ACME An International Journal for Critical Geographies

Geographers Are Talking–About Waste

Daniel A. Finch-Race

University of Bologna
Department of History and Cultures, Via Guerrazzi 20, 40125 Bologna, Italia
ORCID: 0000-0002-3884-0799
daniel.finchrace@unibo.it

Joanna Jordan

University of Bologna
Department of History and Cultures, Via Guerrazzi 20, 40125 Bologna, Italia
ORCID: 0000-0002-7051-7713
joanna.jordan2@unibo.it

Annaclaudia Martini

University of Bologna
Department of History and Cultures, Via Guerrazzi 20, 40125 Bologna, Italia
ORCID: 0000-0001-5059-7368
annaclaudia.martini@unibo.it

Timothy Raeymaekers

University of Bologna
Department of History and Cultures, Via Guerrazzi 20, 40125 Bologna, Italia
ORCID: 0000-0001-7205-6917
timothy.raeymaekers@unibo.it

Published with Creative Commons licence: Attribution–Noncommercial–No Derivatives

Abstract

This piece of conversational co-thinking about waste and its impacts encompasses an array of themes that ranges from physical and conceptual multiplicity to emotional and temporal dimensions of objects/places via economic/political/social values. The format is intended to disturb a certain normativity in scholarship: ideas bubble up spontaneously and hang in the air without necessarily being brought back down to Earth. In point of fact, our ruminations came together through bottom-up conviviality in environments that might seem light-years away from research outputs, not least chatting on a bench in a bustling square during an hour's lunch break—such shared breathing space is full of potential for slow scholarship.

Keywords

affect, literature, migration, time, value, wasting

Practicalities

This text is the outcome of conversational co-thinking among four human geographers with a shared interest in waste and its socio-spatial meanings. We all belong to a unit of two-dozen scholars whose research spans a variety of topics and regions. The team makes time for coffees/lunches on a regular basis and the last two Septembers have seen ideas shared during two-day retreats in the nearby Apennines. At 2022's iteration, a chat about pollution between Annaclaudia and Daniel set the stage for the present piece. Annaclaudia and Joanna subsequently connected in relation to destroyed/disaffected spaces and depopulation, the latter of which piqued Timothy's attention.

As an academic foursome, our first thought was to write an article with a collective voice in which our individual branches of geographical knowledge would receive consideration. It didn't take long for us to realize that our solo and joint curiosity toward waste was motivated by experiences and travels at least as much as scholarly reading. Our talking flowed between research interests and personal encounters with waste, including dumpster diving and city-combing. We decided to have a go at encapsulating such riffing and set about taping hour-long conversations as a basis of creative co-production. Inspirational here was the roundtable format featuring regularly in *ACME* (Holmes et al. 2015; Swab et al. 2022) and *Ethnos* (Bangstad et al. 2012; Friedman et al. 2003; Graham et al. 2016; Haraway et al. 2016; Kulick et al. 2007; Latour et al. 2018). Our initial conversation took the form of excavating our relations with waste, which resulted in many threads of inquiry to pursue. A fortnight later, we had a slightly more directed conversation around recurring themes. Over three months in spring 2023, we continued to mull over the topic while honing a piece of polyphonic writing in which our creative collaboration's unconventional nature came to be expressed through four harmonious voices.

We found convergences around waste's longstanding influence on our respective foci, each of which has high stakes. An array of themes emerged: physical and conceptual multiplicity; emotional and temporal dimensions of objects/places; economic/political/social values... It became clearer and clearer how much our engaged scholarship, grounded in

methodological openness, goes hand in hand with the capaciousness of the discipline in which we four find ourselves. In large part, our activities as geographers are transdisciplinary, drawing on personal roots in anthropology, history, international development, linguistics, and literary criticism across a breadth of space and time. Against the grain of "scholarly objectivity" in academic outputs, i.e. how knowledge production is required to appear as if at arm's length from its author(s), a significant part of the below text is embedded explicitly in our positionalities.

The transcription of our peer-to-peer interchange brings to light thinking on/through/with waste, intentionally paring down bibliographical framing in the main body. This format is intended to disturb a certain normativity in scholarship: ideas bubble up spontaneously and hang in the air without necessarily being brought back down to Earth. Along the lines of Colin McFarlane's *Fragments of the City*, the four of us "bring seemingly disparate and disharmonious ideas, questions, cases, and places together as entry points […], and understanding emerges in the connective tissues across and between fragments" (2021, xix). In point of fact, our ruminations germinated through bottom-up conviviality in environments that might seem light-years away from research outputs, not least chatting on a bench in a bustling square during an hour's lunch break—such shared breathing space is full of potential for slow scholarship (Mountz et al. 2015, 1238–1240).

Our conversing begins with four quite different origin stories and progresses to the topic of economic/political/social value by way of questions around meaning-making and the emotional/temporal dimensions of wasting. We consider how waste arises, moves, and gets repurposed in surprising ways. The discussion crisscrosses issues of capitalism, class, extractivism, gender, migration, poetry, and tourism in Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Our ruminations are offered as speculations and provocations in a manner of lateral thinking without trying to settle things, in the hope that the experimental nature of these pages shall stimulate broad practice- and theory-oriented deliberations among geographically minded individuals and groups seeking innovative ways of working on issues of great scale and severity, as is the case with waste. We aren't sheepish about the format's fragmentary nature: our examples arose on the spur of the moment, we didn't get around to some substantial topics like recycling, and we weren't punctilious about using terms that have distinctive connotations, such as trash, garbage, debris or ruins. What does emerge, ultimately, is the fruitfulness of addressing waste in terms of processes at least as much as objects. This comes across as a locus of cultural geographies—as opposed to, say, materials engineering or political economy—in a mode of thinking beyond the classic example of a broken item being thrown away.

Conceptual scoping

What comes to mind when waste is evoked? A range of meanings is at stake: 1. "Waste or desert land;" 2. "Action or process of wasting," which has to do with "useless expenditure or consumption, squandering (of money, goods, time, effort, etc.);" 3. "Waste matter, refuse," primarily in the form of "refuse matter; unserviceable material remaining over from any process of manufacture; the useless by-products of any industrial process; material or manufactured articles so damaged as to be useless or unsaleable" (Oxford English Dictionary 2023). Waste's multifarious forms permeate the diverse methodological and physical settings

in which the four of us work. As Brian Thill notes in *Waste*, "there is no human-made object so well-traveled, so ambient, as waste" (2015, 3). Our roundtable is based on combing through scholarly thinking and lived experiences of litter on the beach, abandoned post-war/disaster infrastructure, toxic products of resource extraction, and perfectly edible food placed in a disposal unit.

There are myriad ways of understanding materials deemed to be waste, as demonstrated in fields such as capitalist governance (Davies 2008; Gregson and Crang 2010), economic history (Miller 2000; Sterner 2008), mobilities (Arnall and Kothari 2020; Walker and Giacomelli 2021), urban politics (Gandy 2002), and the environmental humanities (Morrison 2015/2021), not to mention cultural geographies (Edensor 2005; Moore 2012; Pickren 2014; Waldron 2018). On the one hand, there's increasing awareness of the humongous scale of waste production and its consequences in environmental and health terms. On the other hand, the prevalence of waste is often normalized. More and more, these thorny issues are being addressed at multiple scales in transdisciplinary ways. By working on the basis of *waste-as-method*, using techniques such as counter-mapping (Tazzioli and Garelli 2019) or examining objects' "alter-lives" (Soto 2018), it's possible to expand the range of entry-points into understanding waste not only as a symptom of capitalist ruination but also as a driver of change (Whitson 2011).

Our undertaking is fundamentally about attending to "the lowly that has sunk to the depths of a value system that is present […] as a clean surface—mask-like" (Scanlan 2005, 14). There's considerable worth in a waste-orientation that undermines dominant thinking by positing a waste-subject imbued with economic, political, and social agency (Moore 2012). Geographers of waste have been concerned not only with pervasive cycles of consumption and "processes occurring at the bottom of the value chain" (Kirsch 2013, 433), but also with how things identified as devoid of value ought to be understood as social constructs grounded in place, thereby "indicating how different matters matter differently" (Gregson and Crang 2010, 1027). Indeed, it's vital to problematize waste being "valueless" and "matter out of place" by recognizing its commodity potential and place-shaping capacity (Whitson 2011). This emphasis on *process* rather than *object* is applicable to the mutually constitutive relationship between humanity and more-than-humanity vis-à-vis the wasting of landscapes and matter in a broader sense (Mah 2010; DeSilvey and Edensor 2013). Our discussion also touches on waste's (non-)value being spatially and temporally contingent. Given David Graeber's emphasis in *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (2001) on how social meaning is placed on things intricately and unevenly, the status of waste circulating in place and time ought to be perceived as a result of meaning-making/breaking, rather than just a case of being there and then. These reflections should include commodities, sites, relationships with Nature, and individuals who are discarded (Armiero and De Angelis 2017).

Waste is often relegated to supposedly invisible locations far from the public eye or even destroyed in attempts at concealment, as happened with contaminated soil following the tsunami disaster at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in 2011. When it comes to border zones of informal migration, forms of waste point to obscured or under-examined cases of stark violence, daily suffering, humiliation, and state authorities' "violent inaction" (Davies et al. 2017): washed-up smugglers' boats; abandoned clothes/backpacks/foodstuffs belonging to migrants evicted from makeshift camps or illegally pushed back by border police; hazardous detritus in sites of compelled immobility for protracted periods (Dhesi et

al. 2015). Prejudiced accounts of migrants as those who litter and live among trash in squalid squats (Sundberg 2008) are indicative of how the conflation of people with waste can lead to whole groups being objectified as a threat needing to be managed or "erased" from view (Kirsch and Mitchell 2004).

Origin stories

Daniel: My research on nineteenth-century French/Italian literature and art is situated at the intersection of environmental humanities and cultural geography. I've been mindful of trash since growing up in northeastern England: on Teesside's beaches, I used to see plastic crisp packets and six-pack rings indicating the close-to-home and faraway consequences of consumption practices. Before long, I found myself drawn to the figure of the ragpicker in Charles Baudelaire's poems, especially "The Ragpickers' Wine" in *The Flowers of Evil* (1857). I was riveted by how Paris's evolution through the "surgical" interventions of Georges Eugène Haussmann in the mid-1800s shunted poetry toward a "ragpicking of modernity," as mentioned in David Harvey's *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (2003). That led me to an ecocritical line of thinking about deep time through trash-traces, with Marco Armiero's Wasteocene theorizations front and center: might humanity's place in the fossil record be a matter of chicken bones and plastic?

Joanna: I've been working on informal migrant mobilities and makeshift camps in the Western Balkans since 2017, first as an activist, then as a geographical researcher. My interest in the realms of waste was piqued through explorations of abandoned buildings and ruins in post-socialist states, particularly in the former Yugoslavia. I've long had a (somewhat morbid) fascination with discarded things at sites abandoned due to the destruction of war, economic devastation, changes of regime, internal displacement, and out-migration, whether former industry, tourist infrastructure, large-scale apartments, government buildings or single-family houses. In 2015, as part of the "migration crisis," these spaces became crucial sites of occupation, shelter, organization, and solidarity for thousands of migrants moving along the Balkan Route toward destinations in Europe. This region is dotted with unused, disinvested, partially-built or destroyed buildings, tracts of land, industrial or military zones that have been repurposed over years into makeshift camps where migrants, solidarity actors, researchers, journalists, NGOs, and police intersect.

Annaclaudia: I work on geographies of affect in Japan after the triple disaster of 2011: a 9.0 earthquake, a tsunami of unprecedented height, and a meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. My main research on tourism, memory, and heritage-making after those events of March 11th has taken unexpected turns, one of which has been the relationship between value and the instrumentalization of waste for sociopolitical purposes. I've collaborated with the anthropologist Duccio Gasparri on discourses surrounding washed-away items: they were initially regarded as waste, then recovered after years in different parts of the world, covered in seaweed and shells, and sent back to Japan to be memorialized as heritage objects. Discursive choices with regard to what should be discarded and what should be "un-trashed" point to connections between waste and emotion, especially disgust—an affect that Sianne Ngai puts under the umbrella of "ugly feelings."

Timothy: I've been intrigued by the way objects are valorized on a spectrum ever since my experiences as a journalist in my native town of Antwerp. In the early nineties, I met the City Comber—a squatter named Ysabel who displayed things that she found during her nightly

scavenging throughout the city. Antwerp, being a major harbor, plays a central role in commodity flows, including precious metals and minerals. In the early 2000s, I started research in Central Africa on coltan, a mineral originally discarded as trash, which acquired enormous value for its use in the electronics industry. The way in which coltan transformed local economies in Central Africa brought me back to thinking about the ways that wasting relationships reflect the ruination of people and things embroiled in capitalism as a global system, and how these cycles become frontiers and dynamic articulations of social ecologies. Critiquing the work of David Harvey in *The Urbanization of Capital* (1985) and his narrow understanding of ruins as "devalued capital," my approach to capitalist frontiers tries to raise questions about why certain things and activities are valued or devalued, and what these networks of valorization produce globally. Such dynamics now occupy a central place in my research on mineral economies and industrialized agriculture: I'm part of a project using archaeological methods to unearth linkages between wasting as a socioecological phenomenon and the transformation of rural societies in Africa and the Mediterranean.

What counts as waste?

Daniel: A key text about practices of discarding is William Viney's *Waste* (2014), which signals how objects identified as waste have a distinctive capacity to act as a springboard for understanding ways of living and collective practices in relation to environmental questions. This opens up the issue of certain societies' wasting actions having more widespread impacts than others, especially with respect to where the Global North's detritus ends up finding a resting place. The all-too-common tendency to drive supposedly useless products out of sight and out of mind has considerable infrastructural ramifications, of course. Besides that, I'm interested in what happens *conceptually* at the stage where an entity gets designated as no longer being of use, which can lead deep into the popular consciousness. Mehita Iqani's *Garbage in Popular Culture* (2020) points out how waste is at least as much about a representational/denotative dimension as it is about a material one. Possibilities for approaching a wastescape in the mode of empirical or theoretical "waste-hounds" are myriad, not least when it comes to understanding different kinds of "waste-talk." Indeed, the use of related circumlocutions and (non-)descriptions is narratively and linguistically striking, as explored by a number of contributors in the issue of *Journal of Sociolinguistics* themed around "Language and Waste" overseen by Crispin Thurlow in 2022.

Joanna: Much of my work—in makeshift and institutional migrant camps, routes, and corridors—includes spaces that no longer host migrants or are dormant between moments of presence and passage. Here, trash can hold meaning and operate as evidence. It often consists of energy drink cans, discarded clothes and backpacks, broken shoes, water bottles, canned food, razors. These items are not remarkable but their quality of being "out of place" in a location makes them indicators that migrants are there, have been there or may return in the future. An example is a small abandoned house in the middle of a field near a border where there's no reason for people to be unless they're seeking temporary shelter before a clandestine crossing attempt. Trash in this case can be a methodological basis for counter-mapping migrant presence, strategy, and lived experience. It may also indicate squattable buildings, fields or well-trodden crossing points for those looking to take shelter and move along informal migration routes. Martina Tazzioli and Glenda Garelli talk about an imperative to map and archive migrant spaces, even those that are no longer active, so as to generate a "minor cartography of vanishing spaces" that ethically accounts for disappearances,

transformations, adaptations, and absences in the geographies of informal migration. A lack of documentation of former makeshift camps poses a risk of erasure of violent events like push-backs, police raids, evictions or forced relocations that caused them to be emptied. In this way, an empty building filled with out-of-place items offers evidence, even an element of storytelling that is important in understanding experiences of borders.

Annaclaudia: This goes beyond the micro scale. When we talk about migrants and dangerous policies on migration, we can see how trash can be a metaphor for humans. Waste, as Scott Kirsch has pointed out, can be an important lens for assessing how things are coded with value. This is pertinent to how the dispossessed, the poor, the vulnerable, and the lower classes are often represented in media and popular culture. There's a lot to be said about discarded objects being akin to people who have no value; it also applies to people that are taken out of their normal context. Fundamentally, trash is something that has (been) shifted from its place or purpose to a place where it does not "belong." After the 2011 tsunami and disaster at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, I interviewed people that had been displaced and became treated as trash. Those who lived near the power plant were akin to the nuclear survivors of the Second World War—the *hibakusha*. This word entails a stigmatization, insofar as people ended up feeling like they had been set aside from humanity due to supposedly being radioactive, and their value was diminished. This relates to the affective dimension of trash, particularly the potential for emotions to uncover new layers of meaning. Some tsunami debris—fishing nets, cars, temples—was used to make art. At my PhD institution in the Netherlands, the University of Groningen, I participated in a workshop where an artist asked everyone to bring trash from their home, and taught students how to make something with it to challenge the boundaries of what we believe is valuable or usable.

Timothy: In my research on migrant agri-food laborers being frequently evicted as part of supply chain capitalism in Basilicata, southern Italy, I collaborated with the small collective The Margin is the Center / of Change (MIC/C). We recreated the trajectory of ousted migrants in the locality of Alto Bradano, in conjunction with two workers who had settled there. They pointed me to utility-oriented objects and aspects of buildings that I would have considered waste but they were actually valued quite a lot: I was looking for signs of forced displacement and labor exploitation, whereas they were scavenging for pieces of cutlery, video cassettes, CDs, and other stuff that could generate value. Undoubtedly, it's important not only to narrate these spaces from different viewpoints, but also to memorialize them in a nuanced manner, valuing their layeredness. Memorialization of wasting can be violent if no place is given to objects and lives that have been "dislocated."

Annaclaudia: Long after the 2011 tsunami, debris proved very emotional for some people. One example is the Daini Katsumaru, defined by the Japanese and American media as a "miracle boat." It was found in Hawaii four years later and became the subject of an agreement between the US and Japanese government to return it to Japan. A lot of newspaper articles framed it as a matter of cross-cultural friendship, giving hope to the Japanese population that losses of people and property could somehow be mitigated. As Duccio Gasparri and I have explored, the boat represents an instance of a thing perceived as waste getting "untrashed" and memorialized, creating narratives that were meant to pull the heart-strings of a Japanese audience—the boat was a metaphor for everything that was lost, found, and brought back to Japan. The point was poignantly made in an interview with the daughter of the boat's owner, in which she expressed the feeling that, just like the boat, her father was coming back to her.

The narrative was misleading, however: the story was framed as if the father perished in the tsunami, but he had died long before, and the boat was there rotting and unused, until it suddenly became imbued with value—now, it's in a museum.

Emotional and temporal dimensions of wasted objects/places

Daniel: The complexities of waste-stories are addressed by Stephanie Foote in *Teaching Climate Change in the Humanities* (2017), zeroing in on questions of scale. Many waste systems span the micro- and the macro-scalar in a vertiginous manner beyond even the wildest imaginings of some consumers in the Global North going about their everyday lives. Cases like obsolete rigs and vessels being offloaded to the Global South for extremely dangerous shipbreaking, as investigated by BBC News in 2020, throw into stark relief the intersectional dimensions of wasting, with certain areas of the world ending up downgraded due to questions of race and class, in particular. By force of circumstance, a geopolitical hierarchization is at play whenever a nation-state takes up materials for incineration.

Timothy: In the Mediterranean, certain migrant shipwrecks get a lot of media attention, such as the fishing boat that sank on the night of 18 April 2015 between Libya and the Italian island of Lampedusa, leaving between 700 and 1100 people dead—it was displayed at the 2019 Venice Art Biennial. Such acts are prone to superimposing a victimizing narrative. Identifying some objects and lives as having more or less value runs the risk of obscuring people's agency, as well as how individuals or groups repurpose sites and objects for their own purposes.

Annaclaudia: Attempts to bring order to disordered assemblages of waste can create categories of inclusion and exclusion that are material and emotional, often leaving out the perspective of the people involved. In the case of Fukushima, there's a question of temporality: 12 years have passed and most people have gone back to a normal life, but certain places remain "haunted." You can still see buildings marked by the tsunami at a certain height and some areas have not been cleared completely or are overgrown with weeds, as they are no longer considered habitable. Looking at gaps and missing pieces in the landscape, you come to ask yourself not only how the past looked but also what the place's potential could be—a sort of void to be filled. Japan is full of abandoned places, rusting metal, dilapidated houses, trash… As people move more and more to big cities, the countryside is slowly becoming a mixture of discarded objects and "hauntings." In my work on dark tourism, I look at how tourists have a fascination with ruins—a fetishization, at times. Some people are fascinated because the act of looking at abandoned places, especially those connected to disasters, can give an indication of the future: in 1984, a pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, leaked toxic gas that killed thousands, and many tourists go to the area illegally in an attempt to get a sense of a coming apocalypse.

Daniel: Such sites give the impression of Earth being trashed to the point of uninhabitability. The *where* and *when* at stake here are explored in Christoph Lindner and Miriam Meissner's introduction to *Global Garbage* (2016), which dwells on how waste shapes sociocultural relations—its burden is most frequently borne by minoritized individuals/groups with no choice over living with it. Related to those geographies of difference is how waste gestures toward being-in-the-world in ways that are both concrete and nebulous, insofar as it exists within *and* beyond the orbit of human experience. The anthropologist Joshua Reno has paid close attention to said in-betweenness.

Joanna: Ann Laura Stoler discusses ruins as destroyed or abandoned structures endowed with a value that is collectively recognized—a Ruin, emphasis on the capital "R." By that definition, not a single one of the buildings that I consider in my work is a ruin; rather, it's a case of destroyed/discarded sites layered with meaning through memory, occupation, repurposing.

Academics, activists, and artists in the Balkans have worked extensively on questions of temporalities in terms of post-socialism, post-war transitions, former industries, nostalgic visions, and a "future past" that was never fully realized. In the former Yugoslavia, many buildings served their intended purpose either temporarily or not at all; some were left half-built. There's a plethora of disused sites such as the plentiful tourist infrastructure in the mountains, on the Adriatic coast, near springs and rivers, all of which was developed in a time when there were Yugoslavs with the possibility of vacationing. This infrastructure is occasionally squatted or transformed into reception centers for migrants (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Former migrant squat in an unfinished retirement home (*Dom penzionera*) in Bihać, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 2022. Photo credit: Joanna Jordan.

In the city of Bihać in northwestern Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has become a hub for crossing the borders of Croatia and Slovenia to reach western or northern Europe, there's an industrial area with several buildings that were economically significant during the Yugoslavian era. Following the wars of the 1990s, the area was partially destroyed and abandoned, becoming a collection of large unused structures just outside the center. From 2018–2021, big makeshift camps were situated here, emerging on and off until authorities definitively closed them. The occupations of these left-behind buildings add complex "sedimentation" to the ruins.

Timothy: Migrant settlements in Basilicata intersect with the infrastructure of agricultural reform in the 1950s–60s that, for many Italian inhabitants of the region, memorializes a shameful experience. They want to look toward a modern future that discards the material

connotations of the past. Political decisions are made on the basis of that narrative, which is not discussed enough. People in Basilicata use quite different words for sites that become migrant settlements, often "abandoned houses" (*case abbandonate*) or "ruins" (*rovine*). Here, "abandoned" means "not currently in use," i.e. ready to be repurposed, whereas "ruins" are wasting-places that have lost their value.

Daniel: Another Italian case of shame associated with infrastructure is Naples's "waste management crisis" in the 1990s–2000s, which got to the point of prime minister Silvio Berlusconi calling in the armed forces in 2008 to carry out Operation "Clean Streets" (*Operazione "Strade Pulite"*). I was there for the Easter fortnight and people were talking abashedly about mafia syndicates like the Camorra and 'Ndrangheta having capitalized on vulnerabilities in government outsourcing to do with disposal. The discussions were in part about health risks in the form of disease exposure, but mostly about a threshold beyond which waste amassing had become unacceptable, i.e. at the intersection of enviro-medical humanities and emotional geographies.

Annaclaudia: To go further into geographies of affect, the terming of something as waste doesn't necessarily involve materiality: an item can become revolting because of processes of naming and spatializing. An object in a trash can is perceived as trash because it's in a place denoting that role, whatever the state of the thing. If I were to put perfectly edible food in a trash can, many people would be squeamish about taking it out and eating it. They would feel disgust because of the role of the *container*. Value is place- and time-contingent, not really based on an object's ins-and-outs. In the Netherlands, most trash is deposited underground through a tiny opening, not unlike the system in central Bologna, e.g. Piazza Aldrovandi near our team's office. Not seeing the true quantity of trash is as sociopolitical an issue as it is an emotional one. There's a feeling in Italy of something not working whenever trash is visible. What's more, trash is often connected with poverty: not being able to afford new things was certainly a source of embarrassment for my father and grandma in Venice, though nothing like Brazilians and Indians struggling to subsist in favelas and shanty-towns built from trash.

On the topic of ruins utilized as heritage, places where meanings are negotiated/ contested tend to have a certain dissonance: the narrative of a ruin is generally just one interpretation that has become authoritative over others. When it comes to a building being occupied, there are different meanings at stake for migrants, the resident population, and institutions desiring a "clean" role for the place. In a similar vein, tourism is constructed around events and places that have been storified. Things are regularly framed in terms of changing for "better" or "worse." Bodily fluids are even subject to repurposing in contexts like agriculture. Is waste just an anchoring label amid the shifting sands of a society? Can it be a stable term?

Economic/political/social value

Daniel: The figure of the ragpicker (*chiffonnier/straccivendolo/Lumpensammler*) is bound up with how something perceived as waste can be repurposed—one person's trash is another's treasure. Back in the second half of the 1800s, the transformation of swathes of Paris into boulevards and avenues entailed a radical shift in relationships to the urban fabric. The "capital of the nineteenth century," to reprise Walter Benjamin's formulation from the 1930s, became marked by sites of renovation-generated layering like the environs of the Louvre, serving as the backdrop to Charles Baudelaire's famous poems "The Swan" and "The Little

Old Women" in the group of "Parisian Scenes" inserted into the second edition of *The Flowers of Evil* (1861), where the poet adopts the outlook of a *chiffonnier*—the feminine equivalent, a *chiffonnière*, was decidedly uncommon (Figure 2). Gleaning things on the verge of disappearing had to do with looking to the past, sometimes as far as classical antiquity, while in the midst of a quantum leap that gave rise to very mixed feelings. The art of delving into less-valued entities, both inanimate and animate, really comes to the fore in the prose poems assembled after Baudelaire's death in *Paris Spleen* (1869). Literary geographies of this sort bring out the worth of creative works as a waste-archive in the era of the Industrial Revolution and "all that is solid melt[ing] into air," as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels posited in 1848.

Figure 2: Louis Léopold Boilly, *La chiffonnière*, 1822, lithograph, 17 x 16 cm (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 59.500.723, Elisha Whittelsey Collection, 1959)

Timothy: I see this as related to production-obsessed contexts such as the textile industry in Prato, Tuscany, that depended on the recovery of rags (*stracci*) until the 1950s: materials were reinserted into the industrialization process within a circular economy of ragpickers and home-based laborers who resold to factories to supplement predominantly agrarian

subsistence. An infuriating counterpoint to such circular economies is the centrality of wasting in free-market systems perpetuating socioecological failings. Businesses giving away surplus food is a legal minefield in Italy and other European countries, so complex circumventive mechanisms have been conceived, including the app *Too Good to Go* (TGTG) that allows leftovers to be shifted at low cost to consumers.

Daniel: When a business cuts the price on produce that is destined to be thrown away unless someone takes it almost immediately, there's an insidious capitalist logic of making a small profit while somehow being socially minded. Apps to do with reducing food waste run the risk of perpetuating a gamification of disposal because it's about getting there before the timer ticks down, akin to a virtual-reality mission where the temporal window inexorably closes until all is lost.

In terms of how a wasting-system reproduces itself, it's worth dwelling on supermarket "trashing" and the act of reclaiming thrown-away things in an anarchist gesture going against date labels, which have come to determine a sizable amount of thinking about food: "Best before" and "Use by" equate to a slippery slope from "nice right now" to "past-it" via "okay for this long." While camping in France during summer 2012, friends of mine stopped to see what a large chain had jettisoned on account of "Sell by," most of which was still fit for consumption. These questions of food standards and labeling—perennial political issues in Europe and the US—stand in contrast to the spread of practices encapsulated in Agnès Varda's film *The Gleaners and I* (2000), which bears witness to people going into a harvested field to pick up potatoes deemed unsuitable for sale.

Annaclaudia: Since waste is so pervasive in our capitalist society, actions like dumpster diving can have a strong political valence. After all, distinguishing between what can be reused and what is supposedly at the end of its cycle is something that lots of people do daily. One way of separating waste from non-waste is the extent to which something is useful as a whole or as parts, dividing what is needed from what isn't. Another consideration is temporal, typically framed in relation to the moment at which a need lapses and the whole object becomes disposable. Such is the way with planned obsolescence, i.e. the idea of objects having an expiry date, allowing producers to sell more: laptops and telephones are notorious for being geared toward turning into waste within a brief timeframe. This comes down to a flood of consumables.

Joanna: As a student in Montreal, I had a period of dumpster diving. It was (at least partly) a form of resistance to the huge quantities of waste being produced by supermarkets and restaurants every day, as well as an anti-capitalist interruption of the conventional chain of commercial transactions. Information regarding locations and ideal timing was shared by word of mouth and a Facebook group, mostly involving young students—a demographic that did not necessarily have economic reasons for digging through discarded items to find food but chose to do so, exercising some light civil disobedience and hacking the system. People sleeping rough near the dumpsters in question often had no idea what we were doing and were surprised that supermarkets were discarding perfectly safe and edible items—bread, yogurt, cheese, fruit, vegetables, coffee, teabags—due to supply or storage policies. This alerted me to dimensions of class and access to information, insofar as an internet connection and membership of social networks were fundamental to success. There's also a question of privilege: the slightly disobedient act of rummaging in a trash can is less likely to lead to a

severe reprimand for a young white student in a certain type of clothing, as opposed to more marginalized folks.

Elements of class and ethnicity are certainly at play in forms of scavenging and repurposing discarded things. In makeshift camps along the Balkan Route, trash is an inescapable feature: food wrappers, clothes, batteries, plastic bags, gray water, dead dogs, human waste—it's burned for cooking and heating, producing smoke and stenches. Reports often depict chaos, ruination, revulsion in these dismal wastescapes, even where there is a sympathetic approach to migrants' plight. The outcome is a kind of "pornography of suffering" centered on trash that engenders visceral responses and can fuel dehumanizing ideas regarding trash-producing and trash-dwelling migrants. In point of fact, people on the move are ceaselessly re-appropriating spaces and items to produce their informal encampments. Following evictions, impoverished or homeless locals also come to scavenge for something usable or sellable, thereby generating "alter-lives" for items.

Timothy: Waste can be deemed the material expression of the boundary between capitalist and non-capitalist forms of economic action and interaction (Figure 3). On the one hand, the city comber Ysabel and I in Antwerp were somehow "competing" with Romani trashcombers who definitely weren't happy about our presence getting in the way of their livelihood. On the other hand, I've seen southern Italians start preparing for winter at the end of August by making sauce from tomatoes shorn of market value and left in fields once quotas for European subsidies have been reached. These parallel economies of commodities on the verge of waste ought to be explored in terms of social inequalities.

Figure 3: Burned CD from an evicted migrant labor camp in Basilicata, Italy, 2015. Photo credit: Timothy Raeymaekers.

In privileged industrialized societies based on an economic model that is less and less tenable, the necessity of reusing wasted-objects is slowly bringing about a shift in geopolitical relations, as architect Teddy Cruz and political theorist Fonna Forman have noted about the US-Mexico borderlands, where waste from sprawling San Diego is being systematically transferred to Tijuana for new homes and community centers. The Mexican urban model is geared toward greater sustainability because it's constantly reinventing itself through materials that would otherwise have been dumped someplace by the American administration.

Anyways, waste is dead; long live waste! Lest we forget: "rien ne se crée, il n'y a que des changements" (nothing is created, everything is transformations).

Conclusion

This roundtable flowed unconventionally from a common interest toward different horizons. Every segment of our ruminations on waste—its value, emotional charge, temporalities, sociopolitical ramifications—was intentionally held open, in an effort to operate as generatively as we could imagine. This method's evident flexibility and expansiveness provided unexpected opportunities for enjoyment as much as constructive critique while accumulating and nuancing ideas. Just as personal and joint moments of understanding were sparked by our foursome's process of analysis across areas of research familiar to each individual to a greater or lesser extent, shifting from affect studies to mobilities via literary geographies, we hope to have contributed to the discipline by establishing jumping-off points for conversations beyond ours. By reflecting together, we came to a deeper understanding of what waste can mean and become, well beyond objects being more or less violently discarded. Above all, the four of us developed a better grasp of how wasting occurs in fits and starts, on the basis of a cyclical frontier of commodification that leaves plenty of liminal spaces in which alternative forms of life may take hold. Geographers have the ability—not to say the responsibility—to make such worlds visible as possibilities for learning, however fragile and fleeting they may be: tomatoes keeping southern Italians going through winter; rural economies sprouting from miners' engagements with minerals in the Democratic Republic of Congo; ruins repurposed by en-route migrants in Bosnia and Serbia… Our sifting through wastescapes ranging from Baudelairean ragpicking to post-disaster Fukushima entailed questioning the justness of many societal features that tend to be taken for granted. There's still a great deal of work to be done on waste as a site of transgression, a locus of tensions between past and future, and a medium for strategy formation, at the very least. Methodologically speaking, our *slow conversing* opened up alternative research pathways based on embracing nascent thoughts and speculative intersections, e.g. the potential for appraising migrants' discarded items through border archaeology. We four Bolognese waste-hounds are excitedly envisioning new realms of co-thinking waste's distinctiveness across time and space.

Prompts

1. To what extent are emotional geographies appreciable through leftover objects?

2. How can transhistorical/multifocal work be enabled by time- and place-bound remnants such as graffiti?

3. What happens to the layering of place identity when a site is abandoned, destroyed or repurposed?

4. Where might the imagination come into play if a waste-story's traces are minimal?

References

Armiero, Marco. 2021. *Wasteocene: Stories from the Global Dump*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Armiero, Marco, and Massimo De Angelis. 2017. "Anthropocene: Victims, Narrators, and Revolutionaries." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116 (2): 345–362.

Arnall, Alex, and Uma Kothari. 2020. "Becoming an Island: Making Connections and Places through Waste Mobilities." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 45 (4): 891–905.

Bandy, William Thomas. 1957. "Le chiffonnier de Baudelaire." *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 57 (4): 580–584.

Bangstad, Sindre, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, John L. Comaroff, and Jean Comaroff. 2012. "Anthropologists Are Talking: About Anthropology and Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Ethnos* 77 (1): 115–136.

Baudelaire, Charles. 1857/1861. *Les fleurs du mal*. Paris: Poulet-Malassis/De Broise.

Baudelaire, Charles. 1869. *Petits poëmes en prose*. Paris: Lévy.

Benjamin, Walter. 1969. *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Cerruti But, Michele. 2017. "Prato: Che ne è dei distretti industriali?" *Territorio* 81: 111–115.

Cruz, Teddy, and Fonna Forman. 2020. "Unwalling Citizenship." *E-Flux Architecture*, November 3, www.e-flux.com/architecture/at-the-border/358908/unwalling-citizenship.

Davies, Anna R. 2008. *The Geographies of Garbage Governance: Interventions, Interactions and Outcomes*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Davies, Thom, Arshad Isakjee, and Surindar Dhesi. 2017. "Violent Inaction: The Necropolitical Experience of Refugees in Europe." *Antipode* 49 (5): 1263–1284.

DeSilvey, Caitlin, and Tim Edensor. 2013. "Reckoning with Ruins." *Progress in Human Geography* 37 (4): 465–485.

Dhesi, Surindar, Arshad Isakjee, and Thom Davies. 2015. *An Environmental Health Assessment of the New Migrant Camp in Calais*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

Edensor, Tim. 2005. "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space." *Environment and Planning D* 23 (6): 829–849.

Finch-Race, Daniel A. 2015. "Placelessness in Baudelaire's 'Les sept vieillards' and 'Les petites vieilles.'" *Modern Language Review* 110 (4): 1011–1026.

Foote, Chris. 2020. "Breaking Bad: Uncovering the Oil Industry's Dirty Secret." *BBC News*, March 17, www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/ao726ind7u/shipbreaking.

Foote, Stephanie. 2017. "Garbage and Literature: Generating Narrative from a Culture of Waste." In *Teaching Climate Change in the Humanities*, edited by Stephen Siperstein, Shane Hall, and Stephanie LeMenager, 191–196. London: Routledge.

Friedman, Jonathan, Andre Gingrich, Sarah Green, and Thomas Hylland Eriksen. 2003. "Anthropologists Are Talking: About the New Right in Europe." *Ethnos* 68 (4): 554–572.

Gandy, Matthew. 2002. *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Graeber, David. 2001. *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Graham, Mark, Paul Boyce, Elisabeth L. Engebretsen, Elena Gonzalez-Polledo, Thomas Hendriks, Adnan Hossain, Silvia Posocco, Hadley Z. Renkin, Taylor Riley, and Heather Tucker. 2016. "Anthropologists Are Talking about Queer Anthropology." *Ethnos* 81 (2): 364–377.

Gregson, Nicky and Mike Crang. 2010. "Materiality and Waste: Inorganic Vitality in a Networked World." *Environment and Planning A* 42 (5): 1026–1032.

Haraway, Donna, Noboru Ishikawa, Scott F. Gilbert, Kenneth Olwig, Anna L. Tsing, and Nils Bubandt. 2016. "Anthropologists Are Talking—About the Anthropocene." *Ethnos* 81 (3): 535–564.

Harvey, David. 1985. *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Harvey, David. 2003. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York: Routledge.

Holmes, Cindy, Sarah Hunt, and Amy Piedalue. 2015. "Violence, Colonialism and Space: Towards a Decolonizing Dialogue." *ACME* 14 (2): 539–70.

Ibos, Caroline. 2020. "Masculinité des chiffonniers et disqualification des chiffonnières à Paris (1830–1880)." *Travail, genre et sociétés* 43: 31–49.

Iqani, Mehita. 2020. *Garbage in Popular Culture: Consumption and the Aesthetics of Waste*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Jordan, Joanna, and Claudio Minca. 2023. "Micro-Politics of a Makeshift Refugee Camp: The Grafosrem Factory in Šid, Serbia." *Antipode* 55 (2): 480–505.

Kirsch, Scott. 2013. "Cultural Geography I: Materialist Turns." *Progress in Human Geography* 37 (3): 433–441.

Kirsch, Scott, and Don Mitchell. 2004. "The Nature of Things: Dead Labor, Nonhuman Actors, and the Persistence of Marxism." *Antipode* 36 (4): 687–705.

Kulick, Don, Louise Lamphere, Rayna Rapp, and Gayle Rubin. 2007. "Anthropologists Are Talking: About Feminist Anthropology." *Ethnos* 72 (3): 408–426.

Latour, Bruno, Isabelle Stengers, Anna Tsing, and Nils Bubandt. 2018. "Anthropologists Are Talking—About Capitalism, Ecology, and Apocalypse." *Ethnos* 83 (3): 587–606.

Lavoisier, Antoine. 1789. *Traité élémentaire de chimie*. Paris: Cuchet.

Lewis, Eden. 2022. "What a Mess! Beach Becomes 'Rubbish Dump' as Towels, Bottles and Barbecues Litter Shoreline." *Teesside Live*, July 20, www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/teesside-news/what-mess-beach-becomes-rubbish-24538178.

Lindner, Christoph, and Miriam Meissner. 2016. "Introduction: Globalization, Garbage, and the Urban Environment." In *Global Garbage: Urban Imaginaries of Waste, Excess, and Abandonment*, edited by Christoph Lindner and Miriam Meissner, 1–13. London: Routledge.

Mah, Alice. 2010. "Memory, Uncertainty and Industrial Ruination: Walker Riverside, Newcastle upon Tyne." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34 (2): 398–413.

Martini, Annaclaudia, and Dorina Maria Buda. 2020. "Dark Tourism and Affect: Framing Places of Death and Disaster." *Current Issues in Tourism* 23 (6): 679–692.

Martini, Annaclaudia, and Duccio Gasparri. 2021. "Miracle Boats and Other Wonders: Locating Affect in the Narratives of Recovery and Removal of Japanese Post-Disaster Debris." *Emotion, Space and Society* 38: 100765.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1848. *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*. London: Burghard.

McFarlane, Colin. 2021. *Fragments of the City: Making and Remaking Urban Worlds*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Miller, Benjamin. 2000. *Fat of the Land: Garbage in New York—The Last Two Hundred Years*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.

Milliot, Virginie. 2021. "Lutter contre le dénuement: Fragments de vie d'un chiffonnier à Paris au XXIe siècle." *Monde commun* 6: 70–87.

Moore, Sarah A. 2012. "Garbage Matters: Concepts in New Geographies of Waste." *Progress in Human Geography* 36 (6): 780–799.

Morrison, Susan Signe. 2015. *The Literature of Waste: Material Ecopoetics and Ethical Matter*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morrison, Susan Signe. 2021. "Waste." In *The Cambridge Companion to Environmental Humanities*, edited by Jeffrey Cohen and Stephanie Foote, 229–242. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mountz, Alison, Anne Bonds, Becky Mansfield, Jenna Loyd, Jennifer Hyndman, Margaret Walton-Roberts, Ranu Basu, Risa Whitson, Roberta Hawkins, Trina Hamilton, and Winifred Curran. 2015. "For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University." *ACME* 14 (4): 1235–1259.

Ngai, Sianne. 2005. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Oxford English Dictionary. 2023. "Waste (n.)." *Oxford English Dictionary*, December 1, www.oed.com/dictionary/waste_n.

Pickren, Graham. 2014. "Political Ecologies of Electronic Waste: Uncertainty and Legitimacy in the Governance of E-Waste Geographies." *Environment and Planning A* 46 (1): 26–45.

Raeymaekers, Timothy. 2014. *Violent Capitalism and Hybrid Identity in the Eastern Congo: Power to the Margins*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Raeymaekers, Timothy. 2023. "Border Waste: Migrant Farm Workers Wrecked by an Intoxicating Border Regime." *Border Criminologies*, April 26, https://blogs.law.ox.ac.uk/blog-post/2023/04/border-waste-migrant-farm-workers-wrecked-intoxicating-border-regime.

Reno, Joshua Ozias. 2014. "Toward a New Theory of Waste: From 'Matter out of Place' to Signs of Life." *Theory, Culture & Society* 31 (6): 3–27.

Scanlan, John. 2005. *On Garbage*. London: Reaktion.

Soto, Gabriella. 2018. "Object Afterlives and the Burden of History: Between 'Trash' and 'Heritage' in the Steps of Migrants." *American Anthropologist* 120 (3): 460–473.

Spelman, Elizabeth V. 2016. *Trash Talks: Revelations in the Rubbish*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sterner, Carl S. 2008. "Waste and City Form: Reconsidering the Medieval Strategy." *Journal of Green Building* 3 (3): 67–78.

Stoler, Ann Laura, ed. 2013. *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Sundberg, Juanita. 2008. "'Trash-Talk' and the Production of Quotidian Geopolitical Boundaries in the USA-Mexico Borderlands." *Social & Cultural Geography* 9 (8): 871–890.

Swab, Jack, Jack Jen Gieseking, Michael Brown, Larry Knopp, and Bo Zhao. 2022. "Toward Queering the Map 2.0." *ACME* 21 (4): 416–35.

Tazzioli, Martina, and Glenda Garelli. 2019. "Counter-Mapping, Refugees and Asylum Borders." In *Handbook on Critical Geographies of Migration*, edited by Katharyne Mitchell, Reece Jones, and Jennifer L. Fluri, 397–409. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Thill, Brian. 2015. *Waste*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Thurlow, Crispin. 2022. "Rubbish? Envisioning a Sociolinguistics of Waste." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 26 (3): 386–403.

Varda, Agnès. 2000. *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*. Paris: Ciné-Tamaris.

Viney, William. 2014. *Waste: A Philosophy of Things*. London: Bloomsbury.

Vogel, Christoph, and Timothy Raeymaekers. 2016. "Terr(it)or(ies) of Peace? The Congolese Mining Frontier and the Fight against 'Conflict Minerals.'" *Antipode* 48 (4): 1102–1121.

Waldron, Ingrid. 2018. "Re-Thinking Waste: Mapping Racial Geographies of Violence on the Colonial Landscape." *Environmental Sociology* 4 (1): 36–53.

Walker, Sarah, and Elena Giacomelli. 2021. "Waste, Space and Mobility Justice: Interconnecting Strands of the Climate Crisis as Experienced in Dakar, Senegal." *Lo squaderno* 60: 9–13.

Whitson, Risa. 2011. "Negotiating Place and Value: Geographies of Waste and Scavenging in Buenos Aires." *Antipode* 43 (4): 1404–1433.