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Designing Disappearance: On the Cultural and Affective Histories of Waste

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Keywords

affect theory, discard studies, cultural history, political aesthetics, waste design, discard literature

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_Abstract

The *_Essay* explores affective and cultural legacies embedded in disposal architectures. Drawing on various theories of waste, it examines the material histories of domestic disposal and notions of affect and belonging. Central questions include how the design, function, and everyday use of disposal systems shape perceptions of waste; how these architectures relate to notions of citizenship; and how waste is perceived as either a social good or a mere trace of survival. In different literary and cultural contexts, the *_Essay* examines historically shaped distinctions between purity and pollution, necessity and excess, and structure and disorder through the lenses of Lauren Berlant's concept of intimate publics and cultural theories of waste.

"The gesture of throwing away is the first and indispensable condition of being," notes Italo Calvino in his essay on the Paris garbage bin, written during his stay in the city from 1970 to 1974.[1] Beginning with reflections on his relationship to garbage, Calvino delves into various aspects of his existence, presenting the ritual of taking out his trash not as a mundane task but as "something that awakens the special satisfaction I get from thinking."[2] In this account, Calvino captures a sentiment echoed in much of the writing on waste: among the many objects of everyday life, those deemed trash—a category defined by its perceived lack of utility and worth—offer a unique perspective on the often disregarded aspects of social life.

Drawing on various theories of waste and the material history of domestic disposal, this *_Essay* explores the affective and cultural legacies embedded within disposal architectures. It investigates the relationship between physical disposal structures and notions of affect and belonging. Central to this exploration are the following questions: How do the design, function, and daily use of disposal systems shape perceptions of waste? How do images and narratives of disposal practices relate to notions of citizenship? And how does waste, in different contexts, appear as a social good in some instances, while being merely a trace of survival in others? By examining these questions through the lens of literary narratives and in cultural contexts, the essay seeks to show how seemingly insignificant acts of discarding can reflect social anxieties and perpetuate cultural distinctions. The aim is to explore historically constructed boundaries between purity and pollution, necessity and excess, and the ways in which these boundaries shape social and material practices.

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1_Affect and Discard Theory

In emptying the dustbin from his home into the big one on the streets of Paris, Calvino experiences this act as a transition from private to public—a symbolic donning of his civic mantle and a threshold experience on which domestic life itself rests. "The moment I empty the small garbage can into the large one and pull it by both handles outside our front door, [I slip] into a social role."[3] To Calvino, the *big poubelle* with its "dark green, military-uniform grey," symbolizes the social contract he enters when discarding his trash, silently reminding him of his duties of citizenship. Taking out the trash, in this way, transcends a mere "fulfillment of a contractual obligation;" it becomes a symbolic "ritual of purification."[4] The day's accumulated residues must be removed, Calvino writes, so that "when we wake up in the morning, we can begin a new day without having to struggle with what we discarded forever the evening before."[5]

What if that possibility suddenly disappears? The science fiction short story "Disposal" by American writer Ron Goulart explores this question.[6] In a distant future where waste disposal is fully automated, a father experiences a cascade of disasters when the garbage disposal in his house stops working. He begins to secretly dump garbage in the houses of his neighbors, in his office, in the woods, and gradually loses his dignity, his job, his wife, and ultimately, his sanity. As the disposal system collapses, so does everything it sustains: his bourgeois facade, his family life, his moral infrastructure. Like Calvino's essay, this story explores how the seemingly mundane act of discarding household trash can play a significant role in sustaining a sense of coherence and performances of citizenship.

In both Calvino's essay on the garbage bin and Goulart's fable, acts of discarding serve as narrative explorations of Mary Douglas's seminal work on purity and pollution, particularly her assertion that "there is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder."[7] Challenging the notion that dirt and waste have inherent qualities, Douglas posits that what is classified as dirty results from clear separations, distinctions, and categories. The practices of separation, purification, demarcation, and punishment for transgressions, central to Douglas's work, are also evident in Calvino and Goulart's narratives. As Douglas emphasizes, these concepts function to systematize an inherently disordered experience. The 'impure,' Douglas concludes, arises not in isolation, but from unacceptable mixtures. This only occurs when clear

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distinctions exist based on cultural criteria. "Where there is no differentiation," Douglas argues, "there is no defilement."[8] Waste, then, signifies a transgression of boundaries—a threat to cultural and symbolic intelligibility. It is, as Douglas famously phrased it, "matter out of place."[9]

The notion of 'matter out of place' has often been used to understand the social implications of purity and pollution and to illuminate forms of exclusion and inequality. Drawing on the work of Mary Douglas, Julia Kristeva developed the concept of 'abjection' to explain how individuals perceive certain objects or encounters as disgusting, revolting, and threatening to their sense of identity. *In Powers of Horror* Kristeva emphasizes the role that abjection and the physical act of expulsion play in maintaining the conceptual experience of a 'coherent' self.[10]

Building on Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva, Sara Ahmed's analysis of the performativity of disgust explores the 'stickiness' of objects perceived as impure or abject. She describes how repeated interactions with certain objects accumulate negative associations, making these attributes appear inherent. In this framework, 'contact' refers to encounters between objects already marked by disgust and new objects that come into proximity with them. Ahmed highlights the arbitrariness of these categories, noting that disgust is built upon prior associations, not the intrinsic nature of the objects themselves: "[An] object becomes disgusting through its contact with other objects that have already, as it were, been designated as disgusting before the encounter has taken place."[11] Ahmed further observes that "[i]t is this metonymic contact between objects or signs that allows them to be perceived as disgusting, as if it were a material or objective quality."[12]

Ahmed thus reframes disgust not as a universal response but as shaped by historical and cultural contexts—reflecting past encounters and inherited biases. While Kristeva emphasizes psychological expulsion, Ahmed centers proximity—whether real, imagined, physical, or metaphorical—as a trigger for disgust. Her analysis reveals disgust as a 'performative act' that reinforces social hierarchies, particularly along lines of race, class, and gender. For instance, viewing certain communities or individuals as out of place or threatening often arises from ingrained cultural prejudices, perpetuated by repeated acts of distancing and exclusion.

Rosie Cox and Ben Campkin, for example, explore the global phenomenon of racial and gender bias within garbage disposal industries, arguing that theories of

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waste are essential for understanding how ideas of cleanliness are intertwined with social and political dimensions of exclusion and marginalization.[13] In their work, Cox and Campkin illustrate how waste collection and disposal are often assigned to marginalized groups or low-income workers, who are disproportionately burdened with society's waste. For example, in many Western countries, migrant workers are often employed in waste collection, reflecting and perpetuating discriminatory structures that associate certain racial or ethnic groups with undesirable labor. Similarly, gendered assumptions within the industry mean that men are more likely to be employed in higher paid waste management roles, while women are relegated to less visible, lower paid tasks such as sorting and cleaning.

2_Aesthetics of Disappearance

The material histories and infrastructures of disposal offer a unique lens through which to examine the home as an institution. As Alessandra Ponte argues, the rise of modern sanitation did not simply remove waste from the private sphere. Instead, it ushered in a new era of regulations governing the private management of refuse within the home. These regulations effectively relegated trash to its 'proper sphere'—the domestic domain—while demanding a new form of social contribution from citizens.[14] This seemingly contradictory phenomenon underlines the complex relationship between public and private in waste management. While the state takes responsibility for garbage disposal, making it a public matter, it simultaneously privatizes and 'domesticates' discards through the infrastructure of twentieth-century sanitation systems (baths, kitchens, garbage disposals). These domestic spaces solidify the notion of waste as belonging to the private sphere, transforming disposal practices into public performances subject to judgement and potential social sanction. The stakes associated with proper waste disposal become particularly high for those whose belonging and being part of the community is already in question, and waste management in this context can serve as a marker of 'otherness' and potential exclusion. This perspective sheds light on how everyday disposal practices involve not only routines and sorting, but also affective practices that imply and train notions of citizenship, creating a sense of belonging in the broader "imagined community" of the nation.[15]

The handling, placement and timing of garbage disposal became a civic duty expected of city residents, effectively linking waste management to social order. This

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focus on proper disposal practices further highlights the 'abstracted and distanced' nature of essential urban functions such as waste management.[16] These once visible and potentially disruptive activities became "disembodied, silenced and deodorized."[17] This shift also impacted social interactions, with backyards taking on some of the functions previously relegated to public streets and waste disposal sites.

A notable example of an architecture of disappearance is the garbage chute. First introduced in the early twentieth century, trash chutes became popular in high-rise buildings for their convenience and sanitation. Initially promoted for these benefits, they eventually raised concerns about smelling, pests, and improper waste disposal.[18] With its unique design and aesthetic, it exemplifies the connection between personal habits and larger social structures, revealing how everyday actions are intertwined with concepts of social order. The chute symbolizes the anonymity of garbage; as soon as the bag of garbage hits the ground, it crosses a threshold and becomes public rather than personal. This invisibility reflects the hidden lives of the inhabitants. Consequently, chutes often receive items that do not belong, predisposing them to violations of disposal rules. Architectural features like garbage chutes facilitated the rapid disappearance of waste, reinforcing social norms and anxieties surrounding waste and cleanliness.

Ellen Lupton and Abbott J. Miller's *The Kitchen, the Bathroom, and the Aesthetics of Waste: A Process of Elimination* offers valuable insights into this intersection of affect and disposal architectures. They explore how early twentieth century models of kitchens and bathrooms, heavily influenced by concerns about disease transmission, prioritized cleanliness and hygiene in everyday life; and how the new physical spaces featured—and one could say, even promised—an "aesthetics of disappearance."[19] Lupton and Miller trace the evolution of kitchen and bathroom design, noting how an aesthetic of elimination and disappearance, evident in stain and water-repellent surfaces, parallels the social and emotional investment in maintaining boundaries between the private and public spheres. As Nancy Tomes notes in her account on the development of sanitary science and domestic hygiene: "At the core of popular sanitarian writings about the home was a vision of life as an intimate process of respiration, consumption, excretion, and decay, in which the individual body figured prominently as a pollutant."[20]

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This design reflects deeper cultural anxieties about purity, contamination, and the body as a potential source of pollution. The body, like the home, is seen as a potential source of danger, both in health and socio-cultural contexts. At the same time, the physical construction of waste disposal systems—including garbage chutes, cans, and functional kitchen design—intersects with ideals of wastefulness and efficiency. Christine Frederick, in her influential advice books on modern housekeeping (*The New Housekeeping*, 1913), encouraged readers to learn to "waste creatively," implying consumption that benefits the national economy.[21] "It is now time to assert and proclaim [...] a bold new policy, already in existence, without fear of being called extravagant and wasteful. This is the policy of creative waste in spending."[22]

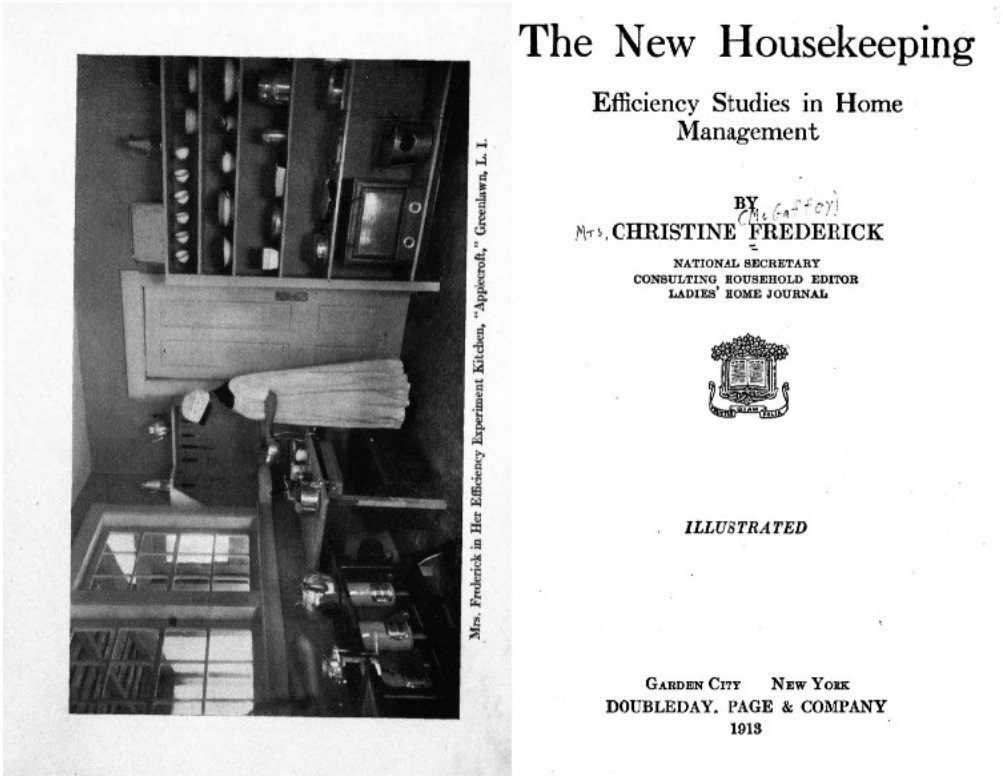

Fig. 1: Book cover of Christine Frederick's *The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management* (1913).[23]

In Frederick's writing, 'creative waste' describes a form of disposal that is not destructive but valuable and resourceful—a concept that resonates with modern ideas of garbage economies. In *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (1929), she introduces 'creative waste' as a process of replacing easily replaceable items with newer or better products, framing this practice as a moral duty for the white middle-class. According to Frederick,

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"[t]here isn't the slightest reason in the world why materials which are inexhaustibly replenishable should not be creatively 'wasted.'"[24] The disposal of older items in favor of modern appliances is promoted as a way to strengthen the national economy. This concept positions waste generated through middle-class consumer upgrading as inherently 'good,' virtuous, and productive—transforming it into a positive, even patriotic, act. Through this lens, replacing goods becomes an enjoyable endeavor that reinforces social status and aligns with national prosperity ideals. Where these creatively discarded items ultimately end up, however, remains unspecified.

As Kathleen Anne McHugh points out, this view on household economy reveals how the construction of American (white bourgeois) femininity is intertwined with ideas of proper consumption and proper waste. The 'right' way to discard and produce trash becomes a marker of exclusivity, reinforcing distinctions of class and race, with the act of disposal itself being tied to notions of citizenship and belonging within the national economy. In this light, 'trash' is not merely a category of worthless objects, but one depended on preceding distinctions, while the acts of discarding and organizing refuse are themselves historically and culturally embedded within perceptions of purity and impurity.

In the European context, Regina Schulte argues that the eighteenth century saw an increasing "feminization of service."[25] Previously, service work signified a relationship rather than an activity. Schulte describes how in seventeenth-century France, for example, undifferentiated living spaces led to frequent physical contact among servants, family members, and visitors in wealthy households. By the eighteenth century, domestic design prioritized 'private intimacy,' leading to a separation of bodies, classes, and genders. A 'new topography' assigned servants specific spaces like kitchens and anterooms, revealing how power, work, and gender interrelate and are reflected in the architectural structures of homes. This spatial reorganization was instrumental in enforcing prevailing heteronormative ideals. Specifically, the emphasis on distinct private spaces for family members fostered the ideal of a nuclear family unit, which became central to the emerging bourgeoisie. This design upheld traditional gender roles, with the wife and children occupying the domestic sphere, while servants were relegated to more hidden, functional spaces. The architecture of the home thus mirrored and reinforced the ideals of heteronormative family life and the roles that men and women were expected to play, along with specific consumption

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patterns and rituals of waste management that distinguished the household from 'less orderly' or 'less civilized' ones.

Rituals of discarding and the social meaning of trash can be viewed through Lauren Berlant's concept of "intimate publics."[26] The term 'intimate publics' captures the collective dimensions of intimacy in which strangers share common texts and experiences, fostering a mediated social intimacy.[27] Berlant's work highlights how private actions and emotional responses resonate within broader cultural and national frameworks, shaping collective identities and the effects of citizenship. From this perspective, rituals of discarding, embedded in design histories that perpetuate the illusion of trash disappearing, align with specific affective legacies and investments in sovereign citizenship. They emphasize individual responsibility while obscuring larger institutional structures and power dynamics.

By foregrounding distinctions between socially valued and mismanaged disposal practices, as well as narratives of necessity versus thoughtless discarding or unnecessary waste—between 'good,' productive, socially acceptable waste and 'bad' waste—these rituals of discarding transform the shared physicality of bodies that leave traces into exclusive forms of civic affect and participation. For example, Christine Frederick's advocacy for 'creative waste' in her advice books presents the disposal of outdated goods as a positive and patriotic act, aligned with the values of the white middle class. In contrast, the accumulation of waste in other contexts, such as hoarding or improper disposal, is often framed as a moral failing and attributed to marginalized groups. In this way, rituals of discarding reflect deeper cultural and social dynamics, intertwining personal actions with broader societal structures and practices of discarding as a means of performing belonging to a national sphere.

3_Material Deviance

The role that the regular disposal of garbage plays in the material and social organization of domestic life becomes particularly evident when these structures come to a halt, are rejected, or are simply omitted. Scott Herring explores this in his book *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern American Culture*. It focuses on the brothers Homer and Langley Collyer, who, in 1947, came to symbolize hoarding in the broader culture. (Hoarding would come to be considered a pathology, included in the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 2013.[28]) After po-

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lice responded to a report of a strange odor coming from their home and discovered a barricade of old newspapers blocking the entry, they found first Homer's and later Langley's body, under huge piles of newspapers. Ninety tons of miscellaneous items, including old bicycles, canned food, car parts, pianos, and organs, were removed from the house during the ensuing evacuation. The spectacle was widely reported in New York newspapers and attracted hundreds of spectators. In the U.S. psychology and counseling literature, the Collyer brothers are still cited as a prime example of hoarding.[29]

Herring traces the evolution of hoarding as a category of domestic disorder and argues that the Collyer brothers embodied specific anxieties around 'social disorders' that the media attributed to the place they lived (Harlem), as well as to their refusal or omission to adopt a traditional family model. Considered eccentric for their departure from the American model of the nuclear family, the Collyers represent a material and symbolic refusal to engage in the exchange between public and domestic life. Their bachelor status further solidified their image as deviant, failing to conform to the nuclear family structure. This association of hoarding with non-heteronormative domesticity persists into contemporary accounts, as evidenced by Frost and Steketee emphasizing in their book that people living on their own are more likely than married people to hoard.[30]

Fig. 2: Police Inspection of the Collyer Brothers' Harlem Brownstone, 1947[31]

The figure of the hoarder embodies a form of refusal that extends beyond objects. It represents a resistance to societal expectations of family life, engagement with au-

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thority, and participation in the 'metabolism' of the home—the continuous flow of acquiring and discarding goods. Herring argues that the Collyers case marks a shift in how hoarding is understood, from avarice to an inability to part with objects, especially those deemed worthless. Their accumulation of 'junk' disrupts the narrative of waste's seamless disappearance from private spaces, exposing the underlying assumption that the home relies on a cycle of consumption and disposal. Hoarding interrupts this illusion of effortless waste removal, drawing attention to the otherwise hidden mechanisms of waste management and disposal. From this perspective, hoarders are not only counter-figures to conventional waste practices; they reveal the systems of waste management typically concealed in everyday life.

By disrupting the invisibility of waste in domestic spaces, the figure of the hoarder reveals the ongoing but concealed processes of waste management, as well as the anonymity and silence surrounding everyday waste disposal practices. This resonates with Joshua Reno's notion in *Waste Away*, where he discusses how organized systems of waste collection and disposal create 'hidden selves' that are silently transported and persist in distant places.[32] This disappearance from view results from historical projects on domestic space and its symbolic and cultural underpinnings related to notions of purity, pollution, and the impact of the domestic sphere on citizenship. Reno argues for new perspectives on waste, suggesting that it should not be understood solely as "matter out of place" or a socially constructed nuisance.[33] Instead, he proposes seeing waste as a "sign of life."[34] Reno points out that many theoretical approaches to waste are constrained by an exclusively human-centered perspective, which interprets waste only in terms of dirt and disorder. By viewing waste from the perspective of non-human life, it becomes evident that waste signifies the existence and persistence of life forms. This concept of a 'sign of life' also encompasses waste as an involuntary record of history—material traces that endure over time, revealing past uses and activities.

4_Intimate Publics: Wastefulness as Infrastructure

As different as the presented perspectives on the history of disposal designs, practices, and divergences are, they all underscore the role of affect in the material histories of waste. The examples and cases discussed highlight how rituals of discarding are intertwined with investments in a 'productive' metabolism of the home. This res-

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onates with Nicole Seymour's critique of the heteronormative language of mainstream environmental politics in her book *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age.* Seymour rethinks queer phenomena as those that not only "fail to follow available scripts for appropriate environmental feeling," but also "fail to feel in ways that are clearly directed or otherwise obviously useful."[35] This notion positions queerness as a term that denotes strangeness and discomfort, emphasizing a sense of alienation—similar to Mary Douglas's characterization of polluting objects as 'matter out of place.' Challenging the traditional affective structure of environmental politics, Seymour explores the intersection of affect theory, queer theory, and sustainability discourse.

Seymour critiques campaigns based on heteronormative, middle-class ideals of domesticity that frame environmental responsibility as a matter of individual virtue and the 'good' household. She points out how the focus on individual behavior in these campaigns distracts attention from the larger industrial and corporate forces responsible for environmental degradation and criticizes mainstream environmental campaigns for their use of 'greenwashing' techniques, which often rely on traditional sentimentality and emotional manipulation rather than meaningful environmental action. One example is the Sierra Club's 2011 campaign against mercury pollution, which featured images of pregnant bellies with captions emphasizing mercury contamination. Seymour argues that campaigns like this contribute to a culture of 'fetal citizenship' and eco-normativity, using emotional appeals and sentimentality to maintain control and reinforce conservative social values. These examples illustrate how mainstream environmental campaigns often perpetuate the very power structures they claim to challenge, linking environmental responsibility to personal guilt rather than addressing systemic problems. Instead, Seymour argues for a more ironic, irreverent approach, contrasting this with campaigns that draw on Western Christian notions of salvation and redemption—suggesting that individual acts of environmental "purity" are akin to spiritual purification.[36]

In *Pollution Is Colonialism*, Max Liboiron offers a critical perspective on how waste has traditionally been theorized, particularly in Western and neoliberal societies. Challenging the idea of universalized approaches to waste management, Liboiron argues that these approaches obscure specific knowledge and perspectives, instead asking what is prioritized and what is marginalized within discard discourse,

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highlighting "the unique bias of each way of knowing."[37] An example of how discard studies challenge traditional thinking is Liboiron's critique of established theories of pollution that consider a certain level of pollution to be tolerable. This attitude reflects a deeply ingrained assumption that some environments, often historically and currently marginalized areas, can simply 'absorb' pollution. Numerous studies of environmental injustice demonstrate the harmful effects of this approach.[38]

Liboiron co-authored a book with Josh Lepawsky that expands the field of discard studies by focusing on the broader implications of waste as part of social, political, and economic structures. They argue that the focus of waste management should extend beyond individual activity such as recycling, to examine the infrastructures and systems that dictate discard practices.[39] They emphasize that these popular 'solutions' can obscure the broader contexts and power dynamics that contribute to waste problems, thus neglecting the origins of these issues in favor of simple, moral, or technological responses. In this way, Lepawsky and Liboiron emphasize that discard studies must work to "trouble the assumptions, premises, and popular mythologies of waste" and push the discourse to include wider systemic considerations rather than remain limited to individual-level solutions.[40] A key argument in Liboiron and Lepawsky's work is to understand waste as infrastructure rather than simply the result of individual actions. They emphasize that recycling efforts, often emphasized as a personal responsibility, are only one small part of a larger system that includes laws, policies, markets, and advocacy. For example, they mention the fight against plastic straws—a popular environmental campaign—that, when individualized, overlooks the specific needs of disabled people who rely on such items. This illustrates how one-size-fits-all solutions can marginalize vulnerable communities. Liboiron and Lepawsky's work challenges the myth of universal management solutions, arguing instead for a historically and culturally informed understanding of the role of trash in environmental politics.[41] Their analysis shows how waste management is embedded in broader social structures, and how power is maintained by distinguishing what is considered inside or outside, valuable or disposable.

A particularly compelling example of discard studies rooted in historical and cultural analysis is Zsuzsa Gille's study of waste management in Hungary, which examines how refuse materials are embedded in systems of power. Gille's research focuses on the transitions from Hungarian communism to post-socialist capitalism and a sig-

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nificant shift in the waste economy: under state socialism (1948 to the end of the Soviet era), a culture of reuse and recycling prevailed, which was replaced by landfills and incineration after privatization.[42] Gille underscores the critical role of institutions in shaping perceptions of waste and value. For example, scrap metal, once valued for its potential reuse, was reclassified as toxic waste in post-Cold War capitalism. This case study demonstrates that disposal management practices are not simply environmental issues, but are deeply embedded in social and political beliefs. By examining not only notions of purity and their material histories, but also the underlying affective pedagogies that sustain these notions, discard studies can critically assess how power is maintained and mythologized. Such studies reveal how seemingly natural concepts such as the environment are socially constructed and challenge narrow ideals of environmentalism, sustainability, and the human-nature relationship. The act of discarding signifies not only political choices and practical concerns, but also the emotional and social effects of everyday discard practices within specific political and social contexts.

While Max Liboiron and Josh Lepawsky's discussion of waste as infrastructure demonstrates that waste management cannot be reduced to personal responsibility alone—being embedded in complex systems of power, politics, and exclusion—Zsuzsa Gille's study of waste management in Hungary underscores how shifts in economic and political regimes transform both the value of materials and the institutions that manage them. These perspectives challenge the dominant narrative that waste can simply be managed through universal, one-size-fits-all solutions, emphasizing instead the cultural, historical, political and affective dimensions of discarding.

Throughout the extensive scholarship on waste, tensions persist within its cultural legacies: discarded matter on the one hand, and unruly residue on the other. From Mary Douglas's exploration of purity and pollution to Julia Kristeva's analysis of the abject, and Max Liboiron's insights on pollution, studies of waste continue to raise critical questions about the relationship between institutional life and everyday existence, challenging the myriad ways in which power is mystified and maintained.

Trash, as Brian Thill emphasizes in his book on it, is an "outcast object"[43] —something deemed unfit and discarded—that not only sustains social structures but also reveals their limits. Sarah Baker's novel *Longbourn* powerfully illustrates this through the eyes of a servant who, in disposing of the waste of the upper classes, exposes the

fragility and dependence of those positioned as socially superior.[44] Here, waste serves as a tool for dismantling the myth of the inherent superiority and stability of the privileged. Garbage, in its materiality, strips away facades and shows that those who live above are vulnerable and finite beings. Returning to Italo Calvino's reflection on the satisfaction he derives from contemplating garbage, what makes theorizations of waste so compelling is their focus on the often-overlooked aspects of social life. Waste's characteristic ambivalence—its marginal status, its ubiquitous presence, and its ephemerality that resists erasure—positions it as a powerful lens for examining how everyday practices intersect with broader systems of power and control.

The study of waste reveals not only the lingering effects of long-established boundaries and distinctions, but also the affective dimensions that sustain them. As explored through affect studies and Lauren Berlant's concept of intimate publics, the rituals of discarding create a shared experience that transcends the private sphere and extends to collective identities. Waste practices—whether as mundane as taking out the trash or as systemic as institutional policies—shape and reinforce notions of citizenship, belonging, and sovereignty. Understanding waste through the frameworks of Kristeva's abjection, discard studies scholarship and Berlant's notion of intimate publics, the act of discarding can be seen as a ritual that both reveals and questions social hierarchies. The boundaries drawn long ago, between purity and pollution, valuable and disposable, continue to echo in practices of disposal today, showing that waste is never just waste, but a reflection of worlds created, and histories inherited. As William Faulkner once observed: "The past is not finished—it is not even past."[45]

_Endnotes

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