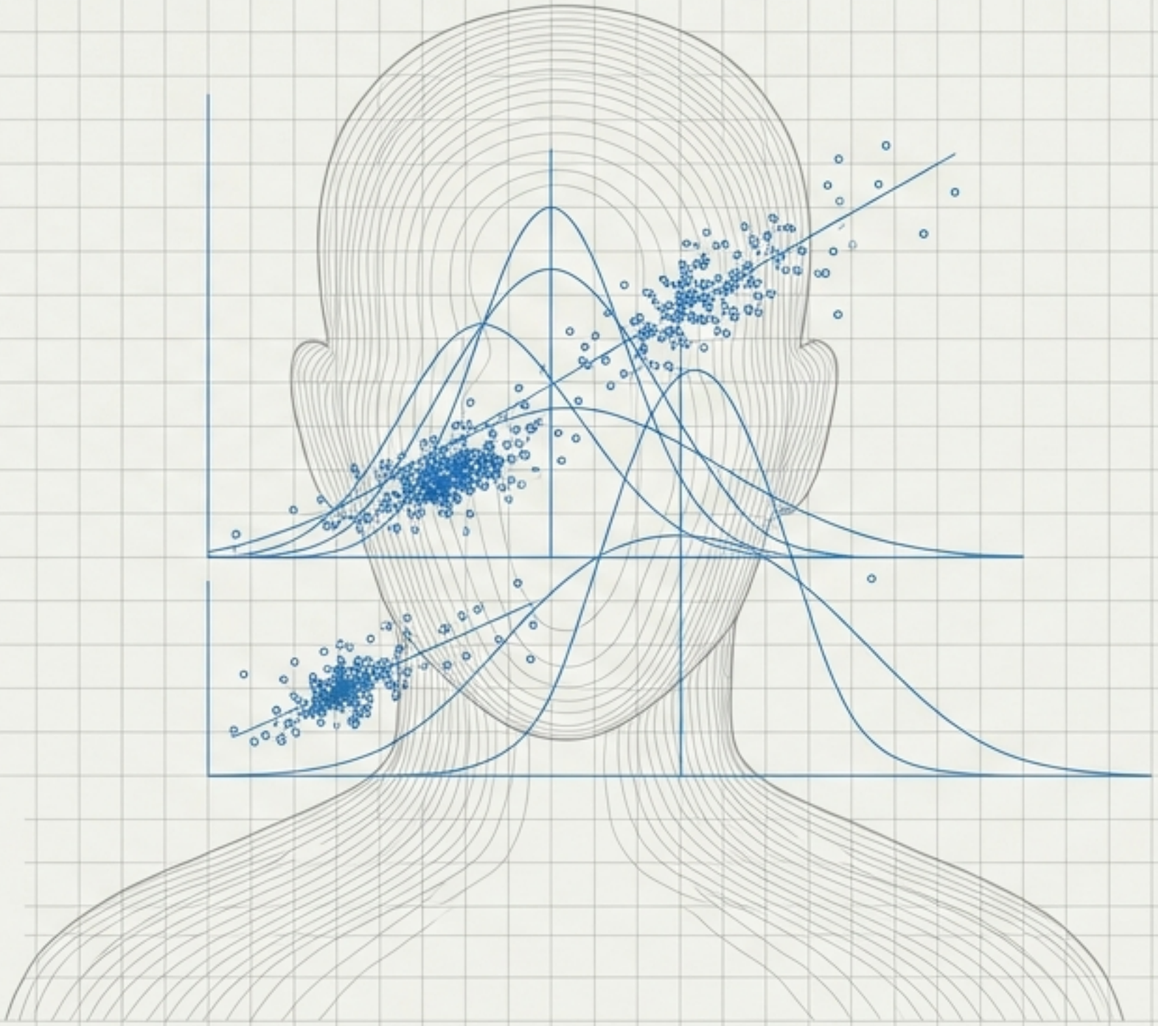
"We are not here for ourselves." — Bob Randall

Statistical Erasure

Calculating the acceptable level of indifference.

Risk assessments translate real relational harm into probabilities.

If the risk is “low enough,” abandonment is justified.



Epistemic tools designed for control systematically weaken accountability for long-term consequences.

Relational Repair

Filters and laws are not enough. We must repair the relationship with matter. Repair begins before the release, by refusing to create substances that cannot be loved.

FROM:
How much can we dump?

TO:
Who will receive this?

Principle 1: Custodianship over Ownership

Responsibility does not end end when utility ends. We carry the substance across time.

We are responsible for the entire lifecycle of matter.

“We don’t own the land. The land owns us.” — Bob Randall

Principle 2: No Release Without Reception

Every release demands a receiver (land, water, or future people). If the system cannot safely receive it, it cannot be released.

This makes “orphaned matter”—substances that endure without guardians—a violation of law.

Principle 3: Temporal Thickness

Future risks are present obligations.

Uncertainty about the future does not absolve us; it deepens the need for care. We must stop using time to dissolve obligation.

TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT

- Thresholds
- Waste
- Externality
- Management

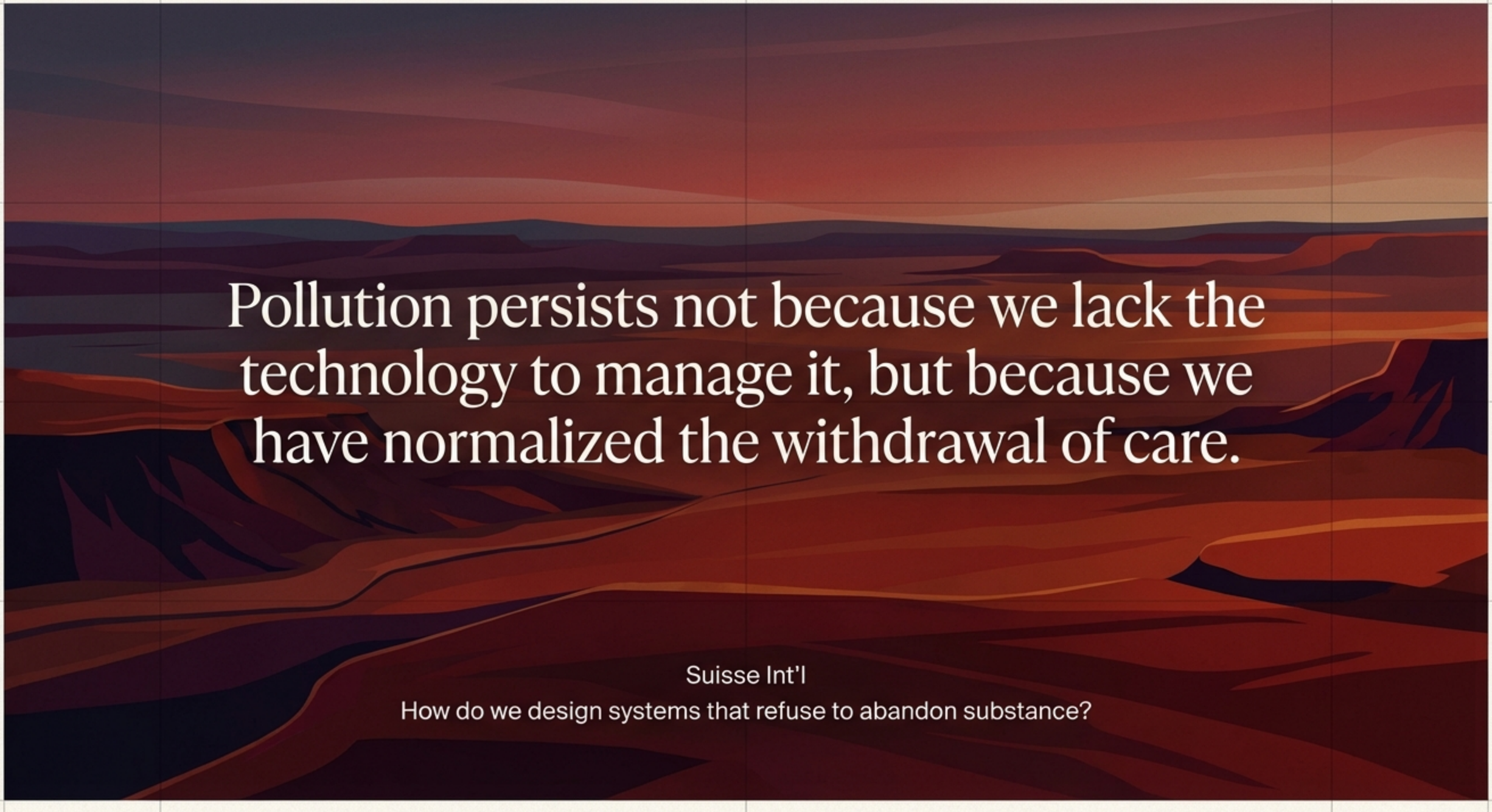
Goal:
Manage Excess

RELATIONAL CARE

- Continuity
- Family
- Custody
- Repair

Goal:
Refuse Abandonment

The Paradigm Shift


Pollution persists not because we lack the technology to manage it, but because we have normalized the withdrawal of care.
Suisse Int'l
How do we design systems that refuse to abandon substance?