The Redemption of Rubbish:

Representations of waste in selected 20th-century fiction

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To Nonno Sergio, who brought things home off the street

and to Nonna Nina, who made him throw them away

Table of Contents

'The first thing we see as we travel round the world is our own filth, thrown into the face of mankind'
—Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes-Tropiques*

'Who's to say what is, or might turn out to be, related to what else?'
—Tom McCarthy, *Satin Island*

'Garbage in, art out'
—Donald Barthelme

Chapter One: Introduction

'There is nothing like a good rummage through someone's rubbish before nightfall,' asserts the anonymous narrator of Ellis Sharp's novella, *The Dump* (1998).[1] Sharp's narrator claims to have woken up one morning in the middle of an immense landfill on the fringes of his native Walthamstow, joining a 'rickety population' of several thousand scavengers who wander, day after day, through its 'waste, desolation and smouldering rubbish' (*TD,* 15; 19). The Dump, as the landfill is called, is a vast and inexplicable 'place of the rejected, the worthless' (*TD,* 19). Its inhabitants have no knowledge of how they got there, and no hope of ever getting out, spending their days 'feeding on the scraps of others, devouring their leavings' (*TD,* 70). The space's incoherence is reflected in the narrator's own disjointed, a-chronological speech, which layers anecdote upon anecdote with no attempt to distinguish between actual events and imagined ones. But in amongst the asynchronous babble there appear brief moments of insight, during which the narrator cogently distils The Dump's broader meaning. This is a place, he tells us, for 'all that is superfluous, expendable, unneeded, unwanted. Things and people once fit as a fiddle, now fit for nothing. Built-in obsolescence, the very marrow of every gleaming product' (*TD*, 51). And for all its discomfiting qualities, Sharp's narrator is at home in The Dump. Describing himself as 'the mundane distilled into human form' (*TD,* 29), he finds his surroundings agree with him, and provide an apt basis for a patched-up hodgepodge of a narrative, where he can be 'untroubled (bliss!) by capitalism or troublesome sex' (*TD,* 58). Yes, in a place such as this, 'all you can hope for is an epic of bits and pieces, of odds and ends, of ended odds and odd ends' (*TD,* 57), but there is much to learn from those bits. Indeed,

> The only other place where you learn about the truth of things is down in the city sewers, in among the shit and the gin bottles and the thousand-and-one things that guilty shamefaced folk flush down the loo when no-one else is about (*TD*, 57).

Thus, while bemoaning his destitute state, the narrator also recognises that The Dump offers a unique perspective on the world: 'You get a real sense of life's rich variety and mystery […] In fact you probably end up knowing more about life [in the real world] than [its inhabitants] do themselves' (*TD*, 57). Further, in its inchoate, disordered state, The Dump raises questions about the logic underpinning the workings of the real world: 'one of the intriguing and interesting things about life on The Dump is the strange things that get thrown away for no apparent reason, not to mention the strange juxtaposition of things which don't belong together at all' (*TD,* 57). Thus the male inhabitants of The Dump queue up to lie on top of a 500LB bomb, which has been repurposed to

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[1] Ellis Sharp. *The Dump* (London: Zoilus Press, 1998), 60. Henceforth *TD.*

function as a sex implement (*TD,* 77). Our discards not only reveal the irrationality underlying our attributions of value; re-contextualised in The Dump, they take on new and absurd meanings.

Ellis Sharp's narrator is not alone in his fascination with what he calls 'the tease of enigmatic scraps' (*TD,* 60). Rather, his ideas are but an extension of a century-long enquiry into the narrative and philosophical value of our domestic and industrial discards, and, relatedly, into the value of human beings themselves. Since the Industrial Revolution and the rise of commodity culture, writers have condemned the things we throw out for their hygienic, moral, financial and ecological toll. At the same time, however, a number of them have either implicitly or explicitly acknowledged the aesthetic, ontological and even historiographic value of our discards, and they have frequently seen, in the disposal of these items, a metaphor for capitalism's marginalisation of the poor and the unemployed. For Sharp's narrator, the multifarious and absurd ways in which waste might be repurposed, and his fellow scavengers' capacity to survive in this landfill, provide alternative narratives to the lives that humans and objects lead in mainstream society. Where capitalism sees the absence of commercial value, The Dump sees the presence of historical, aesthetic, sentimental, or anthropological value. Where capitalism sees a population of superfluous entities 'once fit as a fiddle, now fit for nothing' (*TD,* 51), The Dump sees human beings with an ingenious capacity to make do with what they find. Here, the events of the civilised world are experienced in hindsight as a 'repeat performance' by shadowy scavengers who appear to be grotesque imitations of 'normal' citizens (*TD,* 75). The world of The Dump echoes and parodies mainstream society, thus throwing into relief its own peculiarities.

This thesis examines the literary representation of manufactured waste and remaindered humans – humans cast out of the job market, or who actively resist being put to use – at specific moments in the evolution of 20th-century capitalism, with particular attention to the role these different forms of waste play in its critique. My project's scope is historical insofar as it views each of the literary instantiations of superfluous humans and manufactured waste under review as reflective of a broader shift in capitalism's progression, and its effects on culture at large. However, the concern is not to trace a history of literary movements, or a history of labour and consumption – rather, it is to examine what the depiction of waste in each of these texts tells us about the stage of capitalism in which it was written, and to explore the very different ways in which waste is deployed to critique specific aspects of capitalist ideology. The texts themselves have thus been chosen as unique depictions of waste and interrogations of capitalist ascriptions of value, rather than for their exemplification of a particular aesthetic credo or movement, although in some instances these two criteria do merge (for instance, it is difficult to think of waste in art without thinking of Dada and Surrealism, and it is difficult to think of Dada and Surrealism without thinking of waste). Beginning

with the mixed-media experimentations of three European artists closely associated with the historical avant-garde, and ending with the dystopia of nuclear fallout and toxic landfills at the century's close, the project traces waste's deployment in the critique of crucial moments in the transformation of capital, from the commodification of art at the beginning of the 20ᵗʰ century to the post-Fordist era of flexible accumulation. In between these two periods, I examine the depiction of homeless vagrants and scavengers in Samuel Beckett's mid- to late-prose (1950-1967), in which I read these characters as resisting Fordist rationalisation and parodying the life of consumer-workers. As in Ellis Sharp's novella, the life Beckett's characters live immersed in mud, excrement and domestic waste is also a metaphor for their perceived lack of social value, rendering them the antithesis of Marx's 'reserve army of labour.'[2] Where the surplus entities Marx describes are forced to do the job for less, the surplusage of Beckett's characters is rooted in their abstention from participating in the market economy. In each of these chapters, I argue that to observe waste is to be acutely aware of the dissonance between the quantified, commodified social, and that which resists commodification, or has been deemed unprofitable.

The commodity

This project takes waste to be intimately tied with commodities. But what *is* a commodity? In Volume I of *Capital,* Marx defines the commodity as 'an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another.' However, he adds the caveat that the object must have 'a use-value' and be 'something useful' and that this use-value must serve the needs of people other than the producer:

> Whoever directly satisfies his wants with the produce of his own labour, creates, indeed, use-values, but not commodities. In order to produce the latter, he must not only produce use-values but use-values for others, social use-values (*C,* 17).

Whether it is a material used for the production of goods, or a good itself, the item must have a market in order to be considered a commodity.

Commodities are in turn quantitatively assessed by their exchange value (the amount by which they can be exchanged for each other), which Marx notes is entirely abstracted from their use value (*C,* 15). This recognition brings Marx to consider what other characteristics commodities have in common, if it is not their use-value: and he seizes on their relationship to human labour. That is, that all commodities can be reduced to products of labour. And like its exchange-value, the commodity's characterization as a product of labour results in an abstraction. Defining a commodity as a product of labour dissociates it from both its physical qualities and form (its useful qualities),

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[2] Karl Marx. *Capital.* Transl. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1867-1883]), 350. Henceforth, *C.*

and from its relationship to its maker. Capitalism reduces all commodities 'to one and the same sort of labour, human labour in the abstract' (*C*, 15). All commodities, then, are 'a mere congelation of homogeneous human labour, of labour-power expended without regard to the mode of its expenditure' (*C*, 15).

This historical materialist definition offers a useful point of departure, but it is problematic for an investigation of waste, which – as we shall see – can frequently be re-commodified, which is also to say, put back to use, and re-cycled back into the commodity cycle. At what point, we might then ask, does a commodity cease to be a commodity and become waste? Can it be both? And, perhaps more importantly, when it becomes commodity-waste, does the congealed labour hidden within it still matter, or should we be more concerned about (for example), the eventual shape it takes in the landfill, its effects on the environment or the emotional effect of its loss to its owners? In other words, waste at once underscores but also deeply complicates Marx' concept of the commodity, and in doing so, begs questions that allow us to translate his theories into our own period.

Material culture studies (the study of the social status of objects), and new materialism, which builds on and complicates both Marxist theory and material culture studies, can help us bridge the gap. In its broadest sense, new materialism is concerned with the study of matter, and specifically with highlighting the inextricability of objects' existence in the world, and our knowledge of those objects—which is to say, the inseparability of ontology and epistemology. Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, the discipline is especially concerned with the agential potential of matter – from the imbrication of matter with broader human narratives to, at its most extreme, the capacity of matter to have agency of its own, and evince change. The discipline, as Maurizia Boscagli notes in her recent study, *Stuff Theory,* goes beyond both Marxist historical materialism and material culture studies in its focus on the 'unruly' potential of matter, the life of objects after their production.[3] New materialism, in other words, 'throws open [the] monologic narrative' of historical materialism while at the same time remaining conscious of the fact that

> stuff is already worked-upon, hence aestheticized, matter, that exists inside the cycle of commodity circulation under capital. The older materialism insists that under the system of capital every object is always already commodified; the new materialism insists on the fungability of matter and on the plasticity possible at the moment of subject-object interaction (Boscagli, 3).

In other words, matter exists in the culture of commodities, but its status as a commodity should not be presupposed. Two far earlier studies in the field – Arjun Appadurai's foundational essay, 'The Social Life of Things' (1986), and Igor Kopytoff's 'The Cultural Biography of Things' (1986) – can help us explore these ideas further, and think about the strict dichotomies of commodity/not

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[3] Maurizia Boscagli. *Stuff Theory: Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 3.

commodity or useful/useless laid out by Marx and challenged by Boscagli.[4] For Kopytoff, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism misses the non-economic dimension of commodities – that is, the cultural value they are ascribed *after* they are produced, and which fundamentally shapes their inclusion or preclusion from exchange. A moral economy, he notes, influences whether and when a thing can be monetised (Kopytoff, 72). This leads him to posit that commodification itself 'is best looked at as a process of becoming than as an all-or-none state of being' (Kopytoff, 73). Culture continuously impinges on this process, and thus objects too, as they move between commodified and non-commodified, 'absorb the other kind of worth, one that is non-monetary and goes beyond exchange value' (Kopytoff, 83).

In a similar fashion, Appadurai argues for a modification of two of Marx's assumptions: that 'commodities either exist or do not exist, and [that] they are *products* of a particular sort' (Appadurai, 9). Instead, he focuses on Marx's identification that a commodity must have a social use-value in order to shift attention away from the dynamics of production to the dynamics of exchange and the ensuing life of the object itself. In this context, commodities are merely:

> things in a certain situation, a situation that can characterize many different kinds of thing, at different points in their social lives. This means looking at the commodity potential of all things rather than searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sorts of things. It also means breaking significantly with the production-dominated Marxian view of the commodity and focusing on its *total* trajectory from production, through exchange/distribution, to consumption (Appadurai, 13).

Like Kopytoff, Appadurai proposes we abstain from defining objects as commodities or not-commodities, and consider them, instead as moving *in* and *out* of the commodity stage, as their marketability, utility, and status as 'innovative' or *démodé* changes. He proposes examining the 'commodity situation' of an object, in which the object's 'exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature' (Appadurai, 13). This can in turn be divided into three 'commodity-hoods' or typologies: the commodity phase, commodity candidacy, and commodity context.

The term 'commodity phase' calls attention to the fact that 'things can move in *and* out of the commodity state, that such movements can be slow or fast, reversible or terminal, normative or deviant' (Appadurai, 13). 'Commodity candidacy' is the 'regime of value' that allows, for instance, for commodities to be exchanged across borders regardless of the incompatibility of the ideologies or cultures of the parties involved, while the 'commodity context' refers to the social arena that enables the commodity candidacy to be linked to the commodity phase of its career (Apparudai, 15). For example, a car boot sale, where a family decides to sell their unwanted possessions to their

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[4] Arjun Appadurai. 'Commodities and the politics of value' and Igor Kopytoff. 'The Cultural Biography of Things.' *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective.* Ed. Arjun Appaduai (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-63; 64-91.

neighbours and friends, provides a context in which it is socially appropriate to treat one's possessions as commodities, and one's acquaintances as customers (in contrast, for example, to a dinner party, where such an attempt would be seen as deeply *in*appropriate).

Kopytoff and Appadurai's identification of the commodity *potential* of all things, and their definition of the commodity itself as a phase rather than a category, allows us to consider waste not as a not-commodity, but rather as a certain phase in an object's life. Expanding Marx's original definition, we might consider not only the process by which products appeared on the shelf, but also their complex trajectories from shop to home and from home to garbage bin or landfill, and also vice versa, from the garbage bin to someone else's home. Relatedly, we might consider how such ascriptions of value extend to human beings (of which I will have more to say in the sections below).

Waste

The definitions of the commodity introduced in the previous section provide a more fluid way of thinking about the concept of waste beyond the actual physical properties of the entity in question, and, too, beyond the binaries useful/not useful, commodity/not-commodity. Based on this, I propose that in the texts discussed in this thesis, commodities and waste exist on a Mobius strip. This is to say that they are shown to be dialectically inseparable from one another, and that under capitalist exchange relations, each is revealed capable of being alchemised into the other. This definition – to which I return later in this section – departs from the vast majority of waste scholarship, which has largely, over the last few decades, taken its cue from Mary Douglas' structural analysis of dirt and cleanliness in tribal law, *Purity and Danger*.[5] Douglas' work conceptualizes dirt as a spatial entity central to tribal understandings of purity, risk, boundary crossing, and danger, defining it, after William James, as 'matter out of place.'[6] For Douglas, social groups use the concept of dirt to maintain social order. The dichotomies of purity/impurity, cleanliness/dirt, use/useless are a means of upholding hierarchical structures and re-instating moral values. They also reflect spatially contingent social boundaries, such as body/world, self/other, private/public. In this respect, dirt's presence not only suggests uncleanliness, but a challenge to the system that has accorded things their specific place, and has mandated that things *be* clean.

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[5] See, for instance: Sophie Gee. *Making Waste: Leftovers and the 18th Century Imagination* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009) and Wendy Maples et al. *Dirt, Waste and Revulsion: How cultures cope with leftovers and mess,* transcript of a discussion at the Open University, based on the Wellcome Collection's exhibition, *Dirt: The filthy reality of everyday life* (24 March 2011 - 31 August 2011). http://www.open.edu/openlearn/body-mind/dirt-waste-and-revulsion-how-cultures-cope-leftovers-and-mess. More recently, Will Viney has sought to challenge Douglas's canonical reading of waste, arguing the merits or reading it temporally rather than spatially. See Will Viney. *Waste: A philosophy of things* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[6] Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1966]).

Ambiguities and otherness amplify dirt's fear-inducing qualities: as well as matter out of place, dirt is matter *without* place, matter that crosses boundaries indiscriminately, hovering without agreeing to 'settle.'

Problems arise, however, when we attempt to apply Douglas' analysis of dirt to the category of waste. Yes, there are affinities between dirt's profane associations among primitive cultures, and our repulsion at the sight or smell of certain typologies of waste such as bodily emissions. And there are certainly affinities in dirt and waste's respective disruption of our sense of aesthetic order, and the efforts we make to circumscribe them within particular boundaries (the garden, the trash bin). But beyond this the analogy fails, and applying it meaningfully becomes difficult. For what distinguishes waste from dirt – and their existence in the world of things – is narrative, origin and time. Douglas ascribes dirt's discomfiting qualities to its dislocation: not the process by which it became dislocated, but the very fact of being dislocated. By contrast, I argue that the strong feelings aroused by organic waste matter (faeces, urine, semen) and inorganic waste matter (the consumer and industrial remnants that form the topic of this thesis) is ascribable to the fact that they are material remnants of an event. Put differently, waste is the product of a process: it signals the aftermath of an occurrence, be that occurrence a dog defecating, the explosion at a nuclear plant, or the end of a fashion trend. This temporal dimension endows waste with narrative qualities: with its very presence a waste object signals that something has come before. We might say, then, that where dirt is matter out of place, waste is matter out of time.

An earlier theorist, Michael Thompson, can help shed light on this temporal and narrative dimension of waste.[7] For Thompson, all objects can be classified as 'transient', 'durable' or 'rubbish' (Thompson, 7). Transient objects 'decrease in value over time and have finite life-spans'; durable objects such as antique furniture 'increase in value over time and have (ideally) infinite life-spans'; and, finally, objects 'of zero and unchanging value […] do not fall into either of these two categories' and can be defined as 'rubbish' (Thompson, 7). Thompson implicitly defines these categories in relation to the value of the objects over time (the first by its depreciating value over time, the second by its resistance to depreciation). And, crucially, all three categories are understood to be fluid – thus, for instance, an object might start out as transient, fall into dis-use and lose all value (becoming rubbish), and then be re-discovered at a later moment and given new meaning – moving, in this way, to the category of 'durable' (Thompson, 9). The shift from rubbish to durable entails an attribution of value: for the object to be no longer considered waste, it must be of use.

Like Appadurai and Kopytoff's elaborations of Marx's definition of the commodity, Thompson's conceptualisation hinges on the understanding that all objects exist in culture, and in time. An

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[7] Thompson, Michael. *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

object's monetary value (and its commodity-potential) is related to its cultural context (including the social codes governing its saleability), as well as its relevance to the present. An object that no longer functions, or for which there is no longer a need, becomes waste. But given enough time, it can become valuable again – gaining, for instance, the status of an antique. In a similar way, the sawdust off a carpenter's table is waste insofar as it evidences a process and has no use; but the moment it is sold for re-use, it becomes a commodity once more. The assignation of a new use moves the sawdust from the category of 'rubbish' to the category of 'transient' or 'durable'; the identification of its marketability turns it into a commodity. Thus where Douglas would see waste as illegitimate matter, waste is merely matter that has served its purpose—for the time being.

For the purposes of this study, then, waste is defined as the obverse of Marx's commodity –the obverse of matter with use-value, exchange-value or a consumer audience – but also, and more importantly, as a stage in the life-cycle of a thing, which is also to say, a stage that can pass. In contrast to Thompson's assertion that certain objects remain impervious to decay or obsolescence, I argue that *any* object has the potential to become waste, as testified by the many comedic plot turns (in novels as well as film and television) that revolve around jewellery, cherished clothing items or money ending up in the trash.[8] Following Appadurai, I read the depictions of waste objects in the texts under review as snapshots of one phase of these objects' lives. The full story of these lives encompasses far more than their sojourn in a tip or landfill – which each of the novels discussed makes clear. However, I also look to complicate this definition by considering the extent to which the waste-potential of commodities, under capitalism, relates to the waste-potential of people – the relegation of specific kinds of people to the status of 'rubbish' in the texts under review plays a vital role in the works' criticism of capitalist ideology.

The implications of the waste-potential of commodities – and the commodity-potential of waste – become apparent when we consider them as vital components of capitalism itself. At heart, capitalism is driven by two very different visions of waste. Manufacturers and retailers are at pains to minimise the waste involved in production and distribution, and to put by-products and expired merchandise to use (a logic that extends to minimising the labour-time necessary to produce the

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[8] In television, for instance, a sub-plot of Season 3, Episode 1 of Armando Iannucci's *The Thick of It* revolves around a character seeking to retrieve his (very expensive) office chair from the dump, where it has been taken in order to avoid press allegations regarding profligate spending. The protagonists of the US comedy series of *The Office* spend much of the 20th episode of Season 6 wading through the local landfill in order to find a list of client leads that has been mistakenly thrown away; the characters never find the leads, but come back with a car full of rejectementa (chairs, cushions) that they feel would be a pity to let go to waste. In Episode 6, Season 4 of *Friends,* Ross describes visiting the incredibly messy flat of a date as a post-apocalyptic world in which only garbage remains: 'You know how you come home at the end of the day and throw your jacket on a chair? […] Well, instead of a jacket, it's a pile of garbage. And instead of a chair, it's a pile of garbage. And instead of the end of the day, it's the end of time and garbage is all that has survived.'

goods, and, in turn, minimising the number of workers to employ in that process[9]). And yet the hope is that consumers themselves will dispose of their products, and soon, so that they might re-purchase a newer version of them. The system is thus contingent upon extreme efficiency on the side of production, and extreme inefficiency on the side of consumption. It is predicated on the finite lifespan of objects, and the creation of new needs and desires (what the industry refers to as planned, or built-in, obsolescence, which, as Harry Braverman notes, is an 'attempt to gear consumer needs to the needs of production instead of the other way around').[10] For the system to work, the things we buy *need* to break, stop functioning, or go out of fashion, and then be disposed of or turned into something else – for a fee. Built-in obsolescence in the form of product upgrades, new fashions, and expired warranties ensures the perpetual becoming-waste of commodities, which in turn ensures the purchase of replacements. The potential for the component parts of these ex-commodities to be sold off to third parties or recycled into new materials results in their reintegration into the commodity cycle. And so it goes, often, over and over again.

The discourse that emerges from the works discussed in this thesis is thus one of origins and processes: the story behind the discard, the process by which it lost its value, and its geo-physical trajectory from rubbish bin to landfill (or, in the case of Beckett, the story of the vagrant's travels from one dump or landfill to another, and in the case of Loy, his many methods of resisting work). Physical form is important insofar as it is part of the object's story, but ultimately the concern is not with these objects' material composition, but with their role in the composition of narrative and the role that narrative has in 'composing' them. To observe visible waste of any form is to observe the passing of time, be it the decay of an animal carcass or the erosion of a landform. But to observe manufactured waste, be it consumer packaging, construction materials, factory emissions, or out-dated hardware, is to observe the relationship between time and commercial value—the degree to which time can erode or add value, the time it takes before a discarded object is rediscovered, or before it starts emitting toxins. The material aspect of the object is important to the extent that it

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[9] For an account of the relationship between modernisation and the reduction of labour costs, see John Burnett *Idle Hands: The Experience of Unemployment, 1790-1990* (London: Routledge, 1994), especially chapter two (42-77), which examines the effects of technology on handloom weaving, seen, now, as a classic example of the degradation of labour in the wake of technological progress, and chapter three (pp. 78-121), which examines unemployment at the end of the nineteenth century in relation to the deskilling of labour. Harry Braverman's Marxist analysis of the transformation of labour under capitalism, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974) provides a salient overview of the dynamics underlying the transfer of power from worker to owner/manager, and the treatment of the unemployed as surplus entities – pithily summarised in the statement that what characterises capitalism is 'the incessant drive to enlarge and perfect machinery on the one hand, and to diminish the worker on the other' (Braverman, 134; 157). See in particular chapter thirteen (pp. 188-196), in which he discusses the reduction of labour, the growth of unemployment, and the 'clearing of the marketplace of all but the "economically active" and "functioning" members of society' and the emergence of private institutions designed to care for these non-workers.

[10] Harry Braverman. *The Degradation of Work,* 185. See also Susan Strasser. *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999) and Jennifer Seymour Whitaker. *Salvaging the land of plenty: Garbage and the American dream* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994).

influences the narrative—a used tampon is unlikely to be re-used while an old t-shirt stands more of a chance—but ultimately narrative overpowers form.

This is especially the case in instances where the waste object discussed is a metaphor or analogy for something else – which is to say, when the text is using the object to convey, for instance, the marginalisation and perceived worthlessness of a person or an idea. In Loy, references to items of waste (the found object the protagonists, Mrs Jones and Insel, stumble upon along the banks of the Seine, or the suit that Insel deems valuable and Mrs Jones deems waste) serve to heighten our sense of Insel's own superfluity. It is my contention that in this text, as in Beckett's prose, waste produced by humans, and humans deemed superfluous are interrelated. Each serves to draw attention to the other: to heighten the thingness of the person, and the social life of the thing (a point to which I return in the next section).

In this, my approach differs from the vitalist branch of new materialism, which explores the 'thingly power' of matter—its capacity to influence events, and effect change, without human intervention. While I embrace Bruno Latour's view that matter is both material and social, and thus warrants attention both in relation to its physical properties and its symbolic or social function, my contention is that commodification frequently inhibits such scrutiny. I am referring specifically to Latour's concept of 'actants,' which can be either human or inhuman, and of the 'quasi-object.' These, according to Latour, are

> much more social, much more fabricated, much more collective than the "hard" parts of nature [though] in no way the arbitrary receptacles of a full-fledged society. On the other hand they are much more real, nonhuman and objective than those shapeless screens on which society – for unknown reasons – needed to be projected (Latour, 55).

We might consider waste as a quasi-object insofar as it is both the result of a process and the instigator of other processes – pollution, toxicity, the proliferation of plastics in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch – but this takes attention away from the fact that waste's environmental effects are the result of human intervention. In other words, whether we refer to it as a quasi-object or as an actant, manufactured matter is the product of human actions, and of a human system, and in the texts discussed, it is deployed to shed light on human stories.

Thus, my contention is that through commodification, objects cannot help but become signs that refer back to the people who made, used, cast them away or repurposed them. The material qualities that render a commodity desirable – appearance, texture, scent – are inextricable from the social value we ascribe them, and to which we have fixed a price. Where Penny Harvey, for instance, identifies used plastic's potential for re-use as a kind of vitality – in which the object's life is extended – I see a narrative about *people* scavenging, selling, and putting a thing (plastic) to use in a

system that deems that thing useful and worth monetizing.[11] Similarly, where Jane Bennett identifies an important (and terrifying) capacity for toxic devastation in landfill waste, I find it problematic to separate the chemical processes at work in the objects of landfill, and the socially-inscribed processes of production, consumption and disposal that got them there to begin with,[12] not to mention the people whom these processes in turn affect.

I am also hesitant to approach waste as an allegory in the Benjaminian sense, as Julian Stallabrass does in his incensed critique, *GARGANTUA: Manufactured Mass Culture* (1996). For Stallabrass, waste on the street serves to remind us that in contrast to advertising's claim to their 'wholeness,' commodities are 'just stuff' – fragmentary, incomplete stuff.[13] The image of trash, he argues, is perfectly suited to allegory for 'it is as something incomplete and imperfect that the objects stare out from the allegorical structure' (Stallabrass, 178). By separating image and meaning, allegory 'rejects the false appearance of artistic unity and presents itself as a ruin.' In this way, allegory also contains its own self-criticism, for the manifestation of ruin is also indicative of a wrong, or failure: 'Allegory, in showing us images of death and of a mortified nature, also reveals the fixed and arbitrary systems which are responsible for it' (Stallabrass, 179). Thus 'trash reveals the broken utopian promise of the commodity' (Stallabrass, 179). While a powerful conceptualisation (and condemnation) of consumer waste's dystopian associations, this definition errs in the opposite direction to Bennett's vital materialism, reducing waste to 'dead' matter and negating the possibility of its (aesthetic, ontological, commercial) redemption. The story of waste, as attested in the novels under review, is far more complex than either of these readings allows: neither truly 'alive' nor 'dead,' waste exists somewhere in between these two states, reminding us of the 'broken utopian promise of the commodity' as Stallabrass suggests, but also seeking, at every turn, to be made a commodity once more.

Human waste

As the opening reading of Ellis Sharp's novella suggests, there are many different kinds and forms of waste, and not all of them are products of capitalism, or even manufactured by industry. Depending on the context, the term 'waste' might as easily refer to human bodily emissions such as excrement, urine, sweat, semen and menstrual discharge, or to animal excretions. When we consider it in terms other than Appadurai's, waste can be biological or manufactured, visible or invisible, easily decomposable (an apple core) or unlikely to ever decompose (the plastic liner of a sanitary towel). A crushed soft drink can is a waste product, but so too are aerosol and carbon

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[11] 'The Material Politics of Solid Waste: Decentralization and Integrated Systems.' *Objects and Materials: A Routledge Companion.* Ed. Penny Harvey (London: Routledge, 2014), 61-70.

[12] Jane Bennett. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), vii-viii; 4-6.

[13] Julian Stallabrass. *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture* (London: Verso, 1996), 175.

dioxide emissions, automobile exhaust fumes, and smog. As this is a study of the literary depiction of waste deployed in the critique of capitalist ideology, the focus throughout is on manufactured, visible waste – waste that is very obviously caught up in, and part of, the processes of production and consumption, and that the authors in question seek to put to radical use, either by observing and describing it, or by turning it into something else.

However, it is also true that a number of the texts discussed make frequent reference to bodily emissions in the course of their narratives, and that in some cases, as already mentioned, they deploy both manufactured and bodily waste as metaphors (most often for a perceived lack of use-value or aesthetic worth). In certain instances, the use of waste as a metaphor serves to underwrite the perceived worthlessness or marginalisation of a character rather than an object. In Sharp's novella, for instance, as much attention is paid to the inhabitants of the dump, 'lying apathetically in large cardboard boxes bearing the names of supermarket chains' (*TD,* 51) and 'condemned to an active and restless inertia amidst instability and putrefaction' (*TD,* 15) as to the items that surround and house them. The narrator invites us to observe those inhabitants who wake up every day at quarter past six, 'as if still in salaried employment,' and he tells us that their morning routine is indicative of a 'biological clock throbbing in tune to capitalism's awesome requirements' despite there being no office to go to and no work to do (*TD,* 9). Like the food wrappers, pools of urine and dismantled furniture items through which the narrator guides us, The Dump's human inhabitants have no purpose, and that lack of purpose becomes their defining feature. They have internalised the rhythm of the working day but having no employment they exist as husks of 'real people' – the workers who inhabit the real world – and their life, like the life of the waste surrounding, hollowly echoes the more purposeful actions of the real world's citizens.

Ellis's conceptualisation of landfill scavengers as remaindered, or surplus, entities cast out of society due to their perceived lack of use-value is an important theme in a number of the texts discussed in this thesis, and is closely connected, I argue, to a broader exploration of value that runs through all of the works discussed. To this end, I adopt Zygmunt Bauman's term 'human waste,' which he coins in *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (2004) to refer to the '"excessive" and "redundant", that is, the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognised or allowed to stay' – a class of people whose emergence, he argues, is an 'inevitable outcome of modernisation, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity.'[14] To be redundant, Bauman notes, is to be

> supernumerary, unneeded, of no use – whatever the needs and uses are that set the standard of usefulness and indispensability. The others do not need you; they can do as well, and better, without you [...] To be declared redundant means to have been disposed of *because of being disposable* – just like the empty and non-refundable plastic bottle or once-used syringe, an unattractive commodity

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[14] Zygmunt Bauman. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 5.

with no buyers, or a substandard or stained product without use thrown off the assembly line by the quality inspectors. "Redundancy" shares its semantic space with "rejects", "wastrels", "garbage", "refuse" – with *waste.* The destination of the *un*employed, of the "reserve army of labour", was to be called back into active service. The destination of waste is the waste-yard, the rubbish heap' (Bauman, 12).

Redundancy differs from unemployment in its finality, Bauman argues. The reserve army of labour is there to be hired – hence the word 'reserve' – whereas the newly redundant are specifically identified as obsolete. I am hesitant to subscribe entirely to Bauman's reading, which assumes that a person who has been made redundant cannot find employment elsewhere by re-training in another trade (that they cannot, in other words, be 'repurposed' or re-commodified). Such reading also risks, in its slightly sensationalist rhetoric, idealising the condition of the 'reserve army of labour' as empowered. However, Bauman's analysis of the ramifications of modernisation on employment and his use of the metaphor of waste to understand cultural perceptions of unemployment is compelling. What Bauman seizes upon on here is the logical end of capitalist modernity's treatment of human subjects as replaceable – indeed, interchangeable – objects or 'appendage[s] of the machine,' as Marx termed the division of labour.[15] Once a more efficient model of production requiring fewer hands has been found, or when the factory or company downsizes, or when the product is discontinued – in any event, when there ceases to be demand for their labour – the worker-object becomes waste. Having served their purpose, s/he is relegated to the status of surplus, or supernumerary. The marginalisation of the unemployed, and their treatment as obstructions to the 'smooth functioning of economy' (Bauman, 39) is in turn an extension of capitalism's ordering practices. From the perspective of production, the unemployed are human waste since goods can be produced 'more swiftly, profitably and "economically"' without them (Bauman, 39). Lack of income in turn makes the unemployed 'flawed consumers': the consumer market, in other words, deems them human waste since they cannot purchase goods, and since industry cannot respond to, or profit from, the demands that they create (i.e., their need for state welfare). 'Consumers,' Bauman notes, 'are the prime assets of consumer society; flawed consumers are its most irksome and costly liabilities' (Bauman, 39).

These ideas offer a useful point of departure for considering the instances in which humans are depicted as waste in the novels under review. Where I differ from Bauman, however, is in my use of the term 'human waste,' which I apply, in my readings, to both waste manufactured *by* humans, and to humans who are treated *as* waste, in order to draw attention to an explicit and intentional slippage between these two typologies in several of the texts reviewed – a slippage that I argue is central to the adjudication of value under capitalism. Put differently, my contention is that the texts reviewed deploy waste through realist detail and metaphor to say interesting things about not only

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[15] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Classics, 2015 [1848]), 5.

the valuation of objects under capitalism, but also about the valuation of human beings, and about the relationship between the two. Moreover, although we might assume such slippage between the figuration of objects as 'lively' and the figuration of people as 'thingly' to be merely a literary device, my contention is that the overlap between the figuration of surplus humans and rubbish is actually born out of the capitalist system, and is specifically tied to a conceptualisation of unemployment that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, as a result of the first global depression.[16] As Michael Sayeau notes in his study of unemployment in Conrad, the effects of the crisis of 1873 lingered well into the 1890s, and resulted in the first attempts, in the fields of economics and social policy, to actually define and assess unemployment.[17] Following the first inquiry into the problem of joblessness, in 1895, there emerged a new understanding of unemployment not as 'an accidental effect [or] a manifestation of the lack of personal industry or gumption on the part of the jobless individual' but as a '*normal* category of economic life, a structural effect of the wage system and modern industrial competition itself' (Sayeau, 155). Thus, as Bo Strâth describes it,

> The concept of "unemployed" was constructed to express an understanding for deviations from a new emerging "normalcy" involved in wage work and wage agreements. Unemployment, alongside sickness and old age, gradually came to be considered as a "normal" form of work interruption.[18]

Crucially for our purposes, Sayeau also points out that this view of the unemployed – and the growth of that pool – had as palpable an effect on those in work as those out of it. The implementation of F.W. Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), which included the intensification of the individual worker's efforts, and the deskilling of work (as exemplified by the introduction of the assembly line) 'would have been impossible without a permanent well of unemployed workers—Marx's "industrial reserve army"—from which to draw' (Sayeau, 156). One of the long-term effects of the first global depression was thus the creation of a class of superfluous, or remaindered, people whose superfluity was deemed inevitable—a natural, and in some ways useful, component of the capitalist system. To Bauman's assessment of capitalism's view of human waste as an inevitable product – or, as he puts it, 'collateral casualt[y]' – of economic progress (Bauman, 39-41), we can add the populace of those 'disposed of' in periods of crisis and whose disposal serves to dissuade those in work from demanding better working conditions, and the assumption that such disposal is both necessary and normal.

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[16] For an overview of unemployment following the depression of 1873, see Charles P. Kindleberger and Robert Z. Aliber. *Manias, Panics and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005 [fifth edition]), 61, and Miriam Cohen and Michael Hanagan. 'Politics, Industrialization and Citizenship: Unemployment Policy in England, France and the United States, 1890-1950.' *International Review of Social History* 40: S3 (December 1995): 91-129.

[17] Michael Sayeau. *Against the Event: The Everyday and Evolution of Modernist Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 155.

[18] Bo Strâth. *The Organisation of Labour Markets: Modernity, Culture and Governance in Germany, Sweden, Britain, and Japan* (London: Routledge, 1996), 11, as cited in Sayeau, 155.

This initial understanding of the unemployed, I argue, forms an integral, if not always explicit, strand of the story the texts reviewed tell. The figuration of unemployed people as rubbish – or living among rubbish – in Loy's *Insel* and Beckett's mid- to late-prose (and, to a lesser extent, in Breton and de Chirico) throws into relief the extent to which a person's labour-value governs our sense of their worth, and, too, the moral dubiousness of such judgment. It is noteworthy that Igor Kopytoff's conceptualisation of commodification of a 'process of becoming' as opposed to an 'all-or-none state of being,' to which I alluded in my discussion of the commodity, is in fact based on his study of commoditised people in the slave trade in Africa, and in particular on the fluidity of slaves' identity over the course of their careers, including the extent to which they were re-socialised upon purchase (Kopytoff, 73; 64). Indeed, as Bill Brown notes in his reading of Kopytoff's essay, 'However aberrant we take the commodification of humans to be, that process becomes exemplary of commodification itself.'[19] More specifically, Brown notes that 'the spectral completion of commodity fetishism (where things appear to have lives of their own) is human reification (where people appear to be no more than things)' (Brown, 178). Thus, 'the point is not just that social relations appear to the producers as "material [*dinglich*] relations between persons and social relations between things"' but that 'the commodity form itself depends on "the conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things"' (Brown, 178). I argue that both Loy's figuration of a homeless Surrealist who resists making sellable art as a waste item that resists scrutiny, and Beckett's depictions of jobless bums as defunct objects intentionally conjoin superfluous humans and manufactured waste to critique the dehumanising effects of selling one's wares or one's labour-time. Similarly, although social inequality is not the main theme of de Chirico's novel, his depiction of the poor cleaning up the leavings of opulent banquets reminds us that, as Bauman notes, it is very often those 'confined to the rubbish heap' who are entrusted with waste collection (Bauman, 59-60). I will have more to say about this slippage in the chapters themselves; for now, what is most important is to recognise the points of connection between manufactured waste under capitalism, and remaindered (unemployed, unemployable) humans, and that the literary depiction of these different forms of superfluity, as well as the depiction of their rehabilitation, frequently overlap.

The recuperation of waste

The above definitions lead us to consider how the waste-potential of a thing or a person is actually determined. When considered in relation to objects, such a question might appear counterintuitive: after all, the act of disposal would appear to imply that the thing being discarded

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[19] Bill Brown. 'Reification, Reanimation and the American Uncanny' in *Critical Inquiry 32* (Winter 2006): 175-207; citation on 178.

does not bear thinking about. But if we look more closely, it becomes apparent that determining an object's waste-potential is a complex process governed by multiple factors: the passage of time, which wears the object down or renders it obsolete, and the consumer's *realization,* or *decision,* that it no longer serves a purpose. The decision to discard involves thinking about our relationship with the object, how its original use has changed, and whether that change can be reconciled (Can we mend the jumper? Can we cut the mould off the cheese? Could that broken tape recorder be deemed an antique?). If we have decided that that change *can* be reconciled, the object's waste-potential is countered by its potential to be recuperated, salvaged and even re-commodified.

The different forms that this return from the garbage grave can take – and what happens when it does not lead all the way back into the marketplace, but stalls somewhere along the way – is one of the central focuses of this thesis. Thus by recuperation I not only intend actual re-use (such as the inclusion of waste objects in collage) or re-purposing (the mending of a broken object). Rather, I extend the idea to encompass any recognition or attribution of meaning, based on the premise that to investigate the story of an object's manufacture, its owner, or the culture from which it emerged is to recognise its historiographical and ontological value (not to mention its potential ongoing use value). To spend time thinking about why an object ended up in the trash, and to imagine the life of its owner, is to re-introduce that object into a signifying system: in this case, a narrative system as opposed to a commercial one. The texts under review show us that recuperation is not confined to turning bicycle handlebars into bulls' heads or recycling plastic; recuperation is at work in any instance in which an item is recognised as having other values beyond that which it has purportedly lost. It is to recognise a broken violin as inherently beautiful, and an apt mantelpiece decoration; it is to recognise the sentimental import of a child's first pair of shoes, the historical significance of an old cereal box, the anthropological significance of a basement full of old porcelain dolls. And, too, it is to recognise that the lifespan of objects – which is to say, their capacity to serve their original function – is far longer than the consumer economy would have us believe. In their very different ways, the novels under review are but a reflection of a dialogue that has been taking place over the last century in homes, shops, factories, offices, museums, libraries and junkyards across the developed world. They invite us to think about what it means to be deemed irrelevant, démodé or beyond repair. They remind us that there are many ways to not want, many reasons to discard, and many ways to recuperate—and they encourage us to dwell on those instances when the imperative is not heroic, and when the salvaging act itself is problematic.

Indeed, as well as exploring the aesthetic or ontological potential of re-use, the texts under review also question and criticize recuperation, as attested in Beckett by his characters' refusal to do anything with waste but roll around in it. A passage from *Capital* provides a useful example of

the potentially dubious morality of recuperation. In his illustration of the purchase and sale of labour-power, Marx describes the common practice, among many 19th-century bakers, of product adulteration.[20] Adulterating bread 'with alum, soap, pearl ashes, chalk, Derbyshire stone-dust, and such like agreeable nourishing and wholesome ingredients' cut production costs, which bakers could then pass on to their consumers – workers who did not receive a wage until the end of the week, and thus could not afford full-price, unadulterated bread (*C,* 238). For Marx, such adulteration exemplifies the capacity for labour exploitation to create new types of demand (in this case, cheaper food for under-paid workers), that in turn sustain and perpetuate the system's inequality. From a purely practical point of view, the introduction of ashes and chalk into bread dough is a brilliant instance of recycling. From a human point of view, it is deplorable: the effect of this putting-to-use of waste is malnutrition, while the business model itself is predicated on the desperation of the consumer.

The ethical dimension to recuperation is raised by many of the writers figured in this thesis, reaching a crisis point in DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), in the discussion of the atomic bomb's use-value. Near the novel's opening, the assemblage artist Klara Sax cites Oppenheimer's name for the atomic bomb, *merde.*[21] She notes: 'He meant that something that eludes naming is automatically relegated [...] to the status of shit. You can't name it. It's too big or evil or outside your experience. It's also shit because it's garbage, it's waste material' (*U,* 78). The bomb's categorization as shit is both an insult, and an explicit reference to the debunking, following the fall of the Soviet Union, of its symbolic role throughout the Cold War, as a guarantee of national security. It is garbage, because its protective function has been rendered obsolete. The reader does not understand the full import of this statement until the very last section of the novel, aptly titled *Das Kapital,* in which its protagonist, the waste management expert Nick Shay, visits a plant in Kazakhstan that merchandises nuclear explosions as a means to destroy contaminated nuclear waste (*U,* 785). In this way, weaponry is used to annihilate its own 'dark multiplying byproduct,' as Viktor terms it, in what amounts to a subversion of recycling -- a kind of self-erasure, in which materials are used to undo their own 'secret history', rather than make something new.

The other aspect that these texts have in common is their amplification of recuperation's absurd, unsettling or even pathological qualities. A scavenger's detailed description of the contents of a trash bag may sadden or horrify us due to the social codes that equate scavenging with uncleanliness or desperation. To fish out a sandwich or a pair of shoes from a trash bin is at best a mark of disregard for basic hygiene, and at worst a sign of misplaced ideology or outright madness.

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[20] Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy.* Transl. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983 [1867]), 238. Henceforth C.

[21] Don DeLillo. *Underworld* (New York: Picador), 77. Henceforth, *U.* See also Ray Monk. *Inside the Centre: The Life of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), 433.

In Jonathan Miles' post-recession novel, *Want Not* (2013), the novel's freegan protagonists Micah and Talmadge may champion the ethical benefits of freeganism, but to their friends they are merely deluded.[22] In Beckett's novels, we *know* that the vagrants sifting through tips are mad: they've told us so repeatedly.[23] In each case however the narrative acclimatises us to the madness, suggesting its utility, and exposes us to its radical potential.

My readings, in this thesis, of the radical potential of waste collection and scavenging are partly informed by recent developments in the realms of queer theory and material culture studies regarding the politics of hoarding. According to Randy O. Frost and Rachel C. Gross's 'The Hoarding of Possessions' – one of the first efforts to formally diagnose the condition and study it in something other than sociological or psychoanalytic terms – is the acquisition of, and failure to discard, possessions which appear to be useless or of limited value.'[24] Clinical psychologist Randy Frost and social worker Gail Steketee specify that hoarders make no distinction between objects of worth and waste, and that such mixing of 'objects (and sometimes money) […] with trash is a symptom of psychological dysfunction.'[25] Scott Herring and Martin F Manalansan, however, compellingly argue that hoarding is also a fundamentally disruptive, radical act and suggest how this 'wayward relationship to material objects' might be seen as queer.[26] The accrual of trash, and the collecting practices of the displaced, marginalized or mentally ill, interrupts traditional subject-object relations and, in Herring's words, upsets 'normative social boundaries.'[27] In attending to the cultural history of hoarding, including its causal relationship to urbanisation and industrial modernity, its depiction in literature from Dickens to the present day, and developments in its assessment by the medical community, these scholars also show how our codification of hoarding as a 'disease,' like our codification of other waste disposal practices, is shaped by heteronormative, capitalist interests.

Indeed, the very definition of hoarding as the amassing of waste, and as a pathological disorder, is very recent. Herring notes that until the 19th century, hoarding was associated with miserliness and the accrual of wealth as embodied in George Eliot's *Silas Marner*—thus William James' writings on the topic are concerned with his subjects' extreme attachment to money

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[22] Jonathan Miles. *Want Not* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2013).

[23] See Samuel Beckett. *Molloy* (1951/1955), *Malone Dies* (1956) and *The Unnameable* (1958) in *Trilogy* (London: John Calder, 1959). See also *Stories and Texts For Nothing* (New York: Grove, 1967; London: Calder & Boyars, 1974).

[24] Randy O. Frost and Rachel C. Gross. 'The hoarding of possessions.' *Behaviour Research and Therapy*. 31. 4 (May 1993): 367-382. Citation on 367.

[25] Gail Steketee and Randy Frost. 'Compulsive Hoarding: Current Status of the Research.' *Clinical Psychology Review* 23. 7 (2003): 905–27, citation on 907.

[26] Martin F Manalansan IV. 'The "Stuff" of Archives: Mess, Migration and Queer Lives.' *Radical History Review* 120 (Fall 2014): 94-107.

[27] Scott Herring. 'Material Deviance: Theorizing Queer Objecthood.' *Postmodern Culture* 21. 2 (2011): 45; Scott Herring. *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Martin F Manalansan IV. 'The "Stuff" of Archives: Mess, Migration and Queer Lives.' *Radical History Review* 120 (Fall 2014): 94-107.

(although James also notes hoarders' willingness to accrue 'anything besides').[28] By contrast, the hoarder of waste and effluvia – the person who fills up his or her home with old newspapers and bric-a-brac and other items of little worth, to the point of being buried beneath them – is a far more recent phenomenon. We do find a few instances of such practices in 19th-century literature (Nikolai Gogol's miser in *Dead Souls* is also an obsessive collector of trash, so much so that 'after him, there was no need to sweep the streets'; Krook, the rag and bottle merchant in Dickens's *Bleak House,* never actually sells off the scraps he collects[29])*.* However, hoarding first gained true notoriety in the 1930s, due to the much-publicised story of Homer and Langley Collyer, two wealthy brothers who filled their mansion in Harlem with trash, and eventually died under the mountains of debris. In 'Collyer Curiosa,' Herring argues that the brothers' story is very specifically modern, born out of (or perhaps more to the point, dismantling), a markedly new relationship to material goods. Herring traces the shifts in the public and academe's perception of the Collyer case over the course of the last century, and argues that the very recent pathologisation of hoarding reflects a heteronormative, capitalist, view of the world – one in which anyone who deviates from participating in the cycle of purchase and disposal is deemed diseased or disorderly (Herring, 179). Instead, both Herring and Manalansan invite us to consider the reparative dimension to hoarding and similarly deviant practices, and how they might serve to challenge dominant cultural values. Herring quotes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's recognition of the pleasure to be found in the '"over"-attachment to fragmentary, marginal, waste, or leftover products"'[30] – a pleasure that is fundamentally subversive – while Manalansan reads the attachment of undocumented immigrant workers in New York City to objects found on the street as reflective of a precarious, fundamentally unstable lifestyle (Manalansan, 104). In each of these instances, the critic examines the extent to which the assumptions we make about those who collect waste – or live among it – are born out of a specific paradigm, and consider what fresh perspectives we might gain from seeing the world through their eyes.

The view of scavenging and hoarding as a disruptive, deviant or reparative process practiced by the marginalised and contingent is acutely relevant to the ideas discussed in this study. Herring, Manalansan and Sedgwick reveal how the recuperation of effluvia involves thinking otherwise. To look at scavenging or hoarding involves assessing objects and people outside 'normative social boundaries' and opening one's self up to the possibility of permeating those boundaries, challenging them, and perhaps even shattering them. The texts discussed in this thesis likewise

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[28] Scott Herring. 'Collyer Curiosa: A Brief History of Hoarding.' *Criticisms* 53. 2 (2011): 159-88.

[29] Fred Penzel. 'Hoarding in History.' *The Oxford Handbook of Hoarding and Acquiring.* Ed. Randy O. Frost and Gail Steketee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-13. Citations on 5 and 6.

[30] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading.' *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*. Ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 28, as cited in Scott Herring. 'Material Deviance: Theorizing Queer Objecthood.' *Postmodern Culture* 21. 2 (2011): 45.

invite us to acknowledge the inherent humour in our efforts to codify our excretions, in our differentiation between 'normal' forms of accrual and 'diseased,' and, too, in their own efforts to provide an alternative narrative. Ellis Sharp's psychotic scavenger, for instance, humorously parodies how objects and people are put to use under capitalism and in so doing artfully normalises the lifestyle of his fellow Dumpster-dwellers. The narrator recalls meeting a young man in The Dump holding up a placard with the word 'ANUS' on it: 'At first I admired his flexible attitude to market realities. Having nothing to sell other than his body he was prepared to rent out any orifice that might earn him a few pennies from a passing sodomite' (*TD,* 50). But as it turns out, the young man is not a gigolo but a semi-literate dyslexic masturbator, 'ANUS' being a misspelling of 'A SUN,' the English tabloid. He is not selling his body but merely looking to get an old copy of the paper. Sharp's text asks us, what is worse: prostitution, or amassing old newspapers? Surely in this instance, hoarding is the more dignified option? Similarly, the entire premise of Breton's *Nadja* is to derive meaning from rubbish and to relish the looks of disdain of passers-by. The plot of Loy's novel is driven by Insel's avoidance of his friend's efforts to turn him into a commercially successful artist – by remaining human waste, he resists allowing himself to be commodified. Finally, Beckett's vagrants use the wastelands through which they move to live outside the capitalist paradigm: they put waste to use in order not to be put to use themselves. Each of these texts explores if and how waste might be utilised to enjoin us to think otherwise.

Symbols of transience and change

Much of the aesthetic merit of the texts under review can be ascribed to their conceptualization of human waste as material evidence of change, and in their exploration of how such waste informs our experience of what came before, and what comes after. In fixing their gaze on domestic discards and industrial by-products as well as human beings deemed obsolete or irrelevant, the writers I examine provide a startling view of the transient nature of culture under capitalism and the hold that commercial value has on the public imagination. To an extent, then, the estranging effect of these depictions can be ascribed to their identification of waste as the embodiment of the dark side of capitalist modernity: they reveal to us the ephemeral nature of the ideas we hold dear by demonstrating how quickly the recent past becomes irrelevant at the toll this value system has on human lives. By selecting an object from this pile of cast-offs and putting it on display, we not only counter its lack of practical use value or out-datedness with an assertion of historical, aesthetic or ontological worth. We also remind ourselves of the sheer peculiarity of the ontological or affective ascription(s) we once gave it. To observe a person who mimics the cycle of consumption and production, but with crushed bottle cans – or in the case of Beckett's Molloy,

sucking stones – is to be faced with the absurdity of the market economy of which we ourselves are a part.

Simultaneously endearing and off-putting, domestic and industrial waste can be seen as embodying Sigmund Freud's definition of the uncanny—'the familiar made strange,' a thing that elicits at once a keen sense of recognition, and wary diffidence. [31] The uncanny nature of consumer waste is perhaps most evident in the works of the French Surrealists, who were greatly influenced by Freud and profoundly interested in the life of the unconscious. But the uncanny element of waste remains a prevalent theme throughout the latter half of the century as well: for to resist rational understanding or linear explication is also to resist commercial valuation. The texts in the first two chapters sully the bourgeois logic of capitalist discourse by juxtaposing the past with the present in a-chronological narratives that make no attempt at creating order out of experience. The things the capitalist system throws out are re-integrated within the system of the novel in a different process of putting-to-use; the repressed rears its head, and moves to the narrative's centre. In this way, the novel form itself provides an alternative history (although, to be sure, the novel's own participation in the marketplace makes this putting-to-use a form of commodification, as well). André Breton's depiction of artist-producers working with cast-offs counters the dominant history of mass production, while Loy's depiction of a homeless artist resisting being made to produce new work, and Beckett's depictions of bums wading through undifferentiated waste, are a counter to the dominant narrative of individual progress and achievement.

However, the uncanny or phantasmagoric aspect of waste only partially explains the significance of the last century's literary engagements with waste, and thus it is only part of the story this thesis tells. The other part has to do with human beings' long-standing tendency to ascribe meaning to bodily emissions and spoils. Societies throughout the ages have codified what to do with excrement, carcasses, broken tools and weapons, or architectural ruins. And in most cases these rituals of avoidance or disposal had both religious and pragmatic functions: to abide by them was to practice good hygiene, but also good citizenship. Archaeologist Astrid Lindenlauf has demonstrated that the Ancient Greeks from the Homeric period onward not only had sophisticated waste management and disposal practices, and developed a semantic system around notions of impurity, but also operated recycling infrastructures that allowed the re-use and re-processing of building materials, potsherds and statues. These processes had both practical and symbolic value, allowing for the conspicuous re-contextualisation of the past as a reminder or celebration of

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[31] Sigmund Freud. 'The "Uncanny"' (1919). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*: *Vol. XVII,* Ed. James Strachey (Hogarth Press: London, 1955), 228-256.

charged historical events.[32] Similarly, the medievalist Dolly Jorgensen has shown the dual significance of sanitation in the medieval period.[33] In her study of sanitation laws in medieval Britain (1400-1600), Jorgensen demonstrates the strong correlation between the concepts of sanitation and cleanliness, and the concept of good rule: the evolution of sanitation management occurred in tandem with the evolution of city rule.[34] Approaches to ordering and systematising the city's waste matter developed as a result of structural changes in government, but also influenced them.

What these very different examples have in common is the correlation between basic necessities common to any kind of collective living situation (the avoidance of bad smells and sickly sights, and the prevention of disease), and broader ideological constructs relating to history, the dead, otherness/alterity, and the volition of a superior being. It is the correlation between waste's long-standing instigation of fear, awe and dread and its estranging effect in consumer culture that makes it such a compelling subject in the last century's literature. In these works we see up close the affinities and overlap between an almost ingrained, primordial dread of animal and human bodily emissions and a systematised, quantified, regulated abhorrence towards the by-products of production and the relics of consumption. To the Medieval veneration of saints' body parts we find a counter in the depiction of sanitation engineers at the turn of the century, and the parodic depiction of health and safety inspectors. To Genesis' account of man's creation from mud we find a counter in Dickens' depiction of the primordial muck of London's sewage-infested streets, and the poor wading through them. The narratives of consumer and industrial waste depicted by Western writers over the last century play on the contrasts between social norms and ideologies dating back to early modernity, and new modes of relating to the material world under capitalism. The artist picking up street-side bric-a-brac and old furniture; the vagrant sifting through someone else's rubbish or wading through a municipal landfill; the solitary individual contemplating the vast expanse of a recycling centre or a dump at dusk are compelling not only in their exemplification of a radical socio-cultural shift in the ascription of value to objects and people. They are also reflections of a much longer-standing, perhaps immemorial, concern with our relationship to time, our relationship to each other, and our relationship to the earth. These are meditations on change, and on the changing nature of value, but they are also investigations into what constitutes value, and

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[32] Astrid Lindenlauf. *Waste Management in Ancient Greece, from the Homeric to the Classical Period: Concepts and Practices of Waste, Dirt, Disposal and Recycling* (2000), 160. http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1317693/1/271246_Vol_1.pdf. Accessed 14 May 2013.

[33] Dolly Jorgensen. 'The Medieval sense of smell, stench and sanitation' in *Les cinq sens de la ville du Moyen Age a nos jours.* Ed. Ulrike Krampl, Robert Beck and Emmanuelle Retaillaud-Bajac (Tours: Presses Universitaires Francois-Rabelais, 2013), 301-313.

[34] Dolly Jorgensen. '"All good rule of the Citee"': Sanitation and civic government in England, 1400-1600' in *Journal of Urban History* 36.3 (2010), 300-315.

explorations of the dissonance between that modern ascription and earlier ascriptions of moral, spiritual, and aesthetic worth.[35]

The case for literature

While waste has been depicted in a variety of media, from collage and assemblage to poetry, theatre and cinema, the novel form provides a unique focal point for the questions this thesis addresses. Visual culture since the beginning of the century has employed waste to test the limits of form and media, but the novel form has both anticipated and amplified these discussions. The concept of collage, with its introduction of different materials into the frame, revolutionised the very definition of visual representation, lending it an intertextual dimension. But one might argue that intertextuality in literature is nothing new: all writing borrows or refers back to some prior form. To write is to in part replicate, in part re-use, and in part re-fashion. Representations of waste and of re-appropriations and reconfigurations of waste, draw our attention to that intertextuality, particularly in instances when the author uses language that enacts the idea of cyclicality via the use of repetition or citation.

The extent to which literature in the last century has engaged with manufactured and bodily waste forms, then, raises questions of its own. There are many ways to critique capitalist commodity culture, as attested by the myriad anti-consumerist novels of the last century that don't feature scavengers or junk artists. And yet waste recurs in literary critiques of commodity culture often enough to suggest these writers' identification of its importance – ironically, its *use* – in their narratives. But why? What imaginative and political import do a trashcan or a landfill or a toilet bowl have that other modern inventions don't?

There are several answers to this question, the first of which has to do with form. As something that we seek to dispose of discreetly and forget, waste – and particularly domestic and industrial waste – lends itself to the realist project. Realism is concerned with the recovery of the multifarious infinitesimally small details that make up human experience. Each detail adds to the overarching sense that we are contemplating real life. An overflowing trash bin, a crumpled paper napkin, the leftovers of a meal, an empty bottle (instead of, say, a plate full of food, or a letter, or a new pair of shoes) lend themselves to the task of realism because *they have no other function.* As readers, we

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[35] The long-standing twinning of cleanliness and morality and the harrowing history of 'cleansing' society of entire ethnicities or subcultures are both outside the scope of this thesis. However, they should be acknowledged, for along with the capitalist ideology of efficient production for maximum output, the concept of impurity as a justification to eradicate otherness is a central tenet in 20th-century literary representations of waste, and the lexicon of cleanliness and purity remains an overwhelmingly prevalent tool in propaganda today. Tricia Starks, for example, provides a compelling account of hygiene's symbolic role in Soviet propaganda in *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009). Kristin Ross likewise reads cleanliness as a defining trope of postwar French culture, relating it to anxieties about Empire, racial otherness, and the reconstruction effort (Kristin Ross. *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995)).

implicitly recognise the objects in a narrative that are important to the plot, and those that are just there to create a sense of authenticity—what Roland Barthes, in *The Rustle of Language* (1967), terms the 'reality effect,' as exemplified by the role of the barometer in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.[36]

In this sense, the logic driving the novel form is analogous to the logic of capitalism: everything must be put to use – a concept that Franco Moretti suggests, as well, in *The Novel: Vol I* (2006) and, more recently, in *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (2013)*, where he dates the emergence of 'mediating' or 'catalytic' events (events of no import beyond that of driving the plot forward), to the early 19th century, and ascribes their pervasion, by the early 20th century, to the rationalizing tendencies of bourgeois society.[37] There is an important difference, of course, since for Barthes the function of objects in narrative is inherent: the reality effect is created by their very presence within the text. They are useful to the narrative by virtue of their existence – and, specifically, in their uselessness (we might differentiate, for instance, between a knife on a kitchen table that is there simply to convey the realism of the kitchen setting, and a knife that is there to be used as a murder weapon). Capitalism, by contrast, has to first *find ways* to put things to use. In other words, the realist detail is like a plastic bottle that sells itself, as opposed to a recycled plastic bottle being marketed by society for profit. For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to recognise that the *impulse* driving the two systems is the same.

This brings us to the difference between the narrative value of objects and that of waste objects. While ordinary objects are used by the characters, waste objects are used by the *narrative* to amplify the characters' authenticity. At the same time, however, a lengthy description of waste objects has the opposite effect. Rather than simply taking in the details and assimilating them into our sense of the narrative as a whole, we wonder *why* the novelist has indulged in so much detail, whether we should be mentally taking note of the descriptive style and the items listed, and whether their meaning adds up to more than the sum of their parts.

In some cases, of course, the depiction of waste serves both purposes: it can be a means to create a reality effect, while simultaneously gesturing towards a broader metaphysical meaning, or a subtextual narrative. We are invited to think of the waste object as both a physical entity and as an instantiation of narrative, of process. If the city's trash collectors go on strike, the things you have consumed and excreted in the last week, month, year, will linger in the courtyard, piling up and up and up until the neighbourhood's inhabitants can't breathe for the smell, and flies and foxes

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[36] Roland Barthes. 'The Reality Effect' (1967). *The Rustle of Language*. Transl. Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 141-148. I provide a more thorough analysis of Barthes' theory in my second chapter.
[37] Franco Moretti. 'Serious Century.' *The Novel, Volume I: History, Geography and Culture.* Ed. Franco Moretti et al. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 364-399; Moretti expands on these ideas in 'Serious Century.' *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (London: Verso, 2013), 67-100.

and rats set up home on your doorstep. If your local government decides to dispose of toxic refuse in the groundwater system, the city's water will be polluted and you will die. In each of these cases, the waste is not only the result of a narrative; it is the *instigator* of one.

Indeed, Dickens' oft-quoted opening in *Bleak House* (1852-1853) perhaps exemplifies the novelist's understanding of the narrative role of waste and the degree to which this narrative extends from modernity back to the beginning of time.[38] 'There is as so much mud in the streets,' the omniscient narrator tells us, 'as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill' (*BH*, 18). Thus the narrator explicitly relates the modern urban *milieu* to the pre-human. This mud is not only the effect of the 'tens of thousands of other foot passengers [who] have been slipping and sliding' in it 'since the day broke (if the day ever broke);' the reference to the Megalosaurus suggests that it has been here since the beginning of time: the city may have sprung in the meantime, and commuters' passage may have 'add[ed] new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest;' but these are only recent phenomena. Dickens counters capitalism's notion of time with a reminder of the epochal time scale that preceded it. In this way, Dickens not only provides a realistic, and humorous, account of the messy, unhygienic conditions of the city's streets: he relates the life of the city to the pre-historic, reminding us that all life begins in the mulch, from the original story of God's creation of mankind from mud, to his own narrative. In this context, we see waste function as both a device of realism and as a mythical trope, relating the novel's modern concerns to long-standing ones.

Relatedly, literary depictions of waste amplify the novel's concern with subjectivity. To read is to enter into a contract with the author, an agreement to consider the world of the narrative through their eyes as well as one's own; but to read about waste is to be reminded of the (often extreme) dissonance between those two perspectives: for if in real life we shudder at the sight of garbage, or neglect to even notice it, as readers we know to pause, and look closer. We know that we are being invited to think beyond our automatic assumptions, to query what ulterior meanings are contained in the banana skin or the crumpled sweet wrapper. Even in those instances in which the depiction's function is solely a realist one – to convince us that this is an authentic alleyway or abandoned neighbourhood – it still makes us pause. Literature primes us, like children, to look for the meaning within things: as readers, we cannot help but ponder what the protagonist's trash bag contains, anticipate that the sticky sludge pooling out from under his sink is toxic, imagine that the foul smell coming from his neighbours' house is evidence of a dead body, and assume the bric-a-

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[38] Charles Dickens. *Bleak House* (Oxford University Classics, 1996 [1852-1853]), 17. Henceforth, *BH.*

brac he finds in a flea market or car boot sale has a redemptive or at least revelatory purpose. The author guides us in the direction of those thoughts, but so, too, do our imaginations. And, crucially, the imaginative leap required to understand a character's fascination with an object of waste is greater than that required to understand desire for money or material goods: it involves a logical inversion, and thus reminds us, acutely, of the subjectivity of lived experience itself. In reading the narrative of a landfill dweller or a dumpster diver, we are reminded of the distance between self and other, but we are invited, too, to seek out the affinities between the two.

In this sense, it is only fitting that the novel form, traditionally invested in the life of people, should also be acutely alive to the imaginative import of humanity's discards, particularly when the process by which those discards came to be is a systemic one. The novel form is concerned with origins and endings, with transformation, with the trajectories that individuals and societies travel, be these over the course of a day or a lifetime. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that novelists see, in our discards, a material record of everything that has made us who we are now, either on an individual or a collective level. The traditional novel form, in perhaps not so dissimilar a way from primitive cultures' purifying rites, seeks to create unity and order and form out of experience; the experimental movements that have followed since the form's inception may challenge that unity, or interrogate that order, or suggest that experience is fundamentally neither unified nor ordered, but they have not disavowed the imaginative import of the elements that make up experience, and the fact that whether we pay attention to those elements or not has largely to do with how much narrative value we attribute to them. Waste – be it consumer, industrial or bodily waste – is at the centre of this discourse. It draws attention to itself by resisting to or complying with our efforts to organise, unify, or monetise it; by suggesting that there is more to its presence than simple description; and, finally, by inviting questions about its origins, and why it was discarded, what its enduring presence might signify, and whether leaving it there will have consequences.

As a material form with undeniable physical attributes – stench, unseemly appearance, toxic fumes – waste lends itself to narratives that investigate both process and the repercussions of process. If you don't eat the sandwich in the fridge within a week, it will grow mould, and smell; if you eat it, it will give you food poisoning. If you throw it out, you might feel a pang of guilt for having wasted it, or relief since you didn't want to eat it in the first place. To be sure, the story of a moulding sandwich is perhaps not the most fascinating of tales – although it is worth noting the many early- and mid-20th-century novels that deal with precisely such marginalia.[39] The point, however, is that there is a narrative there, and that the novel form considers it worth telling.

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[39] One thinks, in particular, of Georges Perec's novella, 'A Man Asleep' (1967), which narrates in minute detail the heremitic existence of a young man in his bedroom, looking at the cracks in his ceiling and his socks rotting in the sink. See

In light of this, it is perhaps no surprise that as the century unfolds, the acknowledgement of waste's literary merit is coupled with a sense of urgency, a sense that this is not only stuff *worth* telling, but in need of telling. Such urgency, moreover, is not solely confined to narratives that interrogate capitalist excess: rather, it manifests itself in numerous postwar novels addressing the ramifications of totalitarian regimes, genocide and nuclear holocaust, in which waste is figured as all that which any hegemonic system deems of no value. These are not critiques of capitalism, but they are critiques of a particular system of oppression in which one social strata or race is valued above another; they are narratives in which the marginalised or oppressed are treated as waste – relegated, in other words, to the status of human waste – and in which writing provides a means to speak out against that treatment. The most extreme and literal example of this, of course, can be found in narratives about the Jewish Holocaust, in which we find detailed recollections of piled up corpses and accounts of internment camp dwellers being made to dig graves for fellow inmates who have died. In these narratives, the notion of a superior race and of an inferior one that belongs to the scrapheap is subverted to the extent that the scraps in the heap are allowed to speak. As a recuperative act, the Holocaust survivor's recorded experience is the antithesis of the Nazis' own recycling practices: to the horrific process of annihilating a race and then using its remainders to make lampshades, the author finds (some) redemption in the articulation of the experience, in making those horrors known. Thus in Primo Levi's *If this is a man* (1947), the militant systems of hygiene in effect in the Nazi internment camps are related in great detail in order to convey the full horror of the concept of ethnic cleansing; but, too, we are repeatedly reminded that this is a written record, and that the act of writing the text we hold in our hands has had a reparative use.[40] The capacity to find words capable of expressing the experience, and the fact that there is a world willing to receive those words, attest to language's capacity to reclaim meaning from waste.[41]

In broader terms, however, waste, or more specifically, human waste, functions as an apt theme for not only holocaust or genocide, but of any failed or broken social system, of any process of degeneration. Indeed, it is worth mentioning the fierce debate amongst Marxist theorists in the 1970s and 1980s after the full extent of environmental degradation in the Eastern European states was disclosed, undermining the view that capitalist industrialization was the sole source of the ecological crisis. Although the controversy has subsided (the consensus amongst ecological Marxists today being that however poorly it may have played out in Eastern Europe, socialism per se has the potential to re-dress the environmental ills of capitalism, as it is not predicated on endless

Georges Perec. '*Things: A Story of the Sixties*' and '*A Man Asleep*.' Transl. Andrew Leak (London: Vintage, 1999 [1965/1967]).

[40] Primo Levi. *Se questo é un uomo* (Einaudi: Torino, 2012 [1947]).

[41] Tadeusz Rozewicz. *Zawsze fragment. Recycling* (1996). Transl. Tony Howard and Barbara Plebanek (London: Arc: 2001). Originally published in Polish by Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie Press.

expansion, growth, and use of natural resources in the same way as capitalism), it *is* indicative of the difficulty of ascribing 'blame' so to speak to any one system. [42] As a form concerned with human behaviour, with processes, and with the narratives that connect people to each other, the novel cannot but be attuned to the anthropological aspects of human waste. Thus, for instance, the sight of an overflowing rubbish bin outside a character's house or an overpowering stench emanating from under their front door is a sign that the inhabitant is unwell, or dead, or past the point of caring about basic norms such as bathing or disposing of their excretions.

J.G. Ballard takes this concept to the extreme in *High-Rise* (1975),[43] which depicts the devolving social structure of a luxury apartment block two miles east of the City of London as a process of habituation, and willingness to live amid waste. Ballard foreshadows this devolution early in the novel, by intimating the unsavoury secrets contained in the residents' garbage bags, while the first signs of unrest are hinted at in their petty disputes over blocked garbage disposal chutes (*HR,* 40). As the tenants gradually abandon all social propriety they also grow less squeamish, and entirely disregard the garbage accumulating around them. Indeed, we see them hold cocktail parties in the middle of rooms piled high with debris:

> Along corridors strewn with uncollected garbage, past blocked disposal chutes and vandalised elevators, moved men in well-tailored dinner jackets. Elegant women lifted long skirts to step over the debris of broken bottles […] The scents of expensive aftershave lotions mingled with the aroma of kitchen wastes […] marking the extent to which these civilised and self possessed professional men and women were moving away from any notion of rational behaviour (*HR,* 103-104).

Once the violence starts, garbage becomes a tool of aggression: the tenants fling human faeces on walls and block the ventilation shafts with dog excrement. This is a novel about the dismantling of civilisation and its class structures; Ballard shows us the extent to which that involves the dismantling of our socialised understanding of waste. Thus by the novel's end, the civilised order of the building's social hierarchy has spectacularly fallen apart, together with the technologies that kept the building itself functional: once discreetly disposed of, the tenants' unseemly secrets are evident for all to see. The piling up of fetid waste is material evidence that humanity's atavistic impulses have been fully disclosed.

In this sense, Ballard's garbage has both a realist function (to render palpable the devolution into civil unrest) and a metaphorical one. Debris in the high-rise's parking lot is the only marker the outside world has of the luxury apartment block's transformation into a primitive dystopia (*HR,* 156). The casual flinging of slop and glass bottles from the apartment balconies is explicitly likened to the norms of 19th-century tenements. And the obsolescence of domestic appliances, of television, even of the garbage disposal chutes themselves (supplanted by the now malfunctioning

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[42] For an extensive overview of this discussion, see *The Greening of Marxism.* Ed. Ted Benton (London: Guilford, 1996).

[43] J. G. Ballard. *High-Rise* (London: Flamingo/Harper Collins, 2003 [1975])*. Henceforth, *HR.*

elevators) is interpreted by Ballard's protagonist, Laing, as dislocating the high-rise from linear time: it is no longer clear whether these debris are relics of the past, or emblems of the future. They are merely evidence of change, as attested by Laing's contemplation of his 'derelict washing-machine and refrigerator, now only used as garbage bins,' his difficulty in remembering their original function, and his realisation that in the process of losing it, they have 'taken on a new significance, a role that he ha[s] yet to understand' (*HR,* 167). In the new world order of the high-rise, 'everything [is] either derelict or, more ambiguously, recombined in unexpected but more meaningful ways' (*HR,* 167). To navigate their way through this new world, the characters must interpret the meanings of these new combinations.

This brings us to the final reason for focussing on the novel form: the idea underlying all of the novels under discussion in this thesis is that language and narrative have a unique capacity to reclaim meaning out of waste, even when it resists commodification or logical interpretation. Narrative provides a means to glean understanding from the 'unexpected but more meaningful' combinations in which waste is often cast. For instance, the anonymous narrator of Ivan Klíma's *Love and Garbage* (1986) identifies an inherent affinity between writing and collecting waste.[44] Like his author, the narrator is a former member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. He has turned down a prestigious academic post in the United States, and abandoned a half-finished work on Kafka, to instead clean the streets of his native Prague. He has chosen 'this unattractive occupation' to gain an 'unexpected view of the world,' for 'unless you look at the world and at people from a new angle your mind will get blunted' (*LG,* 2).

Waste collection provides that fresh angle. For instance, the protagonist's realisation that reclaiming metal from old cars merely 'transform[s] them into new rubbish, only slightly increased in quantity' (*LG,* 15) only serves to confirm his overriding theory, articulated throughout the novel, that:

> No matter ever vanishes. It can, at most, change its form. Rubbish is immortal, it pervades the air, swells up in water, dissolves, rots, disintegrates, changes into gas, into smoke, into soot, it travels across the world and gradually engulfs it' (*LG,* 6).

The narrator's own career trajectory from writer to garbage collector marks a reverence for this enduring but ultimately unknowable matter. The day-to-day life of the street sweeper, he suggests, bears strong affinities to the day-to-day life of the writer; perhaps, in fact, the experience of street sweeping might bring something to bear on his work, should he choose to return to it. For to deal in discards is to move out of step with society, and to pay heed to all of the things society no longer notices. Like the novelist, the street sweeper is acutely attuned to the passage of time: each

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[44] Ivan Klíma. *Love and Garbage* (London: Picador, 1990 [1986]), 2. Originally published in Czech by Ceskoslovenský spisovatel. Henceforth, *LG.*

item he sweeps up is a reminder of the past tense, an event that has already occurred, of people who have come and gone, of things past their prime. In depicting the process of waste collection, Klíma suggests, his narrator endows the absurdity of his existence with something approaching meaning.

From scavenging to window-shopping

To fully understand the radical nature of the last century's different literary figurations of waste under capitalism, it is necessary to understand their origins. Although the periodisation of the origins of commodity culture itself remains contested – scholars such J.H. Plumb date it back to the end of the sixteenth century; Rosalind Williams and Thomas Richards place it in the 19th – the mid-19th century is generally recognised as the beginning of mass culture in England, the United States and France, resulting, in part, from the transformation of the advertising industries in these countries.[45] In the last decade, a rich discourse has arisen around the narrative underlying the object culture of the 19th century, combining material culture and Marxist criticism to consider the origins of these objects and what they say about industrialisation, Imperial rule and military oppression. Elaine Freedgood, for instance, has shown how specific objects and materials in the Victorian novel function as cryptic narrative devices: ivory in *Jane Eyre* (1847) functions as a key to the colonial subtext in the novel, highlighting the backdrop of slavery and the ivory trade.[46] From a very different standpoint, David Trotter has shown the symbolic charge of specific material surfaces, textures and sheens as indicators of anxieties about social mobility. For the Victorians, ostentation was a sign of newly acquired wealth (as opposed to inherited), and thus the mark of ill breeding.

These anxieties are at the heart of Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65)*,* in which the main source of wealth is an immense mountain of dust, and in which the upwardly mobile classes are represented by the aptly named Mr and Mrs Veneering. The Veneerings' house is full of 'things […] in a state of high varnish and polish,' and 'what was observable in the furniture, was observable in the Veneerings—the surface smelt a little too much of the workshop and was a trifle sticky.'[47] Profligate spenders and ostentatious in their choice of home décor, the couple endow wealth with a sticky, sickly quality—provoking disgust rather than awe. This characterisation, in turn, heightens

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[45] See in particular Peter N. Stearns. 'Stages of Consumerism: Recent Work on the Issue of Periodization.' *Journal of Modern History* 69 (Spring 1997): 102-117; Rosalind Williams. *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late 19th-Century France* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1982); Thomas Richards. *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford University Press: 1991). Neil McKendrik, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb provide a compelling periodisation in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialisation of 18th-century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), dating the birth of commodity culture to the late 18th-century, although Plumb's chapters in the collection date its origins to the 1690s.
[46] Elaine Freedgood. *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2006).
[47] Charles Dickens. *Our Mutual Friend* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, [1864-1865]), 17.

the sense that however shiny or fashionable their possessions, they are 'riff-raff' dressed up as chic.[48] As Trotter notes, 'The Veneerings have come a long way and in a short time and the stickiness which coats their new identity, and which hangs about it, suggests that they have not yet settled fully into position' (Trotter, 184). The *nouveau riche* are dressed-up trash.

At the other end of the social scale, working class Victorians practised the process we refer to as recycling long before we gave it a name and a logo: they separated food waste for composting, and either re-used old textiles or gave them to door-to-door rag pickers for collection.[49] Industry itself, in the UK, France and North America, relied on the 'stewardship of objects': rag-picking and waste separation were essential to both manufacturing and agriculture.[50] Households were alive to the enduring value of the things they themselves no longer needed: food waste, old clothes and broken furniture could all be re-purposed. As well as helping save money, re-appropriating waste was seen as the 'moral' thing to do. Fittingly, the moral compass of *Our Mutual Friend* is a crippled dressmaker, Jenny Wren, who makes her living sewing doll dresses from rags brought her by an orphaned foundling called Sloppy. Her re-use of scraps is both a moral act, and a creative one, the counterpoint to the corrupt accrual of wealth by those involved in the dust enterprise.[51] The form of the novel, with its many narrative strands and sub-plots, is testament to the kind of skilful, and arresting, work that can rise out of such patchwork. In this sense, Dickens exemplifies the novelist as dressmaker, patching together the stories of Londoners from all classes and backgrounds to create a multi-textured portrait of the present. In broader terms, the novel's central dispute over dust mounds functions as a scathing critique of capitalism's capacity to commercialise even dust, in a not dissimilar vein to Zola's *Germinal* (1885), which portrays coal mining as a de-humanising process, in which labourers are obliged to spend their days in the midst of slag heaps for the profit of a few.

The evolution of waste's role from necessity to hindrance can be traced to the development of sanitation engineering and the sanitised landfill, and the figure of the sanitation engineer. Sanitation engineering emerged in the 1890s, out of the science of bacteriology, from scientists' shift in viewing poverty and behavioural degeneracy as the foremost threats to public health and safety, to ascribing that role to urban filth. The sanitation engineer was elevated to the status of a

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[48] See, for instance, Ellen Handy. 'Dust Piles and Damp Pavements: Excrement, Repression and the Victorian City in Photography and Literature.' *Essays in Criticism* 2.3 (1973): 206-212; and Michelle Elizabeth Allen. *Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press), 190.

[49] See Heather Rogers. *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* (New York: The New Press, 2005). In her history of US waste management, Rogers posits waste as a social construction largely shaped by industry. See also Susan Strasser. *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999). Since 1850, the economy of the Italian city of Prato has relied on the textile industry, and specifically on processing wool from recycled materials. Over the course of the 19th century the city became the world's third largest centre of wool textiles.

[50] See Jennifer Seymour Whitaker. *Salvaging the land of plenty: Garbage and the American dream* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994).

[51] For a nuanced analysis of this, see Nancy Metz. 'The Artistic Reclamation of Waste in *Our Mutual Friend*.' *19th-Century Fiction* 34 (1979): 68.

scientist, in a similar way to the 19th-century detective and the forensic expert of today, and by the 1930s had become a powerful figure in his own right. As a man of science, he was seen to be authoritative, politically neutral and immune to bribery (Rogers, 70). Indeed, publications such as the 1930s trade journal *Municipal Sanitation* envisaged the sanitation officer as an almost priest-like figure, one with a moral authority, and the acumen of a soothsayer. In turn, the industry's emphasis on the diseases and infections carried by waste radically shifted the public's view of recuperation: once seen as a mark of good citizenship, re-use was cast as unsavoury, and dangerous. The lexicon of sanitation used by government and industry was aimed at stamping out disease, but also to encourage consumption. Industrialised agriculture had no need for households' waste scraps, while the future of retail was contingent upon those scraps being deemed unsavoury, and unsuited for re-use. While periods of economic stagnation such as the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War saw a return to previous frugal methods of re-use, the general trend, from the turn of the century onwards, was towards disposal: 'the growth of markets for new products came to depend in part on the continuous disposal of old things' (Strasser, 15).[52] While these ideas did not gain traction until the 1920s, the seeds were already being sown at the end of the 19th century. Thus, for instance, Emile Zola's *Ladies' Paradise* (1883) depicts the department store – born in Paris in the 1850s – as an erotic space.[53] The goods on display arouse the desire of the female shoppers who gaze upon them, catalysing violent and frenzied impulses to purchase. Necessity here is a secondary consideration: it is the pleasure afforded by the objects on display, their colour, their scent, their texture, their novelty, and, finally, the prospect of a discount, that drives the shopper to possess them. In this way, the objects they already possess lose their appeal: like an old lover, familiarity breeds distaste.[54]

While commodity culture has its roots in the mid-19th century, consumerism as we know it today did not begin to emerge until the early 1900s, with the growth of mass production and mass marketing.[55] The idea that capitalism depends on the finite lifespan of objects was first articulated in the 1920s, by the advertising consultant Christine Frederick. For Frederick, encouraging purchase was contingent upon the supplanting of current products with newer models: she termed the

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[52] Naomi Klein's most recent book on the ecological impact of capitalism, *This Changes Everything* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), also provides an exceptionally sharp analysis of the reliance of consumerism on waste.

[53] Emile Zola. *Ladies' Paradise* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008 [1883]).

[54] Rachel Bowlby provides an exceptional analysis of the erotic element of consumption in *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York: Methuen, 1985).

[55] See Matthew Hilton. *Consumerism in 20th-century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Raymond A. Bauer and Stephen A. Greyser. *Advertising in America: The Consumer View* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1968); and Gary Cross. *An All-Consuming Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Cross points out that discretionary spending (spending on nonessential goods) in the United States increased from 20% to 35% in the first three decades of the 20th century thanks to industry growth. Bauer and Greyser point out that national advertising campaigns became ubiquitous in the 1910s, growing between $500m to $1.3bn between 1900 and 1915.

process 'progressive obsolescence.'[56] To re-use in such a context would be anathema: the whole point was to encourage customers to be thinking about replacing the object they have yet to purchase. The circulation of goods relied on fetishizing novelty, and making the objects of the recent past appear archaic. I take this transition, or period of transition, as the starting point of my thesis.

Chapter overviews

This study begins by examining the depiction of waste, recuperation and superfluity in Giorgio de Chirico's *Hebdomeros* (1930),[57] André Breton's *Nadja* (1928),[58] and Mina Loy's unfinished novel, *Insel* (1929-).[59] Each of these artist-novelists was closely associated with what Peter Bürger terms the 'historical avant-garde.' [60] Bürger defines the early 20th-century's experimental movements (including Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism) as a counterforce to the commodification of art under capitalism. As Walter L. Adamson notes, capitalism by the late 19th century had become 'increasingly aesthetic, as commodities bec[a]me more and more bound up with images, logos, trademarks, and other visual references' while the promotion and sale of art increasingly mimicked those of regular commodities.[61] For the historical avant-garde, the subjection of art to the rules of the market and its treatment as a product or exchange-value was one further way in which life was being subjugated to the demands of capitalism. These artists thus sought to shatter the strictures of bourgeois society and halt the encroachment of commodification through a radical artistic praxis. André Breton's concept of the *objet trouvé,* or 'found object,' was a defining trope in this project. A cast-off that the artist discovers in the street, and identifies as containing hidden qualities that have the capacity to both estrange and comfort the viewer,[62] the *objet trouvé* features in the work of all three of the novelists examined in this chapter: so do other, more ambiguous forms of waste that resist the reader's interpretative efforts and remain unused, untransformed, and resolutely inexplicable. In de Chirico's *Hebdomeros,* we observe encounters with waste objects resistant to explication and impenetrable to the reader's gaze. In Breton's *Nadja,* we observe objects that have ceased to be commodities become a valuable source of interruption and shock (until the moment

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[56] Christine Frederick. *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York: Business Bourse, 1929), 246; 250-251, as cited in Strasser, 16. Also see Roland Marchand. *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1985), 156-160, as cited in Strasser, 16.

[57] Giorgio de Chirico. *Hebdomeros.* Transl. Margaret Crosland (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 1992 [1930]).

[58] André Breton. Transl. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1960 [1928]).

[59] Mina Loy. *Insel.* Ed. Elizabeth Arnold (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1991). Begun in 1929, the novel was left unfinished, and published posthumously.

[60] Peter Bürger. *Theory of the Avant-Garde.* Transl. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 [1974]).

[61] Walter L. Adamson. *Embattled Avant-Gardes: Modernism's Resistance to Commodity Culture in Europe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 38.

[62] See Hershel B. Chipp ed. 'Dada, Surrealism and Scuola Metafisica' in *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

they are re-introduced into the commodity pathway as art and rendered participants, once more, in the market economy). Finally, Loy's novel undercuts our assumptions about recuperation by positing the artist himself – in this case, a homeless Surrealist – as a remaindered entity resistant to being put to use. Loy's novel complicates the historical avant-garde's narrative of radical recuperation by exploring the ramifications of treating the artist as a worker or producer of goods. Alongside Breton and de Chirico's narratives, Loy's story of a gallery worker's efforts to coax a homeless genius into making sellable art invites us to consider the extent to which human worth, even in the art world, is tied to productivity – all else is waste.

Our next subject of enquiry is the representation of discarded objects and superfluous humans in Samuel Beckett's novels and prose between 1950 and 1964. Here, we find waste functioning as an obstruction to the export of (American) consumer culture: a spanner in the works, so to speak, to the putting-to-use of people and things that extends Loy's preoccupation with remaindered humans and the valuation of human beings as use-values. Waste in these narratives serves as a metaphor for the socially marginalised – humans relegated to the status of 'other' due to their uselessness, humans who live off of (or in some cases, *in*) society's scraps – but also as something that the socially marginalised can make their own. I argue that the centrality of waste in Beckett's texts re-works Surrealism and Dada's aesthetic of recuperation in an effort to critique the culture of Fordist rationalisation. I base this contextualisation of Beckett's work on David Harvey's study of Keynesianism-Fordism in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), which identifies the importance of Fordism in developing the concept of the worker-consumer – which is to say, the idea of labour as a means to participate in the consumption of discretionary goods, rather than merely a means of subsistence.[63] However, I also base my readings of Beckett's prose on more recent studies of the so-called 'Americanisation' of French culture by scholars such as Kristin Ross and Laura Salisbury, who examine the cultural effects of Fordism as manifest in French literature and film in the decades following the Second World War.[64] For Ross in particular, the literature of the immediate postwar period is best understood as a response to a shifting nationalism, as the rhetoric of corporate expansionism – embodied in a lexicon of speed and cleanliness – served to replace that of colonialism and empire. In this context, productivity, efficiency, order and system are part of a broader discourse of reparation forged as much by advertisers as by writers. As a translator of André Breton's fiction and prose, and as an émigré writing in France, Beckett was keenly aware of waste's symbolic, affective and metonymic import for Surrealism; but he was writing in the movement's aftermath, and his adoption (and complication) of their methods responded to a very

[63] David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1989]), 125-140. Citation on 126.
[64] Kristin Ross. *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); Laura Salisbury. *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

different context. Beckett's absurd representations of vagabonds covered in dung, steeped in mud, buried in rubbish piles or poking about in junkyards can be seen to reject all forms of recuperation and productive use-putting – and to in fact view Surrealism's aesthetics of reuse as not radical enough. In meticulously detailing these heaps of rubbish and recounting his oddball protagonists' attempts to order and systematise them, Beckett's depictions of human waste parody both the ordering rationale of Fordism and Surrealism's methods of opposition. Yes, commodity culture's allocation of value and Fordism's production quotas are absurd, Beckett concedes. But so, too, is the suggestion that a pile of excrement might emanate beauty.

The fourth chapter of this thesis takes us to the late 20th century, where we examine the depiction of waste and recuperation in the works of the Don DeLillo, whose postmodernist novels since the early 1970s have repeatedly examined American culture through its excretions, and whose 1997 work, *Underworld,* is widely regarded by scholars as the 20th century's definitive waste novel.[65] I situate this discussion in relation to Fredric Jameson's delineation of the flattened a-temporality and hybridity of postmodernist works as reflective of the 'frantic economic urgency' of what he terms 'late capitalism' – an economic context defined, among other elements, by mass consumption, the close interrelationship between the American military and industry, the internationalisation of business, and the interpenetration of the media and capitalist values (Jameson, xix, 5).[66] My analysis is also informed by David Harvey's analysis, in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), of postmodernism's relationship to the economic developments of the 1970s, including the shift from Fordism-Keynesianism to neoliberalism— a historico-economic period he terms 'postmodernity.' DeLillo's depictions of waste are postmodern insofar as they explicitly examine subjective experience in a world governed by commercial gain; and they are postmodern*ist* insofar as they adopt a fragmented, nonlinear, and often iterative narrative technique to convey the atomising nature of that world. His novels repeatedly posit waste as the underbelly of consumer culture, a 'mass metabolism [threatening to] overwhelm us,'[67] while also reflecting upon the extent to which recycling has been subsumed into a cluster of values that collectively serve to justify continued growth. These narratives effectively confirm the reservations of Marxists in the 1970s, who anticipated environmentalism would be co-opted by industry to

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[65] See, for instance, John Duvall. *Don DeLillo's* Underworld (New York: Continuum, 2002), 24. Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke. *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value.* Ed. Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke (New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), ix; John Scanlan. *On Garbage* (London: Reaktion, 2005), 28; Peter Boxall. 'There's no lack of void: Waste and abundance in Beckett and DeLillo.' *SubStance* 37. 2 (2008): 56-70.

[66] Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991). Although Jameson's analysis of late capitalism as the 'final' stage in capitalism has been disproved – as attested by the resilience of capitalism even in the aftermath of the global financial crisis – his assessment of the differences between the form of capitalism that emerged in the decades following the Second World War, and particularly after 1971, and what came before, and the effects of these shifts on culture, remain compelling, and particularly relevant with regards to the novels under review.

[67] Don DeLillo. *Underworld* (New York: Picador, 2011 [1997]), 184. Henceforth, *U.*

create new sources of revenue.[68] Where Breton, Loy and de Chirico's aesthetics of recuperation served to revolutionise everyday life, DeLillo shows us how that effort has been systematically neutralised by the industrialisation of re-use. Recycling in DeLillo's novels is thus alternately cast as an obsessive-compulsive effort to classify and order; as a derivative attempt to make art out of the nation's most humiliating secrets; and, in *Underworld*'s closing narrative about the recuperation of nuclear waste outside Chernobyl, as the most extreme form of unethical commercialisation of a devastating event. At the same time, DeLillo suggests that garbage can be put to historiographical or archeological use, and serve, as the German sculptor H.A. Schult puts it, as 'a mirror of ourselves.'[69] Through language, he suggests, we might begin to reclaim meaning from our excretions.

The fifth, concluding, chapter of this thesis looks back over the texts discussed thus far, and then forward to the 21st century, to consider how the literary depiction of waste in anti-capitalist fiction continues to evolve. Although it is perhaps early to assume a rupture between 21st-century novelists' depictions of waste and their predecessors', I put forward a proto-theory about postmillennial waste based on its depiction in three postmillennial novels: Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013), Jonathan Miles' *Want Not* (2013) and Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* (2014). Each of these texts posits waste as something simultaneously all pervasive and ineffable, which, I argue, reflects the simultaneously all pervasive and unknowable qualities of neoliberalism. Through their attention to the limits of dumpster-diving, the trash-like quality of online effluvia, and the abstract nature of oil, and through their identification of the connection of these themes to the speculative dimension of neoliberal ideology, Miles, Pynchon and McCarthy suggest the untenability of subverting the productivist paradigm. Though they explore strikingly similar themes to those of the historical avant-garde, Beckett and DeLillo, these novelists suggest the limited radical potential of the rhetorical and formal strategies of their predecessors, a stance that, I argue, is ultimately rooted in the nature of capitalism today. My definition of neoliberalism in this last chapter is based on the most recent writings of David Harvey and Wendy Brown, as well as the work of Thomas Piketty, Philip Mirowski, and David Graeber,[70] each of whom differentiates neoliberalism from traditional capitalism in its speculative dimension and in its treatment of individuals as 'financialised human capital' (Brown, 33). Miles, Pynchon, and McCarthy explore the ramifications of this ideology

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[68] See, in particular, H.M. Enzenberger's seminal essay, 'A Critique of Political Ecology' (1974), in which Enzenberger anticipated the emergence of an 'eco-industrial complex' of state-funded private waste management corporations entrusted with managing the environmental effects of overproduction and overconsumption (*The Greening of Marxism,* Ted Benton, ed. (London: Guilford Press, 1996), 17-49. Citation on 25).

[69] H.A. Schult, 'Art is Action: Actions are Experienced Pictures' (Tubingen and Berlin: Wasmuth, 2002), as cited in Mark Bradley and Kenneth Stowe. 'Introduction.' *Rome, Pollution and Propriety: Dirt, Disease and Hygiene in the Eternal City,* Ed. Mark Bradley and Kenneth Stowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

[70] David Harvey. *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Wendy Brown. *Undoing the Demos* (*Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2015); David Graeber. *Debt: The Last 5,000 Years* (New York: Melvill House Publishing, 2011); Thomas Piketty. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

in very different ways. Miles' *Want Not* considers the future of 'living off the grid' when the grid is, to all intents and purposes, everywhere: the radical efforts of its dumpster-diving protagonists are doomed to fail. *Bleeding Edge* takes us back to the aftermath of the dot com crash to consider the empty offices of Manhattan's Silicon Alley, the soon-to-be closed Fresh Kills Landfill and the Deep Web – each of which is posited as waste to be repurposed and re-commodified under the logic of the 'holy fuckin' market' (*BE,* 338). Finally, McCarthy's *Satin Island* depicts the intellectual divagations of a corporate anthropologist obsessed with weaving the 'generic' aspects of oil spills and the poetic meaning of the apparition of Fresh Kills Landfill in his dreams into an 'Anthropology of the Present' that will be put to use by the company for which he works. Here, we see waste (in the abstract) posited as the stuff from which consumer culture itself is made – undermining the very possibility of a radical aesthetics. Each of these contemporary novelists extends the ideas developed by their 20th-century forebears, and highlights the difficulty of conceiving a radical discourse through waste in a landscape that is suffused with it, and in a culture that is all too willing to put even the radical to commercial use.

The case for pursuing 'this unattractive occupation'[71]

This project is an original contribution to knowledge on several levels. Firstly, it extends the parameters of waste theory to consider the economistic dimension of waste, an area hitherto underexplored by scholars in the discipline, and to indicate how literary criticism with an investment in socio-economic context(s), in turn, might benefit from waste theory. Secondly, my focus on waste's use at different moments of the 20th century and its role in the critique of different aspects of capitalism seeks to illustrate the *versatility* of waste in literature, which is to say, its amenability to different kinds of narratives of dissent. The texts examined in this thesis reveal the aesthetics of waste to be a fluid, changing thing – not a fixed category, but a discourse that evolves in line with the culture to which it responds.

Beyond contributing to the disciplines of waste theory and literary criticism with a socio-economic investment, this project provides unique contributions to the critical discourse around the specific writers examined, highlighting areas where scholarship is virtually absent. My concern, with this thesis, is not confined to what Anglo-American novelists have to tell us about scavenging for rubbish in the street or homeless artists, nor is it specifically about the role of landfills and recycling centres in the contemporary imagination. This is not a project on the role of the found object in Surrealism, although Surrealism's understanding of waste's aesthetic value certainly plays an

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[71] Ivan Klima. *Love and Garbage* (London: Picador, 1990 [1986]), 2.

important part. My concern, rather, is with tracing specific moments of change in capitalism, and what the depiction of human waste says about these moments.

The writers I have chosen not only provide compelling examples of the historical trajectory of the public imagining of waste; they also help us to reflect upon the tensions between financial, aesthetic and moral value, and how these tensions have changed over the course of the last century. Each of these chapters examines the texts as meditations on the meaning of value – itself a charged term with a multitude of associations – and as reflections of moments of transition in society's understanding of value. The texts themselves are evidence of the fact that the things we throw out and the places they end up are far from forgotten. Together, these novelists help tell the story of capitalist commodity culture's relationship with manufactured waste and remaindered humans, and provide compelling examples of how that story has evolved. Each of the narratives they trace demonstrates literature's role in resisting the norm, and bringing about social change, as well as showing how that task can help transform the rhetorical and formal devices of literature itself.

Chapter Two
In search of an epiphany: Redeeming waste and irrupting into the everyday

In this chapter, we examine the recuperation of human waste – waste manufactured by humans, as well as humans deemed superfluous – in the work of three early 20th-century artist-writers, where it functions as part of an initial, embryonic, effort to challenge the commodification of art. The readings in this chapter are informed by Peter Bürger's historical materialist reading of the socio-political underpinnings of the radical aesthetic movements that swept across Europe in the early 20th century, and by Franco Moretti's conceptualisation of the realist function of objects in the 19th-century novel. In this context, waste objects (which is to say, once-commodities, or objects divested, for the time being, of their use value) and remaindered humans become a vital means to interrupt the linearity and logic of bourgeois society. Their contemplation becomes a means to subvert form and attack the institution of art itself.

In his seminal study, *Theory of the avant-garde* (1974), Peter Bürger reads the aesthetic revolutions that occurred in the first decades of the century as an historical phenomenon that went beyond modernism's assault on traditional techniques or form, to attack the institution of art itself.[72] He terms these movements the 'historical avant-garde' and uses the term 'institution' to refer to art's autonomous role in bourgeois society – which divested it of its social purpose, and rendered it complicit with bourgeois ideals – as well as to the formal properties used by artists of the time. Avant-gardism built on 19th-century aestheticism's opposition to bourgeois rationalism (as exemplified by the Art for Art's Sake movement's non-utilitarian ethos), which was itself a product of art's emancipation from religious worship and its growth as an industry. However, the historical avant-garde opposed aestheticism's end result, which was an art divested of social use – an art aimed at satisfying needs repressed in everyday life, and therefore complicit in maintaining the status quo (Bürger, 28). By challenging central tenets such as the principle of individual creation and the concept of an 'organic' work, avant-gardists such as Picasso, Duchamp, Schwitters and Breton sought to dismantle existing preconceptions about art's purpose as well as the very concept of authorship (Bürger, 63; 52). The aim of these movements was to develop a radical artistic praxis that would redefine the very idea of representation, and allow art to irrupt into the everyday.

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[72] Although my readings in this chapter are based on Bürger's definition of the historical avant-garde, it would be remiss to suggest that Bürger's is a definitive assessment of the movements, or of the definition of avant-gardism, which is in fact a contested term. The most influential efforts to define avant-gardism aside from Bürger's are Clement Greenberg's 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939); Max Renato Poggioli's eponymous *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1962), and Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1970). See also Matei Calinescu. *The Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 1987), 94-110. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner provide a useful analysis of the collapsing of the distinction between the terms 'avant-garde' and 'modernism' in American universities following the Second World War in *The Postmodern Turn* (London: Guilford Press, 1997), 129.

André Breton's concept of the *objet trouvé,* or 'found object,' can be seen as embodying many of the historical avant-garde's radical aims. The found object is a discard that the artist identifies as simultaneously seductive and estranging.[73] The *objet trouvé* plays an important role in Breton's novels, which are, themselves, governed by the principle of montage – a narrative form characterised by discontinuity and rupture, and in which the individual parts 'lack necessity' and the meaning of the whole is not necessarily linked to, or a result of, its constituent parts (Bürger, 80). In interrupting his narratives with aesthetic and ontological reflections and incidents apparently unrelated to each other – which, as Bürger notes, one might easily remove from the narrative proper without affecting it – Breton undermined the principle of aesthetic unity, suggesting that art could be illogical, that its parts could add up to something different than their whole.

A similar idea can be found in the underlying tenets of collage, a form developed by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, and which takes its name from *colle,* the French for glue. In the broadest terms, a collage is any work of formal art composed of an assemblage of different forms or media.[74] By layering new materials on the canvas these artists sought to introduce volume into the pictorial plane of their Cubist representations.[75] Later practitioners adopted the practice to destabilise the unity of the cohesive work – the introduction of newsprint fragments and advertising slogans allowing the parts to point to something different to their sum. The use of everyday materials not of the artist's making – what Bürger terms 'reality fragments' – allowed the works to encompass reality itself, and to enable a 'life praxis bas[ed] in art' (Bürger, 72; 49). This subversive intent is at the heart of Tristan Tzara's identification of resistance and active protest as Dada's defining traits: 'the new artist protests, he no longer paints.'[76] The artist evinces change by dismantling the defining characteristics of art and their complicity in maintaining bourgeois ideals, and producing work that revolutionises the everyday. Of course, Bürger's analysis is not without its critics; however, it offers, to my mind, a much more concrete way of thinking about avant-gardism than, for instance, Renato Poggioli's eponymous study (1968) or John Weightman's *The Concept of the Avant-Garde* (1973), both of which, as Andreas Huyssen notes, effectively conflated vanguardism and modernism. My reading thus echoes Matei Calinescu's analysis, after Bürger, of the historical avant-garde as something distinctly separate from modernism in its radical leftist inclinations (futurism of course

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[73] See Hershel B. Chipp ed. 'Dada, Surrealism and Scuola Metafisica.' *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 366-455.

[74] See also http://www.alicepazzi.it/arte/storia_collage.php?lang=en. Adamowicz, Elza (1998). 'Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse.' *History of Collage Excerpts from Nita Leland and Virginia Lee and from George F. Brommer.* http://www.kriegartstudio.com/nesting_cranes/susan_krieg_history_collage.htm. Accessed 24 December 2011.

[75] Harriet Waldman. *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object* (London: Phaidon, 1992), 10.

[76] 'Dada Manifesto 1918.' Tristan Tzara. *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries* (Riverrun Press: New York, 1992), 7, as cited in Gavin Grindon. 'Surrealism, Dada, and the Refusal of Work: Autonomy, Activism, and Social Participation in the Radical Avant-Garde.' *Oxford Art Journal* 34. 1 (2011): 79-96. Citation on 89.

being the exception to this), and in its embodiment of 'the most extreme form of artistic negativism, art itself being the first victim.'[77]

The avant-gardist concept of collage rapidly gained recognition outside of the visual arts, largely due to its practitioners' own involvement with the written word. The term 'collage' in fact made its first appearance in literature in the visual artist and novelist Wyndham Lewis' urban narrative, *Tarr* (1918),[78] while Max Ernst's *La Femme 100 Têtes* (1929) has been generally credited as the first collage novel for its juxtaposition of cut-outs from 19th-century magazines, encyclopaedia entries, and penny novels. [79] By interspersing images and texts from many different sources, and doing away with plot altogether, Ernst's novel challenged the basic tenets of the traditional novel.[80] The combination of deracinated media defies logic, impeding a definitive assessment of the individual elements' role.

The countercultural aspect of collage and its influence on literature has been noted by critics across disciplines: Jane Goldman cites its influence in the construction of literary texts 'throughout the period 1910 to 1945, and beyond.'[81] Esther Leslie reads the recycling modality of the form as both emblematic of, and a means of surviving, urban modernity: 'significant experience occurs amidst urban detritus' in Baudelaire's pavement lyricism, in Leopold Bloom's stroll through Dublin.[82] In this sense, 'rag-picking' and scavenging are a means of delaying the journey from here to there, of (re-) contemplating that which has been overlooked (Leslie, 230-231). Umberto Eco goes further, citing collage's utility in challenging Romanticism's concept of 'creation from nothingness.' Collage 'belongs by right to the entire history of artistic creativity; plagiarism, quotation, parody, the ironic retake are typical of the entire [modern] artistic-literary tradition.' [83]

Crucially for our purposes, the juxtaposition of forms and media was a politically charged statement for visual artists and writers alike. The recuperation of ads for obsolete products and defunct shops implicitly challenged aesthetic ideals under capitalism and the commodification of art. The works' celebration of the archaic and the démodé and their formal qualities of the collage suggested something entirely at odds with commodity culture. The Dadaist collage artist Hans Arp,

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[77] See Matei Calinescu. *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 140 and 287; and Andreas Huyssen. 'The Search for Tradition: Avant-garde and postmodernism in the 1970s.' *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 163.

[78] *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*. Ed. Robert K. Barnhart (New York and Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap, 1988). See Wyndham Lewis. *Tarr* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

[79] *La femme 100 têtes* (Paris: Éditions du Carrefour, 1929). See http://www.kb.nl/bc/koopman/1926-1930/c53-en.html and John Williams. *Max Ernst Collages: The Invention of the Surrealist Universe* (Henry N Abrams, 1991).

[80] See Paul van Capelleveen, Sophie Ham, Jordy Joubij, *Voices and visions. The Koopman Collection and the Art of the French Book* (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, National Library of the Netherlands; Zwolle, Waanders, 2009).

[81] Jane Goldman. *Modernism, 1910 – 1945: Image to Apocalypse* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 33.

[82] Esther Leslie. 'Recycling.' *Restless Cities.* Ed. Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart (London: Verso, 2010), 233-253. Citation on 238.

[83] Umberto Eco: 'Interpreting Serials.' *The Limits of Interpretation* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 83-100. Citation on 95.

in fact, identified chance and inchoate imperfection as pivotal aspects of his artistic method.[84] Inspired by the sight of his own, early, works now in the process of decay, Arp realised that what collage expressed was the 'transience, the dribbling away, the brevity, the impermanence, the withering [...] of our existence' (Arp, 15-16). He tested the limits of this idea in the late 1930s, with a series of smaller three-dimensional assemblages that the viewer could pick up, take apart and re-configure into new arrangements, essentially allowing for the creative process to continue indefinitely.[85] The antithesis of assembly line manufacturing, the work was premised on uncertainty and experimentation, exemplifying Arp's definition of Dada as 'against the mechanisation of the world.' [86]

Hans Arp's artistic evolution is indicative of a much broader shift. By renouncing coherence, the historical avant-garde continued nineteenth-century aestheticism's subversion of bourgeois rationalism, while seeking to re-imbue art with a social, anti-bourgeois, purpose. Within literature, we find a somewhat different pattern. The European novel, as we know, emerged as a form of private diversion for the new middle class that emerged in the eighteenth century – what Ian Watt terms the 'reading public.'[87] It was, in other words, a bourgeois form. The form spoke to, but also commented upon, the lives of its bourgeois readership, engaging with the tension between interiority and public life. Detail and description in this context functioned on two levels: to create verisimilitude, and to create order, or convey a moral. Over the course of the century, however, the role of description changed. In his study of realism in the 19th-century European novel, Franco Moretti unpicks the aesthetic, ideological and political function of description, and demonstrates a similar arc in its development to that occurring in the century's painting style.[88] From mere 'imitations of significant human actions,' we see an effort to 'describ[e] the world seen.' In turn, the stuff accrued around the subject calls attention to itself, eliciting further investigations. Moretti's point here is that 'narrative *does not consist only of memorable scenes*' (Moretti, 365, emphasis in the original), but of all the things – averted glances, forgotten conversations, mediocre meals, discarded objects, more-or-less-insufferable household chores and uninterrupted, dreamless nights – that reside between those moments. This new aesthetic project re-draws the boundaries between

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[84] See David Trotter. *Cooking With Mud: The Idea of Mess in 19th Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 323. Trotter reads Arp's change of tack as signalling the entry of mess and the 'phenomenal chaos as accident' into the process of composition, legitimising chance and contingency in a period that otherwise sought, via abstraction, to eradicate them completely (abstraction, in Trotter's view, is an attempt to 'clean up' the chaotic clutter of impressionism's urban scenes).

[85] Hans Arp. *Head and Shell* (*Tete et coquille*), ca. 1933. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

[86] Hans Arp. 'Looking.' *Arp.* Exhibition Catalogue. Ed. James Thrall Soby (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1958), 12-16, citation on 13.

[87] Ian Watt. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (University of California Press, 2001 [1957]), 35; 39.

[88] Franco Moretti. 'Serious Century.' *The Novel, Volume I: History, Geography and Culture,* ed. Franco Moretti et al. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 364-399.

things. The attention to the marginal and marginalised challenges traditional assumptions about what is to be 'left in' or 'left out' – which is fundamentally a question of hierarchy, and taxonomies (Moretti, 365).

To substantiate his argument, Moretti draws upon Roland Barthes' classification of narrative episodes with a 'cardinal function' ('nuclei') and narrative episodes that act as 'catalysers,' re-naming the former 'turning points' and the latter 'fillers'. Moretti's 'turning points' are essentially inter/actions with narrative import, whereas 'fillers' are the moments that take place *between* significant or pivotal narrative episodes.[89] The narrative filler is the cursory glance or the description of an object that takes up narrative space between meaningful events. Its role is to help convey time's passage, and amplify the narrative's realism, without actually modifying it, thus offering up a circumscribed sense of uncertainty that effectively channels what Max Weber termed the bourgeois logic of rationalisation under capitalism.[90] The filler, Moretti argues, enables the author to '"*rationalis[e] the novelistic universe*: turning it in to a world of few surprises, fewer adventures, and no miracles at all"' (Weber 154, emphasis added by Moretti). The use of fillers is part of a mechanism 'designed to keep the "narrativity" of life under control—to give a regularity, a "style" to existence' that is neither tragic nor comic (Moretti, 368). Moretti conceptualises this lack of dramatic bias or tone as 'seriousness,' citing Eric Auerbach's delineation of mimesis as bound up with 'serious[ly]' reproducing the everyday' (Moretti, ff. 369). The 19th-century bourgeois novel's seriousness aptly reflects the bourgeois subject's own intermediate state, wedged between the genre of the plebeian class (comedy) and that of the aristocracy (tragedy). As well as rationalising the unknown, the prosaic filler serves to distance the entire novel form from the 'carnevalesque noise of the labouring classes' (Moretti, 370).

These ideas provide a useful entry into our discussion of the historical avant-garde, as Bürger terms it. From prosaic placeholders in a narrative process governed by logic and intent, fillers in the avant-garde novel become objects of attention, and, as in the case of the fragments of a collage, it is their very mundane nature that elicits it. Less important than realistic depiction is the transmission of society's sense of fracture, and its burgeoning self-awareness, which is also an awareness of itself as an agglomeration of individuals, each composed of conflicting ideals. Nowhere is this departure from the traditional novel more apparent than in the assignation of a central role to both fillers (which is to say, mundane events that in the traditional novel serve only to uphold the narrative), and, I argue, to objects of no commercial use or sentimental value. In other words, I extend Moretti's analysis to argue that the texts discussed re-define the novel form through an unusual

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[89] Roland Barthes. 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives' (1966). *Barthes: Selected Writings.* Ed. Susan Sontag (Glasgow: Fontana, 1983), 265-266, as cited in Moretti, 366.

[90] Max Weber (1922). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 154, as cited in Moretti 381.

attentiveness to fillers rather than the events catalysed by fillers, and, relatedly, that they deploy useless objects and physical and human effluvia not as realist devices to furnish the narrative, but as subjects in their own right. Where the novel form historically sought to construct an entity of singular, memorable, significant 'moments' whose resilience and shape was contingent upon the actions that filled the gaps between them, and whose verisimilitude was dependent on references to objects of no import – objects whose sole purpose was to give credence to the central story, and to the characters involved in it – the historical avant-garde undermines this. It makes mundane non-events its subject, focussing on a rotting piece of fruit or broken vase or box of old toys in an effort to interrupt linear narrative and undermine rationality. The filler *takes the place* of the incandescent moment. The discovery of the defunct and contemplation of its inexplicability become the story. Where the 19th-century novel circumscribes chance within the order of logic, the novelists under review deploy chance to shatter logic altogether. Chance events and inexplicable objects work together to convey the enigmatic and ultimate unknowable qualities of everyday experience. Attending to these provides us – as readers of these texts – with a glimpse of a world outside the confines of capitalist commodity culture.

The historical avant-garde novel's filler provides a way into considering the form's elaboration of the Surrealist found object: it is a cast-off worthy of more attention than the narrative interrupted by its discovery. It is the happenstance or diversion that becomes more significant than the storyline it impedes. Surrealism itself was borne out of a perceived need to unshackle lived experience from its 'increasingly circumscribed' state—a state which André Breton likened to that of a caged animal, 'pac[ing] back and forth […] protected by the sentinels of common sense.'[91] The movement sought to challenge 'the reign of logic' and the 'absolute rationalism' it viewed as limiting human thought (Breton, 10). The collection, assembly and narrative of the cast-off are key aspects of this subversive effort. The finder of the *objet trouvé* sees in his discovery an unexpected treasure, and his own capacity to re-create.[92] At the same time, of course, the found object exemplifies the self-contradictory nature of the historical avant-garde project itself, since to take a find and put it to artistic use is to re-imbue it with a function and to potentially re-commodify it (if the work is put on sale). In other words, a found object is only waste *before* it is found – while its subversive potential only lasts as long as it remains a source of shock for the viewer, and an embarrassment for the establishment. Once enshrined in a museum, its revolutionary intent is lost.

The writers under review examine both the possibilities and limits of recuperation. The first section of this chapter examines these ideas in de Chirico's *Hebdomeros*. From here, I go on to

[91] André Breton. 'Surrealist Manifesto of 1924.' *Manifestoes of Surrealism.* Transl. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 10.

[92] André Breton. 'Situation of the Surrealist Object.' *Manifestoes of Surrealism.* Transl. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 257.

consider the very different forms that human waste and its recuperation take in Breton's *Nadja* and Loy's *Insel.*

'The enigmatic side of beings and things'[93]: de Chirico's *Hebdomeros*

Recent critical re-assessments of Giorgio de Chirico's work use collage as an analogy for both the recycling of motifs in his visual practice and in the juxtaposition of different, often vertiginous, viewpoints in his written narratives. And, indeed, as we will see in the next section on Breton, de Chirico himself served as a key reference point for the historical avant-garde and Surrealism in particular. Discovered by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1911, the young de Chirico frequented the poet and critic's salon, exchanging ideas with Pablo Picasso, [94] and befriending Andre Breton. In turn, de Chirico's concept of Metaphysical Painting profoundly influenced Dada, Surrealism and Futurism, the movements' leading artists often making overt reference in their own works to particular themes (enigma, melancholy), tropes (mannequins, empty squares), or even specific paintings.[95] Both Loy and Breton, as we have seen, cited de Chirico in their novels, while Breton wrote extensively about him in his critical works.[96] Indeed, Breton's essay *Surrealism and Painting* engages in a detailed discussion of early de Chirico as a 'manifestatio[n] of the eye as it "exists in its savage state."'[97] And as the Paris representative between 1931 and 1936 for Julien Levy's New York gallery, which featured, as well as an impressive roster of Surrealists, also de Chirico, it is likely that Loy's own references to the artist were based on an actual meeting between the two.[98]

However, the three artists' engagement with human waste differs greatly, both in terms of the kinds of waste they examine, and in their articulation of its aesthetic merits. Where Breton's *Nadja,* as we shall see, proposes the recuperation of found objects as a means to invigorate art production under capitalism and Loy's protagonist's exasperation with cleaning up scraps of paper and hosting a mad bum suggests the limits of this process, de Chirico's *Hebdomeros* depicts urban vagary as a fruitless endeavour, and the capitalist framework is framed as essentially exhausting the imagination. In this context, waste is less a material for making, and more a material for thinking. As the novel's eponymous protagonist slowly walks across a nameless country, the contemplation of rotting foods, broken machines, and obscure, archaic objects provides a focal point for an otherwise aimless journey. Human waste directs the otherwise uncertain nomad's gaze, organising his thoughts and patterning his experience. 'Instinctively attracted by the enigmatic side of beings and

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[93] Giorgio de Chirico. *Hebdomeros,* Margaret Crossland, transl (London: Peter Owen, 1992 [1929]), 14. Henceforth *H.*

[94] See James Thrall Thoby. *Giorgio de Chirico* (New York: Museum of Modern Art and Arno Press, 1955), 249.

[95] Giovanni Lista. *De Chirico et l'Avant-Garde* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1983), 35.

[96] See 'Cométe surréaliste,' 121, as cited in Mark Polizzotti, 546. See also Polizzotti, 596.

[97] André Breton. 'Surrealism and Painting', as cited in Polizzotti, 241 and fn. 666.

[98] Caroline Burke. *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 377.

things,' the novel's protagonist invites us, too, to look at the effluvia of the material world from a different angle (*H,* 14).

A slim, odd little narrative, written in French rather than his native Italian, and long after de Chirico had broken with the Surrealist movement, *Hebdomeros* is difficult to classify. It is even more difficult to square within the artist's broader oeuvre: at the time of its publication, Max Ernst commented on the paradox of it having been conceived when de Chirico himself had returned to realist painting.[99] It is precisely the novel's strangeness, however, that makes it such a compelling subject. This is an experiment in form, but also an experiment in thinking about form—and one that the Surrealists themselves praised for its embodiment of metaphysical ideals, superimposing historical past, personal memory and narrated present often in the same sentence. The novel's own protagonist has in turn been likened to the 'Great Metaphysician' of de Chirico's eponymous painting—a figure constructed out of wood planks, a mannequin head and an easel.[100]

The resemblance of the waste items in the novel to the strange objects in de Chirico's metaphysical paintings suggests an effort to transpose the artist's visual practice onto the page, suggesting that the novel should be read in conjunction with his paintings. However, while art historians and literary critics have acknowledged the relationship between de Chirico's visual works and prose, the area is underexplored, and *Hebdomeros* itself has received very little critical attention. Maurizio Fagiolo has commented on the presence of the dominant themes of his paintings in de Chirico's prose poems.[101] Renée Riese Hubert has identified Surrealist influences in *Hebdomeros'* intertextuality, and compellingly argues for the novel to be read in both literary and plastic terms, and above all as an artistic statement.[102] These readings, however, only begin to address the full import of the artist's extension of his visual waste representations onto the page.

Before addressing the degree to which *Hebdomeros* both embodies and stages the collagistic recycling of de Chirico's early visual practice, and deploys Surrealist methods to critique the movement and deconstruct the avant-garde aesthetic itself, it is worth examining the main principles of his practice. The intention of early de Chirico is to transcend representation, evoking the impression (likeness) of the object while fostering a sense 'of something new, of something that, previously [they] *have not known.*'[103] His experimentations were influenced by the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, the salons of Voltaire, and a post-enlightenment *milieu* in which space is

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[99] Ernst's comments come from a recently discovered essay by the artist, written in 1933 following his visit in the company of Giacometti and Breton to de Chirico's Paris studio (Michael R. Taylor and Guigone Rolland. *Giorgio de Chirico and the Myth of Ariadne; including an essay by Matthew Gale; a text by Max Ernst; and a conversation with Gerard Tempest* (London: Merrell in association with the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 173-175), citation on 173).

[100] John Ashbery. 'Introduction: The decline of the verbs.'*Hebdomeros* (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 1992 [1966]), ix-xiii.

[101] Maurizio Fagiolo. *Giorgio de Chirico. Il Tempo di Apollinaire: Paris 1911-1915* (Rome: de Luca Editore, 1981), 98.

[102] Renée Riese Hubert. 'The Fabulous Fiction of Two Surrealist Artists' in *New Literary History,* 4. 1 (Autumn, 1972): 151-166*,* citation on 166. www.jstor.org/stable/468498. Accessed 4 January 2012.

[103] de Chirico, as cited in Thoby, Appendix A, 244, emphasis in the original.

characterised by the void left by the absence of God. His focus on yawning spaces, his reduction of humans to mannequin-headed assemblages, and his transformation of inanimate things into toy-like entities were designed to reveal the dehumanizing effects of capitalist modes of production, and to critique the changing shape of labour under industrialization. As Keala Jewell notes, the hybrid mannequin of these paintings resembles a mindless robot, a modern monster borne out of an alienating industrialized modernity.[104] De Chirico's concept of the metaphysical thus juxtaposes industrialised modernity and the otherworldly, the everyday and that which transcends it. Where Loy's mongrel artist embodies the anxiety-producing otherness that domestic modernity aspires to clean up and shut out, the metaphysical waste in de Chirico's works expresses anxieties about Italy's rapid urbanization in the 1930s and human reification under capitalism.[105]

In turn, de Chirico's depiction of cast-offs in *Hebdomeros* is an extension of his prior efforts to articulate Metaphysical Painting. De Chirico identified the role of the marginal, or 'insignificant' as early as 1911, when he articulated Metaphysical Painting as a matter of seeking out the enigmatic in the everyday:

> One must picture everything in the world as an enigma [and] to understand the enigma of things generally considered insignificant. […] To live in the world as if in an immense museum of strangeness, full of curious many-coloured toys which change their appearance, which, like little children we sometimes break to see how they are made on the inside, and, disappointed, realise they are empty.[106]

The material world calls attention to itself, but its deconstruction reveals nothing—a void. Our engagement with it goes only so far. The toy the child breaks in order to understand its origins, its *raison d'être,* reveals an enigma and the limits of rational thinking. The process depicted exemplifies Derek Winnicott's concept, in *Playing and Reality,* of the 'transitional object'— a toy or other object the child invests with 'excess' meaning, and, as such, gains a unique hold on them. As an entity the child both recognises as separate from itself, and is able to manipulate (i.e., break, chew, rub), it nurtures illusion. As the child gradually loses interest, however, the toy loses its value and becomes an object of disillusion: it becomes a 'resting place' – a moment, or space, between fantasy/desire and the real world. The transitional object is a space between dream and reality, infancy and adulthood, the spiritual and the material*,* the rational and the irrational.[107] Metaphysical representation captures the world as seen in that interstitial state, but goes further, representing *broken,* fragmented objects caught between fantasy and reality, things that to the 'developed' self—to an adult modernity—are divested of logical meaning, function, or commercial value. The

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[104] Keala Jewell. *The Art of Enigma: The de Chirico Brothers and the Politics of Modernism* (Penn State University Press, 2004), 40.

[105] See Wieland Schmied. 'L'histoire d'une influence: "Pittura Metafisica" et "nouvelle Objectivité." *Les Realismes* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1980), 20.

[106] de Chirico, as cited in Thoby, Appendix A, 246.

[107] *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971), 1-5.

approach amplifies the transitional aspect of Winnicott's concept, making broken, partial objects – objects that are already transitional in their quality as waste – the site of imaginative play.

This liminality is, to an extent, influenced by Nietzschean thought, which de Chirico himself acknowledged as informing his work.[108] Indeed, de Chirico detected a biographical affinity between Nietzsche's ongoing gastrointestinal problems and those which himself suffered for much of his own life (like Nietzsche, he was plagued by migraines, colic and intestinal disorders), which attuned him to the relationship between artistic creation and the body (*MDMV,* 61). Like the 'revelation' Nietzsche delineates in *Ecce Homo* (1888/1908), de Chirico claimed that his metaphysical aesthetic was conceived while he was in a suspended state, emerging from a long gastrointestinal illness akin to that which Nietzsche experienced intermittently throughout his life.[109] But in *Hebdomeros,* we do not find references to recovery so much as an ongoing concern with the symptoms of intestinal disorder, and a profound sense of the relationship between gastrointestinal health (or lack thereof) and civic health: the omniscient narrator offers us glimpses into the boarding house rooms of characters rendered invalid by their malfunctioning livers and intestines (*H,* 84-85; 93), as well as descriptions of different attempts at urban renewal, in which the 'repair and cementing of the paths' and the 'installation of a collective rubbish dump' are foregrounded and the city itself is presented as a body in disarray (*H,* 111).

Elsewhere, the link between body and built environment is made even more explicit, in the spectacularly strange depiction of a series of gigantic stone men sitting on the park benches surrounding a group of villas. Without ever moving from their perch, these living statues converse amongst themselves, exchanging stories about deer and woodcock hunting until the day they suddenly 'sp[eak] no longer' and summoned specialists determine that 'the small amount of life which had animated them until now ha[s] vanished' (*H,* 78). The city decides that the carcasses of the stone men must go, so that they 'no longer uselessly encumber the little gardens of the villas' – and thus, de Chirico tells us, 'one after another the great stone men were broken up and the pieces thrown into a valley which soon looked like a battlefield after combat' (*H,* 78). This startling account of not-quite-living beings and their subsequent death and disposal brings together de Chirico's fascination with fragmentation and the relationship between objects and space, as well as underscoring a preoccupation with the processes of urban renewal and reconstruction. These living statues, who spent their days discussing their hunting exploits in forests long since gone, can be seen to extend the artist's concern with urban alienation – the city, in this context, has turned its

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[108] Michael R. Taylor. 'Between Modernism and Mythology: Giorgio de Chirico and the Ariadne Series' in *Giorgio de Chirico and the Myth of Ariadne*, 15-50, citation on 33.
[109] de Chirico. 'Meditations of a Painter.' *Theories of Modern Art.* Ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 397-401. Matthew Beaumont provides a compelling reading of this moment in his analysis of the aesthetics of urban convalescence in *Restless Cities.* Ed. Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart (London: Verso, 2010), 59-78.

inhabitants into stone, and its central concern with those bodies is to dispose of them efficiently once they have ceased to be of use.

What is crucial for our purposes is the self-consciousness of de Chirico's representation of urban alienation. The appearance, in these piles of brick-a-brac, of empty and broken frames and his own paintings, speaks of an aesthetic all too conscious of its own precariousness, and the transitional nature of modernity itself, on its way to full mechanization. Such precariousness is exemplified by the central figure in *The Great Metaphysician* (1917), to whom, as mentioned earlier, Hebdomeros himself has been likened (see figure 1). To an extent, the painting features familiar de Chirico tropes: the Metaphysician is a pile of heaped wooden planks and empty picture frames, crowned by a featureless mannequin head, against a backdrop of skewed perspectival lines and anonymous building facades against which an ambiguous figure is barely discernible. It stands out, however, in its re-situation of these elements, which can be seen to very clearly anticipate their representation in *Hebdomeros*. While de Chirico's earlier paintings represent heaped objects indoors, this is the first to bring them into the open – as if there were no more space, inside, to house them. Moreover, in its resemblance to an official monument, this veritable rubbish-pile reliquary suggests an aesthetic and ideological challenge. Traditionally a site for commemorating religious and literary figures or national heroes, the piazza is transformed into a home for a disquieting pile of bric-a-brac. At the same time, the title suggests the other-worldliness of that pile. This is both metaphysical waste – waste refigured, waste revealed, waste that transcends the material – and *meta-waste*: waste conscious of its own defunctness, conscious of its capacity as interloper, a mere figuration of a human or godlike form. James Thrall Thoby likewise notes the evolution of this figure during the course of the next eight years, from a composition of 'relatively simple, mostly angular forms' to an increasingly 'complicated heap of strange bric-a-brac, over-contrived and lacking in emotional impact' (Thoby, 132).

Figure 1: Giorgio de Chirico. *The Great Metaphysician* (1917)

This move prefigures the ideological stance de Chirico presents in *Hebdomeros.* The novel opens with a childhood memory triggered by the visit to a strange building reminiscent of a 'German consulate in Melbourne' in a space redolent with the 'atmosphere which pervades Anglo-Saxon towns on Sundays' (*H,* 10). From this collage of geo-spatial impressions, Hebdomeros is transported to an episode of his childhood: when

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he broke a vase from Rhodes that has sat on the family's living room mantelpiece for ninety years (*H,* 14). At the same time, there is an ambiguity of subjectivity: the little boy's name is Achilles – as if, in recalling the event, Hebdomeros were also re-living a mythical past. Rather than scolding him, his family members stare, transfixed, at the fragments on the floor:

> They spoke of sticking the pieces together again […] Some of them alleged that they knew specialist craftsmen who carried out this kind of work so perfectly that afterwards the break was invisible. [His] brother made out that it was the way in which the pieces of the vase were scattered over the floor which was largely responsible for fascinating the [family] in this way. The pieces in fact were arranged in the form of a trapezium, like a well-known constellation, and the idea that the sky was turned upside-down fascinated to the point of immobilisation [these people] who, after all, apart from the fact that instead of looking up were looking down, [resembled] those first Chaldean or Babylonian astronomers who through the fine summer nights kept watch, lying on terraces, their heads turned towards the stars (*H,* 15).

There is an uncanny affinity, here, between de Chirico's description of the fragmented art object and Jean Arp's account of his and the Dadaists' collage processes – practices characterised by the examination of fragments strewn on the floor as if they were, indeed, constellations. It is as if de Chirico were commenting directly on the historical avant-garde's recuperative efforts, and yet slyly poking fun at such naïveté: the child who has broken the vase wonders at the fact that no one has laid any blame upon him for his participation in the fall of the gods (the Greek vase is from Rhodes), and marvels at the assertion that that which has been broken can be put back together. That he is figured as an infant Achilles – the hero who as an adult is characterised by his flaw, and his early death – speaks further of mortality, of human limitations, of the distance from the gods. Concurrently, he can be seen as the disillusioned avant-gardist, critiquing his contemporaries for not mourning the ruins of antiquity and tradition: for merely observing them like 'curious archeologists' (*H,* 15). Indeed, the 'scene had been for Hebdomeros the cause of a disappointment followed immediately by a feeling of shame' (*H,* 16) – an echo of the artist's own disenchantment with Surrealism and attempts to distance himself from its practices. The irony of the movement's reception of a work that is, rather, a critique of its practice disguised in quasi-Surrealist form, is compelling.

One manifestation of this is in de Chirico's protagonist's canny predilection for punning, which can be seen to parody the punning games of the Surrealists (as exemplified, perhaps, by Ernst's *La femme sans/100 tête*). To the cries of '"The acropolis, the acropolis!"' for example, Hebdomeros replies, that:

> cette fois-ci, ni *d'accroc,* ni de *Paul*' et bien qu'il y ait meme un Périclés, ce n'est pas celui auquel vous tous instinctivement pensez, celui […] qui fuit le tendre ami des peintres, des sculpteurs, des architects et des poétes. [110]

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[110] I am citing the original French edition here to highlight the wordplay. Giorgio de Chirico. *Hebdomeros* (Paris: Flammarion, 1964 [1929]), 71. Margaret Crosland's translation is as follows: 'No, there is no question this time either of *a*

The word 'acropolis' and the word game that follows (a pun on *accroc* – French for snag – and the name Paul) can be seen to further signal the text's consciousness of its own textuality. It is a triple subversion – a *détournement* of classical mythology and Christianity, a deployment of the methods of the historical avant-garde, and, at the same time, a *détournement* of those methods. For the use of classical mythology and Christian theology (the allusion to Pericles and Paul) in the punning game breaks the rule-breaking rules of Surrealist practice: it amounts to a re-introduction of that which the historical avant-garde sought to brush aside. The myth of Pericles is debunked; the apostle Paul is referenced as an absence; and the reference to the loss of the subject for 'painters, sculptures, architects and poets' gives utterance to the modern crisis of representation. Where the punning name 'Hebdomeros' signals the death of God, man's consciousness of his own corporeality, and the text's consciousness of its own *materiality,* the garbling of the mythical hero's name signals a consciousness of the inevitable wasting of body and text – an awareness that the corporeal is caught up in processes of waste, and that artistic production both generates waste and will one day end up as/in waste. The building will crumble, the paint will peel, the *polis* will fall. The story will end.

As mentioned earlier, disquieting objects akin to those of de Chirico's still lives are scattered throughout the narrative of *Hebdomeros*. The landscapes the characters traverse are littered with them – and when they are not, it is the people themselves who appear inanimate. A signal of incipient transformation and change, these decontextualised entities elicit thoughts of a metaphysical modernity – what, in his early writings on representation, de Chirico termed the capacity for 'the things of this world [to] speak' and for 'modern times [to] appea[r] strange and distant.'[111] The fact that the images themselves are ones recycled from his paintings, and the technique a veritable textual translation of his visual practice, moreover, can be seen as one more de-contextualisation—as if de Chirico had severed a figure from one of his paintings and pasted it, in words, into the body of the text. Such a transposition of the enigmatic themes of his visual practice is acutely apparent in an ambiguous depiction of a city of men who construct trophies for a living:

> curious scaffolding, simultaneously severe and amusing, rose in the middle of the bedrooms and drawing-rooms, the delight and enjoyment of guests and children. Constructions which assumed the shape of mountains, for like mountains they were born from the action of internal fire and, once the upset of creation was over, they proved through their tormented equilibrium the ardent urge which had led to their appearance [...] they were immortal, for they knew neither dawns nor sunsets, but eternal noon. The rooms which sheltered them were like those islands which are found outside the

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crow or of *Pollis.* And although there is a Pericles, it is not the one of whom you are all instinctively thinking […] he who was the loving friend of painters, sculptors, architects and poets' (*H,* 66).
[111] de Chirico, 'Manuscript from the Collection of Paul Eluard', 1911-1915, as cited in Thoby, Appendix A, 246.

great shipping routes, where the inhabitants sometimes wait for whole seasons for an oil-tanker [...] to toss them some cases of damaged canned food (*H,* 47).

The ambiguity of this passage is worth examining more closely. There is a slippage of subjectivity in the second sentence: beginning as a description of constructed objects, the sentence ends with an attribution of immortality that is difficult to gauge: does it refer to the constructions, or their creators? The ambiguity extends to the following lines – to whom, or to what, does the sheltering effect of the room refer? And is it the trophies, or the men, which are being likened to marooned beings subsisting on others' waste? Such ambiguity is further heightened by the resemblance of the housed constructions to the subjects of de Chirico's still-life interiors: assemblages of precariously-piled detritus mainly composed of wooden frames and wood planks, the whole resembling a strange hybridisation of building scaffolding and a de-constructed easel.

Elsewhere, it is the reference to *specific* materials that recalls his visual representations. Early in the novel, for example, Hebdomeros travels through a landscape recently transformed by the convulsions of modernity, where 'gradually, huge buildings had risen up on all sides [and] there were new faces to be seen in the streets' (*H,* 24). Hebdomeros 'fle[es]' the district and its 'strangely accelerated rhythm of life' only to find himself in a forest infected by industrial progress. A 'strange epidemic rage[s]' among the trees, manifest in a 'giant spiral staircase of untreated wood which ended in a kind of platform, a real buckler which h[olds] the unfortunate pine in a stranglehold round its throat' (*H,* 24). On this platform lies a 'strange' inert man – resembling neither human nor statue, he recalls, rather, the

> petrified [...] corpses discovered at Pompeii. Lying on the platform made him in the end become one with it, he became platformised; he began to resemble a large piece of wood with unsquared corners nailed in place hastily in order to protect the floor from a shock which would never occur. This is why, when he was on the look-out, the platform appeared upside-down for any reinforcemet of the planks could only be imagined as nailed *underneath* (*H,* 25).

It is a collision of things: the self merges with the built environment, nature is subsumed by modernity, and the text is infiltrated by the materials that characterise de Chirico's visual practice. 'No longer human', evoking death, and foreboding that 'which will never occur', the image of the 'platformised' man recalls the mannequins in *The Disquieting Muses* series (1917 to c. 1947) and the *Great Metaphysician* series (1917 to c. 1925). The emphasis on the grained texture of the wood, and the degree to which the passage turns the plank itself into an object for contemplation, recalls the pivotal role wood plays in these paintings and throughout his pictorial views. Already significant for its involvement in catalysing the subject's 'de-animation' (if not itself the catalyst), the plank, here, shudders to life. The city has infected the tree, but the wood has infected the self. In this way, the 'platformised' individual gains the metaphysical aura of the objects intrinsic to the artist's visual *oeuvre*.

In the article on *Hebdomeros* I mentioned earlier, Hubert argues that in contrast to the plastic devices of his paintings (for example, light and shadow), words in de Chirico's text 'undermine the contours and of an outer reality so that only an evanescent and ephemeral suggestiveness can subsist' (Hubert, 156). This is, to a certain extent, true – sentences snake along the page with the same slipperiness as Loy's, the grammar skewed, subjectivity obscured. Nevertheless, there is a solidity to the *obstacles* to which they give expression, a tangibility to the very things that resist the reader's scrutiny – and, often, even that of Hebdomeros and his disciples. This solidity or materiality is crucial, and here my reading differs from Hubert's. The obstructions in the text are less a reflection of language's limits, but of its all too cumbersome presence. Blockages are described in minute detail: waste is depicted all too clearly, the layering of multiple analogies onto each other rendering it almost three-dimensional. Thus, for instance, de Chirico attends to the 'rubbish of all types' scattered in an empty piazza at the end of a market day in a town where people flock to be treated for their venereal diseases (*H,* 49). The description of the ailing patients is juxtaposed with the haphazard assortment of 'orange-peels and crushed cigarette ends' they leave behind at the day's end, conveying a *malaise* in a manner acutely reminiscent of the motifs of his paintings, in which remainders are as – if not more – important than whole entities. Waste is, in other words, all too aware of its quality *as* waste, and eerily capable of expressing itself as such. The metaphysics of De Chirico's prose lies precisely in this: language's absorption (consumption, *exhaustion*) in the description of rubbish, of the mess at hand, of what de Chirico himself termed the need to *débarasser* (clean up) art from logical thought or realist concerns. [112] It is not that the contours and solidity of reality have been undermined: the issue, rather, is that once that untidy, relic-strewn wasteland has been described, there are no words left to say what it means. The text has tripped on itself, exceeded itself. The meaning that transcends reality has not been articulated: the subtext or underlying signification evoked by the disquieting object remains subtextual, embedded in the object described. The shards have not been assembled, or analysed.[113] Indeed, it is the threat of cohesion's impossibility that, paradoxically, draws attention to the materiality of these component parts, often in a humorous, quasi Dadaist fashion. Consider, for example:

> Among the drums of broken columns where big horses suffering from dysentery come each evening when the square is deserted and crop avidly the tender camomile plants flourishing in the shadow of the glorious ruins, everyone was in his place (*H,* 66).

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[112] Giorgio de Chirico. *De Chirico par de Chirico*, Ed. J. Damase, Paris, 1978), 35.
1978. The full quote reads: 'Ce qu'il faut, c'est débarrasser l'art de tout ce qu'il conteinet de connu jusqu'á present, tout sujet, tout idée, toute pensée, tout symbole doivent être mis de côté.'
[113] As defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary, 'articulate' refers to both the ability to speak, to 'express oneself clearly or effectively' and that which 'consists of segments united by joints' (from *articulatus,* the Latin for 'jointed' (past participle of *articulus* or 'article'). Thus the word holds within it both the notion of eloquence, and that of cohesion and wholeness. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/articulate. Accessed 7 January 2012.

The scatological reference and the notions of desertion, ruin and decay are juxtaposed against the suggestion of regeneration and re-ordering. The depiction of medicinal plants sprouting from the cracks of the city's ruins suggests that the urban space has become a place for pasture; there is a place for everything in this strange landscape, and everything – humans, animals, forgotten buildings and flora – is in its place. The incessant motion of modernity triggers an inclination towards inertia. It is a tactic that hinges on appropriating the inanimate qualities of the detritus excreted by the urban, and whose decomposition the sculpture or painting seeks to stall.

The limits of recuperation are repeatedly figured, too, in the text's accounts of decaying bodies and marginalised selves against a backdrop of social unrest and political upheaval. Witness, for example, the episode in which Hebdomeros makes his way through a city unsettled by revolution, where financial uncertainty and social unrest are fomented by 'greedy bankers who ai[m] to cause a fall in prices and speculate afterwards on the rise which w[ill] follow' (*H,* 92). He wanders into the estate of a luxury hotel, where he finds a sick man who spends his days in his room surrounded by his medications and bandages, wearing a short nightshirt and no underwear, his flaccid genitals exposed as he 'smok[es] his pipe and gaz[es] dreamily at the mouldings on the ceiling' (*H,* 93). The passage can be seen to recapitulate an earlier incident in the novel, when Hebdomeros himself is residing in a hotel next door to a 'famous invalid' and to a 'polyglot' whose existential questions create an unbearable Nietzschean '*Stimmung*' (*H,* 33). The depiction of the 'famous invalid' is significant, amounting to a veritable layering of bodily functions and physical materials:

> He suffered from a pernicious disease which demanded that his body should always lie in the chair at a fixed angle for otherwise he was liable a to sudden death due to the bad turn that the stagnant urine in his body might have played on him; for he could only expel it with great difficulty (he often remained whole days without passing water). Lying in his wheelchair, his legs covered up to the knees with wraps and shawls, he would remain [...] his eyes vacant, thinking of nothing (*H,* 32).

Redolent with impending mortality, both passages depict man as an assemblage of malfunctioning bodily process, a degenerating system of solids and fluids that don't quite coalesce, and that merely mask an absence – uncannily recalling the bandaged, patched mannequins and bric-a-brac 'metaphysicians' of de Chirico's visual representations. A conduit for stagnant urine, an immobile fixture who neither sees nor thinks, the former 'minister of genius' can be seen to exemplify the aesthetic of waste's consciousness of its own limitations (*H,* 32), an aesthetic of which only the husk, or mythologised ideology, remains.

That things are going precisely nowhere, that human waste is both means and end, is further evidenced in the figuration of the wandering 'madman' who 'without being a gastronome' spends his days perambulating the city streets, asking passersby for an account of their last meal, and his nights 'pok[ing] about in cases full of rubbish which he found outside the main doors,' telling whoever will listen that 'he [is] very fond of sausage and rice' (*H,* 41). A mere imitator of a 'true'

culinary *connoisseur*, the parasitic vagrant who feeds on second-hand accounts – cast-off stories, cast-off comestibles – speaks of an aesthetic that has nothing left to say, that is entirely preoccupied with absorbing, pastiching, or satirising, the practices of its contemporaries.

This crisis, or impasse, is exemplified by the devolution of Hebdomeros' *flânerie,* in the novel's conclusion, into the senseless wandering of a homeless man, meandering among unsignifying signifiers. de Chirico sets the scene up carefully, situating his protagonist amongst walls and billboards covered with political manifestoes and urban renewal plans in order to satirise the bureaucratic processes of modernity as well as the idealisation of progress (*H,* 110). The political manifesto is absurdly complex and ornate, rife with obscure turns of phrase whose opacity is highlighted by the narrator's footnote: 'Hebdomeros never succeeded in understanding the meaning of these […] words' (*H,* 110). The municipal plan is similarly set up as an absurdity, promising a 'prophylactic clinic for combating venereal diseases [,] repair and cemen[t] paths, instal[l] a collective rubbish dump' and to erect a 'lighted bowling-alley [for] lovers (*H,* 111). In both cases, the text shrilly calls attention to the failings of modernity, while the presence of the manifesto form suggests an interrogation of the avant-garde itself, and an identification of the obscuring effect that any attempt to delineate an aesthetic intent will have.

'What is the meaning of this dream [of] trenches dug in haste' Hebdomeros eventually asks – of 'tiny hospitals […] where even the […] poor wounded zebras, are cared for with skill and tenderness, and emerge bandaged, sewn up again, repaired, disinfected, patched up, renewed again, in fact. Is life no more than a vast lie?' (*H,* 91). It is a question that recalls the very patched-up, quality of the novel itself, the repeated failure of its attempts to renew, or, indeed reveal. To the very end, *Hebdomeros* enacts de Chirico's own version of the avant-garde's recuperative practices. But while testing the limits of translating its author's visual recuperations into prose, it reads, too, as an interrogation—suggesting that even via the Metaphysical lens, waste can only reveal so much.

'Quite unexpected, quite improbable'[114]: André Breton's *Nadja*

Like de Chirico's, the Surrealist André Breton's artistic vision was based on a melding of life and art, and his practice was governed by the principles of juxtaposition and re-use of discards. According to Mark Polizzotti, Breton appropriated the collage technique as a regenerative means.[115] This idea was indebted to Lautréamont's earlier articulation, in the *Poésies,* that "Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it," which is to say, that the new artistic ideas and forms will always be indebted, to some degree, to previous modes. A new aesthetic holds within it echoes of those that

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[114] André Breton. *Nadja* (1928)*,* Richard Howard, transl (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1960), 52. Henceforth, *N.*
[115] Mark Polizzotti. *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), 76.

have come before; the new work is a layering over of that which precedes it. This recycling of methods and materials went beyond Breton's artistic practice, infiltrating his life and relationships: Polizzotti notes that 'Letters to close friends became cut-and-paste assemblages of newspaper clippings, labels, scraps of cigarette packages, medical reports and pieces of others' letters' (Polizzotti, 77-78). Breton himself became increasingly concerned with collecting both valuable primitive objects and everyday ephemera. One journalist described the ageing artist's living room as a 'junkyard,'[116] while in his posthumous (1970) account of Breton, James Lord recalled:

> an extraordinary interior [...] filled literally as full as can be, with an astonishing profusion of heteroclite objects, paintings, sculptures, constructions, and whatnot. I have never seen so many crowded into such a limited space. And yet it does uncannily make a whole, which is the strangest thing of all.[117]

Assembled together, the discards and valuables contained in Breton's home constituted a disjointed narrative, a tenuous living assemblage, in which each item was saved from the scrapheap by virtue of its categorization (for the moment) as sentimentally or aesthetically valuable.

Such recuperation forms a central tenet of Breton's arguably most well known novel, *Nadja* (1928)*.* The antithesis of Moretti's description, after Max Weber, of a narrative sustained by the logic of bourgeois rationalism (Moretti, 381), Breton's narrative is set against a *milieu* entirely exposed to coincidence and chance – 'quite unexpected, quite improbable' occurrences that he holds up as evidence of an irrational, otherworldly alternative to bourgeois existence (*N,* 52). From the very first page, identity is articulated as both arbitrary and fluid:

> Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I "haunt". I must admit that this last word is misleading, tending to establish between certain beings and myself relations that are stranger […] than I intended. Such a word means much more than it says […], evidently referring to what I must have ceased to be in order to be *who* I am. Hardly distorted in this sense, the word suggests that what I regard as the objective, more or less deliberate manifestations of my existence, of an activity whose true extent is quite unknown to me (*N,* 11).

Moreover, the novel situates itself as exemplifying a new, revolutionary, form that challenges the works of his avant-garde forerunners.[118] Of these, the figure of Giorgio de Chirico looms most prominently. A key influence for the Surrealist movement, de Chirico's metaphysical painting is an important reference point for the narrator, and the analysis of his aesthetic approach provides a clue to the way the text itself should be read. It is to de Chirico's eye for the aesthetic possibilities inherent in the ordinary and the cast aside that the entire novel gestures:

> Chirico acknowledged at the time that he could paint only when *surprised* [...] by certain arrangements of objects [...] the entire enigma of revelation consisted for him in this word: surprise [...] the resulting

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[116] Anon. 'Un Parisien Solitaire' in (*Combat,* 29 Sept. 1966), 7, as cited in Polizzotti, 618 and fn. 732.

[117] Lord, unpublished notes for *Giacometti,* as cited in Polizzotti, 618 and fn. 732.

[118] See Polizzotti's interview with Edouard and Simone Jaguer. 10 Nov. 1993.

work [...] resembled [its source of inspiration] only "in the strange way two brothers resemble each other, or rather as a dream about someone resembles that person in reality. It is, and at the same time is not, the same is not, the same person; a slight and mysterious transfiguration is apparent in the features" (*N*, 16).

Surrealism itself looked to seize upon surprising encounters and finds: the *objet trouvé* is a challenge to the art-work-as-commodity, but it is also a challenge to aesthetic norms: to find the object is to find astonishment outside of the pictorial frame. In *Mad Love* (1937)*,* Breton states that the *objet trouvé* must 'dra[w one] as something [one] ha[s] *never seen.'*[119] More specifically:

> What is delightful here is the dissimilarity itself, which exists between the object wished for and *the object found.* This *trouvaille,* whether it be artistic, scientific, philosophic, or as useless as anything, is enough to undo the beauty of everything beside it. In it alone can we recognise the marvellous precipitate of desire. It alone can enlarge the universe, causing it to relinquish some of its opacity, letting us discover its extraordinary capacities for reserve, proportionate to the innumerable needs of the spirit. Daily life abounds, moreover, in just this sort of small discovery, where there is frequently an element of apparent gratuitousness, very probably a function of our provisional incomprehension, discoveries that seem to me not in the least unimportant. I am profoundly persuaded that any perception registered in the most involuntary way—for example, that of a series of words pronounced off-stage—bears in itself the solution, symbolic or other, of a problem you have with yourself (*ML*, 15).

In other words, the found object's significance lies in its capacity to interrupt the everyday, as well as in its role as catalyst for reverie, contemplation and insight into that which bourgeois society eschews. The found object inhabits the waste phase and recuperative phase, because it no longer serves its original purpose and is 'as useless as anything,' while the new function ascribed to it by the artist is both aesthetic and spiritual:

> The finding of an object serves here exactly the same purpose as the dream, in the sense that it frees the individual from paralysing affective scruples (*ML*, 32).

At the same time, the implication that the incorporation of the waste object into an aesthetic work renders it immune to the 'paralysing affective scruples' of everyday life is somewhat paradoxical – the art object exists in the market, which is also to say that it is a commodity. The recuperation of a found object, however enlightening, will culminate with the sale of the art work itself – a form of commodification that is arguably not so very different from the adulteration of bread with chalk described by Marx (*C,* 238). The work itself may well shock and arrest by imbuing creative meaning into the item and demonstrating the aesthetic possibilities of chance, but it cannot but participate in the commodity pathway. One way – or one place – Breton is able to circumvent this issue is through narrative. The novel provides an arena in which to test the limits of the 'finding' process and reveal how a 'life praxis [based] in art' (as Bürger terms it) might play out (Bürger, 49). The novel form provides an avenue for Breton to engage with the aesthetic possibilities of waste without having to recognise the commercial implications of the end product. It

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[119] Andre Breton. *Mad Love.* Transl. Mary Ann Caws (University of Nebraska Press, 1987 [1937]), 28. Henceforth, *ML.*

is a discourse on the possibilities of aesthetic recuperation, a fiction-qua-manifesto that deploys waste objects and waste on a metaphorical level to make its points. Thus, Breton posits that

> We have said nothing about Chirico until we take into account his most personal views about the artichoke, the glove, the cookie, or the spool [...] As far as I am concerned, a mind's arrangement with regard to certain objects is even more important than its regard for certain arrangements of objects, these two kinds of arrangement controlling between them all forms of sensibility (*N*, 16).

The reference here is not cryptic: Breton engages in this discussion of de Chirico's search for the enigma in objects in order to then stipulate his own approach to contingency and chance. By shifting our attention away from the objects themselves – including their quotidian unimportance and the divesting of their former function – and towards the 'arrangement' of the mind that observes them and identifies their importance, Breton underscores the significance of their mystical, inexplicable qualities and conveys the irrelevance of their material qualities, and their original purpose. It is not the functional aspects of the glove or the artichoke that matters here, and their combination with other, similarly incongruous, objects undermines any realist intent. Rather, it is their decontextualized state and what it says about the mind that selected them that is of note. The odd arrangement of objects suggests the irrationality of the mind that seized upon them, while contemplation of the irrationality of that mind's arrangement adds to the dislocating effect of the objects: the one enhances the other, creating a cyclical 'sensibility' rooted in the making strange of the mundane, and in peeling away the functionality and order of the material world.

Moreover, Breton substantiates Moretti's thesis in his novel's introduction-qua-statement-of-intent – a claim that itself can be seen as an extension or re-affirmation of the Surrealist Manifesto. This in turn lends further mileage to a reading of the text as exemplifying the historical avant-garde's attack on art's role in bourgeois society. As Peter Bürger articulates it, avant-gardist literature stands out for its playful juxtaposition of reality and artifice: the form wilfully undermines the author's individual creativity through references to actual events and theoretical elaborations (Bürger, 22). Similarly, Breton situates himself against the literary canon. Against, that is:

> those empiricists of the novel who claim to give us characters separate from themselves, to define them physically, morally—in their fashion!—in the service of some cause we should prefer to disregard! Out of one real character about whom they suppose they know something they make two characters in their story; out of two, they make one' (*N*, 16).

The Surrealist non-novel as conceptualised by Breton centres on the infinitesimal detail divested of its moral value, and of its relation to the grand narrative of a life governed by destiny or predetermination. It centres on that which the infinitesimal detail reveals, or presupposes to reveal, about the author-qua-biographical-subject. Where the Surrealist house is a glass edifice open to outside scrutiny, and whose 'walls sta[y] where [they are] as if by magic' (*N*, 18), the Surrealist non-

novel is a transparent narrative that appears more fictional than any fiction could claim to be, and which teases us with its blurring of art and reality. Moreover, these infinitesimal details out of which it is constructed are precisely the materials the traditional novel sidelined: his work, in fact, undercuts the very notion of centre and side, text and margin:

> I intend to mention, in the margin of the narrative I have yet to relate, only the most decisive episodes of my life *as I can conceive it apart from its organic plan,* and only insofar as it is at the mercy of chance—the merest as well as the greatest—temporarily escaping my control, admitting me to an almost forbidden world of sudden parallels, petrifying coincidences […] I am concerned, I say, with facts [...] which on each occasion present all the appearances of a signal, without our being able to say precisely which signal, and of what (*N,* 19-20, emphasis in the original).

'*Life as conceived apart from its organic plan*' suggests the margin of a narrative as yet to be narrated, and coincidences that render the lived life novelistic. In this passage, Breton breaks with the formal guidelines of his predecessors: the rationalising, ordering functions of bourgeois logic give way to a programme designed to highlight the irrational, the chaotic. Moreover, in rejecting the moral value of work (which underlies the Protestant work ethic), Breton re-draws the lines governing the *writer's* work ethic, effectively countering what Franco Moretti defines as the moral purpose of description: 'And after this, let no one speak to me of work—I mean of the moral value of work,' Breton says. 'I am forced to accept the notion of work as a material necessity [...] life's grim obligations make it a necessity, but never [will] I [...] believe in its value, revere my own or that of other men' (*N,* 60). If the function of work (*travaille*) is no longer moral, then neither is the function of *the* work (*l'oeuvre*).

The aim of Breton' project is thus to discuss 'things without pre-established order, and according to the mood of the moment which lets whatever survives survive' (*N,* 23) – an aesthetic plan that mirrors Breton's urban practices – and much of the narrative is dedicated to recounting and meditating upon chance encounters and chance objects, and seeking to determine how they might relate to each other. The novel's narrator – who may or may not be Breton himself, as he suggests at various points – can be seen to enact the historical avant-garde's commitment to an aesthetic that intrudes into the fabric of everyday life. This is evidenced not only by a meandering, largely plotless narrative that mimics the perambulations of its protagonist, but by the minute attention given, throughout, to the mundane, overlooked, and worthless. Thus, for instance, Breton's narrator dedicates nearly two pages to describing his fascination with a woman's glove, and his ensuing fear at the prospect she might give it to him: 'I don't know what there can have been, at that moment, so terribly, so marvellously decisive for me in the thought of that glove leaving her hand forever,' he tells us (*I,* 56). The reason underlying his fear is never disclosed, for 'not knowing' is crucial to the Surrealist project – to resolve the mystery would undermine it.

Breton explores this concept at length, in the novel, in his observations of cast-offs and effluvia that are unknowable by their very nature. The most compelling of these is, perhaps, the text's of-quoted flea market scene, and its yawning parenthetical digression:

> Again, quite unexpectedly, when Marcel Noll and I went one Sunday to the Saint-Ouen flea-market (I go there often, searching for objects that can be found nowhere else: old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse—at least in the sense I give to the word and which I prefer—like, for example, that kind of irregular, white, shellacked half-cylinder covered with reliefs and depressions that are meaningless to me, streaked with horizontal and vertical reds and greens, preciously nestled in a case under a legend in Italian, which I brought home and which after careful examination I have finally identified as some kind of statistical device, operating three-dimensionally and recording the population of a city in such and such a year, though all this makes it no more comprehensible to me), our attention was simultaneously caught by a brand new copy of Rimbaud's *Oeuvres Complétes* lost in a tiny, wretched bin of rags, yellowed 19th-century photographs, worthless books, and iron spoons (*N,* 54-55).

In this passage, the delineation of the found object's significance erupts into the space of the text. It shatters it. Housed in parentheses is the very ethos of Surrealist exploration— the search for the surprising, the laying one's self open to surprise, and the ability to look at things anew and, in so doing, to see the world itself anew. The scene represented, the practice described, the urban space in which it occurs, are all liminal spaces in the body of the text. Their representation within parentheses can be seen as exemplifying that very ethos of stealth and subversion espoused by Surrealism. Moreover, the fact that the first time we encounter the found object occurs within brackets can be seen as further testament to the object's liminal quality, its marginalisation: like the world that treats waste as worthy only of rejection, the text itself expunges it, marginalises it, casts it aside. At the same time, the fact that the parenthetical statement ends up taking up so much space – growing to several paragraphs, spilling onto two pages – says something about the resistant, order-defying nature of detritus, and Surrealism's faith in its capacity to resist circumnavigation and in fact evince change. Like the anecdote the protagonist told us, earlier, that he intends to 'mention, in the margin of the narrative [he had] yet to relate,' the parenthetical description of the found object acts as both one of the 'most decisive episodes of [his] life *as [he] can conceive it apart from its organic plan*' (*N,* 19, emphasis in the original), and one to be glossed over. The description of the found object is a clue for the reader to seize upon, and recognise as deserving of attention in its parenthesised displacement in much the same spirit as the 'mind's arrangement' that Breton urges us to consider when contemplating a de Chirico painting. In both cases, Breton is keen to emphasise that it is on the seemingly trivial that we should be setting our sights.

Having explained the concept of his flea market perambulations, Breton turns to the contents of the complete works of Rimbaud he has just found. Caught in its pages, he discovers two loose sheets of paper – a typewritten poem in free verse and a series of pencilled reflections on Nietzsche

– that the saleswoman hastily explains belong to her, and are not for sale. As she and Breton converse, however, it becomes apparent that they have much in common – she is familiar, for instance, with his friend Louis Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* – and Breton successfully persuades her to give him the loose leaves of paper as a gift. The chance encounter functions, here, to highlight the unexpected treasures one might find amongst worthless objects, as well as, crucially, the points of connection that might transpire between those drawn to them. In this case, what is especially compelling is that the book and loose pages are neither discarded objects, nor objects for sale – the saleswoman has not disposed of the book, nor is she willing, initially, to part with it – and they are in no way conceived of as potential elements of a collage or assemblage. Rather than elements in the production of a future work of art, or commodities for sale, they are merely catalysts for reflection. Breton's account of this momentary exchange distils an important element of Surrealist practice – the appreciation of the overlooked, outside the confines of commercial exchange – as well as indicating that such appreciation is as vital to everyday experience as it is to the creation of actual works of art.

It is likewise worth noting that Breton himself, in revisiting this moment in *Mad Love* (1937)*,* performs that very act of re-discovery, treating both Nadja the woman and the parenthesised episode as 'decisive' strays, strands that make themselves felt due to their separation or distance from the narrative's 'organic plan', their lack of cohesion with the narrative proper. Finally, consider that if the attention of Breton and Noll is 'caught' by the book-object in the flea market (which recalls the object status of the book in question), the *reader*'s attention is 'caught' – diverted, distracted, captivated, in a word, seduced—by the textual diversion of the parentheses. Moreover, where the pages of the book that the characters find are interrupted by a 'pencilled series of reflections on Nietzsche' and the 'type-written copy of a poem in free verse', the book-object *Nadja* is interspersed with illustrations, photographs, drawings: documents that both 'verify' the veracity of the narrative and provide a kind of documented visual account of the story, and challenge its quality as text, turning it into a collagistic work—a flea market for the reader to peruse. This of course can be seen, in turn, as a challenge to the very notion of representation, and of the boundaries between text and image.

The novel's other central concern is to dismantle social assumptions about the moral value of work and commercial value, and to highlight the relationship between idleness and creativity – a key element of the Surrealist credo. Scavenging, the extraction of meaning from chance encounters, and idleness are inextricable from each other: to be able to attend to the city's effluvia, one must be unencumbered by work, and to be able to imagine the meaning underlying said effluvia, one must be in an unencumbered state of mind. Thus, Breton admonishes the reader, 'let no one speak to me

of work—I mean the moral value of work' (*I*, 59), and notes specifically that the difference between those who work and those such as Nadja and himself is that the former, on the train ride home, 'are thinking about what they have left behind until tomorrow, only until tomorrow' (*N*, 68). Caught between the just-completed and as-yet-to-do, they have little chance to notice their surroundings, let alone contemplate an alternative way of life. As Breton points out to Nadja, '"People cannot be interesting insofar as they endure their work […] How can that raise them up if the spirit of revolt is not within them? Besides, at such moments you see them and they don't see you"' (*N*, 68). The labourer is fettered by his desire to do his duty, and this desire functions, the narrator suggests, as a patina that obscures his gaze and impedes his vision. It is the artist's role, in this context, to illuminate all that goes unobserved, and in so doing to suggest alternative ways of seeing, and, crucially, of existing. The novel's efforts to delineate why, specifically, doing one's duty is a form of self-imprisonment is in keeping with Surrealism's central tenets, while its disjointed narrative structure and meditative, inconclusive tone can be seen to offer an alternative to the blinkered vision of the working day. This idea is crystallised in the narrator's forceful assertion that:

> there is no use being alive if one must work. The event from which each of us is entitled to expect the revelation of his own life's meaning—that event which I may not yet have found, but on whose path I seek myself—*is not earned by work* (*N*, 60).

In this sense, we might see the novel as essentially driven, however fitfully and digressively, by its narrator's desire to find 'that event […] on whose path' he seeks himself, and we might assume, too, that the process of sifting through flea market bins and wandering into deserted areas of the city, are components of that search.

We see further evidence of this ethos in a scene in which the narrator and Nadja end up by accident in the Place Dauphine. The episode is curious, for it is immediately followed by a long parenthetical explanation that, like the description of the flea market, elaborates on the unimportance of the place itself while drawing attention to its evident significance for a Surrealist mind:

> (The Place Dauphine is certainly one of the most profoundly secluded places I know of, one of the worst wastelands in Paris. Whenever I happen to be there, I feel the desire to go somewhere else gradually ebbing out of me, I have to struggle against myself to get free from a gentle, over-insistent, and, finally, crushing embrace. Besides, I lived for some time in a hotel near this square, the City Hotel, where the comings and goings at all hours, for anyone not satisfied with oversimplified solutions, are suspect)' (*N*, 80).

Note, here, how the Place Dauphine is depicted at once as an unexceptional wasteland, and as a magnetic space from which he is loath to leave. The place is seedy – as evidenced by the description of the 'suspect' comings and goings 'at all hours' at the City Hotel nearby – but it is also enigmatic, inexplicable and in fact smothering (as denoted by the reference to its 'smother embrace').

One is tempted, here, to draw connections between Breton's attraction for the Place Dauphine and his attraction to Nadja (underscored by the triangular shape of the Place, which Breton described, in *La Clé des Champs,* as 'le sexe de Paris,' and which Dagmar Motycka Weston notes was 'long associated, in the Surrealists' imagination, with the female pudendum'[120]). In both cases, what renders them attractive for Breton is their marginalisation and exclusion from the bourgeois everyday, the one existing near a hotel but having no use-value of its own, the other explicitly identified as poor and without a fixed home or source of income (although she has, we are told, prostituted herself and sold cocaine). Both entities exist outside the sphere of capitalist exchange, and are plundered, by Breton's narrator (and, indeed, by Breton himself) for artistic inspiration – as manifest in their inclusion in the novel. Both the Place Dauphine and Nadja are, in other words, two further forms of human waste that share characteristics with the found object of the flea market, but whose surplus status is directly related to their exclusion (or marginalisation), respectively, from the property market and the labour force. Indeed, Nadja too appears to see herself in precisely such interstitial terms. As she herself puts it, '"I am the soul in limbo"' (*N,* 71). Similarly, among the first parenthetical asides Breton makes regarding their first meeting is a qualifying statement about her very intentions: '(I say claimed because she later admitted she was going nowhere)' (*N,* 65). An articulation of her plans for that day, the statement exemplifies an overarching sense of the character's lack of direction. Indeed, she herself claims indeterminacy as the reason for calling herself Nadja: '"because in Russia it's the beginning of the word hope, and because it's only the beginning"' (*N,* 66). It is an expression of indeterminacy-qua-potentiality, and suggests an implicit awareness that potential can only be termed such if one leaves it untapped*.* That is, that potential is what doesn't go beyond the beginning – it exists as long as one remains either a vacant space to be filled, or a formless mass that takes the shape of any space in which it is situated.

Nadja's sense of her own marginalisation, in turn, is but a substantiation of Breton's earlier articulation of his own first impression of her. Characterising the 'young, poorly dressed woman walking,' he notes, is a 'faint smile' that 'may have been wandering' across her face (*N,* 64). The modal verb here is significant, indicating uncertainty, and in turn underpinning the already indeterminate action of wandering. Thus if (linguistically speaking) the *name* 'Nadja' connotes the beginning of something that has yet to be determined, then the physical characteristics of the woman, and her mobile, shifting, facial tics connote someone whose personality and fate alike are subject to re-visitation and reconfiguration. Even her facial features are approximated: 'She was curiously made up, as though beginning with her eyes, she had not had time to finish' (N, 64). On a

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[120] Breton, *La clé des champs* (Paris: Fayard, 1977), 232; Dagmar Motycka Weston. 'Surrealist Paris: The Non-Perspectival Space of the Lived City' in *Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture.* Ed. Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Stephen Parcell (Montréal: McGill University Press, 1996), 149-172, citations on 157 and 171, fn. 29 and 30.

metaphorical level, then, Nadja can be seen as human waste in her ambiguity, opaqueness, and marginality, while her receptiveness to the urban environment through which she moves – and her freedom (or exclusion) from work – render her uniquely open to Surrealist encounters.

One final moment in the novel is worth revisiting, and that is Breton's discovery, in the flea market scene discussed earlier, of the object 'covered with reliefs and depressions that are meaningless to [him]' (*N,* 52), which upon close examination he 'finally identif[ies] as some kind of statistical device, operating three-dimensionally and recording the population of a city in such and such a year, though all this makes it no more comprehensible to [him]' (*N,* 52). The description of the mysterious device is compelling in its attention to its inscrutability (an inscrutability akin to Nadja's), which remains intact even after Breton has determined its purpose. The object's identity, in other words, has been disclosed, but we remain uncertain as to how it originally worked, when it was used, and what numerical stories it recorded. We can assume that the object's value lies, now, in its status as an antique, or what Michael Thompson terms the status of 'durable', making it not quite waste (inasmuch as someone may still buy it), and yet worthy of Surrealist attention. It is, in short, a rehabilitated waste object, a thing recognised for its aesthetic and historical value that at the same time remains defiantly unreadable.

Breton's novel takes us through a perambulating, dream-like exploration of Surrealist practice, inviting us to gaze upon the city and its marginalia with the eyes of an artist open to otherness. His depiction of his ambiguous relationship with Nadja and meditations on the nature of art, narrative, madness, aesthetic beauty, and paid employment meld autobiography, fiction, art and literary theory, and social criticism, and throw into relief the central role that waste plays in these discussions. His investigations into overlooked objects and cast-offs and faith in their aesthetic and metaphysical qualities, and his meditations on idleness, are also a search for an alternative to capitalist logic and its influence on the everyday.

Human waste and the aesthetics of the 'economically nude'[121]: Mina Loy's *Insel*

While Giorgio de Chirico is best remembered for his visual art and André Breton for his novels, Mina Loy (1882-1966) is perhaps best remembered as a poet, and for her personal and professional connections to the avant-garde movements in Paris and, later, New York.[122] As well as engaging with Italian Futurism in her poetry, Loy collaborated closely with the likes of Tristan Tzara and Francis Picabia. She had affairs with the Futurist movement's leaders, Tommaso Marinetti and Giovanni Papini, and later married the proto-Dadaist poet Arthur Craven, whom Breton cited as a key source

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[121] *I,* 23.

[122] See Carolyn Burke, endnotes for 'Recollecting Dada: Juliette Roche.' *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity.* Ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 571-575.

of inspiration for Surrealism.[123] Her poetry and stories engage closely with the concerns of the historical avant-garde – perhaps most explicitly in her mock-manifestos, which undermine the central tenets of Futurism – while excrement, garbage, and human waste in the form of the homeless are prevalent across both her writing and visual art. Thus, for instance, one of her most well-known poems, 'Love Songs to Joannes' (1917), begins with a description of Cupid as a pig, 'His rosy snout/Rooting erotic garbage' – a figuration that startlingly undermines the distinction between the spiritual and the earthly, conceiving of waste as an alternative to heavenly manna, and with its own peculiar erotic charge.[124] This interest in the material, and the almost grotesque, runs throughout her work. Moreover, like de Chirico and Breton, Loy identifies, in waste, a radical potential and a means to break with past forms and traditions, as exemplified by the desire expressed, in the poem 'Oh Hell' (1920), 'To clear the drifts of spring/Of our forebear's excrements' and her description of the modern poet as 'Choked with the tatters of tradition.'[125] Where she differs from Breton and de Chirico – and from other fellow artists such as Duchamp – is in her deployment of waste as a metaphor for the socially excluded, the marginalised, and the financially vulnerable – what she terms, in the unfinished novel *Insel,* the 'economically nude' (*I,* 23). Thus waste, for Loy, is not only a means to overthrow tradition, and material with which to make experimental visual art, but a medium through which to explore marginality, including the marginality of unsuccessful (often starving) artists, the unemployed, and the homeless.

This materialist concern was partly rooted in Loy's own design practice: throughout her time in Paris in the 1920s, she designed hats, dresses, perfume bottles and jewellery out of bric-a-brac from the flea market in Porte de Clignancourt, which she then sold to the Paris department stores.[126] During the same period, she owned a lamp and lighting shop funded by Peggy Guggenheim, where she sold lamps she herself had made out of flea market finds. This work brought its own challenges: fear of selling out (Peggy Guggenheim recalls Loy's fear that selling through department stores cheapened her creations[127]), and financial instability (Burke, 338). Indeed, Caroline Burke notes that by the late 1920s, Mina 'was so confused about what she owed to whom that she not only threatened to sell the [lampshade] shop but told Joella [her daughter] that her apartment was about to be seized' (Burke, 369). For Jessica Bernstein, Loy's engagement with design situates her in between the role of artist and producer. This 'perennial awareness of the economy supporting [her] enterprise' underpins her work, and particularly her reflections on the making of art and what

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[123] Breton cites Craven in the Preface for a Reprint of the Manifesto (1929). See *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* 3.

[124] Mina Loy. 'Love Songs to Joannes' (1917), *The Lost Lunar Baedeker,* ed. Roger Conover (New York: Farar, Straus & Giroux, 1997), 53-70. Citation on 53.

[125] Mina Loy. 'Oh Hell' (1920), *The Lost Lunar Baedeker.* Ed. Roger Conover (New York: Farar, Straus & Giroux, 1997), 271.

[126] Caroline Burke. *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 338.

[127] Peggy Guggenheim. *Out of this Century: Confessions of an Art Addict* (New York: Universe, 1979), 71.

Bernstein terms the 'play between firstness and reproducibility.'[128] Loy's one attempt at the novel, the unfinished, posthumously published, *Insel,* provides a compelling insight into the historical avant-garde's recuperative efforts, and the tension between a radical aesthetic and the more practical issue of making a living.

Loy started writing *Insel* while she was still living in Paris, inspired by her relationship with the German Surrealist painter Richard Oelze, during her time as an agent for her son-in-law Julien Levy's New York gallery (Burke, 400). Her work on the novel continued intermittently after she moved to New York in 1936, but was largely superseded by her interest in the street bums of the Bowery, where she lived for the next decade and a half, spending her days writing about their relationship to the city, and making collages from junk she collected off the street (see figure 2).[129] Scholars have read this shift away from the international artistic circles in which she initially took part and her turn to the observation of homeless people as part of a wider rejection of the historical avant-garde's insularity.[130] In this sense, then, the novel's concern with the negotiation of commercial work and art, its playful derision of the Paris art scene, and its parodying of avant-gardist values can be seen to anticipate her later work, while its challenge to the Surrealist patriarchy sheds light on the historical avant-garde as a whole. In its undercutting of one of the Surrealist movement's canonical texts and subverting its plot, *Insel* challenges Surrealism's recuperative practices, identifying a hypocritical subtext to its ideals and fundamental inconsistencies in the views it espouses.

In Breton's novel, as we have seen, the first-person male narrator—an artist—meets and seduces a homeless prostitute, Nadja. In Loy's novel, the roles are inverted. The first-person female narrator, Mrs Jones, an artist who supports herself by finding new works of art for a New York gallery, meets a homeless male Surrealist artist, Insel, who lives off the kindness of various (female) strangers who feed and house him in return for sexual favours. Mrs Jones' reference to Insel, throughout the novel, as her 'pet *clochard*' (tramp, or bum), also bears affinities to Breton's depiction of Nadja. While it would be difficult to ascribe these similarities to an intentional effort to satirise Breton's novel, Loy's inversion of roles certainly suggests an interrogation, and critique, of

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[128] Jessica Bernstein. *Cold Modernism: Literature, Fashion, Art* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2013), 152-153 and 159.

[129] See Kristin Gilger. 'On Skid Row: Bowery Bums and the Politics of Waste.' Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, Hilton Baltimore. 17 August 2013. Available online at: http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p509397_index.html.

[130] See, for instance, Caroline Georgianna Miller. 'Ephemeral Materiality: The Objects and Subjects of Mina Loy's Downtown New York.' *Abstract Concrete: Experimental Poetry in Post-WWII New York* (University of Michigan: 2011), 16-53. Miller notes that the Bowery provided a 'refuge' from the artist compatriots she befriended in Paris in the 1920s, and argues that the waste objects she collected in the 1950s came to replace community (Miller, 5). In her introduction to the 2014 reprint of *Insel,* Hayden characterises Loy's engagement with both Dada and Futurism as 'ironic' and highly attuned to the movements' 'performance politics' (Sarah Hayden. 'Introduction.' *Insel* (New York and London: Melville House, 2014), 3). Cristanne Miller notes Loy's ambivalence towards the Paris art scene after she moved to New York in the 1930s, and that she had a general tendency to move in and out of artistic circles (Cristanne Miller. *Cultures of Modernism: Marianne Moore, Mina Loy & Else Lasker-Schüler* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005), 72). See also Elizabeth Arnold. *Mina Loy and the Avant Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

the representation of gender and artistic creation in the Surrealist *Kunstlerroman* as a form. Moreover, where Breton argues for the aesthetic re-evaluation of flea market oddities and for the merits of recuperation as a counter to the commodification of art, Loy highlights how even such recuperative practices exist in a market, and calls into question the idealisation of vagrancy as a method of radical resistance. She suggests, in other words, both the impracticality and the ethical dubiousness of living one's art in a Surrealist vein. Wandering, examining the overlooked, and identifying meaning in cast-offs will not pay the rent unless one turns those endeavours into a work of art that can be sold, at which point the entire process becomes once more complicit in the commodity cycle. The novel itself is not so much about the recuperation of actual waste – there are in fact very few references to the scavenging Loy herself enjoyed — as about the narrator's failed efforts to rehabilitate her homeless, starving friend and turn him into an art-producing unit of value. The waste object, in this context, is Insel himself – a man who dwells on the outskirts of the market economy, neither labouring in the traditional sense nor producing art.

My reading of Insel as human waste chimes with recent studies by Sandeep Parmar and Sara Crangle, both of which address the relationship between poverty, waste and avant-gardism in Loy's work. For Parmar, the social aims of Loy's later junk collages and Bowery poems are consistent with those of her earlier writing. The Loy who emerges from his study of her unpublished prose is a Loy concerned with both material rubbish and human beings treated as rubbish by society, and who, by 1930, has 'lost faith in the avant-garde's ability to offer a directive to society.'[131] Parmar groups *Insel* together with later works of Loy's which, unlike her first poems, are 'immensely conscious of the futility of conveying a useful message to society' but nevertheless 'anxious' to undertake the task (Parmar, 16). Sara Crangle also attends to the complexity of Loy's breed of avant-gardism, viewing the homeless figures in her poetry as metaphors for marginality and exclusion. She thus reads the central homeless woman in Loy's late poem, 'Chiffon Velours' (1942-1949) as 'a waste product of a consumerist system devoted to a productivity she neither embodies nor engenders.'[132] My analysis of *Insel* builds on these ideas, considering Loy's ambiguous classification of particular objects – a rotting suit that its wearer nevertheless deems useful, a piece of decaying wood seen to contain hidden magic – as complicating Surrealist values, while I consider the figure of Insel as inhabiting the liminal space between waste and use-value, continuously fluctuating between human waste and artist-producer.

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[131] Sandeep Parmar. *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 169.
[132] Sara Crangle. 'Mina Loy' in *A History of Modernist Poetry.* Ed. Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 275-302, citation on 293.

Figure 2: Mina Loy, *Communal Cot* (1949). Collage of cardboard, paper and rags.

Loy's novel, I argue, is about the tension between creating art and making money, and about the role the starving artist plays in the avant-garde imagination. In its depiction of Insel's own deployment of his emaciated state to ingratiate himself to wealthy women as a starving genius to be salvaged, the novel also explores the extent to which the commodification of artistic genius involves the idealisation or glamorisation of poverty. In this way, Loy meditates on the distance between the 1920s and 1930s art market's fetishisisation of Surrealist scavenging and the actual experience of poverty and social marginalisation. In this context, Insel is more than a focal point for the narrative: he is a use-value whose identity as a wastrel is in part a constructed persona designed to increase his appeal as an artist. Loy's interest in this starving artist can be seen as anticipating her later concern with the Bowery bums, while her depiction of Insel as human waste anticipates her figuration of the homeless, in her later collages, out of trash. In these collages, huddled, prostrated figures made of rags are juxtaposed against a blank backdrop, or layered over other waste items; thus, while assuming the appearance of human beings, their immobility and dislocation renders them akin to found objects. What renders them compelling is precisely their resemblance to waste, and their composition *out* of waste, which underscores their status as surplus entities.

Like the transient homeless of her junk collages, Insel stands for the uncommodifiable and unassimilable. However, as well as a surplus entity deemed useless by bourgeois society, he is also useless to the very avant-garde circles that claim to reject bourgeois norms. Loy introduces these ideas from the novel's outset, through references to Surrealism that subtly undercut its practices. Mrs Jones introduces Insel as 'a madman, a more or less Surrealist painter,'[133] who lives off scraps (*I,*

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[133] Mina Loy. *Insel,* 19.

25), finds shelter in the homes of the women he seduces and, failing that, sleeps under bridges (*I*, 86-87). He does not use scraps to make art, but for nutritional sustenance, while his vagrant antics are so extreme as to alarm even the Surrealists: 'None of the[m] will have anything to do with me,' he notes wistfully. 'They know only too well, if they did, I should try to borrow money' (*I*, 129). Moreover, contrary to Breton's *I,* who looks for the epiphanic potential in found objects, Loy's Mrs Jones is captivated by Insel himself – and, crucially, with the potential to put him to some form of use (*I*, 64). This tension between the aesthetic and the commercial – and the assumption that one cannot be both a radically subversive artist and commercially successful – underwrite the entire novel, and can be seen to throw into relief the paradox of the *objet trouvé* itself, which, once turned into art, is once more a commodity.

Mrs Jones recognises that her concern with housing and feeding Insel is based on his artistic potential – the assumption that if fed enough steak, he will paint – and that their relationship is thus as transactional as those he has with the other Parisian women who regularly give him money. For Breton, the artist's role is to imbue meaning into the things commodity culture has relegated to the scrap heap. Loy demonstrates the limits of this vision: firstly, in order to eat, the artist must sell something. Secondly, the attempt at rehabilitation is quite obviously driven by commercial interest. To spend time with Insel is not to expose one's self to unexpected truths, but to strive after a sale. We see this early in the novel during one of Mrs Jones' meditations on the capacity of his presence to imbue the most mundane objects with beauty. At first, she notes, 'As soon as I was seated beside him I had reached the extremity of optimism. The landscape of a spattered hoarding across the street was too lovely to look at. I had to lower my eyelids' (*I*, 72). Insel's presence turns the hoarding, which would ordinarily be a backdrop to the scene, into a subject in its own right, a thing of beauty. Moments later, however, the impression is superseded by Mrs Jones' recognition of the hoarding's normality and her realisation that 'I was a tout for a friend's art gallery, feeding a cagey genius in the hope of production' (*I*, 74). The epiphany, here, is not related to the human *objet trouvé*'s epiphanic potential, but to his potential commercial value. Mrs Jones' realisation reminds us that this is a story, after all, about a transactional relationship whose central purpose is to persuade the genius bum to produce a work. Aiding the Surrealist *clochard* is, after all, a form of investment.

Insel's affinity with the *objet trouvé* is rendered explicit mid-way through the narrative, following a digressive walk he and Mrs Jones take among the bookstalls along the *Seine.* We follow the two as they observe the books and objects on display, and as they coincidentally happen upon the same book, and the same passage. In a scene reminiscent of Breton's discovery of the Rimbaud in the flea market, 'we had both,' Mrs Jones tells us, 'in identical silence found one significance in an

early Greek fragment—I do not remember which' (*I*, 86). The difference, however, is that Mrs Jones later likens Insel himself to the Greek fragment, describing him as he sits as imbued with 'the same eternal conviction of the Greek fragment' (*I*, 97). Where the first discovery of the fragment recalls Breton's concept of the relationship between chance and the *objet trouvé* (the coincidence, in this case, being that both happened upon the object at the same time), Loy's comparison of Insel to the fragment suggests that it is he who is the enigmatic find. She underscores this by recalling, in the very next passage, how

> Once at dark in the Maine woods, I had stumbled on a rotten log. The scabs of foetid bark flew off revealing a solid cellulose jewel. It glowed in the tremendous tepidity of phosphorescence from a store of moonlight similar to condensed sun in living vegetables (*I*, 97).

The description, intended as a metaphor for Insel's hidden artistic genius, hinges on the resemblance between the rotten log's foetid bark and Insel's own disintegrating attire as well as the enigmatic qualities she assumes they both hide. And it can be seen, as well, to anticipate Loy's own scavenging practices in later life, including the logic driving her search for trash along the sidewalks of the Bowery and her interest in the homeless people who lived there. The rotten log is not human waste – that is, it is not a by-product of capitalist production or consumption – but it is biological waste, and Mrs Jones's recollection of its mysteriousness is intended to underscore Insel's strangeness, and his thing-like qualities.

Indeed, it is this curiosity about the 'solid cellulose jewel' within her 'pet *clochard*' (*I*, 84) that drives Mrs Jones to pursue Insel so assiduously, and we are led to believe that Insel, too, shares this view of himself. In a characteristically humorous episode, Mrs Jones points to a coin on the floor and asks Insel, '"Would you pick that up?"' – a request that Insel misinterprets, assuming that she is pointing at him. Ignoring the coin, he instead '"beg[ins] pulling himself together"' (*I*, 86). Although the item here is not a waste object but rather a coin, it is a discarded object to be collected, and the conflation of it with Insel is telling. In fact, if we consider the financial imperative governing Mrs Jones' stewardship of Insel, likening him to a lost or misplaced coin is quite apt. Left to his own devices, he would remain, like the coin on the floor, of no use to anyone; picked up and polished (and in his case also fed), he can potentially be put to use.

As mentioned earlier, putting things to use is an abiding theme in the novel: as Mrs Jones repeatedly reminds him, Insel must find some way to make money: rather than begging his lovers for succour, she argues, he should sell his paintings. But when she painstakingly explains, '"When you have money and can eat you paint a picture so as to have more money—when you haven't any more money"' he counters, '"It is more complicated than that"' for his painting is still wet, and thus not ready (*I*, 134). The retort is of course meant to be humorous—wet paint being a weak excuse to

delay the sale of a painting—but the humour belies a more serious point. Insel highlights a disconnection between the world of artistic creation and the expectations of the art market, the slow pace of creativity and the more rapid pace of production and consumption. Where Breton uses his novel as a platform for the Surrealist vision, Loy uses hers to indicate that the challenges facing art might require more than a manifesto or an eye for scavenging.

We see this very clearly in the novel, as Mrs Jones describes her first encounters with Insel, dwelling at length on the precariousness of his lifestyle. In so doing, Loy highlights the extent to which Insel's artistic practice is born out of a particular economic condition, and his radicalism limited by it. She makes this concern explicit early in the novel, as she muses on Insel's unemployment. In this passage, the protagonist describes the job market as a 'metal forest of coin bearing machinery' that is anathema to the '*révolté* […] incapable of taking it as it is' (*I,* 24). She elaborates:

> A man who finds himself economically nude, should logically, in the thickset iron forest of our industrial structure, be banged to death from running into its fearfully rigid supports. He is again the primordial soft-machine without the protective overall of the daily job in which his fellows wend their way to some extent unbettered by this sphere of activity. For them, the atrocious jaws of the gigantic organism will open at fixed intervals and spit at them rations sufficient to sustain their coalescence with the screeching, booming, crashing dynamism of the universal "works" (*I,* 23-24).

It is a spectacular passage, both in its linguistic play and in its figuration of labour as an amorphous body that flows in and out of the jaws of industry. Note, in fact, how Loy conceives of the job market as a 'thickset iron forest' against whose forbidding structure the 'economically nude' unemployed thrust themselves, to no avail. At the same time, the emphasis on poverty and employment as a form of 'nudity' is noteworthy, complicating the figuration of industry as a dehumanising machine. For as dispiriting as it may be to daily enter the 'atrocious jaws' of the workplace and receive the 'rations' one's employer 'spits' out – a process whose stultification is underscored by the description of its participants as 'to some extent unbettered' – to be outside it, Mrs Jones recognises, leaves one with no means to subsist, let alone make art. The idealised notion we might have of the starving artist is very different from the actual condition of starvation.

However, Loy further complicates our understanding of the plight of the *révolté* who abstains from – or is rejected by – the market by revealing how Insel leverages his image as a bum to endear himself to the wealthy women off whom he feeds. For example, his resistance to having his threadbare, dirt-encrusted, malodorous suit mended stems, above all, from a reluctance, as Mrs Jones puts it, to 'cut a slice from' his '"beggar's capital"' (*I,* 108). To Mrs Jones, the suit is waste – an item that should be disposed of, or at the very least washed, mended, and repurposed back into something resembling more than shapeless rotting fabric. Thus her efforts throughout the novel to strip the suit off him and wash it become a source of comical contention. Indeed, even after she has

successfully repurposed the suit, she notes that he has since managed to burn a hole in the trousers, in an effort, she suspects, to 'replenis[h] his beggar's capital' (*I,* 129). To remain of interest to the women he seduces and to retain his image as a vagrant genius (and, one suspects, to continue eliciting sympathy from art buyers such as Mrs Jones), he must remain a *clochard.* Put differently, to be a use-value he must, paradoxically, continue to appear a non-use-value: his livelihood depends on his appearing to be a bum, on looking the part of the homeless scavenger he is. Indeed, towards the end of the novel, Mrs Jones notes:

> "It's marvellous [...] your knack of dying on doorsteps. At will! At any moment! You might make a good thing out of it. Perhaps you do. Insel, I believe you put *lots* of money in the bank!" (*I,* 164).

The moment of recognition is important, crystallizing our understanding of Insel's performative persona and its profitability, but what is perhaps still more compelling is Mrs Jones' impression, following this utterance, of 'a sacred stronghold "blowing up," that shadow-tower of iron rag the *clochard*-deity Insel had built, like an ant of his wasted tissue' (*I,* 164). This odd depiction of the persona of the starving genius as a 'shadow-tower of iron rag' brings to mind her earlier impression, at the novel's outset, of the 'iron' structure of industry. Likewise, the description of the tower as something Insel has built out of his own 'wasted tissue' suggests an explicit link between the dynamics of industrial production – and its ingenious capacity to re-use by-products – and the produced image of the artist-bum. Where the *objet trouvé* is repurposed into an artwork to be re-sold, Insel has transformed his homeless persona into a profitable enterprise that relies, paradoxically, on the value of his apparent lack of use value. It is little wonder, then, that he spends so little time actually painting – indeed Mrs Jones recognises, at one point, that her interest in him stemmed from the expectation that he will paint, and that 'the result will be spectacular' when he does, rather than from any knowledge of what he has already painted (*I,* 125).

Loy's depiction of Mrs Jones' working life – which effectively takes up any time she might otherwise spend making art – also sheds light on the life of the artist under capitalism: unless she is able to sell her art, she must confine that creative practice to the fringes of the working day. For Loy, the responsibility of running a business and the repeated threat of having her designs stolen from larger businesses encroached on the time she was meant to be writing: by the time the lamp shop finally closed down, Bernstein notes that it had become a 'burden to the artist it had meant to liberate' (Bernstein, 188). In Loy's novel, this confinement is expressed in her attention to how Insel's rehabilitation ultimately distracts Mrs Jones, too, from making art. Michael Wood has noted that the early 20th-century novel must always contend with the existential anxieties of

incompletion.[134] We might well argue that its protagonist must contend with incompletion's far more material implications – overflow, stultification, if not actual burial under the sheaths of one's manuscript or the notes accrued (the most obvious example being the crushing death of Leonard, in *Howards End,* under the weight of a bookcase[135]). A contributing factor to this stultification might be what David Trotter has termed modernity's self-awareness of its own 'messiness', and of the many kinds of mess to be negotiated: that is, the untidiness of the artistic process, the domestic mess to which the female artist is persistently recalled, and the mess of negotiating the making and selling of one's art, that is, of moving between the (however idealised) disorder of artistic creation as espoused at least for as long as Romanticism, and the order and system required by business. If not Insel's, then certainly the narrator's and Loy's own artistic paralysis result from a sense of the myriad practical constraints on the modern artist. 'So complex is the status of the [usually starving] artist, dining with affable millionaires every other night' (*I,* 25).[136] All the more so if the artist is female: indeed, the narrator suggests as much towards the very beginning, in recounting her exasperated attempt to create order out of a room full of manuscripts to have the space in which to write:

> I sat looking at that apartment obsessed with the necessity of disencumbering it of personalia. The onus of trying to make up one's mind where to begin overpowered me. The psychic effort of retracting oneself from the creative dimension [...] while the present actuality is let to go hang [...] was devastating. The contemplation of a bureau whose drawers must be emptied—the idea of some sort of classification of manuscript notes and miscellaneous papers [...] the effort to concentrate on something in which one takes no interest, which is the major degradation of women, gives a pain so acute that, in magnifying a plausible task to an inextricable infinity of deadly detail, the mind disintegrates. The only thing to do is to rush out of the house and forget it all (*I,*40).

In solving the issue not by escaping but by sewing up the neck and sleeves of a pair of painter overalls to make a 'corpse-like sack' in which to 'stuff' all the 'scribbles,' the quotidian is literally stuffed away (*I,* 40). Having thrown the overalls into the spare room, she locks the door on them and feels 'once more [her]self' (*I,* 40). In stowing away these untidy reminders of business without attending to their use or lack thereof, the narrator makes space for her artist self. The overalls themselves in this context serve a similar function to one of Picasso's 'finds', for the narrator explicitly describes their discovery as unblocking her creative paralysis: 'Something in [her] brain clicked' (*I,* 40). In this scene, Loy veritably takes Surrealist practice indoors, showing how the subversive practices of the urban might be practiced within the domestic space, not to make art but to make way for it. Furthermore, in privileging an object bearing the very traits with which Insel himself is associated – he is, as mentioned earlier, repeatedly referred to as a clochard (*I,* 84; 164),

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[134] 'The Modernist Novel in Europe.' *The Oxford Handbook to Modernisms,* Ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth, Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 108-121. Citation on 112.

[135] E.M. Forster. *Howards End* (London: Penguin, 2000 [1910]), 279.

[136] My reading chimes with Tyrus Miller's assessment of Insel as 'literally embod[ying] the predicaments of the [1930s] artist' ('More or Less Silent: Mina Loy's Novel *Insel.' Late Modernism*, 207-221. Citation on 208).

'beggar' (I, 108), 'tramp' (*I*, 99, 111), and an 'enormity of sensuous filth' (*I*, 99 170) – the passage enacts – or rather, presages – the narrator's multiple efforts to organise Insel himself into a coherent, and sellable, entity.

The project of the historical avant-garde, Peter Bürger tells us, was destined to fail. 'An art no longer distinct from the praxis of life but wholly absorbed in it will lose the capacity to criticize it, along with its distance' (Bürger, 50). Loy's narrative gestures towards that failure: her depiction of Mrs Jones' efforts to rehabilitate the *clochard* artist and to find time to make her own art, and the novel's complication of the concepts of waste, the *objet trouvé* and scavenging, suggest the limits of Surrealist practice. Through her depiction of Insel as human waste that resists both interpretation and being put to artistic use, Loy's novel playfully parodies central Surrealist themes, drawing attention to the contradictions inherent in attempting to both live a radical aesthetic, and sell it.

The artists we have considered in this chapter demonstrate the complexity and depth of the historical avant-garde's appropriation of human waste, and the extent to which this aesthetic differs from both the novel tradition, and the formal experimentations of literary modernism. Breton, Loy and de Chirico's exploration of the marginal and the contingent reflect a keen awareness of commodity culture's effect on our relationship to the objects and people around us. Within the consumer economy, today's purchase is tomorrow's rubbish, and the physical world itself is understood in terms of the markets it fuels and feeds. The historical avant-garde shows us the other side of this codified world, revealing the uncanny, metaphysical, or merely evocative aspects of the cast-off and the démodé and exploring the imaginative and political dimensions of idleness. Failed prototypes, obsolete technologies and remaindered humans have a mysterious allure of their own, attracting us with their unreadability and their patina of failure. The artists in this chapter show us that to be avant-garde is not only to interrogate culture and seek to dismantle its institutions. It is to intuitively recognise the ontological and epistemological revelations that a closer examination of the overlooked, or the juxtaposition of unrelated things, might have. Breton, Loy and de Chirico's introduction of political, philosophical and aesthetic manifestoes into their narratives, their repeated references to each other's work, and their introduction of images into the text reflect an explicit effort to re-define art, and to both test and interrogate the limits of aesthetic recuperation. Their novelistic hybrids reveal the degree to which art can re-purpose and make new the old and marginalised, and in so doing resist the homogenisation of capitalist commodity culture. At the same time, they reveal the limits of recuperation: art, too, takes part in the marketplace – and thus any effort to put waste to aesthetic use will result in its commodification. The texts we have examined play out the tension between waste's recuperative potential as art, and the risk of co-option that recuperation entails.

Chapter Three
Samuel Beckett's *personnes perdues*:
Human waste in *The Trilogy*, *Texts for Nothing*, and *How It Is*

> I catheterise myself, unaided, with trembling hand, bent double in the public pisshouse, under cover of my cloak, people take me for a dirty old man. He waits for me to finish, sitting on a bench, coughing up his guts, spitting into a snuffbox, which no sooner overflows than he empties it in the canal, out of civic-mindedness.[137]

As we saw in the first chapter of this study, the recycling of waste formed a key aspect of European vanguardism, providing a means to oppose the commodification of art and redefine the scope and intent of representation itself. The manipulation of waste and the aesthetics of incompletion, I argued, was a defining feature of the historical avant-garde (a term I borrow from Peter Bürger). de Chirico and Breton explore the ramifications of re-introducing waste into the cycle of commodities and the implications of this process for the novel form; Loy's depiction of a homeless artist as human waste extends these ideas to consider the limitations of the Surrealist ethos.

We move, now, to a slightly later moment in 20th-century capitalism, to consider the literary representation of waste and of unproductive, remaindered humans as a counter to capitalist production, and, specifically, as a form of resistance to capitalist labour organisation emblematised by the ideas of such figures as F.W. Taylor and Henry Ford. I argue that Samuel Beckett's depictions of waste-dwelling bums in the late 1950s and early 1960s provide a salient, and insightful, counter to the culture of rationalised production and consumerism that spread throughout Western Europe after the Second World War. In Beckett's *Molloy* (1951 French; 1955 English), *Malone Dies* (1951/1956), and *The Unnameable* (1953/1958), and in his later prose novellas *Texts for Nothing* (1955/1967) and *How it Is* (1961/1964), we find characters wading or sleeping in excrement, mud and rubbish and making great efforts to avoid doing or saying anything useful. Time and again, we see them either make a mess of their work or refrain from doing anything at all, while the incoherence of the narratives themselves question the rationality of the novel form. Resisting paid work, they exist on the cusp of the commodified social.

By rationalised production, I intend two interrelated ideas borne at the beginning of the 20th century: Taylorism, named after the mechanical engineer F.W. Taylor, and Fordism, named after the industrialist Henry Ford. In *The principles of scientific management* (1911), Taylor delineated a method for radically increasing labour productivity by breaking production into component steps and organizing these, in turn, according to carefully-mapped out standards of time and motion study.[138] Henry Ford applied these ideas when he opened his first automobile factories. David Harvey,

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[137] Samuel Beckett. *Stories and Texts For Nothing* (New York: Grove, 1967) 17. Henceforth, *TN.*

[138] See Harry Braverman. *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998 [1974]), 66-82.

however, notes an important distinction between Fordism and Taylorism, which will be important to this chapter: Fordism's recognition that for mass production to work, industrialists would have to encourage mass consumption.[139] Indeed, Ford's instatement, in 1914, of the five-dollar, eight-hour day at his automated car-assembly line Dearborn, Michigan, was explicitly designed to 'provide workers with sufficient income and leisure time to consume the mass-produced products the corporations were about to turn out in ever vaster quantities' (Harvey, 126). This is to say that the system was not just a form of what Harvey terms labour control – the 'repression, habituation, co-optation and co-operation' used to discipline workers – but a means to socialize workers to think of themselves as *consumers.* Fordism was thus a 'total way of life,' designed to foster a new consumerist ethos (Harvey, 136). Harvey uses the term 'Fordist-Keynesian' to define the form of capitalism that shaped the period between 1945 and 1973, based on the equally strong influence in that period of Keynesian economics on government reform. Very briefly, Keynesianism is an economic model based on the work of John Maynard Keynes, which championed the importance of a mixed economy – which is to say, an economy dominated by the private sector, but with a place for government intervention, particularly during critical moments such as recession – and which privileged government investment in large infrastructure projects to create jobs (as exemplified by Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal). This is not to say, however, that the two models – Keynesianism and Fordism – were entirely aligned (they were in fact frequently at odds with each other), but rather that they were the single most influential modes of thought in the West in that period (Harvey, 124; 130).

Since Fordism only reached Europe after 1940, as part of the war effort, its expansion was closely tied to the evolution of European postwar reconstruction (Harvey, 137). In this sense, it profoundly altered not only European manufacturing and the consumer landscape, but culture at large. Kristin Ross provides a compelling account of this shift in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies,* noting the effects of the modernisation of automobile production on Postwar French economic growth as well as on the ethos of, among other things, work, consumption and leisure – not to mention the birth of new industries such as market research, which emerged in the 1950s to understand the motivations behind consumption.[140]

It is against this backdrop of rationalised production and consumerism that I wish to address Beckett's depiction of bums wading through and lounging in waste. I read Beckett's texts as narratives that resist the one implicit in the model of Fordist efficiency—an efficiency that Kristen Ross detects in the rhetoric of cleanliness and self-improvement that arose in tandem with the growth of the personal care and domestic cleaning product industries (Ross, 73). Beckett's novels

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[139] 'Fordism.'David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 125-140. Citation on 126.
[140] Kristin Ross. *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 19; 25; 26.

seek to imagine an existence in which the world of commodities is replaced by a world of unusable, perished goods, and in which time, divested of the need to work or consume, is devoted to idleness – or to spectacular exhibitions of failed production. Of course, this is not to say that Beckett himself wrote the *Trilogy* or his later texts with a view to dismantling Fordism, critiquing Keynesianism, or undermining consumerism. What I am suggesting, rather, is that these texts speak to, and of, a cultural moment in which the ethos of rationalisation, production, and consumption were at the fore – a moment when the irrational so prized by Breton, de Chirico and Loy, and which Beckett himself, through his poetry, sought to extend[141] – was entirely at odds with a world intent on reconstruction, and when consumerism itself was thought to hold untold promises.

Beckett's narratives repeatedly challenge these assumptions, and the foundations on which they are based, while his characters repeatedly interrogate the productivist paradigm by resisting its very tenets. They do this in several different ways. Firstly, by failing at their allotted tasks, often via extreme measures (such as dispensing with a limb) which effectively render their bodies unusable. Secondly, by embarking on useless narrative quests, commencing interminable inventory projects, or accruing useless objects. Thirdly, by choosing to dwell in landfills and waste piles and subsist on waste, thus abstaining from participation in the market economy. And finally, by playfully drawing attention to their own waste-like quality – which is to say, the extent to which their surplus status, their habitation of wastelands and dumps, or their attention to discards, renders them, in the eyes of capital, remaindered entities undistinguishable from remaindered things. Each of these aspects of Beckett's depictions of resistance to use-putting and productivity hinges on the deployment of waste either as a realist device (a backdrop against which the characters move, the stuff through which they sift) or as a metaphor for the characters' own remaindered, superfluous status. Beckett deploys a variety of aspects and forms of waste to explore the ramifications of the productivist paradigm.

My readings chime with Laura Salisbury's analysis of the *Trilogy* as narratives about 'minds and bodies that cannot be habituated to the temporality of early to mid-century capitalistic production nor to the linearity of its favoured mode – the 19th-century bourgeois novel or the classic Hollywood narrative film that races towards the production of a denouement.'[142] Indeed, she notes, the 'hate-filled resistance' of 'the Unnameable's creatures […] does not make them compliant subjects within late capitalist modernity [and] it is clear that one would neither give Beckett's characters jobs in a

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[141] For instance, Peter Fifield notes Beckett's application of the Dadaist 'recipe for a poem' in the construction of his late prose piece, *Lessness*. Writing sixty sentences on separate pieces of paper, Beckett threw the pieces in a box and retrieved them one at a time. *Lessness* comprises the sentences that emerged, in the order in which they were picked. Peter Fifield. 'Samuel Beckett and the Interwar Avant-Garde.' *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts.* Ed. S.E. Gontarski (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 176. Enoch Brater notes that the procedure bore affinities with Tristan Tzara's 'recipe' for 'making' a Dadaist poem. See 'From Dada to Didi: Beckett and the Art of his Century.' *Ten Ways of Thinking About Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 24.
[142] Laura Salisbury. *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 100.

factory nor invite them round for polite after-dinner conversation' (Salisbury, 98). Like Salisbury, I read the inactivity and shit-dwelling of the characters in Beckett's prose as resisting a particular type of homogeneity and putting-to-use. However, I am less convinced by her interpretation of these narratives as stories of ingestion, excretion, and the anal erotic pleasure afforded by producing shit rather than work. Rather, my reading of these texts posits them as more closely concerned with outright abstention (which is to say, *no* production of any kind), or subversion (a kind of wilful failure) and with what one does with those who refrain from taking part in the market economy. In other words, where the historical avant-garde re-invests in waste, only for its project to become, in essence, a recycling plant, Beckett rejects the ethos of re-use through outright abstention. His depictions of waste propose a radicalism of idleness as opposed to recuperation.

Now, of course, the resistance of Beckett's characters to be put to use and the relish with which they gaze upon discards without actually *doing* anything with them can be seen, in part, as a reference to Beckett's own ambivalent relationship to the historical avant-garde. Beckett's friendship with Marcel Duchamp and the belatedness of his involvement in the translation of André Breton and Paul Eluard's work is well documented.[143] As Peter Fifield notes, Beckett moved to Paris and discovered Dada only in the movement's aftermath, when it was already succumbing to commercialisation.[144] Beckett's own translations played an important role in widening Surrealism's reach in anglophone countries. Understandably, then, the waste in his prose is frequently read in relation to this relationship, or, relatedly, as a kind of celebration of the irrational in the tradition of Georges Bataille's *Solar Anus* (1931).[145] The Beckett that emerges from these readings is one acutely concerned with excretion as a form of production, and with the subversive potential of scatological wordplay.[146] Without dismissing these approaches, I argue the fruitfulness of reading Beckett's narratives as guides to the merits of being unproductive. The accrual of waste – both manufactured and biological – in his prose, and his characters' willingness to make themselves at home in it rather than participate in putting it back to use, amount to a double-subversion: a resistance to being reified, as well as a resistance to participating in the putting-to-use of surplus matter, be it physical

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[143]See Pascale Sardin and Karine Germoni. "Scarcely Disfigured: Beckett's Surrealist Translations.' *Modernism/Modernity* 18. 4, (November 2011): 739-753.

[144] Peter Fifield argues that Beckett's frustration with the final product of his translation of Paul Eluard's poems stemmed from the involvement of the art editor and curator Herbert Read, whose engagement with both art commentary and the commercial world of sales suggested a 'troubling commercial repackaging of Surrealism.' His involvement thus 'represent[ed] a tamed or marketable avant-garde.' Fifield, 173; 176.

[145] See, for instance, Anna Katharina Schaffner and Shane Weller. *Modernist Eroticism: European Literature after Sexology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[146]Ivan Fónagy associates pronunciation itself, in the *Trilogy,* with defecation, relating Molloy's reference to his mother as 'Countess Caca' to the anal impulse in speech. Ivan Fónagy. *La vive voix: Essais de psycho-phonétique* (Paris: Payot, 1983). Keir Elam has suggested that the reference, in *How it is,* to 'wordshit,' which most readers assume to be a description of his logorrhea, might actually be a literal description of him losing control of his bowels. See Keir Elam. '*Not I*: Beckett's Mouth and the Ars(e) Rhetorica.' *Beckett at Eighty/ Beckett in Context.* Ed. Enoch Brater (Oxford University Press, 1986), 124-148. Citation on 146. Beci Carver extends this investigation of scatology in 'Waste Management in Beckett's *Watt*' in *Granular Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 142-170. See esp. 162.

(the stuff in which they wade), or metaphorical (the events that happen to them, and which they abstain from narrating in a linear fashion). Beckett's texts invite us to observe different forms of human waste – remaindered things, and remaindered humans – and to revel in their resistance to commodification.

I use the term 'reified' here in the Lukácsian sense, which is to say, as the 'thingification' of human relations under capitalism resulting from commodity exchange. For Marx, commodity exchange transforms object and human relations, rendering human subjects passive (or socially determined) while endowing objects with an active, determining role (*C*, 26; 38; 39). Georg Lukács expanded these ideas in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), arguing that commodity culture relies on the 'relation between people tak[ing] on the character of a thing and thus acquir[ing] a 'phantom objectivity;' an autonomy 'so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.'[147]

Beckett's subversion of the taxonomic distinctions between objects and people, and his focus on figures of displacement, explicitly resists the totalising effects of reification. Firstly, the depiction of characters as objects literalises the marketplace's obscuring of the human. Their very marginality is a reminder of the extent to which our role in society is predicated on our marketability: those with no marketable skills are cast out of the system altogether.[148] Secondly, their willingness to discard objects, to accrue them for no meaning, or to refer to their own body parts as inert things, suggests a wilful resistance to putting *anything* to use, which is also to say, to regard things in terms of their utility or commercial value. Beckett's characters are, in a sense, stalled commodities—people who have been turned into things, but who have not quite made it into the market. Thirdly, the emphasis on idleness – which is to say, wasting time – highlights the extent to which time itself is a commodity, and reminds us of Marx's assertion that the 'mutilat[ion]' of the worker 'into a fragment of a man [or] an appendage of a machine' involves 'transform[ing] his life-time into working time' (*C*, 604).

By focussing on human waste (objects discarded by humans, as well as humans deemed superfluous) in Beckett's novels rather than his dramatic works, I seek to show the relationship between his critique of reification, and his efforts to dismantle the traditional novel form. Beckett's condemnation of the 19th-century novel is well documented: the subversion of reification through stasis and waste-dwelling in his novels is thus bound up in a broader effort to destabilise the foundations of the form itself, to counter its totalising tendencies, and shatter its logic.[149] The inhabitation of waste (the one way that his characters can, in fact, be seen to put waste to use)

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[147] Georg Lukács. *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin, 1967 [1968]), 83.

[148] My reading of Lukacs is informed by Timothy Bewes' in Bewes. *Reification, Or, The Anxiety of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2002), 4.

[149] Sardin and Germoni note Beckett's mockery of what he termed 'the "chloroformed world" of Balzac' (Sardin and Germoni, 741).

becomes a means not only to abstain from participating in the market economy: it is a means, as well, to undermine the novel's ability to circumscribe the irrational and ascribe a narrative function to all things, be they objects, characters or events.

As we saw in the first and second chapters, objects in the 18- and 19-century novel have a realist function. In 'The Reality Effect' (1968), Roland Barthes argues that useless objects in the traditional novel are used to lend verisimilitude to the narrative, and, often, to ultimately illuminate the character and intent of the players while stamping out the inexplicable. For Barthes, useless objects advance the plot, for the particularity of their features reveals the social and moral codes to which their owners are bound. In this sense, their presence substantiates the post-Enlightenment view that all things are readable. Housed in the novel, useless objects become part of a broader totalising logic, in which the unknown is made known and the irrational tamed.

Beckett's fragmented, meandering narratives can be seen to subvert that logic, or turn it on its head, by using useless objects not to advance the plot, but to underscore its absence, and to allow the characters themselves to exist wholly outside the capitalist order. The unmoored status of his characters suggest how one might resist being put to use – through abstaining from work, or doing a bad job – and resist, too, the urge to ascribe meaning to things. Beckett's character Molloy's assertion, at the very beginning of the *Trilogy,* that 'to restore silence is the role of objects' and that 'there could be no things but nameless things' suggests the material world's resistance to being made legible or productive (*MO,* 9; 31). Mute, anonymous and indistinct, the matter in his narratives becomes part of a silent backdrop that, far from elucidating the plot, helps highlight the fundamentally unfixed, ambiguous status of the characters. Thus what we find are characters who trundle *through* ambiguity rather than seeking to make sense of it and who, rather than transforming rubbish, instead burrow, roll, wade through and feed off it. In so doing, they embrace their marginalised condition and suggest a method for being at home in the irrational.

In turn, the tendency of waste itself to absorb the characters or distract us from their story serves to satirise reification (highlighting the extent to which exchange grants objects more importance than the humans trading them), and to posit the characters themselves as surplus entities. Directionless, homeless and unemployed, Beckett's characters qualify, in a sense, as Karl Marx's 'reserve army of labour' (*C,* 781). Marx uses the phrase to denote a specific form of de-valuation of labour under capitalism, whereby the perennial existence of others willing to do the job for less enables an employer to cut wages. While Beckett's characters are not jobseekers, they are very much surplus entities, and their surplus status is rooted in their abstention from taking part in the market economy, from accruing financial capital, and from inhabiting a fixed dwelling. In the eyes of the market, they are human waste, or what Zygmunt Bauman terms 'flawed consumers' – people

without the means, and in this case, the desire, to participate in the cycle of production and consumption.[150] In what follows, we will see the many ways in which Beckett's characters abstain from such participation, how they fail to be of use, and how they revel in their own superfluity.

'I gave rein to my pains, my impotence'[151]: On futility and the (failing) body

Beckett explores the many ways one might fail to be productive throughout the three novels of his *Trilogy* (1959), but particularly in the first, *Molloy* (1951/1955). The first part of the novel recounts the (first-person) wanderings of Molloy, a crippled vagabond on a bicycle, while the second part records his pursuit by a private detective, Jacques Moran, and his son (also named Jacques). The elder Jacques has been commissioned by a man called Youdi to find Molloy, bring him home, and write a detailed account of the journey, as he has done on numerous occasions before with other vagabonds. The narrative in question is precisely that account. But the project and narrative ultimately fail, as the elder Jacques develops injuries and infirmities akin to those of his pursuant, loses his bearings in the wilderness, and is abandoned by his son. His account ends with Jacques returning home empty-handed to record his journey and die alone in the courtyard of his ruined homestead. Left untended, his farm and henhouse have become gutted buildings strewn with the carcasses of the animals he once kept. Of Molloy we know only what we knew in the novel's opening: that he has been found by someone, isolated in a room, where he, too, is being forced to write his story. In both narratives, the characters' journeying results in a gradual incoherence of expression: their textual inscriptions are a counter to a more general sense of aimlessness.

In combining these two enforced records, in which obligation obfuscates reason and endurance takes the place of catharsis, Beckett enacts a particular process of failed productivity. The body falls ill and fails in line with the quest's growing absurdity, while the traveller's marooned state in the wilderness reflects his social exile. In emphasising the gradual erosion of his characters' productive capacity, physical strength, geophysical bearings and mental stability, Beckett turns failure and unproductiveness into a joke, making pointlessness precisely the point:

> So many pages, so little money. Yes, I work now, a little like I used to, except that I don't know how to work any more. That doesn't matter apparently. What I'd like now is to speak of the things that are left, say my good-byes, finish dying. They don't want that […] I don't work for money. For what then? I don't know (*MO,* 8).

The subtext, that there is nothing to be gained, is an echo of Beckett's most quoted line – *Waiting for Godot's* 'Nothing to be done.'[152] But where *Godot's* surrender belies any kind of

beginning, the absence of intent in *Molloy* is all the more fraught in that the characters continue, regardless of their diminishing ability to do their jobs. Molloy's explicit admission that he is working neither for money, nor for some other personal satisfaction, amplifies the enigmatic quality of work itself. It is strange that he is doing this for something other than financial recompense, yes, but that only serves to remind us of how odd it is that we ourselves do things we would not otherwise do, in exchange for a quantity of something defined by someone else. Molloy has, in effect, alighted on the fundamental oddity of the system of labour itself. And yet, although the passage casts doubt on the capacity of rational thought to create patterns of meaning, or a coherent thread, out of experience – and invites us to question our motives for working in the first place – their speaker *goes on.* What Molloy sees as the end is only the beginning of the novel – as asserted, too, by the unnamed authorities commissioning the work, in their insistence that he continue.

'I am perhaps confusing several different occasions,' Molloy admits: 'different times, deep down, and deep down is my dwelling, oh not deepest down, somewhere between the mud and the scum' (*MO,* 8). Causation is entirely lacking from this process. The catalyst for narration is partly primordial (the thing deep down 'between the mud and scum'), partly chance circumstance, entirely external to the narrator and beyond his understanding. The physicality with which this ambiguity is rendered is significant: the limits of expression and the limits of the body underscore the limits of human endeavour. Just as our utterances fall short of the discourses we aspire to make, our bodies, too, are fraught with inadequacies. Sites of pains and producers of displeasing odours and fluids, our bodies, their embarrassing emissions and their failure to operate under duress, are relentless reminders of our fallibility.

Such fallibility is exemplified by the sheer obstruction the characters' bodies pose to movement. Molloy and Moran may vagabond through the wilderness, but their travels are punctuated by a relentless search for repose. Lying by the roadside, in a field, in the middle of a forest, they seek stasis, a kind of stillness akin to an object or stone laid to rest (Put differently, they seek the silence of a full stop – the collapse can be seen as the physical embodiment of a sentence seeking closure). They look, in other words, to not be of use, or be put to use. At the outset of the novel, a policeman remonstrates Molloy for lying on the handlebars of his bicycle – a sleeping posture deemed indecent in a public place, and slyly recalling the handlebars of Picasso's 'Bull,' whose aesthetic re-deployment changes their original function. Where Picasso modifies the original function of the handlebars (to navigate the bicycle) and turns them into components of an artwork, Molloy changes their function by using them as a headrest. Inactivity here is intimately linked with

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[152] Samuel Beckett. *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber, 1956 [1954]), 1, 14, 60, 66. Henceforth, *WG.*

uselessness – the body at rest is a body abstaining from work, a body not in use. Molloy's nap is an impediment to the streamlined functionality and productivity on which society depends.

Similarly, although these are tales of journeying, much of the plot takes place in the pauses and rest stops that interrupt the journey – unexpected caesurae in a hospital or mental home, or a parenthetical sojourn in the home of an ageing Circe who feeds the protagonist in return for sex. Molloy and Moran are both supposed to walk, but they spend far more time nursing their bad legs or looking for places to perch so as to delay the work they have to do. The protagonist of *How It Is* (1964) doesn't walk: he drags his pronated body through mud.[153] In *Malone Dies* (1956)*, the book following *Molloy,* the eponymous narrator asserts that he has been walking 'all [his] life,' but in the same breath acknowledges he has no recollection of where he has been, or what he has seen on these travels.[154] These are odysseys defined by inertia – a wilful resistance to go, do, or make, in which characters seek to preserve their status as human waste. In this way, Beckett undermines humans' capacity to participate in the flow of production. As Malone himself pragmatically notes, his body is an obstruction:

> My body is what is called, unadvisedly perhaps, impotent. There is virtually nothing it can do. Sometimes I miss not being able to crawl around any more. But I am not much given to nostalgia. My arms, once they are in position, can exert a certain force. But I find it hard to guide them' (*MD*, 186).

Not only unable to walk or crawl, or to guide his arms in their movements, Malone describes his body as *impotent*—literally, unable to perform sexually, but figuratively, unable to do or create or will one's self to act. The body refuses to work for its owner, who becomes, in this figuration, an ineffectual line-manager, unable to guide his staff. The division of labour, when applied to the body, can only result in failure.

Further, the body's use as an *excuse* for ineffectuality is evident from the degree to which its failures are recorded. Malone's characters are either intent on dragging themselves forward despite an aching limb or prolapsed sphincter, or they are entirely consumed by their corporeality, intent on recording each instance their bladder fails or their bowel movement occurs on schedule. In *Molloy,* characters are described almost solely in terms of their secretions. Molloy's mother is incontinent 'both of faeces and water' (*MO,* 18); Molloy himself smells of 'ammonia' and 'bowels' (*MO,* 18-19); the death of Teddy the old dog, whom he runs over with his bicycle, is a blessing in disguise, ending the dog's incontinent old age – allowing him, in fact, to 'finish dying' as Molloy himself would like to do (*MO,* 19; 8). Similarly, Moran's son is nowhere depicted so vividly as when he is lying on the bathroom floor, ass up, waiting for his father to give him an enema to cure his upset stomach (*MO,*

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[153] *How It Is* (New York: Grove, 1964). Originally in French as *Comment c'est* (Paris: Minuit, 1961). Henceforth, *H.*

[154] *Malone Dies* (1956)*. Trilogy* (London: John Calder, 1959), 177. Originally published in French as *Malone meurt* (Paris: Minuit, 1951). Henceforth, *MD.*

113, 133). As Molloy puts it: 'The most you can hope is to be a little less, in the end, the creature you were in the beginning, and the middle' (*MO,* 33). In this context, the body is just a maker of waste, on its way to becoming part of the waste through which it moves.

In 'Beckett and Failure' Michael Kinnucan reads this preoccupation with the body and its limitations as endowing a unique function to the novel form itself: 'In most novels the disposition of the body is merely a metaphor for the disposition of its soul; in Beckett the body shows up as a machine in its own right, breaking down constantly, in need of management.'[155] We might expand this reading, and consider how the perpetual breakdown of Beckett's body-machines subverts his characters' (however half-hearted) efforts to work, and thus challenges the system of production itself. For Marx, production under capitalism results in 'the domination over, and exploitation of, the producers' – the means of development 'mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man [and] degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine' (*C,* 604). In Beckett, the body-machine needs management its owner cannot give: its constituent parts (characters' limbs or bodily organs) are thus given rein to malfunction and fall apart, to *freely fail.* In this way, we are shown an absurd glimpse of the liberating dimension of failing to work or produce. The body as we see it in Beckett resists commodification (if we consider commodification in terms of Arjun Appadurai's delineation, as the putting-to-use of a thing). In relentlessly breaking down and obstructing the work of its owner, it remains in a constant state of waste – an object that, for the moment at least, cannot be put to use. Breaking one's own limbs is, to say the least, a drastic measure to avoid work!

Beyond this role in stalling work, the failure of the body underlines the inadequacies of the novel form itself. The novel, ultimately, will be unable to adequately explain the events of this rambling narrative or give a definitive account of its ambiguous protagonists. Indeed, their very identities, like the onions in the glutinous stew the Morans eat before their journey (and which gives Jacques Junior indigestion), ultimately 'go to nothing' (*MO,* 102). Where Jacques Moran rummages through the rubbish bin, seeking evidence that the charwoman has thrown the onions away, we have only the option of going back to the beginning, in hopes that perhaps we have missed something. Ontological meaning is as easily found by sniffing through a heap of dung as it is in 'the mess of [a] poor old uniparous whore' (*MO,* 19).

As suggested above, one way of understanding failure is in terms of self-sabotage or unconscious subversion – what critics have termed Beckett's 'aesthetics of failure,'[156] whereby the self has no intention of 'looking for extravagant meanings' (*TN,* 9). In this context, the wasted

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[155] Michael Kinnucan. 'Beckett and Failure.' *The Hypocrite Reader,* Issue 5 (June 2011). http://www.hypocritereader.com/5/beckett-and-failure. Accessed 10 May 2015.
[156] See James Knowlson and John Pilling. *Frescoes of the Skull* (London: Calder, 1979); Susan Brienza. *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) and Marcin Tereszewski. *The Aesthetics of Failure: Inexpressibility in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013).

attempt is the result not of external circumstance, physical limits, or age, but of perversion, a kind of wilful desire to remain unproductive. Here, the body isn't merely an impediment, or space taker – it is a means to better divert attention from the project. Falling and losing one's way are all ways of subverting logic and of 'undoing' the work accrued thus far (*MO,* 24; 40; 50; 63-69). It is error in the tradition of Sterne—a return to narrative as feigned haplessness, the performance of an aborted project. This idea of time-wasting is exemplified in *Malone Dies,* in which the narrator intersperses the real-time account of his dying days with a detailed list of his possessions, and a pastime he calls 'playing' – that is, the making up of stories, which he tells in the third person. The novel itself amounts to fragments of this narrative, interrupted by the speaker's self-corrections, second-guessing and distractions. The absence of structure is augmented by the absence of epistemological design, and these absences are repeatedly figured in terms of waste.

For instance, Malone tells himself a story about a married couple, Mr and Mrs Saposcat—a story in which nothing goes to plan, and in which chance undermines their efforts to economise or secure a comfortable old age. The story spirals out of control, lapsing into a comedy of errors. The couple's life is 'full of axioms, of which one at least established the criminal absurdity of a garden without roses and with its paths and lawns uncared for' (*MD,* 188). To counter this absurdity, they consider growing vegetables, instead – but the high price of manure necessitates they move to a smaller house 'in the country where, having no further need of manure, they could afford to buy it in the cartloads' (*MD,* 188). The rationale and order of domestic economy turns into a series of illogical decisions that result in stasis: old age in a cottage with overheads low enough to buy the functional objects that they no longer need. The manure's devolution from financially unaffordable and geographically inaccessible luxury to an item that is affordable and accessible but ultimately useless is also a devolution such as that which Bill Brown identifies in the difference between a 'thing' and an 'object.' For Brown, the 'object' is that which we use for its intended purpose – the 'thing' is the 'object' after it breaks, stops working, or fails.[157] 'We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us [...] when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, [is] arrested' (Brown, 4). Thus, Brown argues, 'The story of objects asserting themselves as things [...] is the story of a changed relation to the human subject [...] the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation' (Brown, 4). In a similar vein, the story of the Saposcats, their absurd efforts to acquire manure, and the changing status of the manure in relation to their house move and changed circumstances is at heart a story about an object's lost use, and its transition to the status of thing – a thing, in this case, that also serves as a metaphor for a failed entrepreneurial effort, and for the lengths we will

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[157] Bill Brown. 'Thing Theory.' *Critical Inquiry* 28. 1 (Autumn, 2001), 1-22, citation on 3-4.

go to make a living. Indeed, the story plays on the degree to which our lives are shaped by supply and demand. It little matters whether we are trading in gold or dung: the market determines where we put our faith. The manure in this instance is a commodity – and a valuable one at that – but in order to afford it, the Saposcats must make a series of decisions that ultimately negate the manure's use. The manure becomes affordable at the same time that it loses its use-value – effectively rendering it waste once more.

This questioning of the totalising effect of capitalist logic relates to a broader concern that permeates Beckett's entire *oeuvre* – the threat to our individual systems of order and the ultimate fallacy of our narratives of causation and intent. Time and again, Beckett's characters seek, and fail, to record, take stock, and make sense of the things they do and the relics they accrue. Objects are to be organised in inventories, the better to keep track of them, but they are forgotten or mislaid— they are always already waste. Lives are to be accounted for in meticulous narratives, but the thread is lost, the narrator's mind falters, their paths (literally or figuratively) obstructed as they go. The very process of assemblage is a source of further anxiety: doubt hounds their inventories and records from the outset. Molloy, for instance, puts off describing his clothes, arguing that he will 'speak of [it] later, when the time comes to draw up the inventory of [his] goods and possessions' only to acknowledge that he might 'lose them between now and then' or 'perhaps one day throw them away' (*MO,* 14). In these narratives, Beckett reminds us that commodities are but waste in the making, reminders that we ourselves, as the characters in 'Waiting for Godot' note, 'give birth astride of a grave.' Or as Molloy asserts, 'To decompose is to live too' (*MO,* 25).

But for Beckett's characters, the inevitability of this devolution is itself a source of comfort, and abstention is a source of agency. For all that we are told to make use of ourselves, for all the ways in which we are put to work and all the tasks that we are allocated, death will force the cancellation of those designs. Someone else will have to take up the slack. This in turn endows the process of work with a kind of comic absurdity, rendering it an activity that, like Molloy, we do without knowing why: thus, Moran tells us, he plans to 'go on, as if all arose from one and the same weariness, on and on heaping up and up, until there is no room, no light, for any more' (*MO,* 15). The unproductive nature of this project – the fact that it will not amount to anything useful – is a source of consolation, for it also means that no one will be *profiting* from his labour. And without an interested buyer to purchase it, the process remains his own. Such perseverance, in turn, entails relinquishing the possibility of an eventual end. To keep going, in this context, is not to close the loop – it is to increase the distance between the point of origin and the place of eventual collapse. When the worker does end up back where he started – as in *Molloy* – the moment is divested of homely connotations, the absence of people and living beings who made it 'home' rendering it

more akin to a graveyard. In this way, Beckett re-defines not only the order of the body, and the boundaries of the novel, but the concepts of odyssey and quest. The absence of a meaningful end underscores the entire *Trilogy*'s concern with divesting people, objects, and the stories of which they are a part of their use. Similarly, Beckett's emphasis on the deterioration of objects seeks to remind us that, like us, they too are susceptible to time's passing. Their relations to each other (waste to a waste bin, tin opener to a tin) are contingent upon the functioning of each part. Malone comes close to communicating this explicitly, in *Malone Dies,* when he likens another character's failed efforts to the failings of the character's different body parts, which are 'indissolubly bound up together, at least until death do them part' (*MD,* 238). Neck and back, chest and belly, coccyx and risorius, legs and feet—it is just a matter of time before the infection and disease of one spreads to the other parts, and the whole body succumbs to illness and death.

'[A]ll these questions of worth and value'[158]: Partial inventories, worthless collections

As well as desisting from work, failing at the tasks they have been allotted, and maiming themselves in order to be deemed unemployable – which is to say, seeking to render themselves human waste – Beckett's characters challenge the productivist paradigm by pursuing tasks that by their very nature can never be completed, and will never bear fruit. We have already seen how Molloy turns the task of listing his clothes into a form of narrative diversion, and how Malone uses the story of the Saposcats' quest to buy manure as a distraction from the pain of dying, and how each instance plays into the characters' broader efforts to resist being put to use. These are but two instances, however, in texts veritably littered with references to listing, recording, and inventory-taking, and meticulous accounts of objects that anybody else would deem of no value. In each case, the emphasis is on the fruitlessness of the endeavour and on its unprofitability. By drawing attention to the meaninglessness of both the objects they have accrued and their efforts to record them, Beckett's characters make a mockery of both work itself, and their own particular role within the labour system.

This subversion is particularly evident in the narrative strands that deal with characters collecting or making inventories of their collections, where the account of the collection and inventory is framed in such a way as to cast doubt on the collection's worth, or the task's merit, and to highlight just how unlikely they are to result in a useful end product. As Molloy notes, 'the things that are worth while you do not bother about, you let them be, for the same reason, or wisely, knowing that all these questions of worth and value have nothing to do with you, who don't know what you're doing, or why' (*MO,* 46). His focus, in other words, is on listing and gathering things

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[158] *Molloy* (1951/1955) in *Trilogy* (London: John Calder, 1959), 46.

with no monetary value, while intentionally shirking the question of how these efforts might be monetised – recalling Scott Herring's definition of hoarding as a form 'material deviance' or 'destabilized materiality' that falls outside the dominant cultural order and 'destabilises the normativity of the normal.'[159] Molloy's efforts to inventory objects of no worth are a rebuke to our assumptions regarding what things are worth recording. Moreover, our doubt regarding the value of these efforts grows as we notice how Molloy's meticulous recollections, like Jacques Moran's after him, tend to stray into descriptions of things that are not even there. For instance, the departure from hospital concludes with an irrelevant comment about his boots, which 'came up to where [his] calves would have been if [he] had had calves, and partly […] buttoned, or would have buttoned, if they had had buttons' and which he thinks he 'has still […] somewhere' (*MO,* 46). The meandering description serves to highlight the many things which Molloy lacks – a functioning, let alone aesthetically appealing, body, proper clothes, a tangible sense of his possessions' whereabouts. Moreover, it draws attention to the absurdity of his narrative project—a haphazard account made up of useless anecdotes, descriptions of things that might have been but are not, and mere approximations of events.

The concepts of collecting, hoarding and ordering have been approached from a variety of different critical disciplines, evincing anthropological, philosophical and psychoanalytic readings. Jean Baudrillard[160] and Jacques Derrida[161] both link collecting and archiving to the death drive: the collector is essentially staving off the inevitable end that is death. For Susan Stewart, after Bachelard, the process of collection is akin to self-articulation – a process, that is, which calls attention to the corporeality of the self and of the pieces from which the body is constituted.[162] For Scott Herring and Martin F. Manalansan, as we saw in Chapter One, those who accrue objects of little or no worth – including trash – offer a rebuke to the normative order of the material world.[163] For Michel Foucault, it is less the collection than its organisation that warrants attention. In *The Order of Things,* he reads taxonomic organisation as an attempt to affirm power.[164] Power asserts itself by the putting of things in their proper place: people and objects are designated roles to play and rules to follow according to social norms and practices. To question or exceed these categories is to challenge authority, and to invite increased measures of systematisation. For instance, in

[159] Scott Herring. 'Material Deviance: Theorizing Queer Objecthood.' *Postmodern Culture* 21. 2 (2011): 45.

[160] Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting.' *The Cultures of Collecting.* Ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books), 7-24.

[161] See *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression.* Transl Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10.

[162] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1993), 132-169.

[163] Scott Herring. *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Martin F Manalansan IV. 'The "Stuff" of Archives: Mess, Migration and Queer Lives.' *Radical History Review* 120 (Fall 2014): 94-107.

[164] Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989 [1966]).

Dickens' *Bleak House,* we might read the characters' systematic attempts to 'move' Jo the street-sweeper 'on' as an attempt to 'sterilise' the public space and rid it of its intimations of human pollutants.[165] Jo in this context exemplifies the vagrant as superfluous entity—the excess or by-product left outside of society. In taxonomic terms, he inconveniences the system.

What is especially interesting, in each of these analyses, is that objects in a collection fluctuate between the status of commodity and the status of waste, and that collecting often entails a valuation of objects that is entirely separate from, or at odds with, that of the market. Although economic value can often play a part (one thinks of the collection of rare stamps, art, or antiques), the governing impulse for the collector is frequently personal and (in the eyes of the market), irrational. The collector's concern is the objects' place within the narrative of the collection (and their potential to help complete it), and their value is tied to their relationship to the other objects, as opposed to the price they might secure in the marketplace. André Breton's hoarding of junk in his house in late life, touched on in Chapter Two, exemplifies this idea (although ironically the objects he saved accrued value after he died, as objects that had belonged to him).[166] According to the logic of collecting, in other words, one might as easily accrue pebbles, buttons, and food wrappers as rare antiquities – as we indeed see Beckett's characters do. In these narratives, in other words, collecting is part of a broader effort to stall productivity. To put it in the terms of Michael Thompson's rubbish theory, collecting is not necessarily driven by a desire to transform the objects from 'transients' or 'rubbish' into 'durables' (Thompson, 7). Rather, it more often stems from a desire to imply a narrative and causation where none exist, or to stop – or shroud – time. In the case of Beckett's characters, the aims of accruing are in perpetual flux, while the objects they collect or inventory are of no value at all. The goal of their inventories is fundamentally unstable, subject both to whim and changes of mood, and to tangible changes in circumstance such as the emergence of a new object, the recollection of an object forgotten, or the loss of one prized.

Indeed, the only consistent factor in these collections and scatterings is the tension between the attempt to catalogue these useless objects, and a profound awareness that such an attempt will likely fail. 'Soon I shall be quite dead at last, and so on, without even going on to the next page, which was blank,' Malone tells us, drawing attention to the narrative's role in marking time and proving his existence before the inevitable end (*MD,* 210). Moreover, the addition of each record serves to undermine the project itself, suggesting its futility. By including his exercise book and pencil in the list, for instance, Malone highlights the absurdity of his endeavour: for what use is it to record the possession of an exercise book in that very exercise book, when in losing the book one

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[165] Charles Dickens. *Bleak House* (Oxford: 1996 [1852-1853]), 128, 190, 192.
[166] Mark Polizzotti. *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (London: Bloomsbury, 95), 618 and fn. 732.

would also lose the record? (*MD,* 210). Does the record's structuring ability only exist insofar as we keep it to hand? Does the order hold if we close the book or lose it? Malone suggests not:

> [It] must be in the natural order of things, [that] all that pertains to me must be written there [in his record], including my inability to grasp what order is meant. For I have never seen any sign of any, inside me or outside me […] I gave rein to my pains, my impotence (*MD,* 210).

The inventory's capacity to organise experience is proven fallible in the very same passage as it is suggested, and it becomes, instead, further evidence of Malone's inability to produce. Further, the description of impotence as something to which one *gives rein* is telling, for it suggests such inability to do, or make, has an anarchic dimension, an energy of its own, a kind of will or built-in drive to fail. For all that Malone follows logic, and seeks to order his thoughts and produce a coherent whole, his instincts drive him to hinder the process.

This fundamental unreliability of the inventory-taker is a theme that runs throughout the *Trilogy.* For instance, Jacques Moran, the private investigator commissioned with finding Molloy, wonders whether he'll remember everything there is to remember, when he returns home from his quest and writes his report. Similarly, he acknowledges that any inventory of his possessions will inevitably be incomplete – even if he keeps them away from his son's grasping hands, he will likely lose them, or forget he possesses them. Ironically, by the time he comes home, there is very little to record. The search was fruitless, his recollections are sparse, and his homestead, left untended while he was away, has fallen into ruin – a graveyard of dead farm animals and ruined crops. He himself lives out his days like one further piece of refuse. We might read this turn of events as a broader acknowledgement of the futility of seeking ontological truth or design – but is it not the case that a different investigator, an investigator with better credentials, with better references, with a better work ethic and strategic approach (to put it in management terms) would have been more than capable of fulfilling the terms of the project? Is it, in fact, an explicit choice on Beckett's part, to play out a narrative in which the contracted worker is frankly uninterested in completing the job for which he has been hired, and to show all the ways in which he might avoid doing so? The useless inventories and investigations described are not intended to suggest an outright absence of meaning, or the limits of ascribing meaning – rather, they suggest an awareness of the extent to which interpretation is a form of use-value. By abstaining from extracting a narrative from their lists, Molloy, Malone and Moran resist putting the information they have gathered to use: they abstain, in effect, from participating in, to use an anachronistic term, the 'knowledge economy'. The lists thus remain a record of items with next to no use value (since they themselves admit not knowing what to do with it), rather than valuable data ripe for analysis. Put differently, the lists and the items within them remain in their waste-state, unable to re-enter the cycle of commodity-information.

A different kind of subversion occurs in the well-known passage describing the absurd circulation of the 'sucking-stones' in Molloy's pockets, which he accrues instead of wealth 'simply to have a little store, so as never to be without' (*MO*, 74). As the name suggests, the 'sucking-stones' are stones which Molloy sucks on in lieu of proper food, and which he moves from pocket to pocket in order to feel that he is sucking on something new each time he fishes one out (*MO*, 63-60). Having no monetary value or established function other than what Molloy imposes on them, and serving as an alternative to the accrual of wealth, the stones are waste objects. Where Malone spends most of his narrative delaying his inventory-taking before finally acknowledging the futility of the entire enterprise, Molloy dismisses system and order within the very first pages of his story: 'But of the other objects which had disappeared why speak, since I did not know exactly what they were' (*MO*, 45). It is beyond the scope of Molloy's project to impose a system on the objects he accrues—just as he himself is 'willing to concede,' it is 'not natural enough to enter into [the] order of things, and appreciate its niceties' (*MO*, 44). Molloy's *own* social displacement livens him to the fallibility of the system itself. In this way, then, the objects themselves remain suspended between the waste-state and the commodity-state: neither confirmed as useful nor dismissed as useless, their place in the list is indeterminate.

The stone-sucking scene even gains greater meaning, however, when we consider how well Molloy is schooled in the rules of capital: he has already noted that 'you cannot go on buying the same thing forever;' and he has also informed us that advertising itself is premised on repetition: if you say something 'often enough,' you will 'end up believing it. It's the principle of advertising' (*MO*, 53). The stone-sucking circuit can be seen as another such reference, effectively mimicking capital's endless circularity. My analysis chimes with that of Félix Deleuze and Gilles Guattari, who cite the stone-sucking sequence in the opening of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Volume I (1972), in order to illustrate what they view to be the affinities between capitalism and the workings of the schizophrenic mind.[167] The schizophrenic, Deleuze and Guattari argue, makes no distinction between people, nature, industry and society: 'What the schizophrenic experiences, both as an individual and as a member of the human species, is not at all any one specific aspect of nature, but nature as a process of production' (Deleuze-Guattari, 3).[168] The schizophrenic makes no distinction between man and nature, man and industry, or man and society – s/he merely sees 'producer-products' involved in a process that is, itself, driven by desire. The world of the schizophrenic is thus a world populated by 'desiring-machines' connected to other 'desiring-machines' (Deleuze-Guattari,

[167] Félix Deleuze and Gilles Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Transl.* Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983 [1972]). 3. Henceforth, *DG.*
[168] It is worth acknowledging the unlikelihood that this definition holds in strict medical terms; however, it serves as a powerful metaphor – or lens – through which to understand the utilitarian and fundamentally dehumanising dimension of capitalism, as well the productive ways in which one might resist it.

4). In this context, production and consumption are not distinct, but rather part of the same continuum:

> [P]roduction is immediately consumption [...] without any sort of mediation [...] Hence everything is production: production of productions, of actions and of passions; productions of recording processes, of distributions and of co-ordinates that serve as points of reference; productions of consumptions, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain. Everything is production, since the recording processes are immediately consumed, immediately consummated, and these consumptions directly reproduced' (Deleuze-Guattari, 4).

Crucially, the schizophrenic intuits that desire does not constitute a lack – as psychoanalysis, for instance, would have us believe – but is, in fact, productive. Unfettered by familial, ideological or territorial ties, the schizophrenic is free to produce, at will, new desires, and new objects (Seem, xi). In the schizophrenic mindscape, there is little – if anything – to distinguish a commodity from waste, for there is nothing to distinguish where production ends and consumption begins (or ends). The schizophrenic makes no distinction between the things it desires and those it has ceased to desire, between those it seeks to consume and those for which it no longer has a use.

For Deleuze and Guattari, these tendencies are a product of the capitalist ethos, which is solely intent on 'continually producing production, of grafting production onto the product, [on] the production of production,' but they represent the '*exterior* limit' of the system, which paradoxically necessitates containment (Deleuze-Guattari, 7). Capitalism, they note, 'produces schizos the same way it produces Prell shampoo or Ford cars,' but because 'the schizos are not saleable,' they must be contained (or shut away) in order to prevent the entire system from falling apart. Thus the figure of the schizophrenic, while exemplifying the most extreme form of the capitalist ethos, is paradoxically both a positive and potentially subversive force, capable of disrupting the entire system.

Deleuze and Guattari only mention the stone-sucking passage in passing, and their readings of the *Trilogy* in later sections of the book take Molloy, Moran and the anonymous protagonist of *The Unnameable* to be different fragments of a schizophrenic self, which I resist. However, although I am reluctant to diagnose Molloy as schizophrenic, the concept of the stone-sucking circuit as a productive machine – a mini recycling plant, in which the used is repeatedly transformed into the new – is indeed compelling, and corroborates my own understanding of the scene as effectively parodying the circulation of commodities, fulfilling their role through endless movement. Such a reading, too, imbues the scene with a radical dynamism, rendering it a kind of protest or expression of dissent. And, too, it sheds new light on the transactions we have already examined in this chapter (most obviously, perhaps, Molloy's copulation with Ruth-Edith in the rubbish tip, each sex act both embodying desire and breeding a new one).

Examined more closely, then, the complex process of moving different sucking stones into different pockets, around and around and around, so as to always have the impression of a 'fresh' stone to suck, is a play on the logic of capitalist consumption, which relies on the lure of the new, and seeks always to produce new desires. The designation of 'new' the stones receive upon reaching a new pocket is akin to an act of reinterpretation, or production of new meaning that effectively amounts to a form or recycling. Although waste objects to us, in this context the stones are imbued with value, and the system itself does away with the category of waste, which in turn does away with any need to consume actual commodities. It is, in other words, a self-enclosed cycle. Moreover, taking into account the nature of the objects being circulated allows us to expand the reading further: for what renders the scene comic is the sheer oddity (not to mention unhygienic nature) of stone-sucking itself. The prizing of stones, and the effort taken to continuously re-imbue them with meaning, amplifies the strangeness of the capitalist logic: Molloy's assignation of value to the stones parodies the arbitrary nature of capitalism's value system, reminding us that the system hinges on turning objects of dubious worth into commodities, often for all too spurious reasons. The collector of worthless things, like the schizophrenic, is radical, but s/he is, too, a child of capitalism – his/her creativity is merely a natural result of the system into which s/he was born.

In depicting these very different engagements with objects of little or no worth – inventorying, collecting, and 'playing' at consumption – each of which discloses a degree of irrationality, and none of which can be seen to have a true point, Beckett does away with both the narrative logic of the traditional novel and the logic that governs subject-object relations under capitalism.

'[I]n the rubbish dump, when she laid her hand upon my fly:'[169]
Figurations of human waste

Beyond suggesting the collection's capacity to enshrine items in a state of uselessness and exploring the list's capacity, in its potential interminability, to defer the production of a complete, and useful, end product, Beckett's texts explore the extent to which the valuation of a person as unfit for use – or unproductive – in turn relegates them to the status of human waste. We see this most clearly in the treatment of people as if they were discarded objects – finds to be scavenged – and in the depiction of tramps whose appearance is indistinct from their surroundings. Inert (often through injury or exhaustion) and averse to working, going, or doing, these characters take on a thing-like quality. Indeed, the figure of human-as-*objet-trouvé* is literalised in *Molloy*. The vagrant's first sexual encounter is with an old woman called 'Ruth or Edith' who 'finds' him in a rubbish dump:

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[169] *Molloy* (1951/1955) in *Trilogy* (London: John Calder, 1959), 57.

> We met in a rubbish dump, unlike any other, and yet they are all alike, rubbish dumps. I don't know what she was doing there. I was limply poking about in the garbage saying probably, for at that age I must still have been capable of general ideas. This is my life. She had no time to lose, I had nothing to lose […] Anyway it was she who started it, in the rubbish dump, when she laid her hand upon my fly. More precisely, I was bent double over a heap of muck, in the hope of finding something to disgust me for ever with eating, when she, undertaking me from behind, thrust her stick between my legs and began to titillate my privates (*MO,* 57).

The first sentence of this passage is especially interesting, revealing specific qualities about waste itself. As a whole, waste when grouped together looks like an undifferentiated mass; but considered closely, nothing could be more different from another thing than one dump from another. Moreover, the aim of Molloy's scavenging (not to find something to eat, but to 'disgust himself' enough to lose his appetite) nullifies the very purpose of the act. He is not scavenging for food, but for food waste unattractive enough to dissuade him from putting it to use. In turn, the passage frames Molloy as a find – human waste that, we soon discover, the old lady intends to put to use by paying him for engaging sexually. For a brief time, Molloy and Ruth-Edith inhabit the dump and she pays him regularly for penetrating her 'arid and roomy' orifice until the day she abruptly dies. In losing her, he feels the 'pain of losing a source of revenue' and wonders whether she was, in fact, a man (*MO,* 60). The act of sex is thus turned into a monetary transaction, amplified by the fact that the woman's age, if not her gender (it is unclear whether she is in fact a woman), negates the possibility of procreation, while her 'aridity' makes for rather uncomfortable 'rubbing.' The cycle of production-consumption would have continued ad infinitum, had she not died. Finally, the interchangeableness of the rubbish dumps ('they are all alike') here is an explicit comment on the homogeneity of waste, which is also an obstacle to its usefulness. If all waste is the same (dubious in itself, given the phrasing 'unlike any other,' which suggests that it is not), then what is the likelihood of finding something of interest within it? Where Dada's scavengers set out to unlock the poetry within things, Beckett's scavenger here is far more sceptical in his foraging. He recognizes that in digging through a tip, one is less likely to find a treasure than get aggressively prodded in the perineum. No narrative belies the things amassed in the dump, and the scavenger himself will not find redemption, although he may, for a brief time, find paid employment.

And, as suggested above, the human find serves another purpose as well – to highlight the transactional dimension of Beckett's characters' relationships. Indeed, Beckett's *personnes trouvées* are frequently cast aside or killed almost as soon as they are discovered: their finders engage with them only long enough to determine whether they are worth keeping. Analogously, the recuperative potential of these finds is repeatedly negated. For example, when Molloy depicts a cigar-smoking gentleman walking his dog (*MO,* 13), he changes his story mid-sentence, and admits that the cigar was just a fag, the gentleman a bum, and the dog a mutt he found on one of his many walks from here to nowhere:

> was not perhaps in reality the cigar a cutty [and] what prevented the dog from being one of those stray dogs that you pick up and take in your arms, from compassion or because you have long been straying with no other company than the endless roads, sands, shingle, bogs [and] the fellow-convict you long to stop, embrace, suck, suckle and whom you pass by, with hostile eyes, for fear of his familiarities? Until the day when, your endurance gone, in this world for you without arms, you catch up in yours the first mangy cur you meet, carry it the time needed for it to love you and you it, then throw it away (*MO,* 12).

The stray dog in this configuration does not signal recuperative potential, nor is it man's best friend—rather, it is a surrogate companion and, as the passage progresses, takes on metaphorical significance as a symbol of the closest approximation to affection. What began as a fantasy of gentrification, in which walking is circumscribed within the order of everyday civilisation, quickly devolves into a bitter rumination over the transactional nature of companionship, in which one carries one's companion 'the time needed for it to love you and you it' before 'throw[ing] it away' (*MO,* 12). Gentleman and bum alike subscribe to this ethos, extracting a temporary use (companionship) from their fellow 'mangy cur' before moving on, recognising the relationship to have been transitory, and the companion himself to have been disposable.

Towards the end of *Malone Dies,* scavenging is framed ironically, as one of the (many) activities for which Malone seeks to find a methodology or governing logic. Here, Malone is looking to understand the parameters of his relations with an unnamed vagrant he has encountered on the road. The man is defined by the resemblance of his clothes to those of Molloy and Moran, and to the greatcoat to which Malone had referred in passing at the beginning of the narrative (*MD,* 273). The meticulous description, with its paradoxical intimations of the interchangeable and fundamentally malleable nature of identity, provides the catalyst for a two-page-long list of questions and commands. These regard the two men's respective situations, the vagrant's identity, his relation to Malone and the plot of the narrative, as well as, more broadly, the nature of being and the presence of God. Crucially, the list is *proposed* rather than actually occurring: Malone suggests its composition, thereby endowing it with a metafictional element. Thus:

> I shall tear a page out of my exercise-book and reproduce upon it, from memory, what follows, and show it to him to-morrow, or to-day, or some other day, if he ever comes back. 1. Who are you? 2. What do you do, for a living? 3. Are you looking for something in particular? What else? 4. Why are you so cross? 5. Have I offended you? 6. Do you know anything about me? 7. It was wrong of you to strike me. 8. Give me my stick. 9. Are you your own employer? 10. If not who sends you? 11. Put back my things where you found them. 12. Why has my soup been stopped? 13. For what reason are my pots no longer emptied? 14. Do you think I shall last much longer? 15. May I ask you a favour? 16. Your conditions are mine. 17. Why brown boots and whence the mud? 18. You couldn't by any chance let me have the butt of a pencil? 19. Number your answers. 20. Don't go, I haven't finished. Will one page suffice? There cannot be many left. I might as well ask for a rubber while I am about it. 21. Could you lend me an India rubber? (*MD,* 274).

The list can be seen, too, to combine the traditional novel form's efforts to order events into a narrative divested of ambiguity or doubt. The list's interruption, the interlocution of an absent

other, and the entire scene's ambiguous, imagined, setting, can be seen to challenge the novel form's capacity to organise lived experience, while the depiction of the vagrant as a surplus entity to be wedged into the narrative and organised into coherence amplifies the text's concern with remaindered figures. By speaking in the second person, Malone reaches out to an Other who straddles the boundary between narrative and world, and makes one final bid for logic and reason to render the unknown knowable. The fact that his story culminates in a heap of unknowns – scraps of different, competing, and ultimately unresolved narratives, all of which point to a different set of concerns – spectacularly undermines that effort. Material possessions, human relationships, ontological, epistemological and theological systems collide in what can only be described as a haphazardly ordered assemblage divested of logic or intent (*MD,* 274). And it is precisely this haphazardness – in which the list-maker must interrupt the account of his meeting with the vagrant to ask his reader to loan him a rubber in order to enable him to erase what they have just read – that renders the passage comedic. Is Malone intending to erase the whole record and start again? Does that record include the novel we are reading? And, if so, what was the *point* of everything we have just assimilated? The novel itself, at this moment, is caught in a limbo between use-value and waste – if it continues, which of course it will, we can assume this record will have some kind of use (if only substantiating our sense of its concern with dismantling narrative design); but if it hadn't continued, the pages of erased writing would have become waste. The mere suggestion of erasure draws our attention to the tenuousness of the writing process, and to the waste potential of literature itself, while distracting us from the narrative's original concern – what to do with the vagrant, how to put him to use within the story. In casting doubt on his capacity to complete his story, Malone turns our attention away from the question of human surplussage, allowing his vagrant to remain human waste – unattended, left to his own devices, and free to be of no commercially productive use.

Beckett extends this preoccupation with the thingness of human beings and their capacity to be deemed human waste in his last novel, *How it is* (1964)*.* The very notion of social relations is inverted here, as the narrator blindly wades through an endless expanse of mud, and encounters an anonymous man. Where the traditional novel would see the two converse, Beckett's protagonist subjects the unknown Other to a process of tactile identification, as if he were an object, and then allocates him the name of 'Pim,' before meditating on how – and if – to put him to use. The man's thing-like quality is implied from the outset, as the narrator identifies his different body parts, and through these his gender, age and size. His identity amounts to the cumulative sum of his body parts – the corporeal equivalent of the 'bits and scraps' via which the narrator's own narrative is murmured (*H,* 43). As such, he is not quite human, but rather an uncanny imitation of the human.

His skin-like texture, the human-like blabber he emits, and the possession of hair and limbs and nails all merely underline the absence of something else – his incoherence, in fact, might be seen as the linguistic equivalent of the assemblage's visual disarray, while his inability to do much of anything and his habitation of this wasteland setting renders him human waste.

My use of the word 'uncanny', here, relates specifically to Freud's delineation of it in his seminal essay, 'The "Uncanny"' (1919).[170] In the essay, Freud identifies the unease evinced by inanimate objects that appear animated, and that of people who appear inanimate: these phenomena elicit our fear due to their primordial associations. The human-looking doll, or the spectral, doll-like woman, recall unconscious fears and desires – they awaken our atavistic impulses. And this, to an extent, is the way in which Pim is framed: as a not-quite-human entity whose surplus status and pliability inspires barbaric tendencies in the narrator, from abusive impulses, to violent processes such as the solicitation of speech via clubbing. The depiction extends one of the central tropes of the historical avant-garde: the potential for our mechanising processes, and our compulsion to put to use, to take on a life of their own, in a vein akin to Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936).[171] The key difference, however, is that the thing threatening to revive, in this case, *is human.* Beckett's narrative, here, centres on the disquieting effect of reification: to look upon an inert human who acts like a faulty automaton, and to be angered by their uselessness, is to glimpse the effects of our ordering systems.

This relationship is augmented by the emphasis on Pim's different anatomical parts, and on their identification via means other than sight. For instance, the narrator ascertains Pim's gender via a process of blind groping and attentive listening to the anonymous voice murmuring the action to him as he performs it. The framing has a distancing effect, severing actor(s) from action, as well as from other actors. Indeed, it suggests a system of actors and acted *upon,* rather than actors relating to each other:

> having rummaged in the mud between his legs I bring up finally what seems to me a testicle or two
> [...] to feel the skull it's bald no delete the face it's preferable mass of hairs all white to the feel that
> clinches it he's a little old man we're two little old men (*H,* 46)

Rummaging brings to light evidence, which, reconstructed, provides a key to the nature of the proverbial beast. This reconstruction, however, highlights the ease with which Pim can be *de-*constructed: the narrator is able to 'bring up' the 'testicle or two', as if his anatomical parts were detachable. Such an impression is heightened, a few passages on, in the explicit comparison between Pim's static quality and that of a rock. Having pulled up Pim's arm to check the time on his

[170] Sigmund Freud. 'The "Uncanny"' (1919). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*: *Vol. XVII.* Ed. James Strachey (Hogarth Press: London, 1955), 228-256.
[171] *Modern Times* (1936)*,* directed by Charlie Chaplin [Film]. USA: United Artists Corporation.

wrist watch – an act that further amplifies his function as a device or utilitarian object – the narrator throws it back down again. The arm flops down, lifeless, recalling the inertness of an automaton or puppet, which depend upon their manipulator to imbue them with a semblance of liveliness and agency. Without such intervention, these objects amounts to little more than cast-offs with no use:

> A few more movements put the arm back where I found it then towards me again the other way [...] until it jams one can see the movement grasp the wrist with my left hand and pull while bearing from behind with the right on the elbow or thereabouts [...] Released at last the arm recoils sharp a little way then comes to rest it's I again must put it back where I found it way off on the right in the mud Pim is like that he will be like that he stays whatever way he's put but it doesn't amount to much on the whole a rock (*H,* 50).

Pim is figured, here, as human waste insofar as he cannot be made to do anything, and insofar as his very limbs lack functionality. He is framed, in other words, as a unproductive entity – a thing not only without agency, but unable to respond to simple orders to fulfil simple tasks, and thus the very embodiment (from the perspective of production) of superfluity.

The narrator further emphasises Pim's condition as human waste in his suggestion of his interchangeability with the narrator's malfunctioning wristwatch. The narrator refers to how:

> It keeps me company that's all its ticking now and then but break it throw it away let it run down and stop no something stops me it stops I shake my arm it starts no more about this watch (*H,* 51).

As he has just been talking about Pim, the 'it' here could be either Pim or the watch. The intentionality of this ambiguity becomes apparent in the dismissive conclusion of the statement, 'no more about this watch,' which resembles the format the narrator deploys elsewhere to clarify potentially ambiguous pronouns (e.g. 'what about it my memory we're talking about my memory' (*H,* 10); or 'it comes the words we're talking of words' (*H,* 21). 'It' isn't the man—it's the watch; but that temporary moment of uncertainty has been enough to destabilise the narrative. 'It' may be the watch, but for a moment, we were made to imagine a malfunctioning ticking man—a man-watch in the process of being used, breaking, and being cast aside. Indeed, the narrator has already implied as much at the outset of part II, in his suggestion that it is he who enables Pim to be more than human waste:

> My part but for me he would never Pim we're talking of Pim never be but for me anything but a dumb limp lump flat for ever in the mud but I'll quicken him (*H,* 10).

Pim's existence is contingent upon the narrator's locution – it is in giving utterance to him, and in naming him, that he gains the (albeit temporary) semblance of a human being with a purpose. The uncertainty of Pim's identity is augmented by the different names by which the narrator refers to him. Having referred to him as Pim throughout Part One, the narrator reverts to calling him 'he' or 'it'; following this, he proceeds to *inform* Pim of the name he has chosen for him:

> no more than I by his own account or my imagination he had no name any more than I so I gave him
> one the name Pim for more commodity more convenience it's off again in the past (*H,* 51).

His name chosen for convenience's sake, 'Pim' comes to stand for an accoutrement – an object to be interlaced in the narrative, dragged through the mud for an equivalent amount of time to the jute sack, and then disposed of when his owner tires of his presence. He is the personification of waste recycled and cast off again.

One way that the narrator seeks to put Pim to use is by training him to respond to violent thumps of a can opener on the skull or spine. One thump, and Pim speaks. A longer thump, and he sings, providing entertainment. The narrator's use of a tin opener to evince these responses is significant, for it renders Pim analogous to the tins in the narrator's bag – a thing from which to extract a function via a mechanical act (screwing the opener into the tin, or wacking Pim on the head with it). Indeed, the narrator himself draws attention to the mechanical nature of the act:

> I take the opener in my right hand move it down along the spine and drive it into the arse not the
> hole not such a fool the cheek a cheek he cries I withdraw it thump on skull the cries cease it's
> mechanical end of first lesson series rest and here parenthesis (*H,* 57).

The opener is thus a way to render Pim useful: just as a tin is useless without an opener or sharp object to extract its contents – and thus, to all intents and purposes, waste – Pim is only useful, to the narrator, when he is made to work. Once the process ceases, he goes back to being an inert object without use value – waste. This cycle uncannily reflects the ease with which the commodity slips from essential to obsolete.

But Pim's uses are limited: while the narrator can strike him to make him emit different noises, the narrator acknowledges the futility of 'demanding something beyond [Pim's] powers that he stand on his head for example or on his feet or kneel most certainly not' (*H,* 55). Moreover, the greatest obstacle to putting Pim to use is his humanity. For instance, the narrator, habituated to clawing Pim in the armpit to evince particular responses, deliberates over 'try[ing] a new place,' one more sensitive, for instance his eye or 'glans', before deciding that this would 'only confuse him fatal thing avoid at all costs' (*H,* 54). The process is governed by the need to ensure that the man-machine operates according to the machinist's will—but what is also evident is the need to adapt the commands to the man-machine's capabilities.[172] Thus it is precisely the objective limitations imposed by Pim's body, and faculties of comprehension, that obstructs the efficiency of the process. Where a machine can be programmed to tease out blips and loopholes, the body remains impassive: where a broken part can be replaced, the body's capacity to heal is limited. Pim's humanity is ultimately what

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[172] The machine-like quality of Beckett's bodies has been identified by a number of other critics as well, including Hugh Kenner in 'The Cartesian Centaur.' *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (New York: Grove Press, 1961); Phil Baker in *Beckett and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 143; Ulrika Maude in *Beckett, Technology, and the Body* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Yoshiki Tajiri in *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Senses in Modernism* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

renders him unfit for the purposes to which the narrator sees to use him, and renders him human waste once more.

Beckett explores human waste and scavenging from a different standpoint in *Malone Dies,* through Malone's account, of the failures of a man called Macmann (known, earlier in the novel, as Sapo) to work as a street sweeper. Due to a near-pathological distractedness, Malone tells us, Macmann cannot help but further sully the spaces from which he is meant to be clearing of waste. In this way, he not only fails in his attempts to meet his employers' expectations: he (unintentionally) resists them by filling up the streets and pavements he is meant to be emptying. Despite his 'hop[e] of […] being a born scavenger,' McMann is incapable of either scavenging or properly disposing of that which he accrues (*MD,* 237). Just as he himself is prone to tripping and stumbling, as if his body were somehow incapable of situating itself in the proper order of things, so, too, his efforts to clean and tidy successively fall short. In this parallel divagation of the body, and sullying of the streets through which it moves, we see MacMann enact the very essence of vagrancy, erring from his course and succumbing to one physical failure after another while failing to fulfil the one task with which he has been entrusted. The depiction reflects both MacMann's lack of biomechanical control, and his lack of agency in the face of external circumstances:

> For he was incapable of picking, his steps and choosing where to put down his feet (which would have permitted him to go barefoot). And even had he been so he would have been so to no great purpose, so little was he master of his movements. And what is the good of aiming at the smooth and mossy places when the foot, missing its mark, comes down on the flints and shards or sinks up to the knee in the cow-pads? (*MD,* 238).

In deciding to stop, MacMann does not cease moving altogether: rather, he pauses, and begins rolling around on the ground, seeking the best way to avoid the pelting rain. The intricacy of the narrative here is telling—Malone spares no detail, delving into the events as they unfold, and how these differ from how one might have expected them to. 'In theory', for instance:

> his hat should have followed him, seeing it was tied to his coat, and the string twisted itself about his neck, but not at all, for theory is one thing and reality another, and the hat remained where it was, I mean in its place, like a thing forsaken' (*MD,* 239).

In this meticulous account, Malone contradicts our aesthetic assumptions, and highlights the degree to which objects defy narrative design via their very inertness. We expect art to give an aesthetic patina to experience, to locate beauty in the malfunctioning or mundane. Malone demonstrates the fallacy of such an assumption. Sometimes the mundane is just that: mundane. Where Surrealism was predicated on finding an epiphanic dimension to waste, and in fact explicitly espoused searching the city for inspiration, Beckett tells us not to bother. Epiphanies are unlikely to occur in the muck, and even less likely to occur on demand. Sometimes things don't fall into place, and sometimes they refuse to budge from their place. Sometimes things fall apart in a way that

defies artistic elaboration. Stepping on a cow pad is not necessarily conducive to philosophical illumination. You won't achieve ontological clarity by sifting through mud or excrement. You'll just get dirty.

'[S]omewhere someone is uttering'[173]: Dwelling and speaking in waste

Beckett's characters not only resist work by accruing waste objects and by pursuing tasks destined to fail. They also find ways to resist being assimilated into the society of producers and consumers by dwelling in landfills, ditches and mud piles, and making waste a space in which to live outside the remit of capitalist production and consumption. Waste in Beckett thus has another socio-political dimension beyond the resistance to human reification, functioning as a space in which his human waste characters can move freely. Beckett's insistence on setting his narratives against a backdrop of rubbish piles and muddied wastelands is a gesture towards the polysemy of objects and spaces, and to their significance beyond the values attributed to them within the system of capitalist consumption and urban planning. Beckett opens mud up as a field of enquiry in its own right, a space worthy of attention despite its evident obstruction to processes such as manufacturing, circulation and distribution. Outside the field of capitalist production, he shows us, there is a use for mud – one that has nothing to do with its commodity potential, but rather with surviving outside the capitalist sphere of production and consumption. In this sense, his characters do indeed put waste to use – but their methods of doing so are very different from those of the historical avant-garde, insofar as the use-putting never finds its way back into the cycle of commodity exchange. The narrative, here, is one of subsistence as opposed to creative enterprise, and often veers towards the criminal.

What we might call the politics of Beckett's wastelands becomes self-evident when we consider his characters' geospatial movements and their object relations as manifestations of de Certeauvian tactics. de Certeau essentially extended Foucault's power relations to address how everyday activities such as shopping and walking can function as manipulations of space.[174] He deployed military lexicon in his analysis of these cultural practices and uses of space, using the concept of 'strategies' to denote actions and movements practiced by entities in power (state, private sector), and 'tactics' to refer to the actions of the weak (citizens and consumers).[175] Strategies rely on an established place from which to plan, envision, and stockpile, and rely on visual cues to do so (de Certeau, 36). Tactics, by contrast, are defined by dislocation. They rely on mobility

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[173] *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (New York: Grove, 1967), 50.
[174] Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Transl. Steve Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 35.
[175] de Certeau, 35.

and creative initiative, often without the privilege of sight; the absence of a legitimate headquarters or home prevents them from growing their wealth: they have to use up what they accrue, or else leave it behind (de Certeau, 37). Their strength thus lies in pure action. Squatting and jay-walking are examples of tactical deployments of space.

This dynamic of randomness and ingenuity lends itself to our reading of waste in Beckett: like de Cereau's tactics, Beckett's characters use their displacement and mobility to their own advantage. As *Waiting for Godot*'s Estragon says to his fellow bum, Vladimir, 'We don't manage too badly […] We always find something […] to give us the impression we exist.'[176] The flippant sarcasm of Vladimir's retort, 'Yes yes we're magicians' (*G,* 69), is deceptive. It is precisely on such apparently menial recuperative efforts, or what de Certeau, after Levi-Strauss, terms 'making do' (the direct translation of *bricolage*), that tactics gain their strength.[177] In a similar vein, Vladimir's own assertion, earlier, that he 'get[s] used to the muck as [he] go[es] along' reflects an ethos of survival contingent upon persuasion and (self)-deception. Where Estragon sees only waste, noting that 'all [his] lousy life [he's] crawled about in the mud' to the extent that one 'muckheap' is indistinguishable from the next, Vladimir discerns minute distinguishing features in the mire (*G,* 61). Similarly, if Estragon is all too keen to bum five or ten francs off the first passerby, Vladimir's indignant objection, 'We are not beggars!' reflects the tactic's peculiar self-reliance – the preference for stealing scraps or digging through a landfill as opposed to accepting alms (*G,* 39). Emphatically creative, and unapologetically disingenuous, tactical use is contingent upon the capacity to 'throw one over' power, be it a police officer, parent, or personage to whom they are in debt. Indeed, it verges on the criminal. To use cannily is also, often, to *mis*-use or transgress. To assign an alternative use to something is to challenge its place in the official narrative or order of things, and thus to (however obliquely or subtly) undermine authority.

In *The Unnameable,* knowledge of the world itself is depicted as requiring re-purposing, if it is to be of any use to the novel's protagonist. The protagonist dismisses what others have taught him as essentially inapplicable to his own marginalised state, but he '[declines] to say it was all to no purpose. I'll make use of it, if I'm driven to it' (*U,* 299). The alienated self makes use of the scraps society throws it—it re-appropriates facts and so-called truths and assembles them in new and unexpected ways. Like Levi-Strauss' *bricoleur,* he deconstructs civilised society's hierarchical values, recognising that 'the thing to avoid […] is the spirit of system' (*U,* 294).

Beckett's characters move through and deploy mud tactically partly because they recognise its 'useful' qualities. In its very obscuring and stalling capacities, mud offers both the possibility of

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[176] *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber, 1956), 69. Henceforth, *G.*
[177] Claude Lévi-Strauss. *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966 [1962]), 17, 21), as cited in de Certeau, 29-30.

concealment, and respite – a surrogate home. Darkness allows concealment from others; an enforced pause is also a chance to rest. For instance, in *Malone Dies,* it is in a muddied ditch that the protagonist of Malone's framed narrative, MacMannn, finally lies down to sleep, and is retrieved by the caretakers of a rest home. While his fall reprises those of Molloy and Moran in the *Trilogy's* previous volumes and Pozzo's towards the end of *Godot* (*G*, 81), it differs in its explicit intentionality. MacMann *chooses* to fall. In *Godot,* Pozzo's fall suggests a tragic determinism: 'pozzo' is Italian for pit, a term already charged with connotations of refuse and waste. Here, it is arguably a reference to the 'pozzo dei giganti' or 'giants pit' in Canto 31 of Dante's *Inferno,* a gap between the eighth and ninth circles of hell, where opponents of God's will are left to suffer for all eternity.[178] Pozzo's name thus indicates his fate long before he falls, and is submerged, by his pile of belongings, while the fall itself is framed as an opportunity for tactical use by the *other characters*. This is not the marginalised individual who has fallen: it is Power, wielding a whip and weighed down with material goods. If for Vladimir and Estragon the fall and wreckage are charged with potential (monetary compensation for aiding the fallen, but more importantly 'diversion' from waiting, which they would be foolish to 'let […] go to waste'), for Pozzo this halt in the dirt is agony, catalysing a succession of failed attempts to pick himself up, which culminate in a malodorous fart (*G,* 81). When Pozzo is dragged down by his servant and immersed in a morass of suitcases, and then loses control of his sphincter, his fallen condition exemplifies the hegemonic view of disorder as obstructive.

By contrast, Sapo/Macmann's *enjoyment* of the space in which he beds down is tactical. He seizes upon the mud as a space for rest, identifying its *useful* properties. 'Caught by the rain far from shelter Macmann stopped and lay down' Malone tells us (*MD,* 239), before meticulously detailing his logic: that in lying down, he might be less exposed to the pelting rain. 'So he lay down, prostrate, after a moment's hesitation' (*MD,* 239). This deployment is important on two counts: where Malone's trajectory remains unexplained, and Molloy and Moran's are subject to chance and their own failings, Macmann displays an ability to thoughtfully manipulate circumstance—to use the bog to his own ends, and thus to wrest a kind of agency out of chance, however fraught. Rather than an obstruction, mud becomes a shelter. What society views as requiring expulsion or avoidance (embodying negative associations of alterity, filth, danger, ambiguity and opacity), becomes, for the vagrant, a medium in which to lay low—to literally wait out the storm. Mud and muck are thus recast as useful, and as *protective*—offering a sense of wrested parentage or homeliness constructed out of necessity. A fundamentally malleable entity, mud acts as a

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[178] I say arguably, because while Beckett's concern with Dante's *Purgatorio,* and particularly the figure of Belacqua, is established, his resistance to intertextual interpretations of his work are just as well-documented. See '*Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*: Theatre as Text.' *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*. *Ed.* John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67-87.

temporary, makeshift shelter. This use-putting is a form of tactical manipulation, where the thing deployed is eventually left behind, a vestige of its transient user's ingenuity and skill.

A crucial aspect of Beckett's vagrants' manipulation of wasted spaces is the degree to which it involves accepting the spaces' unaccommodating, and in many ways *estranging,* nature. Mud sticks, stops and gets in the way: it is revolting to the touch, and repellent to our aesthetic sensibilities, and our systems of order and cleanliness. To rest in the spaces that mainstream society avoids is to perform an act of resistance, as well as to gesture towards an alternative metrics. Where mainstream society seeks self-improvement, promotion, and peer validation, the marginalised *I* cultivates inertia and distances itself via an open acknowledgement of its own impotence. For instance, Malone refers to his body as an external casing that he would throw out the window, were he able to: 'If I had the use of my body I would throw it out of the window. But perhaps it is the knowledge of my impotence that emboldens me to that thought' (*MD,* 219). In their willingness to dwell in the spaces eschewed by the rest of society, Beckett's characters show how we might desist from productivity.

My concern throughout this discussion of waste in Beckett has been his characters' resistance to being put to use, and the many creative ways they find to stall and sabotage both their work and the production of a coherent narrative whole. In the last section of this chapter, I want to expand our discussion to consider how, while resisting being put to productive use, his characters implicitly affirm, in their accounts, the capacity of narrative itself to wrest meaning. They do this by exploring the narrative potential of waste. The entire meandering yet static narrative of *The Unnameable* ultimately builds towards two admissions: that the narrator has 'never stirred from here,' and that it is from a position of stasis that he has spawned 'all these stories about travellers and paralytics' (*U,* 416), including, as his allusions to 'Malone' and 'Murphy' and 'Watt' suggest, all the protagonists that have preceded him. An 'absentee' (*U,* 417) with no discernible identity, he has nevertheless been able to create a multitude of (albeit conflicting, and rarely logical stories) out of a void (*U,* 414). From his 'parlour, where [he] wait[s] for nothing', and aided only by simple tricks of rhetoric (*U,* 414), he creates a linguistic 'something' (*U,* 414).

In scavenging sticks and hats and mouldy food, in rummaging through heaps of dung, in contemplating their own bodily emissions, Beckett's characters enact a process of survival on the margins resistant to commercial paradigms or social mores. In digging a hole in the dirt road, or lying across the handlebars of their dilapidated bicycle, or making a pillow out of their sack of belongings, these travellers demonstrate how one can survive on the cusp of civilisation. They show how one can make one's self at home in one's homelessness, and make do without profit or gain, basing our actions on chance and circumstance rather than logic or bureaucratic order:

> we leave our sacks to those who do not need them we take their sacks from those who soon will
> need them we leave without a sack we find one on our way we can continue on our way […] more
> sacks here then than souls infinitely if we journey infinitely and what infinite loss without profit
> there is that difficulty overcome (*H,* 97).

This complication of narrative's directionality is exemplified in *Waiting for Godot* by the fact that no one goes anywhere, the articulated decision to move followed by explicit inaction. The romantic notion of place as an extension of the self is also shown to be false: Vladimir's attempts to anchor himself in the landscape are futile, his search for signs on the day's date in the sky coming to no avail. The futility of these efforts is underlined by Estragon's emphasis on both the anonymity of the landscape, and its *irrelevance*:

> Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk
> to me about scenery! […] Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it! You and your landscapes!
> (*Godot,* 60).

This tension is amplified in the narrative's efforts to articulate what it means to live in obscurity. In these narratives, it is not waste itself that causes fear: it is the process of iteration, the process of making *sense* of waste, of putting it to use through thought and logic, that horrifies. To bed down in waste is to abstain from meaning-making. Waste provides a means, here, to slip outside the constrictive bounds of logic. The waste Beckett's characters inhabit is where words and scraps of phrases can pile up or decompose at will, where the absence of adverbs or pronouns is irrelevant, where inexplicability, or lack of progress, or disorientation, is of little or no issue. Thus:

> brief black long black no knowing and there I am again on my way again something missing here
> only two or three yards more and then the precipice only two or three last scraps and then the end
> end of part one leaving only two leaving only part three and last something missing here things one
> knows already or will never know it's one or the other (*H,* 38).

There is no coherent order, narrative structure or epistemological framework here, as attested by the absence of 'something' that may or may not fall within the bounds of what the self knows or understands. Rather, the concern of the narrator (and of the other voices he implies are vying to be heard) is to continue saying.

Moreover, it is through narrative that the characters discover what we might term, after Breton, *l'espoir trouvé.* So, for instance, the concluding section of *Texts for Nothing* opens with a declamation of authorial defeat (the text is 'nothing new' and therefore the author himself is 'nothing new' either), only to seize upon that gesture, detecting a kernel of hope and narrative continuity in the very statements of negation. Having asserted that 'it's nothing new, I'm nothing new,' the narrator realises that 'Ah so there was something once, I had something once' (*TN,* 50). If the present is defined by absence, that absence belies a *previous presence*. The narrator inhabits a wasteland, but waste, by very definition, is the remainder of what once was: a wasteland is the

remainder of a once-functioning world. This, in turn, affirms the existence of *a* world, however fractured. Hence the narrator's change of heart:

> This is most reassuring, after such a fright, and emboldens me to go on, once again. But there is not silence. No, there is utterance, somewhere someone is uttering. Inanities, agreed, but is that enough, is that enough, to make sense? (*TN,* 50).

Not only is there a world: it is a world populated by voices. They are fragments, granted, but fragments pregnant with narrative and ontological potential. The reference to sense is both rhetorical and ironic, underlining the absurdity of expecting any kind of understanding in a narrative defined by obscurity. In a story guided by an uncertain narrator speaking for no discernible reason, 'sense' is the last thing we can expect. However, the mention of 'enough' is telling. It implies that despite the paucity of signification, cardinal direction, discernible identities, or clear geographic landmarks, the presence of 'utterance' and the absence of 'silence' belie potential. Indeed, the very muddle of self-contradictory, anachronistic 'buts' in which the narrator has caught himself suggests that if nothing else, he is not at a loss for excess words. In this way, Beckett's narrating wastrel confirms the power of language, and his own capacity to use it to whatever obscure, and unintelligible, intent he chooses.

As we have seen, where Fordism celebrates motion, progress, and the relationship between production and consumption, Beckett's characters challenge it. Where the historical avant-garde resisted the commodification of art by creating works out of discards, Beckett's characters choose to sweep those discards into a pile, and sit in them. Where Dada and Surrealism find new uses for waste, Beckett challenges the need for things to *have* a use. In divesting objects of their functional use, and immersing his characters in bog lands of waste from which there is no exit, his narratives challenge the capacity of logic and rationality to wrest meaning from existence. In abstaining from turning waste into art, his characters show us the inherent limitations of the aesthetic of reuse: by its very nature, reuse becomes part of the system that generated waste in the first place. The *objet trouvé,* once recognised as such, becomes a commodity in the art market, codified within a new system of values. In *The Unnameable*, the paralytic narrator's prone state by the side of the road doesn't inspire pity or love in the woman who salvages him, but an idea for his commercial use. Seeing him lying stuffed in a jar by the side of the road following the amputation of his limbs (*U,* 330), she is moved, not by his powerlessness, but by the prospect of using his faeces as a fertiliser for her kitchen garden, and his jarred state as a novelty to attract passersby to her chop-house (*U,* 331). She feeds and washes him and covers him with tarpaulin when it snows, only because he 'represents […] an undeniable asset' for her restaurant business. While his faeces fertilise her lettuce, he himself is 'a kind of landmark, not to say an advertisement, far more effective than for example a chef in cardboard' (*U,* 331). Indeed, she festoons his jar with Chinese lanterns and invests

in a pedestal on which she mounts the jar itself 'so that the passer-by might consult with greater ease the menu attached to it' (*U,* 331). With this episode, Beckett shows the logical evolution of the avant-garde under capitalism: it's not just the *objet trouvé* that's been commodified – it's the homeless man living inside it.

By way of objection, then, Beckett's figures of human waste do what they do best: either desist, or deny. Via abstention, a wilful, stubborn, constipated sitting-still, they obstruct the system, and, too, its capacity to subsume them. In these narratives, Beckett does not suggest the artistic potential within waste, but suggests, rather, the radical potential of dwelling *in* waste—what we might term a poetics not of reuse, but of immersion. His figuration of failed inventorying, worthless collections and pronated, ailing bodies offer different ways into thinking about how one might resist being put to use, or participating in the market economy. Through his depiction of superfluous humans, pointless lists and meaningless objects, Beckett offers an alternative to both the historical avant-garde's aesthetics of reuse and a counter to Fordist efficiency. He shows us we can do other things with stuff than commodify it, throw it away, or pick it out of our neighbours' rubbish bin, and he playfully parodies our tendencies to evaluate humans, too, in terms of their capacity to produce and consume.

Chapter Four
'Most of our longings go unfulfilled':
DeLillo's historiographic readings of landfill waste and nuclear fallout

'What we excrete comes back to consume us'[179]

It is World War III. A nameless astronaut and his colleague, Vollmer, orbit the earth, observing it from a window portal in their space ship, waiting for a war base called 'Colorado Command' to tell them what to blow up. They spend their days performing safety drills and participating in voice-recognition exercises to reassure Colorado Command – and themselves – that they are still there. For entertainment, they listen to a defective radio which endlessly replays soap operas and news broadcasts from the Second World War. So begins 'Human Moments in World War Three' (1983), a little-known short story by Don DeLillo, which addresses a number of the author's concerns with the role of waste in the experience of postmodernity and in the writing of history.[180] In the story, the narrator marvels at the fragments of sound emanating from the radio, wondering:

> What odd happenstance, what flourish or grace of the laws of physics enables us to pick up these signals? Travelled voices, chambered and dense. At times they have the detached and surreal quality of aural hallucination, voices in attic rooms, the complaints of dead relatives. Cars turn dangerous corners, crisp gunfire fills the night. It was, it is, wartime. Wartime for Duz and Grape-Nuts Flakes. Comedians make fun of the way the enemy talks. We hear hysterical mock German, moonshine Japanese (*HM*, 38-39).

This uncanny montage of radio plays, advertising jingles, slogans and news stories from a defunct era, with their archaic humour and nationalistic piety, re-affirm the narrator's sense that 'all wars refer back' (*HM*, 30). It is only fitting that the war to end all wars is experienced to the soundtrack of the last one's mediated responses. In this context, the narrator tells us, keeping one's sanity becomes a matter of making lists of the things that remain, and contemplating the mementos in the astronauts' 'personal preference kits' – boxes containing mundane, worthless objects collected specifically to keep them company, and remind them of life on earth. The narrator refers to these objects as 'human moments,' but as the story progresses, he extends the definition to include other items, too – memories, the astronauts' hammocks, even Vollmer's native Minnesota, to which he will most likely never return, and which in all probability no longer exists (*HM*, 27). A human moment, he suggests, is anything to which we can attach a story or a subjective experience; it is another term for waste that has been rendered subjectively meaningful, repurposed into something with emotional value (*HM*, 34-35). To recuperate a piece of lived experience is to

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[179] Don DeLillo. *Underworld* (New York: Picador, 2011 [1997]), 791. Henceforth, *U.*

[180] Don DeLillo 'Human Moments in World War III' (1983). *'The Angel Esmeralda' and Other Stories (*London and New York: Picador, 2011), 25-46. Henceforth, *HM*.

prepare for an existence spent remembering what life was like when the earth was still whole. At the same time, these souvenirs are a reminder of the other, far less benign, souvenir of nuclear holocaust – fallout. The recuperation of human moments thus gestures to that which cannot be recuperated. In this way, the term 'human moment' is connotative not only of our capacity to attach meaning to matter, but of our capacity to destroy it, and then mis-read the remains.

DeLillo's depiction of salvaging here is very different to those we examined in the first two chapters of this thesis, for it attends far more explicitly to the historical and environmental dimensions of the social life of waste – which is to say, its role in human life. Where waste – or the useless – in Breton, Loy and de Chirico is explored for its radical potential, and explored, in Beckett, as a means to resist the productivist paradigm, DeLillo examines waste objects as readable artefacts indicative of a variety of different social ills. The reparative dimension of certain discards is thus juxtaposed against the potentially devastating effects of others. In this chapter, I examine that tension in DeLillo from his earliest works (published in the 1970s) through to *Underworld* (1997), a text widely regarded by scholars as the 20th century's definitive waste novel.[181] I argue that DeLillo's work reflects a broader shift in late 20th-century western culture's relationship with consumption and disposal in the wake of environmental movement, and, too, that it exemplifies a particular kind of literary engagement with waste that can be found in other post-1970s writing. Where the novelists we examined in the first chapter deployed waste to resist the commodification of art and propose a revolutionary aesthetics celebrating the overlooked and obsolete, and where Beckett's depictions of vagrants collecting and wading through waste challenged the reification of human beings and the relegation of bums and vagrants to the status of waste objects, DeLillo and his contemporaries examine municipal landfills, rubbish tips and the recycling industry to critique the effects of the logic of late capitalism on both culture and planet. The much broader scope of DeLillo's project can be seen as a culmination of sorts – an effort to contemplate, and make sense of, the last century's manufactured accruals, as well as an acknowledgement of the limits of such an endeavour.

By referring to the logic of late capitalism, I am, of course, relating DeLillo's project to Frederic Jameson's writings on postmodernism, and, specifically, to Jameson's definition of postmodernist art and culture (including architecture, film, photography and literature) as inextricable from the 'nature of multinational capitalism today' with its 'frantic economic urgency of producing fresh new waves of ever-more novel-seeming goods […] at ever greater rates of turnover.'[182] Jameson's ensuing analysis of the postmodernist aesthetic as fundamentally a-historical in its mixing of styles

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[181] See, for instance, *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value.* Ed. Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), ix and John Scanlan. *On Garbage* (London: Reaktion, 2005), 28.
[182] *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 5.

and use of montage narrative techniques has been criticised by many scholars.[183] But his analysis brings together important components with which most would agree. Firstly, the postmodern aesthetic is characterised by a rejection of totalising discourses – what Lyotard termed, in his analysis of the postmodern turn in the physical and social sciences, 'an incredulity towards metanarratives.'[184] Secondly, it features a self-awareness that manifests itself, among other things, in narratives that call attention to their partiality, their fictitiousness, and their openness to multiple interpretations. And thirdly, these characteristics speak to, and of, a particular socio-economic moment. It is rare for a postmodernist narrative not to acknowledge, in some way, that it is a product for consumption, that it exists in a market, and, in short, that it is a commodity. This is the sense in which I myself use the term (which I distinguish from the historico-economic period of postmodernity), although I am all too aware of how contested that definition is.

Indeed, as critics have noted since the term postmodernism gained currency, there is little consensus as to what it actually is, firstly because the rejection of totalising discourses includes a rejection of fixed categories and definitions, and secondly because the pluralistic nature of that rejection can be seen as both exemplifying the logic of late capitalism – a celebration, in other words, of the dazzling, fractured experience of consumer culture – and an effort to resist that logic.[185] Teresa Ebert terms the first of these stances 'ludic postmodernism,' which she identifies in the 'playful' theoretical approaches of a number of social scientists and philosophers (including Lyotard) whose relativistic and in some cases nihilistic views, she argues, are ultimately complicit in

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[183] Of particular note is Linda Hutcheon's rejection of his thesis in 'The Postmodern Problematizing of History' (1988), *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) and in 'Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History' (1989). Hutcheon argues that postmodern writers and artists show greater historical sophistication than their modernist forebears, as attested by their explicit, self-aware analysis of the discursive methods by which historical narrative itself is constructed – what she terms historiographic metafiction, which effectively calls into question the reliability of the facts it narrates, and in so doing shows history itself to be a social construct, using indeterminacy to call into question totalising narratives and the power structures from which they are borne. In this way, it has an acutely radical potential that Hutcheon argues Jameson does not recognize.

[184] François Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 [1984]). It should be pointed out that Lyotard is challenging the totalizing nature of Enlightenment thought in modern science, which he argues is both reductive (negating the plurality and heterogeneity of human existence, and the disordered nature of the universe itself), and far too amenable to serving political interests.

[185] The difficulty of defining postmodernism is perhaps the one aspect of the concept upon which critics agree. The opening chapters of Lyotard, Baudrillard, Jameson, Harvey, and Hutcheon's seminal books on the topic each begin with an acknowledgement of the many different ways the term has been interpreted, and the reasons for these differences. It is also worth noting that the postmodern turn occurred at different moments in the physical sciences, social sciences, art, literature and theory; that postmodern theory in France in the 1960s and 1970s was borne out of a particular set of political circumstances (including disillusionment with the outcome of May '68 and a desire to redress the perceived failures of Marxism and structuralism) very different to the conditions that spurred inquiry into the postmodern in the United States in the 1980s (which included, among other things, growing interest in identity politics, women's studies, postcolonial criticism, and a concern with examining the periphery of mainstream culture in an effort to counter the extreme conservativism of the Reagan era); and that much of postmodern theory is, in turn, very different from postmodern *literature,* which is often far more at pains to critique and dismantle contemporary cultural norms than, say, late Baudrillard, who instead suggests we essentially abandon all hope. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner provide a compelling overview of these conflicting ideas in *The Postmodern Turn* (New York and London: Guilford, 1997).

the system they are looking to overthrow. [186] For Ebert, the revelling of such theory in plurality and heterogeneity disavows the taking up of an actual position (Ebert, 178). An oppositional postmodernism, by contrast, would be one that, in Steven Best and Douglas Kellner's words, 'radicaliz[es] the modern,' engaging with, and critiquing, the 'intensified […] commodification, massification, technology and […] media' of postmodernity.[187] We might similarly extend the terms 'ludic' and 'oppositional' to distinguish the radical impulses underlying the postmodernist texts under review in this chapter. Where a ludic aesthetic (as exemplified by the pop art of Andy Warhol) revels in the commodification of objects, and in the lexicon of advertising that drives their circulation, the texts under review address commodification and its effects in fundamentally oppositional terms.

David Harvey's analysis of the socio-economic phenomena that characterise postmodernity in his seminal work, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), contextualises the above ideas in important ways, for it relates the emergence of the postmodernist aesthetic to specific seismic economic events.[188] These included the first major postwar recession of 1973; the Arab Oil Crisis; the breakdown of the Bretton-Woods agreement and abandonment of the gold standard in favour of floating all major world currencies against the dollar (enabling the US to retain control over the global reserve currency); and the Volcker Shock of 1979, when the US Federal Reserve Bank (under the direction of Paul Volcker), deliberately plunged the US economy and much of the rest of the world into recession and unemployment in an effort to shock the global economies out of stagflation. This last move is generally recognized as marking the beginning of the implementation of neoliberalism, an economic model aimed, in Harvey's words, at consolidating class power, 'creat[ing] a "good business climate" and therefore [optimizing] conditions for capital accumulation no matter what the consequences for employment and social wellbeing.'[189] This includes the privatisation of social services, the deregulation of markets, the normalisation of debt (otherwise known as the financialisation of markets), and the globalisation of finance – all in the name of fostering competition and entrepreneurialism, and rendering citizens 'self-sufficient.' The rhetoric of neoliberalism emphasises individual responsibility rather than social, and individualism rather than collectivism – as exemplified in Margaret Thatcher's famed assertion that 'there is no society, only individual[s].'[190]

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[186] Teresa L. Ebert. *Ludic Feminism and After: Postmodernism, Desire, and Labor in Late Capitalism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 153.

[187] Steven Best and Douglas Kellner. *The Postmodern Turn* (New York and London: Guilford, 1997), 26.

[188] David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1989]).

[189] David Harvey. *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographic Development* (London: Verso, 2006), 17 and 25. As I mentioned in the introduction, the term 'neoliberalism' did not gain traction until the mid-1990s, and the shifts that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s marked the *beginning* of neoliberalism, but the full effects of this process only became apparent in the late 1990s.

[190] David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, 2005), 23.

The effects of these seismic shifts cannot be over-emphasised: Harvey's analysis renders explicit the link between the rise of neoliberalism and the evolution of cultural forms and modalities that we associate with postmodernism in its various competing – and often contradictory – forms. The dissolution of Fordism-Keynesianism after 1973 ushered in a new era known as post-Fordism, or 'flexible accumulation,' that not only radically altered production and consumption, but culture at large. Deregulation throughout the 1980s increased competition between firms, as well as the volatility of individual markets and the fragmentation of the labour force (Harvey, 150). On the production side, product cycles shortened as companies introduced new fashions at an increasingly rapid pace. Crucially, companies' recognition of the commercial opportunities of treating consumers as individuals resulted in a shift from mass marketing to mass customization – the development of niche product lines, and customised communication strategies – which in turn fuelled the rise of a more competitive individualism (Harvey, 171). It also led to disinvestment in the state sector, which may in turn have led to phenomena such as the garbage barges endlessly circling New York in the 1980s – as Benjamin Miller and Heather Rogers both note in their respective historical studies on the New York and US garbage industries (Miller, 284-292; Rogers, 200).[191]

Jameson's and Harvey's connection of postmodernist culture to the post-Fordist sensibility, with its ever-shortening commodity cycles and fickle consumer public, and Harvey's articulation of the historical period of postmodernity (which he distinguishes from postmodernism) in economistic terms provide useful frames of reference for thinking about late 20th-century engagements with consumer and industrial waste. Most useful for our purpose is Jameson's identification of consumerism's reliance on commodity fetishism – that is, the '"effacement of the traces of production" from the object itself, from the commodity thereby produced' (Jameson, 315). This erasure, he argues, 'suggests the kind of guilt people are freed from if they are able not to remember the world that went into their toys and furnishings' (Jameson, 315). The point of 'having your own object world,' he argues, which is to say, the privilege of being a consumer, is the ability to 'forget about all those innumerable others for a while' – the exploited labourers involved in producing your things, or the many who cannot afford them (Jameson, 315). The product, he concludes, 'somehow shuts us out even from a sympathetic participation, by imagination, in its production. It comes before us, no questions asked, as something we could not begin to imagine doing ourselves' (Jameson, 371).

This is, to my mind, an acutely important point: reification in late capitalism goes beyond rendering social relations transactional, to effectively annihilating our sense of responsibility towards others. Human waste, in the novels under review, redresses that erasure: the commodity-

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[191] Benjamin Miller. *Fat of the land: Garbage in New York* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2000), 290.

turned-waste, and the remaindered human, asks us to participate in its backstory. The maimed quality of the waste object – its dissimilarity from what it looked like on the shop shelf – requires an imaginative leap. In looking at it, we are invited to think otherwise, beyond the rules of consumerism, beyond the blinders that allow us to actively ignore the origins of the product and its potentially ethical dubiousness. The consequence of our actions is right there before us, and that consequence might be reproached, or celebrated: if we interpret our discards as signs of excess, we cannot but regard them with guilt; but if we take them to signal how much we have, and to see that wealth as a positive, then the mountains of stuff we produce become a badge of honour. Moreover, the ecological view of waste somehow stands in for or occludes the socio-economic view of the object itself: we worry about discarded plastic in lieu of worrying about the cheap labour that went into making the plastic in the first place. This complex interplay of guilt and horror, smug triumph and curiosity, is at the heart of the novels we examine in this chapter.

Before turning to DeLillo, it is worth examining waste's depiction in postmodernist literature more broadly: by doing so, we can see the pervasiveness of its deployment in critiques of capitalist commodity culture, the features these depictions share, and, in turn, how they differ from the themes underlying DeLillo's project. Among the most vociferous of postmodernism's critics of capitalist excess is Thomas Pynchon, whose first novel, *V* (1963), repeatedly reads contemporary American culture in terms of its commercial relationship with 'inanimate objects' and these objects' eventual decline into waste. Much of the first half of the novel takes place in New York's underground sewage system, where the novel's protagonist, Benny Profane, has been hired to hunt alligators.[192] This population of over-grown alligators is the result of the fashion for baby alligators that swept over the city a few years prior, when every child in Manhattan had to have one (*V,* 43). But 'soon the children grew bored with them. Some set them loose in the streets, but most flushed them down the toilets. And these had grown and reproduced, had fed off rats and sewage, so that now they moved big, blind, albino, all over the sewer system' (*V,* 43). Pynchon thus presents us with living embodiments of progressive obsolescence: commodity culture's excretions, out of sight, are not out of mind, instead haunting it with their presence and reminding us of the fickleness of our market-driven desires. Pynchon extends the concept further, however, by exploring the logical evolution of the alligator-killing market: after a few months, Profane realises that his employment is contingent upon finite resources. One day, there will be no more alligators to kill, and on that day, he will be without a job (*V,* 146, 148). The finite nature of this particular waste-symbol, however, is countered by the novel's numerous narrative repetitions, historiographic parodies and self-aware pastiches, which suggest not only the infinite nature of production, but that where our waste goes is

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[192] Thomas Pynchon. *V.* (London: Jonathan Cape and Vintage, 1995 [1963]).

perhaps the least of the 20th century's problems. Perhaps it is our efforts at reclamation and re-use that are more worrying. Thus in the character of Dr Schoenmaker (*V,* 97; 99; 100) we see the cosmetic surgery industry evolve from an ideologically-inspired effort to 'make right' the devastations wreaked on soldiers in the First World War, to a commercially-minded one intent on 'culturally harmonising' the noses of Manhattan's upper-crust Jewish women, in line with 'the nasal beauty established by movies, advertisements, magazine illustrations' (*V,* 103). The gruesomeness of the procedure, with its severing of bones and cartilage, is justified by the end result – to look like everyone else. Pynchon's second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) builds on these ideas, its plot driven by a quest for a grail-like mailbox, which is eventually revealed to be nothing more than a trash can with the painted initials 'W.A.S.T.E.'[193] Meaning isn't just obscured in this novel: it is entirely absent. Every object, including the mail box-trash can, is entirely self-referential, as attested by the acronym of W.A.S.T.E, which is ultimately shown to stand for nothing but itself.

Similarly, Donald Barthelme's fairy-tale pastiche, *Snow White* (1967), re-casts Snow White's seven dwarfs as a gang of trash collectors or 'dreckologists' (after 'dreck,' an American slang term for waste), who have identified the cultural value of waste.[194] According to the dwarfs, the likelihood that the annual 'per-capita production of trash' in the United States will keep increasing until it reaches 100% warrants a radical shift in focus (*Snow White,* 97). They argue that the question is not how to dispose of waste (or how to reduce it at the source), but how to appreciate its qualities: 'there can be no longer any question of "disposing" of it, because that is all there is, and we will simply have to learn how to "dig" it—that's slang, but peculiarly appropriate here.'[195] The dwarves' recognition of the cultural, ontological, and even semantic, value of waste – or 'dreck' – extends to a fascination with its narrative role. Thus one of the dwarfs quips:

> We like books with a lot of dreck in them, matter that presents itself as not wholly relevant (or indeed, at all relevant) but which, carefully attended to, can supply a kind of "sense" of what is going on. This "sense" is not to be obtained by reading between the lines (for there is nothing there, in those white spaces) but by reading the lines themselves—looking at them and so arriving at a feeling of […] having read them, of having "completed" them' (*Snow White,* 112).

In this way, Barthelme suggests we 'read' the contents of our landfills, and indicates that to do so is to merely build on the human inclination to tell stories.

Further afield, Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972) sees the traveller Marco Polo visit the city of Leonia, whose inhabitants are so intent upon buying new things, they are impervious to the piles of

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[193] Thomas Pynchon. *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Vintage: 1965), 89. Henceforth, *CLFN.*

[194] See Donald Barthelme. *Snow White* (New York: Scribner, 1967).

[195] *Snow White,* p. 97. Stacey Olster provides an excellent reading of this passage in *The Trash Phenomenon: Contemporary Literature, Popular Culture, and the Making of the American Century* (University of Georgia Press, 2003).

rubbish mounting higher and higher outside the city gates, or to the fact that those piles will likely outlast them by several centuries.[196] Thus:

> On the sidewalks, encased in spotless plastic bags, the remains of yesterday's Leonia await the garbage truck. Not only squeezed tubes of toothpaste, blown-out light bulbs, newspapers, containers, wrappings, but also boilers, encyclopaedias, pianos, porcelain dinner services (*Invisible Cities,* 114).

For Marco Polo, Leonia is defined less by the things its inhabitants produce, sell or purchase than by the things it excretes to 'make room for the new' (*Invisible Cities,* 114). As such, he wonders whether their fulfilment comes from the attainment of novelty, or from the sense of purification resulting from the actual disposal process:

> The fact is that street cleaners are welcomed like angels, and their task of removing the residue of yesterday's existence is surrounded by a respectful silence, like a ritual that inspires devotion, perhaps only because once things have been cast off nobody wants to have to think about them further (*Invisible Cities,* 114).

For Calvino, consumer waste poses more than an ecological problem: it is a threat to our assumptions about sovereignty. The ultimate irony of capitalist imperialism is that its posterity is measured in rubbish; and, analogously, the greater the empire, the greater the landfill. The question of disposal becomes also a question of containment, and of preventing our excretions from coming back to consume us. Devotion to new objects is thus displaced by a devotion to those able to dispose of old ones; in this satirical vision of consumer culture, success is not measured in innovative production techniques or conspicuous consumption but in the efficient removal of the *signs* of consumption.

Finally, David Foster Wallace's encyclopaedic novel, *Infinite Jest* (1996) casts consumer waste and its disposal as crucial elements of a dystopian American future, in which innovations in home entertainment have rendered network advertising obsolete – leading to the introduction of 'subsidized time', whereby each year is sponsored by a different corporation – and manufactured waste has become the new enemy of the state. Wallace tells us that this vilification of waste was the product of an ingenious presidential campaign by celebrity-turned-politician Johnny Gentle and his 'Clean U.S.A Party' (C.U.S.P), that successfully attracted both the 'ultra-right jingoist hunt-deer-with-automatic-weapons types and far-left macrobiotic Save-the-Ozone, -Rain-Forests, -Whales, -Spotted-Owl-and-High-pH-Waterways ponytailed granola-crunchers' (*IJ,* 381). Gentle's popularity, Wallace tells us, was a product of its era – a dark time of prosperity ('when all landfills got full'), when 'there was no real Foreign Menace of any real unified potency to hate and fear' (*IJ,* 382).

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[196] Italo Calvino. *Invisible Cities.* Tranls. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974 [1972]), 114-116.

Waste thus provides the perfect 'cohesion-renewing Other' (*IJ,* 384), and Gentle aptly pledges to rid the country of the

> toxic effluvia choking our highways and littering our byways and grungeing up our sunsets and cruddying those harbours in which televised garbage-barges lay stacked up at anchor, clotted and impotent amid [...] those disgusting blue-bodied flies that live on shit (first U.S. President ever to say shit publicly, shuddering), rusty-hulled barges cruising up and down petroleated coastlines or laying up reeky and stacked and emitting CO as they await the opening of new landfills and toxic repositories the People demanded in every area but their own (*IJ,* 383).

Once elected, Gentle deals with the country's glut of waste by 'giving away' its most tainted territories (the land north of the line from Syracuse, New York to Ticonderoga, New York to Salem, Massachusetts) to Canada. This space, christened the 'Great Concavity,' becomes a virtual landfill for the US, allowing it to dispose of the country's waste via gigantic catapults without having to modify its citizens' predilection for consumption, while fuelling a healthy, 'cohesion-renewing' distaste for Canada.

Wallace relates this project to the novel's central quest: the search for *Infinite Jest,* a film cartridge said to be so entertaining as to render its viewers catatonic with pleasure, and uninterested in anything beyond viewing it over and over again, until they die of dehydration and/or malnutrition. As one character describes it, the myth surrounding the 'purportedly lethal' film is

> nothing more than a classic illustration of the antinomically schizoid function of the post-industrial capitalist mechanism, whose logic presented commodity as the escape-from-anxieties-of-mortality-which-escape-is-itself-psychologically-fatal, as detailed in perspicuous detail in M. Gilles Deleuze's posthumous Incest and the Life of Death in Capitalist Entertainment, which she'd be happy to lend [her interrogators], if they'd promise to return it and not mark it up (*IJ,* 792).

The analysis is of course ironic, and the text ascribed to Deleuze – who was in fact still alive as Wallace wrote and published the novel – is fictitious.[197] But the point the character makes is eerily accurate: the perfect commodity is not that which renders all other commodities unnecessary, and purports to sustain its owner until their death. Such a commodity would, as one character puts it, have severe 'implications for any industrialized, market-driven, high-discretionary-spending society' (*IJ,* 473). It would in fact spell the collapse of capitalism, taking away the motivation to purchase other products, or, indeed, *work* to purchase them (a notion explored, elsewhere in the novel, in its depiction of the all-consuming nature of alcohol and drug addiction). The twin threats to late capitalism are thus the overflow of waste, and the debilitating effects of a product that 'take[s] away your functionality' (*IJ,* 882). The novel reminds us that a growth-driven capitalist economy needs people capable of working, and consuming commodities that give pleasure without taking

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[197] However, the allusion to Deleuze, and the description of the cartridge's 'schizoid' function, is an evident reference to Volume I of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* and can be seen to imply that the cartridge embodies the schizophrenic impulse of capitalism, which for Deleuze and Guattari is also the key to its subversion. I explore this concept in more detail in pp. 94-96 of Chapter Three, in relation to Beckett's *Trilogy.*

away their capacity to work; it needs those goods to be finite; and it needs a place to put them when they have served their purpose.

Wallace, Calvino, Pynchon and Barthelme's waste narratives reflect a new understanding of consumerism's environmental effects, which complicates previous assertions of its cultural deleteriousness. Moreover, the affinities between these different depictions – in particular, the sense of waste's amenability to narration, and the view that such narration can in turn throw our cultural ills into relief – can be seen to extend the concerns outlined by Jameson and Harvey. The use of parables and deliberately difficult language to describe landfills and waste management practices are part of a wider effort to affirm literature's enduring capacity to intervene.

DeLillo's works extend these postmodernist critiques of late capitalism, not only asking what should be done with manufactured waste and what it says about us, but how it relates to other forms such as nuclear fallout, toxic emissions, and even memorabilia, which, as the astronauts in the above story show, gains and loses significance depending on the onlooker: one man's 'human moments,' are another man's trash. In broader terms, DeLillo's narratives suggest that waste's inherent hybridity requires a layered narrative style: that to aptly reflect the overlap between different kinds of waste requires devices such as montage, repetition and iteration, which draw attention both to similarity and pattern and the taxonomic distinctions between things. The waste collected by a janitor in his first novel, *Americana* (1971),[198] may be very different from the nuclear fallout in Chernobyl discussed in *Underworld* (1997),[199] and the toxic cloud outside the sleepy university town in *White Noise* (1985)[200] might appear to have little in common with the city bums and junkies hauling trash around in shopping carts in *Great Jones Street* (1973),[201] but DeLillo's depictions of these different kinds of waste, and the different responses they evince, suggests an underlying common narrative. Waste, here, is the dark underside of late capitalism – in contrast to the commodity, which according to Jameson's theory of commodity fetishism, 'somehow shuts us out even from a sympathetic participation, by imagination, in its production' (Jameson, 371), it invites us to imagine how it came to be. Waste reveals the thing that commodities cloak, or obscure. And, too, it resists our efforts to redeem it. In depicting characters at pains to wrest meaning from their garbage bins and municipal landfills, DeLillo suggests we take a closer look at our discards.

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[198] Don DeLillo. *Americana* (London: Penguin, 1971), 270. Henceforth, *A.*
[199] Don DeLillo. *Underworld* (London: Picador, 1998 [1997]), 789-795; 799-803. Henceforth, *U.*
[200] Don DeLillo. *White Noise* (New York: Penguin, 1986 [1986]). Henceforth, *WN.*
[201] Don DeLillo. *Great Jones Street* (London: Picador, 2011 [1973]). Henceforth, *GJS.*

'Garbage for 20 years'

At the time of *Underworld'*s publication, DeLillo himself noted that he 'had been thinking about garbage for 20 years.'[202] This preoccupation is evident from his earliest works, and steadily accrues, manifesting itself both explicitly in narratives about consumer excess, toxic waste and landfills, and more subtly in the use of waste metaphors, be these references to human excrement or garbage. DeLillo's novels thus relate waste to a number of very different, and seemingly unconnected, aspects of contemporary American culture: consumerism and advertising, yes, but also day trading, Cold War paranoia, industrial corruption, American football, and memorabilia collecting. If for the 1950s plastics industry, 'America's future [was] in the garbage wagon,' DeLillo's novels suggest that its past, and its historical identity, is in the landfill.[203]

DeLillo explores these ideas in his first novel, *Americana* (1971)*,* in the story of Dave Bell, a bored television executive who launches upon a cross-country road trip to seek out, and film, the 'essence of the nation's soul' – which, we soon come to realize, amounts to selling, consuming and throwing things away (*A,* 349). The novel itself, however, can be seen to oppose the logic of late capitalism in its piecing together of everyday ephemera juxtaposed against flashbacks to Bell's youth in suburbia. In this way, what emerges is not a plot-driven narrative, but a series of insights into the stuff 'behind the smoke and billboards' of consumer culture (*A,* 111). Bell makes us privy to 'the truth beneath the symbols' – the darkness that lies 'at the mirror rim' of culture (*A,* 130).

This sense that American culture is better told through its discards is exemplified by his view that 'in the last analysis, it is the unseen janitor who maintains power over us all' (*A,* 60). We see this most clearly in a brief conversation Bell has with a Manhattan apartment building custodian, who spends his days collecting garbage from outside people's doors – a task, he tells Bell, that 'gives you clues to human nature' (*A,* 190). The importance of this seemingly insignificant exchange becomes apparent when we consider it in its broader historical context, as effectively anticipating the central tenets of 1970s 'garbology.' An academic discipline initiated in 1973 by the University of Arizona, garbology approached consumer waste as a matter of archaeological inquiry,[204] suggesting, among other things, that manufacturers dissect consumers' trash to glean insight into their purchasing practices.[205] But garbology came to encompass a broader critical re-assessment of waste over the course of the decade. Indeed, we might term the 1970s the moment America sought to

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[202] Diane Osen. 'Window on a Writing Life: A Conversation with National Book Award Winner Don DeLillo.' *The Book That Changed My Life* (New York: Random House, 2002), 18.

[203] Heather Rogers. *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 3.

[204] William Rathje and Cullen Murphy. *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

[205] They noted that 'garbage archaeology [offers] a fresh perspective on what we know—and what we think we know— about certain aspects of our lives,' disclosing the reality of people's dietary habits, consumption and brand preferences (Rathje and Murphy, 24).

broach its waste-makings, as manifest in the FBI's practice of sifting through the waste of suspected mobsters (stealing it as evidence and substituting it with 'fake' trash in an effort to incriminate the Mafia's leaders[206]), and New Journalism's seizing of trash to gain insight into the inner lives of celebrities and politicians. This effort to extract information from waste coincided with the growth of the environmental movement (marked by the first Earth Day in 1970),[207] and a burgeoning awareness of the ecological effects of manufactured waste.

DeLillo's custodian here, of course, is only an ironic garbologist: when Bell remarks that it must be '"satisfying to help keep the city clean," the custodian's deadpan reply, '"It overjoys me,"' is sarcastic (*A,* 190). Thus the 'unseen janitor who maintains power over us all' becomes, in effect, a source of unease, *hinting* at hidden truths to be gleaned from the nation's refuse, and yet abstaining from telling us what they are (*A,* 60). He is framed, ironically, not as a *bricoleur,*[208] but as the antithesis of Walter Benjamin's allegorical conceptualisation, after Baudelaire, of poetry as rag picking[209] – the 19th-century industry based on collecting and re-selling scraps for re-use. [210] For Baudelaire, the rag picker's identification of waste's potential for re-use exemplifies the spirit of industrial modernity, which looks to turn all things into use-values:

> Everything that the big city has thrown away […] everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot he catalogues […] He collects, like a miser guarding a treasure, refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects between the jaws of the goddess of Industry. [211]

Walter Benjamin extended this notion to the recuperation and rehabilitation of culture in urban modernity, seeing the rag picker's putting-to-use of effluvia as analogous to the poetic method, which likewise seizes upon the imaginative potential of the overlooked. The poet-as-rag picker is willing to embrace capitalism's paradoxes and contradictions in order to 'produce' a new work that will, of course, also take part in the cycle of commodities. DeLillo's custodian is the antithesis of this, then, because in contrast to Benjamin and Baudelaire's figuration, he extracts no insight – poetic or otherwise – from the garbage he collects. The unseen janitor, in this instance,

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[206] See Elizabeth Fee and Steven H. Corey. *Garbage!: The history and politics of trash in New York City* (New York: New York Public Library, 1994) and Benjamin Miller. *Fat of the land: Garbage in New York* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2000), 11.

[207] Although concern for the effects of industrialisation on nature dates back to the mid-19th century, scholars generally attribute the beginning of environmentalism in the United States to the publication, in 1962, of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring,* which gave unprecedented attention to the effects of chemical pollutants and eventually led to the banning of the chemical pesticide DDT. See *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century.* Ed. Stephanie LeMenager, Teresa Shewry & Ken Hiltner (London: Routledge, 2011), 270-271; 273.

[208] I am referring, here, to Claude Levi-Strauss' definition, in *The Savage Mind,* of *bricolage* as the art of assembling fragments. Strauss emphasises the pleasure of gathering haphazardly, the privileging of process over completion, and the artist's sense that the construction contains fragments of themselves: 'The rules of [the bricoleur's] game are always to make do with "whatever is at hand"… [He] may not ever complete his purpose but he always puts something of himself into it' (Strauss, 17, 21).

[209] The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire' in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire,* Michael W. Jennings, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006), 46-133. Henceforth, *PSEB.*

[210] See Heather Rogers. *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 37.

[211] Baudelaire. *Ouevres Vol. I*, fn 249. As cited in *PSEB,* 109.

merely divests these spaces of their narratives, and thus the secrets he discovers remain unexpressed. What we have, then, is not a full disclosure – or an aesthetic re-working – but the suggestion of something significant. It is a first embryonic effort by DeLillo to think otherwise about waste.

DeLillo's second novel, *End Zone* (1972), conflates the lexicon of nuclear holocaust with that of American football, anticipating, in many respects, *Underworld*'s twinning of the military industrial complex with capitalism.[212] The novel, which relates a university football team's desert exile at 'Logos College,' also charts the individual players' efforts to find meaning in language while contemplating the prospect of nuclear annihilation. Their explorations take them through the lexicons of thermonuclear warfare, advertising, and product innovation under the Nazis. In this way, DeLillo draws parallels between American postwar technology and 'the showers, the experiments, the teeth, the lampshades, the soap' produced by the Third Reich (*EZ,* 198). The idealistic language of advertising, he suggests, could easily be put to use in masking the 'crop failures, genetic chaos […] panic, looting, suicides, scorched bodies' of a nuclear war (*EZ,* 198). The novel's title itself has drawn parallels with Beckett's *Endgame* due to its thematic concern with waste and excrement.[213] These considerations culminate in a series of ruminations by the novel's protagonist, Gary Harkness, as he walks in the desert, contemplating suicide. Happening upon a mound of excrement, Harkness experiences a terrifying moment of scintillating clarity: the mound of shit catalyses the thought that all matter is, in fact, waste in the making, and that the various lexicons that populate the novel – advertising, war, American football – are merely ways of dressing up shit. Thus he meditates upon the:

> nullity in the very word, shit, as of dogs squatting near partly eaten bodies; faeces, as of specimen, sample, analysis, diagnosis, bleak assessment of disease in the bowels; dung, as of dry straw erupting with microscopic eggs; excrement, as of final matter voided, the chemical stink of self discontinued; offal, as of butchered animals' intestines slick with shit and blood; shit everywhere, shit in life cycle, shit as earth as food as shit, wise men sitting impassively in shit, armies retreating in that stench, shit as history, holy men praying to shit, scientists tasting it, volumes to be compiled on colour and texture and scent, shit's infinite treachery, everywhere this whisper of inexistence (*EZ,* 88-89).

Harkness' fragmented thoughts draw attention to waste's resistance to narration, but also, paradoxically, to the degree to which it lends itself to *multiple* narratives. 'Shit' connotes nullity, but it connotes many different forms of nullity, and in many different ways.

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[212] Don DeLillo. *End Zone* (London: Picador, 2011 [1972]), 69. Henceforth, *EZ*. For an analysis of the desert wasteland's role in *End Zone* see David Cowart. 'Football and *Unsaglichkeit.' The Physics of Language* (Athens, GA: University of Giorgia Press, 2002), 17-32.

[213] See Anya Taylor. 'Words, War and Meditation in Don DeLillo's *Endzone. International Fiction Review* (January 1977): 68-70. http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/viewFile/1322/ 14305. Accessed 12 April 2014. See also Peter Boxall. There's no lack of void: Waste and abundance in Beckett and DeLillo.' *SubStance* 37. 2(2008), 56-70. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25195171. Accessed 6 April 2014.

The sense of the complexity of our leavings, and the extent to which they can be drawn into multiple, often contradictory, narratives, underlies much of DeLillo's *oeuvre.* And, too, from Harkness' conflation of animal entrails, chemical spillage, saints' relics and academic studies on shit, we can infer that waste, for DeLillo, is many different things, and takes many different forms. To say that DeLillo had been 'thinking about garbage for twenty years' prior to *Underworld* is not to suggest he spent two decades thinking about household trash: it is to suggest that he spent two decades thinking about how household trash relates to the 'chemical stink of self discontinued' and 'shit as history' and 'holy men praying to shit' and 'shit's infinite treachery.' It is to suggest, in other words, an enduring preoccupation with the narrative underlying the things we throw out or excrete, the processes by which those things got to where they are, and by which we became a people defined by our propinquity for disposal.

DeLillo's third novel, *Great Jones Street* (1973), expands his critique of capitalist excretion through the story of a number of figures who reject (or have been rejected from) the corporate rat race. Titled after the eponymous street in Manhattan's NoHo district, known, in the 1970s, as a hangout for junkies and derelicts, the novel charts the story of rock star Bucky Wunderlick, who renounces his possessions and relocates to a squalid tenement building in the area, where he lives amongst derelicts and marginalised characters of various types, including a struggling writer and a brain-damaged babbling teenager whose father has spent the last decade and a half trying to put him to use, whether as a carnival act or as a medical subject (*GJS,* 269). Throughout the novel, Bucky is hounded by representatives from the media and his own record company, Transparanoia Inc., who are all seeking to extract a marketable story from his exodus, and, ideally, to convince him to make a return. These efforts, however, are juxtaposed against those of Transparanoia's elicit drug trade branch, and their search for a wonder drug that renders its consumers speechless. In this way, DeLillo interlaces meditations on language, marketability, and the dynamics of obsolescence. Throughout the novel, the characters posit America as a place in which the only value is commercial value, and in which the only difference between a valuable entity and garbage is whether there's someone willing to buy it. As Bucky's neighbour Hanes, a failed writer, describes it, the market 'spits out' the products for which it no longer has a use, or which have stopped functioning (*GJS,* 28). In the eyes of the market – be it the music industry, bookselling, or the drugs trade – our value is measured in terms of what we produce, and how much people want it.

He notes: 'The market is a strange thing, almost a living organism. It changes, it palpitates, it grows, it excretes. It sucks things in and spews them up' (*GJS,* 28). Success amounts to anticipating demand, and spotting untapped areas: 'Once you pre-empt [demand], you're good for years. Send them bird shit wrapped in cellophane, they'll buy it […] Everything is marketable' (*GJS,* 49). In an

effort to distance himself from the 'living organism' of the market, Bucky ends up taking the silencing drug and wandering through the Bowery, mutely observing the city's homeless scavenging and selling the city's waste. Among these is a woman 'loudly cataloguing' the trash littering the pavement:

> NEWSPAPER VOMIT SHIT GLASS CARDBOARD BOTTLE SHIT SPIT NEWSPAPER GLASS SHIT GARBAGE
> BOTTLE CARTON BOTTLE PAPER STOCKING SHIT GARBAGE SHIT GARBAGE GARBAGE SHIT (*GJS,* 246).

It is the culture's human waste – its unwanted, overlooked, superfluous people – making itself heard. Bucky's companion is a ragamuffin child, 'a wanderer in cities, one of those children found after every war, picking in the rubble for scraps of food,' whom he acknowledges can be found in any city, in any time, where either war or radical progress have taken place (*GJS,* 248). In this context, the inchoate babble of the homeless and Bucky's own final murmurings among the city's 'beggars and syphilitics' are merely sounds that have not been put to use—had they had the right agent, the logic goes, NoHo's bums, too, might have become valuable commodities in their own right. Had she been put to use, the ragamuffin child, too, would have her own record label.

In *Running Dog* (1978), DeLillo expands on these ideas to explore the taxonomic distinction between objects of value and objects of waste.[214] Narrating the frenzied search for a pornographic home movie rumoured to have been filmed during Hitler's last days, DeLillo shows us that above all, it is myth that endows objects with the status of collectible. Narrative is what differentiates a relic from waste, and what saves that relic from the scrapheap. In an interview with *Rolling Stone,* DeLillo identified the novel's central concern as the 'the terrible acquisitiveness in which we live, coupled with a final indifference to the object. After all the mad attempts to acquire the thing, everyone suddenly decides that, well, maybe we really don't care about this so much anyway."[215] And, indeed, it is in the eye of the beholder whether an object is a rarity or, as one of the detractors of the novel's seedy art dealer, Lightborne, terms his finds, a 'junkyard piece' (*RD,* 50). In *Running Dog,* the articulations of the film's myth are many: the film's pursuers view it, variously, in commercial, aesthetic, historical and erotic terms. What they share is their subjectivity, as the journalist Moll Robbins realises moments before she finally views the film:

> At the bottom of most long and obsessive searches, in her view, was some vital deficiency on the part of the individual in pursuit […] Even more depressing than the nature of a given quest was the likely result. Whether people searched for an object of some kind, or inner occasion, or answer, or state of being, it was almost always disappointing. People came up against themselves in the end. Nothing but themselves' (*RD,* 253).

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[214] Don DeLillo. *Running Dog* (London: Picador, 2011 [1978]). Henceforth, *RD.*

[215] See Anthony de Curtis. 'An Outsider in this Society: Interview with Don DeLillo' (1988). *Conversations with Don DeLillo.* Ed. Thomas DePietro (University Press of Mississippi, Mississippi, 2005), 52.

Whether we are sifting through our own trash, a derelict building site, or a collection of valuable relics, what we find is some reflection of ourselves. DeLillo ironises this, at the end, by revealing that far from pornography, the film is a home movie, featuring snatches of everyday life in Hitler's bunker during the last days of the Third Reich. Among these living stills are interspersed mock-silent films, culminating with one of Hitler himself, dressed as Charlie Chaplin, enacting Chaplin's own early satire of him in *The Great Dictator* (1940). The discovery of the film's true content undermines the point of the quest, as attested by Lightborne's dismay: 'What do I do with a thing like this? Who needs it?' (*RD*, 268). This is not a product for the erotica industry; it is not a collectible; which means, for Lightborne, that it is as good as garbage (*RD*, 268). Hitler twirling a cane will not sell: there is no market for it. By narrating the pursuit of an object that no one has seen, DeLillo explores what it means to assign something the status of a valuable or rarity, as well as the degree to which that assignation has nothing to do with the object itself. As attested by the marketing magnate, Richie, who has never bothered to ask what the Hitler footage was supposed to show (*RD*, 218), the deciding factor is dual. Narrative grants objects meaning, but under capitalism the most powerful narrative of all is the one on the price tag.

The concerns of DeLillo's project as a whole are articulated in *The Names* (1983), in the protagonist David Keller's meditations on 'our piggish habits, our self-indulgence and waste.'[216] As the novel's female protagonist Kathryn Axton notes, at issue is:

> the theme of expansionism, of organized criminal infiltration […] the corporations, the processing plants, the mineral rights […] The colonialist theme, the theme of exploitation, of greatest possible utilization […] contaminants […] pollutants […] noxious industrial waste […] The theme of power's ignorance and blindness and contempt (*N*, 266).[217]

The passage brings into sharp focus the degree to which waste, for DeLillo, can never be examined in isolation – it is part of a broader, interconnected, narrative, in which corporate power destroys as much as it builds, setting in motion systems that leech chemicals into the earth and the air and alter the very make-up of the humans that reside there. As Lianne, the female protagonist of *Falling Man* (2007) notes of the experience of living in the aftermath of 9/11, 'every subject [is] related' (*FM*, 217). Just as the things with which we furnish our existence exist in relation to other things, so, too, do our excretions. The interconnectedness of waste in its many different forms, and the impossibility of examining them singularly, is a fundamental aspect of DeLillo's project, as well as one of the reasons it stands apart from other late 20th-century articulations of consumer culture. DeLillo shows us that the things we throw out don't have just one story: they have *multiple* stories,

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[216] Don DeLillo. *The Names* (London: Picador, 1987 [1983]), 193-194. Henceforth, *N.*

[217] For a nuanced analysis of the language of environmental wreckage in *The Names,* see Elise Marcucci. *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

and those stories are inextricable from the stories of all the other things that other people, other communities, other eras, have discarded.

This understanding of the interrelated nature of different waste forms is manifest throughout DeLillo's novels, and enacted in their montage-like structure. In this way, the novels themselves can be seen to enact one of the tropes underlying the environmental movement itself from its first manifestations - that ecological responsibility is merely a way to recognise the effects of our actions on others. As H.M. Enzenberger noted in his 1974 essay, 'Critique of Political Ecology' (one of the first documented efforts to address the environmental movement within the context of capitalism), one cannot deal with environmental issues singly, or in isolation:

> One is dealing with a series of closed circuits, or rather of interference circuits, that are in many ways linked. Any discussion that attempted to deal with the alleged "causes" piecemeal and to disprove them simply would miss the core of the ecological debate and would fall below the level that the debate has in the meantime reached.[218]

In connecting the narratives of different waste forms, and drawing attention to the inherent difficulties in dealing with them separately, DeLillo applies ecological principles to narrative. In complicating the issue of re-use, he highlights the limits of attempting to 'manage' overconsumption rather than putting an end to it. Very simply, our efforts to read what we have excreted will not stop it from subsuming us.

This awareness comes to a head in *White Noise* (1986), in which the preoccupation has shifted to waste's resistance to scrutiny, its coterminous provocative intimations of mystery and cryptic self-contained silence. As if questioning the far more definitive opinions of the apartment custodian in *Americana*, for whom 'garbage tells you more than living with a person' (*A*, 24), the novel's protagonist Jack Gladney asks himself whether garbage really is 'so private' (*WN*, 259). Contemplating the contents of the family compactor, Gladney pulls out a tampon wrapped in a banana skin and deliberates whether the stuff really does 'glow […] with signs of one's deepest nature, clues to secret yearnings' (*WN*, 259). Unconvinced, he asks 'Is this the dark underside of consumer consciousness?' (*WN*, 259). In so doing, he questions whether garbage belies a 'complex relationship' between us and our possessions, or whether, in fact, it is our *fascination* with it that we should be scrutinising – the capacity of this 'shapeless mass' (*WN*, 259) to feed our need for meaningful patterns, and too, our paranoia and fear. Can our refuse really reveal aspects of our secret selves?[219] Or, as David Evans has argued, should we perhaps re-think our need to subsume everything, even garbage, into the signifying chain?[220]

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[218] 'A Critique of Political Ecology' (1974). *The Greening of Marxism*, 17-49. Citation on 25.

[219] Neither novel provides a conclusive answer to these questions – indeed, its protagonists veritably abandon their pursuit. Leaving his documentary film project unfinished, Dave Bell returns to New York to resume his work of packaged

At the same time, *White Noise* is the first of these novels to render explicit public fears over toxic emissions, emerging as the United States garbage crisis was first gaining momentum. As Jennifer Seymour Whitaker notes, the late 1980s saw growing awareness – and fear – of the potentially harmful effects of aerosol sprays, chlorofluorocarbons (CFS), and emissions from burning fuels.[221] Reflecting these anxieties, consumerism in *White Noise* is presented as both a means of staving off death, and as the thing that *is* killing us. Shopping and bingeing on junk food are depicted as ultimately flawed social rituals: participants undertake them with quasi-religious fervour, but the outcome is unfulfilling, and ultimately solitary, leaving each to confront their own mortality. Gladney's family trip to the mall, undertaken as a distraction from the toxic waste cloud that has formed over the city and threatens to annihilate the community, ends with a silent meal in which each member consumes their food in solitude. Gladney notes that 'when times are bad, people feel compelled to overeat' (*WN,* 13). Sitting in the car, pushing handfuls of junk food into their mouths without making eye contact, the family members divest mealtime of its traditional function. Food is excess, here – it is unnecessary, it is filling other unmet needs and desires – and it is distancing, insofar as it replaces human interaction and dialogue. Exemplifying capitalist excess, junk food here functions as the waste matter that circulates through the system 'just because'—serving no function other than a kind of inane self-affirmation (i.e. I eat therefore I am), and, indeed, merely fuelling further desire, in a manner akin to cigarettes, alcohol or mind-altering drugs. In this, the novel's repeated depictions of junk food consumption and the characters' subsequent dissatisfaction anticipate Nick Shay's realisation, in *Underworld,* that 'Most of our longings go unfulfilled': in this system, we can fill our holes, but filling them just makes them empty again all the more quickly.

Although DeLillo's post-millennial novels have continued to address these ideas to a degree – most notably, in his novel about the 2000 dot-com bubble, *Cosmopolis* (2003),[222] and in his post-9/11 novel, *Falling Man* (2007)[223] – it is in *Underworld* that they can be seen to culminate. Indeed, in its very explicit engagement with the industrialised world's most prominent post-waste concerns, as well as in its mixing of themes touched on in his previous narratives, *Underworld* constitutes, as

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interruptions for his TV network; Jack Gladney's search for material evidence of his wife's self-medication comes up trumps, and it is he, in the end, who dies.

[220] David H. Evans. 'Taking Out the Trash: Don DeLillo's *Underworld,* Liquid Modernity, and the End of Garbage.' *The Cambridge Quarterly* 35.2 (2006): 103-132.

[221] Jennifer Seymour Whitaker. *Salvaging the land of plenty: Garbage and the American dream* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 24. Whitaker's study posits garbage as symptomatic of the culture of American economic development and on the role of individualism therein: she reads the erosion of the physical environment as disclosing the erosion of the country's ability to solve its social problems (Whitaker, 14).

[222] Don DeLillo. *Cosmopolis* (London: Picador, 2011 [2003]). Henceforth, *C.*

[223] Don DeLillo. *Falling Man* (London: Picador, 2011 [2007]). Henceforth, *FM.*

DeLillo himself has commented, the 'book [he]'d been writing all [his] life without knowing it.'[224] The following sections focus specifically on *Underworld's* depictions of waste, and what the different recuperative efforts DeLillo stages throughout its many strands can tell us about the potential, and limits, of historiographic, aesthetic, and ecological recuperation in late capitalism.

'Waste is the secret history'[225]: Reading the past

DeLillo's novels suggest that to reclaim meaning from waste is above all to understand it in historiographic terms, and to recognise that that understanding will only ever be partial, fragmented, and problematic. In *Underworld,* the transnational discourse of consumer and nuclear waste is juxtaposed against the localised history of New York garbage, and, further, of the Bronx of DeLillo's childhood – a Bronx in the process of rapid urban renewal, scarred by crime and arson, and then showing signs of re-birth, thanks to municipal investment, in the 1990s.[226] The novel itself begins on 3 October 1951 at the Polo Grounds in Upper Manhattan on the day the New York Giants won the National League pennant against the Brooklyn Dodgers thanks to a home run by Bobby Thomson – which was also the day the Soviet Union announced its successful testing of the atomic bomb. From here, the text a-chronologically charts the interconnected stories of the US's involvement in the Cold War, the transformation of the Italo-American Bronx after the completion of the Cross-Bronx Expressway, the New York mafia's mobilisation of the city's garbage cartels and heroin trade, the corrupt practices of waste management, and the relentless pursuit, by a series of baseball memorabilia obsessives, of the ball that was hit for the home run that won the game. Waste functions as both thematic backdrop and plot element throughout: the protagonist, Nick Shay, is a waste management expert; his brother Matt is a nuclear scientist specialising in the re-routing and effective disposal of atomic waste; and among the subplots are the nun Sister Edgar's attempts to engage with orphan children living in the junkyards of the Bronx; J Edgar Hoover's efforts to mount a case against the Mafia underworld via evidence found in their garbage; and a collage artist, Klara Sax, looking to make her mark on the wastelands surrounding a defunct air base in the Nevada desert by re-purposing old fighter planes.

As such, the novel suggests that 20th-century American history, itself, is embedded in American waste, and that our interpretation of particular forms of American waste illuminates our own ideological biases. Whether we view an old baseball or a used condom as items to be thrown away,

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[224] Richard Williams. 'Everything Under the Bomb: Interview with Don DeLillo.' *The Guardian,* 10 January 1998. http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/1998/jan/10/fiction.dondelillo. Accessed 10 September 2012.

[225] *Underworld,* 791.

[226] See Amy Waldman. 'Bank Dips Its Toe in South Bronx; Commerce Gingerly Follows Housing in Ex-Wasteland.' *The New York Times,* 22 July 1999. http://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/22/nyregion/bank-dips-its-toe-south-bronx-commerce-gingerly-follows-housing-ex-wasteland.html. Accessed 20 July 2015. See also Evelyn Diaz Gonzalez. 'The Road Back.' *The Bronx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 130-143.

or as historical relics, says more about us than it does about the items themselves: and our efforts to extract meaning from them suggests an effort to put those items to use. To investigate waste for historical clues, in other words, is a recuperative process. While perhaps not legitimising our excesses, such investigations allow us to redeem them, or at least find redemptive aspects *in* them. To attribute a story to our leavings is, in a way, to locate them in a broader ontological narrative. It is to console ourselves that while the toxins our discards emit will be our undoing, their endurance is a form of posterity.

This is not, however, to ascribe nihilistic tendencies to DeLillo's text. Rather, it is to emphasise DeLillo's *ambivalence* about re-use, and his understanding that it can all to easily be divested of any radical intent. It is to recognise the extent to which recuperation in *Underworld* is depicted as either belated, or as having been subsumed by the mainstream and turned into a commercial enterprise. And it is to recognise the dangers of viewing the *present* in historical terms, as Jameson describes it. To envision what products on the shelf will look like as waste, as Nick Shay and his colleagues do, or to think about how a municipal landfill might be turned into a profit-making tourist site is to have lost hope in the present moment, to see it only as past. Shay tells us that he and his wife 's[ee] products as garbage even when they s[it] gleaming on store shelves, yet unbought' – they don't say 'What kind of casserole will that make?' but rather 'What kind of garbage will that make?' (*U,* 121). In this sense, they embody Jameson's definition of postmodernism's sense of historicity:

> Historicity is, in fact, neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the future (although its various forms *use* such representations): it can first and foremost be defined as a perception of the present as history; that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow de-familiarises it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterised as a historical perspective. It is appropriate, in other words, also to insist on the historicality of the operation itself, which is our way of conceiving of historicity in this particular society and mode of production; appropriate also to observe that what is at stake is essentially a process of reification whereby we draw back from our immersion in the here and now (not yet identified as a "present") and grasp it as a kind of thing—not merely a "present" but a present that can be dated and called the eighties or the fifties (Jameson, 284)

The postmodern condition, Jameson suggests, is to perceive the present as past. For DeLillo, this perception of the present as past is acutely tied to the nature of consumerism at the end of the 20th century, in which consumers are aware of the future obsolescence of their purchases. He complicates this however by indicating that these already-waste objects hold anthropological and historical value.

We see this most clearly in DeLillo's depiction of the theorising 'garbage guerrilla' Jesse Detweiler, whom DeLillo describes as having been at the forefront of 1970s garbology, and whom scholars have read as a caricature of the most notorious garbologist of the decade, AJ Weberman,

who gained notoriety from sifting through Bob Dylan's trash.[227] For Detweiler, civilisation itself is built on waste management: the successful empire is the empire with the most sophisticated disposal methods. Like *White Noise*'s professor of consumer packaging Jay Suskind, Detweiler is presented as a disconnected intellectual who has subsumed the discourse of consumer culture into his work, and become enamoured with the very thing he was initially critiquing. This critical stance is manifest, too, in Nick Shay's derision of the academic career and stature Detweiler has achieved since the days of sifting through J. Edgar Hoover's trash (*U,* 286). No longer a part of the resistance, Detweiler publishes thesis after thesis on the philosophy of waste, chasing book deals and gaining personal accolades while changing none of what he initially set out to oppose. Instead, he spends his time teaching courses on the primordial drives underlying consumption, and championing, for instance, the transformation of landfills and nuclear waste sites into cultural heritage sites to feed a collective 'complex longin[g]' and 'nostalgia for the banned materials of civilization' (*U,* 286).

In this depiction, DeLillo suggests that the capacity for our excretions to subsume us goes beyond the physical – it is not just the physical space taken up by garbage, or what toxic emissions might do to our bodies, that is at stake, but their role in the shaping of individual and cultural identity. Lest we forget, the waste matter Shay and Detweiler are contemplating is the physical remnant of Cold War consumerist ideology, which equated consumerism with patriotism. In weaving waste management into an abstract, immemorial narrative about desire and paranoia, Detweiler glosses over recent history, ignoring, in fact, the role that the ideology fuelling over-consumption throughout the Cold War played in creating the mountains of discards he is contemplating. The landfill's awe-inspiring magnitude and the prospect of what it might convey to future generations has effectively obscured its origins, in a fashion eerily reminiscent of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. Thus Detweiler's championing of the historiographic use of waste negates the actual past, and overlooks the fact that what he is observing is, in fact, a reliquary of specific political tensions, a residue, in fact, of the US's efforts to retain global sovereignty.

The problems inherent to reading waste historically are amplified by the actual structure of *Underworld*, with its inter-layering of past and present, and its cyclical repetition of particular motifs. DeLillo himself has defined the various narratives' backward thrust as an attempt to 'wor[k] back' in time, identifying the interlayering of time frames as a way to emphasise the book's engagement with memory and its on-going presence.[228] But although the backward gaze, in this novel, reflects an effort to make reparations for past mistakes, DeLillo repeatedly shows us the

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[227] See Robert McMinn. '*Underworld:* Sin and Atonement.' *Underwords: Perspectives on Don DeLillo's Underworld.* Ed. Joseph Dewey, Steven G. Kellman and Irving Malin (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 37-49. Citation on 47; John Scanlan. *On Garbage* (London: Reaktion, 2005), fn. 59.

[228] Adam Begley. 'Don DeLillo, The Art of Fiction, No. 135.' *The Paris Review* 128 (Fall 1993). http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1887/the-art-of-fiction-no-135-don-delillo. Accessed 6 April 2014.

fraught nature of such an attempt. On the one hand, the repeated depiction of characters searching through piles of antiques, landfills, and their own memories suggests that if any kind of redemption is to be had, it is from the sifting process itself – from the *faith* in our capacity to make meaning from our discards. On the other hand, the framing of these investigations suggests that such faith is both flawed and naïve: the investigator will ultimately find what he is seeking, and re-affirm his individual identity within that of the collective, as opposed to discovering something unexpected.

This critique of historiography is closely related to a broader concern with the construction of national and cultural myths. US involvement in the Cold War was financed largely by a civilian-consumption system. As Maurie J. Cohen notes, military production throughout the Cold War was paid for by tax revenue generated by the conjoined growth of civilian incomes and consumption, which were in turn predicated on an ever-expanding production of disposable goods.[229] Emily S. Rosenberg extends this, arguing that mass consumerism was the 'ism' that won the Cold War, not only in its attraction for Russians living in the Soviet Union, but in its capacity to capture the imagination of Americans themselves.[230] The great myth upheld throughout the Cold War was that to be American was to consume. *Underworld* is haunted by the repercussions of that myth: figuratively, in the disorientation of its central characters, and physically, by the sheer magnitude of consumer waste the Cold War left behind, and that the country continues to produce, having grown accustomed to mass consumption. In this context, then, the recycling of waste is charged with associations of self-purification and atonement – a palliative to ameliorate the past, and legitimise consumption.

We see this most explicitly in Shay's meditation, towards the end of the novel, on the 'redemptive qualities of the things we use and discard' (*U,* 810), and in his faith in the redemptive potential of the recycling process. The Shay family's separation of glass from plastics, tin from card, creates a sense of order via ritual, to which Shay self-consciously draws our attention by narrating it again and again and again. A visit to the recycling plant is thus framed as the closest we can come to turning back time, promising to undo our actions, while allowing us to then go home and continue making the same mistakes:

> The tin, the paper, the plastics, the styrofoam. It all flies down the conveyor belts, four hundred tons a day, assembly lines of garbage, sorted, compressed and baled, transformed in the end to square-edged units, products again, wire-bound and smartly stacked and ready to be marketed […] Look how [our discards] come back to us, alight with a kind of brave aging [...] The parents look out the windows through the methane mist and the planes come out of the mountains and align for their approach and the trucks are arrayed [...] bringing in the unsorted slop, the gut squalor of our lives,

[229] Maurie J. Cohen. 'Bringing Consumerism in from the Cold War.' *Sustainability: Science, Practice & Policy Blog,* 22 May 2012. http://ssppjournal.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/bringing-consumerism-in-from-cold-war.html. Accessed 7 June 2015.

[230] Emily S. Rosenberg. 'Consumer Capitalism and the end of the Cold War.' *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol 3: Endings*. Ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge University Press: 2010). See also Emily S. Rosenberg. 'Mass Consumerism and the Cold War as Global History,' a talk given as part of the Robert S. Strauss Centre's Globalization Speaker Series at the University of Texas, Austin, 2008.

and taking the baled and bound units out into the world again, the chunky product blocks, pristine, newsprint for newsprint, tin for tin, and we all feel better when we leave (*U,* 810).

It is a majestic passage, in which Shay's reverence for the redemptive possibilities of his industry shines through: the recycling plant, he suggests, is where we might all atone for our consumer sins. This is not about making new: it is about making good the old, of neutralising sin. And yet his comment, 'and we all feel better when we leave,' is anticlimactic, flat – indicating recognition that this is a flawed faith. As a waste management expert, Shay knows that recycling is not a religion, but an industry – and that it serves the interests of other industries. Other passages in the novel return, again and again, to the corporate nature of waste management, its involvement with other concerns, both legal and not. The reverent tone here thus amplifies a broader unease about what Heather Rogers has termed the 'greenwashing' of industry's excesses – the use of recycling to justify production and divert attention away from the need for waste reduction at the source (Rogers, 170-174). Indeed, the text legitimises the fears expressed in the 1970s by Marxist theorists such as H.M. Enzenberger, who anticipated that ecological issues would be used as leverage to create industries, rather than to promote steady-state or zero-growth capitalism (Enzenberger, 25). DeLillo's narrative suggests the deep connection between the lexicon of green capitalism and that of spiritual cleansing and atonement. In turn, this shows one further facet of capitalism's capacity to subsume all discourses—the military-industrial, xenophobic and paranoid discourses of yesterday, and the religious discourses the present deploys to atone for them.

This notion is amplified and made explicit in the novel's last section, *Kapital,* which sees waste and weapons explicitly related in their toxicity, the former the 'mystical' or 'devil twin' of the latter (*U,* 791). According to the Kazakh nuclear waste capitalist Viktor, whose company vaporises toxic waste, 'Waste is the secret history, the underhistory of weapons.' Throughout the Cold War, he notes, 'we thought about weapons all the time' but 'never thought about the dark multiplying by-product' (*U,* 791). Viktor likens his work to 'the way archaeologists dig out the history of early cultures, every sort of bone heap and broken tool, literally from under the ground' (*U,* 791). His job is, essentially, to uncover the past and obliterate it for profit.

Perhaps more ironically, Viktor's story exemplifies a certain entrepreneurial spirit uniquely related to the waste management industry of the late 1970s and early 1980s. As government and industry struggled to deal with where to 'put' waste and who was to foot the bill, incineration was posited as a space- and cost-saving alternative to landfills, with, too, money-earning potential for anyone clever enough to find a buyer. Often referred to with the more benign term 'waste to energy incineration' in reference to the process' capacity to convert organic waste into heat or electricity, the concept of burning waste away implied that waste could be gotten rid of for good. Meanwhile, the notion of converting it into energy appealed to the American entrepreneurial

ethos.[231] The process only lost credence after the burning of polymers (the most common plastic found in packaging) was found to produce dioxine, a powerful compound that had gained notoriety during the Vietnam War due to its associations with Agent Orange and DDT (which DeLillo incorporates into the plot of *Underworld*[232]). When burned, ordinary household waste had the potential to be as lethal as the chemical compounds being used in the deforestation of Vietnam. Thus America's anxieties about waste incineration became conflated with a whole host of associations with the Cold War and Vietnam (Miller, 11; 240). The failure of the entrepreneurial ethos, the involvement of gangster capitalism with the waste management industry, and the ultimate recognition of waste's potentially toxic effects, was exemplified, in 1987, by the much-cited story of the Mobro 4000, the barge of privately-purchased garbage whose owner was unable to find a buyer, spending the latter half of 1987 drifting around the New York Bay area (Miller, 4-14).

To acknowledge incineration's toxic effects, at this moment in the country's history, was to acknowledge waste's endurance: as Viktor asserts, that 'what we excrete comes back to consume us' (*U*, 791). It will not be moved on. *Underworld*'s waste managers are alive to these complexities—they give utterance, indeed, a name, to the nation's waste fears. Shay's and Glassic's Eastern counterpart's project fundamentally parodies the entrepreneurial spirit that shaped both the course of American sanitation engineering from the 1930s onwards, the country's attempts to commercialise it at the end of the century, and its on-going modes of shipping it overseas. Viktor's mythology of waste is but a thinly veiled version of late capitalism as we know it - and an amplified version of the corporate 'greenwashing' discussed by Heather Rogers (Rogers, 170-174).

In these depictions, DeLillo complicates our understanding of recuperation, showing the naïveté of assuming that the signs of ecological damage or social inequality can be rationalised as culturally interesting, or that recycling can purify us of our excesses, and suggests that in subscribing to such beliefs, we simply become complicit in the problem.

'Longing on a large scale'[233]: Nostalgia, collecting and waste

DeLillo's novels complicate the discussions addressed thus far by ruminating on the very definition of waste. Time and again, his characters grapple with the taxonomic distinctions between what to keep and what to throw out, and whether the kept things qualify as something more than mere possessions. They also salvage for very different reasons. For Nick Shay, the recycling process and his role in improving its efficiency serve to atone for his criminal youth, as well as the Cold War ethos of overconsumption. Salvaging junk for Klara Sax forms part of an aesthetic project. For the

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[231] Benjamin Miller. *Fat of the land: Garbage in New York* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2000), 11.
[232] See *Underworld,* 465; 599.
[233] *Underworld,* 11.

homeless children in *Underworld* who scavenge for food in the Bronx, and for the scavengers who wander the streets in *Great Jones Street,* it is a means to survive. A junkie in *Great Jones Street* deliriously suggests transnational 'underwear exchange' as a means to reach world peace (*GJS,* 70, 78), while for *Running Dog*'s Moll Robbins re-use forms part of a flippant fantasy about an ideological movement in clothing exchange, fuelled by the desire to 'get in touch with other's feelings' (*RD,* 42).

Alongside these very disparate acts of practical re-use, aesthetic bricolage, and ecological re-use, DeLillo examines recuperation as a process of collecting—a kind of organised scavenging, which allows the collector to impose his own narrative on his finds. Moreover, DeLillo relates this collecting practice and its historiographical associations with a broader collective longing characteristic of the 1970s. As we saw earlier, the 1970s were the decade during which American culture gained renewed consciousness of its own waste-makings, as manifest in the growth of the environmental movement and the emergence of garbology as both a countercultural practice and one espoused – indeed funded – by industry and government. Marshall Berman reads the environmental movement as part of the decade's renewed interest in home, family and neighbourhood – a kind of enforced nostalgia.[234] The burgeoning green movement, with its attendant grass roots efforts and earth art experimentations, was also an effort to re-connect with the natural landscape of the country's forefathers.[235] Another aspect of this nostalgic thrust was the rehabilitation of ethnic history and ethnic memory (Berman*,* 333). This is not to say that *Underworld*'s nostalgia-ridden characters have ecological sympathies; but rather that their nostalgia forms part of a broader, collective nostalgia—the grand-scale longing that makes history, as DeLillo describes it in the novel's first passage.

DeLillo explores this nostalgic thrust in his narration of the baseball, sought after throughout the novel by its central characters for its commercial value, for its historical value, and, in the case of the geriatric collector Marvin Lundy, to feed an obsession with the past. Transported, at one point, all the way to Russia on a rubbish barge, and riding in the back seat of the Texas Highway Killer's car, the ball ends up in Lundy's basement – a mausoleum to America's past, a quasi-shrine to the Cold War and all of the period's unspoken fears. This underground burial re-enacts the burrowing instinct fostered by the Cold War, as well as further emphasising the novel's concern with the connections between grand narrative and personal, public and private, surface and depth. In interviews, DeLillo himself has highlighted this dualism, and his interest in the interplay between the story of defunct places and practices and the framework of global events, the juxtaposition of

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[234] See Marshall Berman. 'The 1970s: Bringing it all back home.' *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (London: Verso, 2010 [1981]), 329-348; citation on 332.
[235] Jane Jacobs. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961)*.*

'local yearning[s]' such as those for a baseball stadium now gone, with the 'longing on a large scale [that] makes history' (*U,* 11).[236] Most recently, in an interview commemorating the 60th anniversary of the game that inspired the novel, DeLillo commented that the game:

> seemed to me wedged between significant world events [...] Brooklyn's collective memory still bears [its image]. The significance of baseball, more than other sports, lies in the very nature of the game — slow and spread out and rambling. It's a game of history and memory, a kind of living archive.[237]

Marvin Lundy has spent the years following his retirement amassing that living archive in his basement. He has travelled across countries and continents in his quest to collect the remnants of the game, and to find the ball from Thompson's homerun. He eventually retrieves it from a plastic sandwich bag 'crammed in a cardboard box filled with junky odds and ends' (*U,* 180). In so doing, he has amassed the past, and incurred visits from other fellow baseball fans, in whom he identifies a similar nostalgia that goes beyond baseball, relating to the anxieties and paranoia of the Cold War era: they 'surrender [themselves] to longing, to listen to [...] anecdotal texts, all the passed-down stories [...] stories that Marvin had been collecting for half a century—the deep eros of memory that separates baseball from other sports' (*U,* 171). To let go would be to acknowledge the futility of those efforts, and the unimportance of the stories found. Marvin notes:

> People who save these bats and balls and preserve the old stories through the spoken word and know the nicknames of a thousand players, we're here in our basements with tremendous history on our walls [...] There's men in the coming years they'll pay fortunes for these objects. They'll pay unbelievable. Because this is desperation speaking (*U,* 182).

DeLillo shows us how the assembly of remnants can function as a nostalgic means of retracing individual and collective history, and how waste objects can serve powerful metonymic and symbolic functions that link to both the physical and cultural body, bearing associations of eros and death alike. Lundy's comments also draw attention to the subjective nature of the taxonomic distinctions we make between an object of worth, and waste or 'junk.' It is the collector's gaze that endows an old baseball, soup can or machine part with significance. By categorising the ball as memorabilia, he situates it within a system of things that, in contrast to other commodities, *accrue* value with time rather than lose it – what the waste theorist Michael Thompson, in *Rubbish Theory,* terms 'durable objects' as opposed to 'transient objects' or 'rubbish' (Thompson, 7). Where a technological device, item of clothing, or food product begins the process of becoming waste the moment we take it out of the store, collectibles gain value with time, as they become part of the

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[236] Don DeLillo. 'The Power of History.' *The New York Times Book Review,* 7 September 1997, 6.
http://www.nytimes.com/books/images_br/toolbar_br.map, Accessed 10 August 2012. Henceforth, *TPOH.*
[237] Rafe Bartholomew.'Director's Cut: Q&A With Don DeLillo. An e-mail exchange about Underworld, baseball, and the 60th anniversary of Bobby Thomson's Shot Heard 'Round the World.' *Grantland* (3 October 2011).
http://www.grantland.com/story/_/id/7032210/qa-don-delillo. Accessed 28 July 2012.

pattern of history. Lundy's collectibles are the antithesis of the products in the supermarket that Nick Shay cannot help picturing 'as garbage, even when they s[it] gleaming on store shelves, yet unbought' (*U,* 121). Indeed, the baseball itself is framed as an object that has been *saved* from the path to landfill – its retrieval from a box of 'junky odds and ends' is an intervention of sorts into the natural fate of commodities. Like the other seemingly meaningless objects in DeLillo's other novels—*Running Dog's* Hitler film, the mind-altering drug in *Great Jones Street*—the baseball gains subjective meaning when examined through the eyes of the person who has deemed it worth keeping. It is by the grace of subjective valuation that the baseball is salvaged. The ball is not waste only because someone deemed it of historical value.

But perhaps more importantly, DeLillo shows us the ease with which waste can be deployed in totalising nostalgic discourses. Collecting is a search 'for big history' in which the objects collected are often anything but innocuous (*U,* 174). The popularity of Naziana is testament to the fact that collecting is never politically neutral. This reading is borne out by DeLillo's own recognition, at the time of the novel's publication, that much of the novel's thematic concern with longing had stemmed from his identification of an emergent nostalgic, uncritical, stance towards the Cold War.[238] Lundy embodies that uncritical stance, and shows the extent to which nostalgia can neutralise politics – nowhere more so than in his uncritical comparison of the baseball's size to the radioactive core of the atomic bomb (*U, 172*).

DeLillo amplifies this problematic dimension of nostalgic collecting by framing Lundy's collecting obsession as a pathology.. Lundy's, we soon see, is an effort not so much to collect as to hoard, according to the specific clinical definition of the term as it has been used since the early 1990s. Although hoarding was only formally recognised as a condition in the DSM-5 (the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) in 2013, research on hoarding in psychiatry dates back to the late 1980s (DeLillo may have even been aware, when he was writing *Underworld,* of Randy O. Frost's and Gail Steketee's efforts throughout the 1980s to have the condition formally diagnosed).[239] Hoarding differs from collecting in its perceived lack of system – to the onlooker, it appears that the hoarder will keep anything and everything they find, and that they will continue to amass things until they are buried beneath them. And, indeed, hoarding is but one of many of Lundy's obsessions and phobias, which include a pathological fear of contamination, dust and disease, and paranoid aversion to his own bodily emissions. The insanity of purpose that drives his collecting obscures reason, causing his mental faculties to decay. Indeed, while arguing

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[238] Don DeLillo, as cited in Diane Rosen. 'Window on a Writing Life: A Conversation with National Book Award Winner Don DeLillo.' *The Book That Changed My Life* (New York: Random House, 2002), 18.

[239] See Randy O. Frost and Gail Steketee. *The Oxford Handbook of Hoarding and Acquiring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Randy O. Frost and Rachel C. Gross. 'The hoarding of possessions.' *Behaviour Research and Therapy*. 31. 4 (May 1993): 367-382; and Gail Steketee and Randy Frost. 'Compulsive Hoarding: Current Status of the Research.' *Clinical Psychology Review* 23. 7 (2003): 905–27.

that his collection is 'innocuous,' the disintegration of his narrative as he attempts to recount it belies the opposite, suggesting that, like the garbologist Jesse Detwiler, he has been subsumed by his passion:

> He forgot some names and mangled others. He lost whole cities, placing them in the wrong time zones. He described how he followed false leads into remote places. He climbed the stairs to raftered upper rooms and looked in old trunks among the grandmother's linen and the photographs of the dead. "I said to myself a thousand times. Why do I want this thing? What does it mean? Who has it?" (*U,* 176).

The quest for the thing, as recounted by Marvin, resists logic and intent; it suggests the incoherence of the paranoid era out of which it sprang. Thisincoherence in turn is performed within the text, as DeLillo interrupts the third person account of Marvin's narrative with a numbered list of fourteen impressions garnered during the quest for the ball, 'the whole strewn sense of what they [he, people, the nation] remember and forget' (*U,* 176). The list self-referentially comments upon its inability to tell the story straight, and of these dots on the itinerary to amount to a single uninterrupted trajectory. The desperation, then, occurs on a dual plane, collective and individual. The process of collecting seeks to dig up history, but risks both killing and entombing its practitioner in the process. It is the desperation of the collective examining the remains of the Cold War and mourning an ultimately futile national project into which so much effort was invested, and the desperation of the individual who, in the aftermath of the era, perceives himself to be 'the lost man of history' – unfixed, unmoored, part of a 'fraternity of missing men' uncertain of their place in the so-called New World Order (*U,* 182).

Underworld's dealings with longing, then, are fraught: while DeLillo's artists look to make sense of the past on an individual and collective level, the narratives themselves repeatedly underscore memory's capacity to aestheticise – and *anesthetise* – the past, and for traumatic memories to ultimately overwhelm those seeking to make sense of them. However, DeLillo suggests a potentially redeeming aspect to these fraught forms of nostalgia. To examine an old baseball and think about whether it can be thought of as historically or culturally symbolic in any way is to identify the narrative aspect beyond its material qualities, and to see this narrative as important enough to render it distinct from, say, a banana skin or an empty tin. Moreover, it is to contemplate something other than its commercial value. Souvenirs and artefacts are not exempt from market valuation, and, indeed, their value rises with the passing of time, as they gain historical import, and as new generations are beset by nostalgia, or morbid interest, for a particular era—as DeLillo shows, albeit ironically, with the Hitler tape in *Running Dog.* To look to the object for something beyond commercial or nostalgic meaning, then, is to recognise that the process of attaching meaning to old, used, obsolete things is also in evolution: the meanings we attach to the defunct change in relation

to our own circumstances. Historiography is a process, and so, too, is the historiography of objects, and the narrative(s) we attach to our waste.

'The biggest secrets'[240]: Fresh Kills, Consumerism and the Cold War

My focus thus far has been on the national, and to an extent, transnational, aspects of DeLillo's depictions of waste and the degree to which these interrogate the culture of late capitalism during the Cold War and its aftermath, and illuminate our understanding of how national identity is constructed, and its myths upheld. Indeed, this is where the scholarly discourse around DeLillo's work remains largely concentrated. The concerns discussed thus far, however, can only be truly understood when examined in conjunction with DeLillo's depiction of Fresh Kills, the presence that underlies *Underworld*'s many different narratives, and which can be seen reflected in the novel's own layered structure. The landfill, the different ontological meanings his characters ascribe to it, and the parallel constructions we find his other characters making throughout the rest of the novel raise important questions about the extent to which one can, in fact, read waste. We can divide it into taxonomic categories and give a name to each one. We can identify the philosophical and ethical and historiographic questions to which each category gives rise. We can mix up the categories and show the affinities therein. But do these analyses amount to anything more than strata upon strata of interpretations – a semantic equivalent to the landfill itself?

Strikingly, for all DeLillo's attention to the physical size and scope of Fresh Kills, DeLillo scholars have largely read his depiction of the space metonymically or psychoanalytically, either as a cultural bricolage or a reflection of consumer excess. Ruth Helyer reads waste in the novel as the 'unwanted baggage' that 'sullies our ability to conform to an acceptable prototype';[241] for John Duvall, the landfill 'figure[s] spiritually wasted lives' (Duvall, 24); while Mark Osteen and David Cowart both read it as an embodiment of the protagonist's personal history, the digging up and seeking out of relics as means of resolving the past.[242] In none of these readings, however, are the actual landfill's geophysical characteristics, or its charged socio-political significance in American history, taken into account.[243] Moreover, it is surely significant that at the time of the novel's writing, Fresh Kills was (very publicly) scheduled for closure, and thus on its way to becoming, like the other defunct spaces of the novel (the Polo Grounds where the Thompson game took place, the razed streets of the

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[240] *Underworld,* 185.

[241] Ruth Heyler. '"Refuse Heaped Many Stories High": DeLillo, Dirt and Disorder."' *Modern Fiction Studies* 45 (1999): 987-1006.

[242] See Mark Osteen. '*American Magic and Dread* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); David Cowart. 'Shall These Bones Live?' *Underwords,* 50-67.

[243] Mark Osteen reads the landfill as a mystical quality, identifying how the structure 'hide[s] garbage under a cloud of unknowing that increases its dimensions and mystery' (Osteen, 226-227). For McCinn, Fresh Kills exemplifies the original meaning of the word sacred: that which exceeded understanding—overwhelming in its 'absolute unapproachability' Robert McMinn. '*Underworld:* Sin and Atonement' in *Underwords*, 47.

Italian Bronx), an historical relic. Recognising this dimension of Fresh Kills allows us to extend the conservative and positivistic assessments of waste to which scientific or environmental discourses on waste are generally confined (and into which DeLillo criticism does often risk falling) and consider the landfill as an artefact. This more pluralistic examination of waste, which is, I argue, DeLillo's underlying intent, allows us to understand his project in something other than straightforwardly dystopian or redemptive terms.

For instance, the effect of Fresh Kills' size and its impending death on its perception by *Underworld*'s characters plays an important role in shaping the novel's landfill passages. The characters' responses to the space aptly reflect the controversies Fresh Kills evinced from its opening, in 1946, by New York's most controversial urban planner Robert Moses,[244] until its much-publicised eventual closure in 2001, after decades of environmental lobbying (Moses himself had termed it a 'temporary' solution). This closure was scheduled several years before *Underworld*'s publication in 1997, and the landfill itself was frequently under scrutiny by the press, criticised as a monstrosity, an eyesore, and, too, as a reminder of just how much money it costs to dispose of our excretions, and how much space those excretions take up. But as DeLillo's character, Brian Glassic, sees it, Fresh Kills has an almost mythological importance:

> It was science fiction and pre-history, garbage arriving 24 hours a day, hundreds of workers […] He found the sight inspiring. All this ingenuity and labour, this delicate effort to fit maximum waste into diminishing space. The towers of the World Trade Center were visible in the distance and he sensed a poetic balance between that idea and this one […] He looked at all that soaring garbage and knew for the first time what his job was about. Not engineering or transportation or source reduction. He dealt in human behaviour, people's habits and impulses, their uncontrollable needs and innocent wishes, maybe their passions, certainly their excesses and indulgences but their kindness too, their generosity, and the question was how to keep this mass metabolism from overwhelming us. The landfill showed him smack-on how the waste stream ended, where all the appetites and hankerings, the sodden second thoughts came runneling out, the things you wanted ardently and then did not (*U,* 185).

Note, here, the emphasis on the social dimension of waste – the extent to which Fresh Kills appears to participate in a greater human narrative of needs and wishes, appetites and hankerings (*U,* 185). The landfill is presented as a grand narrative – a record of human idiosyncrasies whose immensity dislocates all sense of measure and distance and perspective (*U,* 185). The reference to the World Trade Center in the distance emphasises the landfill's necessity to the maintenance of the capitalist order – a 'poetic balance' links this space to the corporations that manufacture things and the banks that circulate money and the people that buy goods. This is the end point of it all, and we *need* that end point because it *allows us* to keep making things and buying things and selling things. At the same time, however, its depiction as a 'mass metabolism' suggests that this is a living,

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[244] For a thorough account of Robert Moses' modernisation of New York, see Marshall Berman. *All That is Solid Melts into Air,* 290-311.

pulsating, shape-shifting thing, home for gases and toxins and matter in the process of decomposition. Fresh Kills is thus framed as something akin to Bruno Latour's concept of the 'quasi-object quasi-subject' – a hybrid material entity that lends itself to both 'hard' empirical studies (in relation to its physical appearance) and to 'soft' qualitative analysis (in relation to its sociological role).[245] As the repository for objects divested of their commodity value and thus social use, the landfill is defiantly a-social, defiantly 'hard'; but as a repository of human possessions and reflective of a larger economic system, it is redolent with social meaning, which is to say, 'soft.' Indeed, we might go so far as to say that it is this very hybridity that instigates Glassic's awe.

The second thing to notice here though is how Glassic relates the landfill to time. Fresh Kills is both pre-historic and science fiction – in other words, the thing that predates humans, and that will outlast them. Waste is the thing that endures, but is also reminiscent of the primordial slime from which we emerged. In this respect, Glassic's awe is directed not only at Fresh Kills, but at himself, as one of the select few who are able to understand the landfill's importance, and who are *shaping its narrative:*

> He saw himself for the first time as a member of an esoteric order, they were adepts and seers, crafting the future, the city planners, the waste managers, the compost technicians, the landscapers who would build hanging gardens here, make a park one day out of every kind of used and lost and eroded object of desire. The biggest secrets are the ones spread open before us' (*U,* 185).

The reference to 'the landscapers who would build hanging gardens here' is an explicit reference to the plans for the rehabilitation of the space and its transformation into a state park. So this is something of an epitaph—a swan song to the landfill in the face of its imminent closure. It's a very odd thing to be lingering on, the future of a closing landfill, and it plays with our sense of narrative time. Firstly, because landfills are generally regarded as endpoints for things— not places for *beginning* something, and certainly not things worth mourning when they're gone. Secondly, because the closure, in the novel, has yet to occur: this is the present perceiving itself as past, a sanitation engineer imagining future generations' experience of the space following its transformation. And thirdly, because it amounts to a commemoration, or mythology, of postwar consumer culture, envisaged by one of the novel's most self-deluded characters. As his very name suggests, Glassic subscribes to 'classic' capitalist notions of achievement and success. His recognition that 'the biggest secrets are the ones spread open before us' is darkly humorous, suggesting the Glassic himself is blind to the true meaning of the expanse in front of him. Where Glassic treats the landfill as a legible space – one that only a select few such as he can decode – DeLillo suggests that this is anything but the case.

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[245] Bruno Latour. *We have never been modern,* Catherine Porter, transl (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 55.

Indeed, Glassic's self-belief, here, is reminiscent of the self-mythologising tendencies of the waste disposal industry itself, and its close association with private industry (Rogers, 70). Since its birth, in the 1890s, from the science of bacteriology, waste management has been figured as a science in order to augment its authority and political sway. The discipline's very culture was founded on and shaped by business interests, and by the principles of free-market development, and has, throughout the last century, been subject to monopolies – first by the Mob, and then by three major firms, WMI, USA Waste and BFI.[246] Glassic is figured as a senior member of one such monopoly – a deluded emperor with no concept that the landfill's biggest secret is that its contents will outlast everyone, even him. The 'sting of enlightenment' Glassic feels in the face of the space is thus a false epiphany, a moment of apparent understanding that DeLillo frames as a small-minded rationalisation on the part of the novel's personification of capitalist ideology.

Nick Shay, tellingly, sees the landfill in starkly dystopian terms, as anticipating our undoing. The Jesuits, he tells us early in the novel, 'taught [him] to examine things for second meanings and deeper connections. Were they thinking about waste?' (*U,* 88). Having been schooled in the discipline of identifying relationships between things, and the underlying subtext, he recognises not only the immensity of what lies before him, but his complicity in its creation. He is not part of an esoteric order, but rather, part of an industry adept at couching their government lobbying in the language of 'victims,' to voice the right to manage waste, and to make money doing so. The greatest secret, he suggests throughout the novel, is that there is much money to be made from the process of dealing with the things the world doesn't want. Yes, 'people look at their garbage differently now, seeing every bottle and crushed carton in a planetary context' (*U,* 88), as he notes, but this awareness has created new markets. Simultaneously rambling and eloquent, Shay's dystopian analysis provides a sharp counter to Glassic's idealised, fervid view of the landfill and his own role as its keeper and high priest. The biggest secret, DeLillo suggests, is the inherent semantic fluidity of the landfill and its contents. All things are on their way to landfill, but the landfill itself can be viewed, variously, as a sublime vision or a sign of our fast-approaching end.

Taken together, however, Glassic and Shay's contemplations of Fresh Kills and the rehabilitative role of the waste management industry points to a third issue: the extent to which the recycling industry is complicit in obscuring the effects of consumption. Considered alongside the novel's passages on capitalism in the post-digital age, in which the abstract nature of trading is depicted as severing our ties to the material world, the future rehabilitation of Fresh Kills appears less as an ecological project of redemption than as a further cloaking. 'Capital,' Shay tells us in the opening of *Das Kapital*, 'burns off the nuance in a culture. Foreign investment, global markets,

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[246] Carl A. Zimring, William L Rathje eds. *Encyclopedia of Consumption and Waste: The Social Science of Garbage* (London: Sage, 2012), 81; 978;

corporate acquisitions, the flow of information through transnational media, the attenuating influence of money that's electronic and sex that's cyberspaced, untouched money and computer-safe sex' (*U,* 785). What he is describing, of course, is both the homogenising effect of capitalism as a whole, as well as the particularity of the logic of *late* capitalism – or, perhaps more accurately, what Zygmunt Bauman calls *liquid* capitalism. Bauman defines this as an era defined by virtual commodities, in which capital is able to 'travel fast and travel light and its lightness and motility,' in turn becoming a 'paramount source of uncertainty for all the rest.'[247] Society itself is viewed as a 'matrix of random connections and disconnections and of an essentially infinite volume of possible permutations' (Bauman, 3). DeLillo's depiction of 'the flow of information through transnational media' and 'the attenuating influence of money that's electronic' encapsulates the ethos of flexible accumulation, in which the very traces of our exchanges are 'planed away' (*U,* 786).[248] What happens, *Underworld* asks us, when the evidence of our actions is no longer visible -when the landfill is no longer there, in Glassic's words, to 'assault [our] complacency and vague shame' and thus, on the surface at least, there appear to be no consequences to our consumption? (*U,* 185). Perhaps it is not only the spectre of Fresh Kills and its potential to 'subsume us' that haunts the novel – perhaps it is also the prospect of its closure, and the effects that might have on 'planing away' any guilt, or doubt, we might have about consumption. The landfill, DeLillo suggests, has played a similar role in the collective unconscious to that of the Soviet-US threat during the Cold War – haunting and reassuring in equal measure. The biggest secret is perhaps that the country needs Fresh Kills not only on a practical level, but symbolically, too.

The dark nature of what Glassic terms the great 'secrets […] laid open before us' provides much of the subtext to Part Five of *Underworld,* 'Better Things For Better Living Through Chemistry' (*U,* 500). A reference to DuPont's advertising slogan from 1935 to 1982 (when 'Through Chemistry' was dropped), the title draws attention to the involvement of the plastics and synthetic ingredients industries in weapons manufacture, while the section itself interlaces the idyllic description of a sanitised home in 1950s suburbia with fragmented citations from consumer warning labels. [249] Further, DeLillo undermines his pastoral vision by making frequent reference to the Soviet threat. As such, the section not only enacts what Susan Strasser has termed the United States' 'cultural reverence for convenience,' [250] but suggests a connection between this reverence and efforts to

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[247] Zygmunt Bauman. *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 121.

[248] For a compelling ecocritical reading of this passage, see Jennifer Ladino.'"Local Yearnings": Re-Placing Nostalgia in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*' in *Journal of Ecocriticism* 2.1 (January 2010): 1-18 and Jennifer Ladino. 'Don DeLillo's Postmodern Homesickness: Nostalgia after the End of Nature.' *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 180-210.

[249] See Ann McCarthy. *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: New Press, 2010), 50.

[250] Susan Strasser. *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999), 12.

stamp out otherness - a kind of localised nationalism. We find an unexpected connection between homemaking and nuclear threat, as if in sterilising the home, such threat is kept at bay.

As Strasser notes, the cult of convenience was borne out of the application of Taylorist ideologies of industrial efficiency to the marketing of domestic appliances as means to liberate housewives from physical effort (Strasser, 183). Throughout the 1950s, for instance, popular magazines were keen to emphasise the 'freedom' garnered by the emergence of 'miracles in packaging and processing' (Strasser, 269). At the same time, marketers sought to divert attention from the products' toxic ingredients and the companies' involvement in weapons manufacture by promoting the goods themselves as weapons in the fight against communism. As such, these goods became 'a vehicle in the political and ideological clash of capitalism and communism' (Strasser, 269).

DeLillo emphasises the dark underside to the 1950s' ideologically-charged ethos of domestic efficiency in his montage-like narration of an afternoon in 1957, during which future bomb-head Eric sits in his room, masturbating into a condom, while his suburban housewife mother, Erica, makes 'miracles' with that other synthetic miracle of modernity, Jell-O. In another nod to the 'better things' achieved by DuPont, DeLillo tells us that 'doing things with Jell-O was just about the best way to improve [Erica's] mood' (*U,* 532); in this case, unease over the Russians' recent launching of Sputnik (*U,* 514, 518).

The emphasis on Jell-O in particular is significant. As Erica knows, Jell-O is not one dish: it is many. Initially marketing it as a miracle made possible by the refrigerator, General Electric and Frigidaire were keen to promote Jell-O as a cost-effective means to transform leftovers in a seemingly endless process of recycling and reinvention (Strasser, 210). *Your Frigidaire* (1934) argued that 'good things' could be made 'out of odds and ends, which would otherwise be wasted,' resulting in 'a great contribution to better living', a message that posited the domestic economist as a culinary *bricoleur* and indeed anticipated DuPont's marketing angle.[251]

For Erica, Jell-O is miraculous not only for its capacity to give new life to leftovers, but in its semantic fluidity:

> Sometimes she called it her Jell-O chicken mousse and sometimes she called it her chicken mousse Jell-O. This was one of [its] thousand convenient things […]The word went anywhere, front or back or in the middle. It was a push-button word, the way so many things were push-button now, the way the whole world opened behind a button that you pushed (*U,* 517).

Both Jell-O the word, and Jell-O as a concept recuperate the old and turn it into something new; they open up the world to the housewife, freeing up time, providing the satisfaction that comes with discovering one's artistic capacities. They underscore the notion, as expressed by Eric in

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[251] See Alice Bradley. *Electric Refrigerator Menus and Recipes* (Cleveland: General Electric, 1929), 11, 36; 'Left-Overs.' *Frigidaire Recipes* (Dayton: Frigidaire, 1928), 55-62, as cited in Strasser, 209-211.

contemplating the contents of the refrigerator with its slots and shelves, of the fundamentally 'unspoiled and ever renewable' nature of the world (*U,* 518). But the depiction is ironic, insofar as the entire passage is interspersed with fragments of consumer packaging warning labels such as 'If swallowed, induce vomiting at once,' that could be found as readily on toxic household cleaning products as on an aerosol food can like whipped cream or canned cheese (*U,* 515-519). The description of technology's capacity to 'open up' the world is interrupted by the disclaimer 'May cause discolouration of urine or faeces,' while the reference to pushing buttons is an implicit reminder of nuclear threat. Erica's obliviousness to these threats amplifies the novel's over-arching concern with the unknowable, while her awe for the things her kitchen appliances can do highlights one of the greatest paradoxes of modernity: that our advances merely accelerate the path to our destruction. Just as Glassic intuits that the biggest secrets are the ones spread open before us without knowing what they actually are, Erica imagines a world opening up to her without any knowledge that her son, one day, will be involved in blowing it up. DeLillo's depiction of a circumscribed act of recuperation – the making of Jell-O from leftovers – in the midst of a broader context of horror and dread suggests that the biggest secret is our own naïveté, and our capacity to imagine ourselves architects, or indeed stewards, of our own destinies. The sanitation engineer overseeing his mound of trash and the domestic housewife immersed in moulding coagulated leftovers show the extent to which we blindly seek to find meanings in our bits and pieces, and to cast ourselves in the role of artist, visionary, or executor, little realising the ultimate futility of our endeavours.

DeLillo's juxtaposition of technological innovation and financial privilege against the toxicity of the materials used in the name of progress, shows us the distancing, almost sterilising effect of our devices, and the antithesis between these effects and our most carnal desires and base bodily functions. In so doing, he suggests that one aspect of our disgust when confronted with the sight or smell of trash, excrement or rotting food has to do with a more general disconnection from the material world. We have become objectified – or reified – to a new extent, insofar as our disconnectedness from our work is now coupled with a disconnection from lived experience itself. As well as interrogating our efforts to read waste historically or philosophically, DeLillo repeatedly challenges the merits of aesthetic re-use in his depiction of artists seeking new means of expression. This complicates our understanding of his work, extending it beyond a straightforward articulation of consumer desire and disgust. DeLillo's characters' meditations on art and literature's role in the midst of late consumerism amplify our anxieties about mass production's effect on the cultural and geophysical landscape, while suggesting the resistance of these anxieties to coherent analysis, discourse, or representation. We see this most clearly in the depiction of Klara Sax, a former painter

and junk collagist who developed her craft in New York's Soho district in the 1960s and 1970s. Sax's back-story situates her implicitly alongside the likes of César Baldaccini, Robert Rauschenberg and John Chamberlain. These were artists who pioneered the 'junk culture' dimension of neo-Dada, which extended the historical avant-garde's preoccupation with commodification, but this time to directly critique consumer culture and planned obsolescence through 'the throwaway material of cities, as it collects in drawers, cupboards, attics, dustbins, gutters, waste lots, and city dumps.' [252] For Anna Dezeuze, the most interesting aspect of 1960s junk art was its expression not of the binary opposition between parts and whole or criticality and affirmation, but 'the movement *between* these oppositions – the dynamic passage between the recognisable object and the transformed artwork or the "stuff" of junk.'[253] Their most salient feature was 'not so much the relation between the parts and the whole as the suggestion that this relation remains fluid' (Dezeuze, 58). Junk art, in other words, was predicated on the transience of commodity flows themselves – the ability of things to move between states, to be either reconfigured into new forms or to become more amorphous, more waste-like. They were expressions of a dialectical approach to waste, which is to say, an effort to understand it both as end-point and beginning, as once-commodity and as commodity-potential.[254]

DeLillo however does not depict Sax's early junk aesthetic, but introduces her, rather, at the end of her career. We meet Sax in the novel's first chapter, following the opening account of the game. Here she is a woman in her seventies, at work on rehabilitating B52s into a 'landscape painting [that] use[s] the landscape itself' – a project that, in terms of size at least, competes with Fresh Kills (*U,* 70). It is an immense endeavour, a celebration of the end of the Cold War but also a meditation on its legacy. And, indeed, the introduction of Sax's project at the outset of the novel highlights the project's preoccupation with posterity. By following a game that coincided with the beginning of the Cold War era with an account of that era's material remainders, DeLillo is making a point about historiography itself. The depiction of a graveyard of bomber planes that never took off signals a defunct, stalled modernity. Moreover, Sax is alive to the belatedness of this endeavour – she readily admits that this type of rehabilitation has been attempted before, and, in true postmodern fashion, she recognises that her work is derivative (*U,* 70). Occurring in 1992, her installation art project is but a dim echo of Sabato Rodia's, the (real life) sculptor whom she acknowledges to Shay as having 'gotten there first' (*U,* 70; 277). Between 1920 and 1950, Rodia assembled building materials to create the structure of Watts Towers, which he decorated with

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[252] Lawrence Alloway. 'Junk Culture as a Tradition.' *New Forms – New Media.* Exhibition catalogue (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1960).

[253] Anna Dezeuze, 'Neo-Dada, Junk Aesthetic and Spectator Participation' in *Avant-Garde Critical Studies,* David Hopkins ed (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 49-71. Citation on 54.

[254] This reading is informed by Brandon Joseph's analysis of Rauschenberg's combines in *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass and London: MIT Press, 2003), 157.

found objects in a structure meant to represent the diversity of the local community: he called the finished work *Nuestro Pueblo* (our town).[255]

Sax's project differs, however, from Rodia's, in that it is concerned with collective experience rather than familial. DeLillo draws our attention to this contrast in his depiction of Shay's very different response to Sabato Rodia, later in the novel. In contemplating the towers on a visit to Los Angeles, Shay imagines Rodia to be his father – another Italian American who went out one day to buy a pack of Lucky Strikes, and never came back. Shay intuitively recognises that to recuperate materials is also to draw attention to the individual pieces within the collective whole, the personal within the grand narrative. As the real Rodia described his project, in a pamphlet produced in 1961 to save the Towers from levelling:

> I wanted to do something in the United States
> because I was raised here you understand.
> I wanted to do something for the United States
> because there are nice people in this country.[256]

This quote – not included in the novel but well documented in accounts of Rodia's work – exemplifies Shay's understanding of the micro within the macro, the neighbourhood embedded in the 100-foot construction. Which is also to say, the miniature, as Susan Stewart conceptualises it, *within* the gigantic: the interiorised narrative, the self-enclosed, private story to be found in the collective exteriority of public life.[257]

We see this interplay between the miniature and the gigantic in Sax's own articulation of the evolution of her aesthetic. Sax's art has progressed thematically and in scale 'from small objects to very large ones' (*U,* 70), from collecting to the display of a 'landscape painting in which we use the landscape itself,' in which the space of the desert becomes the 'framing device' (*U,* 70); but it has also moved in time. From documenting the marginal and the everyday – one of the central preoccupations of the first collagists, and, too, of 1960s murals and mosaics – Sax's junk aesthetic has moved to encompassing *Underworld*'s ethos of grand-scale longing. In so doing it evidences how a 'local yearning' can grow into an 'assembling crowd' – to turn into shock or mesmerised awe – with a potentially ambiguous politics of its own. Waste, like history, like narrative, is subject to interpretation: hence the military's amenability to the project despite its pacifist strains. 'Longing on a large scale is what makes history' but the texture of that longing is subject to circumstance (*U,* 11). As Marvin Lundy knows all too well, time's passage will change the public perception and valuation

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[255] A complete account of the construction of the Watts Towers can be found in *The Los Angeles Watts Towers* by Bud Goldstone and Arloa Paquin Goldstone (Los Angeles: the Getty Conservation Institute and J. Paul Getty Museum, 1997).

[256] http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/offthemap/html/level2_byp.html?6. Accessed 28 August 2012.

[257] Susan Stewart. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1993)*,* xii and 74.

of the assembled objects, often in grotesque ways. In an interview at the time of the novel's publication, DeLillo himself observed a 'curious sense of nostalgia for the Cold War, of people missing the clearly defined sense of confrontation, the sense of measurable certainties.'[258] Both Lundy's articulation and DeLillo's echo Gladney's identification of nostalgia's mobilising force, and Murray Suskind's recognition, in *White Noise*, that 'nostalgia is a product of dissatisfaction [...] It's a settling of grievances between the present and the past [...] War is the form nostalgia takes when men are hard-pressed to say something good about their country' (*WN*, 258). Thus Klara, once derided for her junk assemblages, now receives donations of materials from plane manufacturers, congressional approval, art foundation grants and international media coverage.

As an aesthetic project, then, Klara's strategy of re-painting the planes offers multiple readings. On one level, it is a project of renewal, an almost ecological vision. Out of the remains of a war that never actually started, she is creating a new use value. But it also has a more ambiguous role, which scholars aside from David Evans have largely neglected.[259] Visible from the sky, this larger-than-life assemblage in the middle of the desert can be seen as the counterpart to that other, soon-to-be-rehabilitated space in the novel, Fresh Kills. Existing on the other side of the country, Klara Sax's fighter plane-graveyard-turned-installation work suggests itself as an aesthetic counterpoint, the 'other,' to the soon-to-be state park. In this sense, the airplane project is less an ecological or pacifist attempt at reconciling land with technology or the mistakes of the past with the future, than a commemorative act.

Crucially, the complexity of Sax's vision lies in her consciousness of the capacity for it to be misunderstood: '"We may want to place this whole business in some bottom pit of nostalgia but in fact the men, who flew these planes, and we are talking about high alert and distant early warning, we are talking about the edge of everything—well, I think they lived in a closed world with its particular omens and symbols and they were very young and horny to boot"' (*U*, 77). And again: '"Not that I want to bring it back. It's gone, good riddance. But the fact is"' (*U*, 76).

The unfinished sentence suggests that discourse on waste and its recuperation is also bound to remain unfinished. Waste, like history itself, lives in time, and even the aesthetic of re-use has the capacity to be used towards violent or universalising ends – ones that obliterate the anxieties of the past left behind. Misinterpretation is as dangerous as erasure. By interlacing his depiction of the historico-politically charged site of Fresh Kills with larger ontological and metaphysical enquiries into the recuperation of warplanes, DeLillo demonstrates not only the fear of mortality that

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[258] As cited in Jennifer Ladino. 'Local Yearnings': Re-Placing Nostalgia in DeLillo's *Underworld* (*The Journal of Ecocriticism 2 (1)* January 2010, 1-18, citation on. 16, fn. 12. http://ojs.unbc.ca. Accessed 28 August 2012.
[259] Evans argues against conflating Sax and Rodia with DeLillo, and contends that Sax's project is designed to *prevent* the recycling of the decommissioned warplanes, and their reprocessing for other purposes: 'What ties art and garbage is a common resistance to utility' (Evans, 122).

underlies our awe of landfills and recuperative art, but the complexities inherent to such subjective readings.

'[A] form of counterhistory'[260]: Waste and language

While critiquing the risk his characters' historical readings of waste run of rationalising or legitimising overconsumption, DeLillo reveals the ambiguous role that language itself plays in constructing and propagating these myths. His novels suggest that just as all objects have the potential to become waste, they also carry the potential to be re-integrated into human narrative. Through this re-integration, waste has the capacity to reveal the hidden affinities between condom manufacturing and the military industrial complex, a toxic cloud and a housewife's efforts to lose weight. This is the greatest secret – the one splayed on the pavement, or exuding malodourous fumes, in the street before us. And it is language that coaxes it to reveal itself, as attested by his different characters' separate quests. While the means DeLillo's characters adopt in their quests vary greatly, they all share a common fascination between the physical aspect of waste, its narrative import, and its affinities with the workings of language itself. In *White Noise,* Murray Jay Suskind expresses his love for the 'bold new form' of consumer packaging, terming it 'the last avant-garde' (*WN,* 18); in *Underworld,* Shay contemplates the etymology of waste, and the word's 'funding [of] such derivatives as empty, void, vanish and devastate' (*U,* 120). In *Great Jones Street*, Bucky Wunderlick regains the power of speech after having renounced the excesses of his celebrity lifestyle, and experienced life on the street. His temporary speechlessness, here, has implications for his art (singing), but is more specifically related to the metaphorical lack of voice of the Bowery bums and vagrants he has encountered throughout the novel: the city's marginalia have no voice in the socio-political sense, and the words they speak might as well be babble. In *Running Dog,* Glen Salvy identifies the importance of language in reclaiming meaning from the Vietnam War. 'Vietnam, in more ways than one, was a war based on hybrid gibberish' in which the names soldiers give to their weapons are a 'counterjargon to death' (*RD,* 234). Meanwhile, Slevy and his boss, Lomax, argue over the terms for erotica and porn, and whether these should be termed 'art' or 'smut' (*RD,* 31). One man's trash is another man's art, but more importantly, the words we use to define them as such are what make the difference.

In these depictions, DeLillo suggests affinities between the way we utilise or ascribe meaning to things, and the way we situate them in language. The whole question of where garbage should go and who should buy it and who should be responsible for it when it proves toxic, and the whole

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[260] Don DeLillo. 'The Power of History.' *The New York Times Book Review,* 7 September 1997, 4. http://www.nytimes.com/books/images_br/toolbar_br.map, Accessed 10 August 2012. Henceforth, *TPOH.*

(interrelated) question of nuclear waste and where *that* should go, is inextricable from the words used to articulate it. That the sheer space taken *up* by consumer waste and the horrific effects of nuclear fallout should inspire wordless awe in the characters themselves reflects an important tension. DeLillo's project not only posits the 20th century as a story of humankind and its leavings: it also posits that story as one resistant to coherent expression. This tension is amplified by the very ideas, beyond the environmental, which recycling connotes, and with which DeLillo increasingly toys from *Underworld* onwards.

DeLillo's narrative style, which intersperses time periods and makes frequent use of montage, has inspired a rich array of critical responses. David Cowart has argued that 'the recycling theme of *Underworld* subsumes a vision of art that lends itself to conclusions about the entire DeLillo oeuvre.'[261] Mark Osteen has identified the use of montage as a means of emphasising social alienation. [262] Most recently, and perhaps most compellingly, David Evans has argued against the conflation of authorial vision and represented figuration, contending, instead, that to relate the two is to fall into the very trap that avant-gardism seeks to fight. 'The final triumph of late capitalism', he argues, is 'to turn the merely useless into raw material for future output, and to transform the resistantly non-identical into a convertible commodity' (Evans, 109-110).

Evans' argument reveals the inherent difficulty of binary readings of DeLillo's waste, and complicates our understanding of his *oeuvre,* but it falls short in neglecting to consider the linguistic and semantic component of these narratives. Ira Nadel's articulation of the DeLillo *oeuvre* as systematically reclaiming language from waste – and in turn wresting meaning from it – is more accurate, as it takes into account the explicit reference, in his novels, between waste and the words used to describe it.[263] These novels, and *Underworld* above all, rely on the premise that consumerism and war, terrorist plots and organised sports, depend upon homogeneity, and a totalising narrative: what Dave Bell terms the 'universal third person' that is advertising's greatest success (*A,* 270). DeLillo's novels seek to peel away the universal third person, and reveal the particular underneath. By articulating the narrative that connects producers, consumers, and the different kinds of waste to which our consumption practices give form, DeLillo shows the ripple effects of Western consumerism and its broader relationship with global politics.

DeLillo's explicit fascination with language's signifying capacity forms an important aspect of his figuration of the composition of history. As DeLillo himself noted in 'The Power of History,' an essay published just prior to the novel, the excavation of defunct languages is intrinsic to the

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[261] David Cowart. 'DeLillolalia: From *Underworld* to *The Body Artist* in *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language* (Athens, GA: University of Giorgia Press, 2002), 197-209. Citation on 198.

[262] Mark Osteen. 'Containment and Counter-history in *Underworld.' American Magic and Dread,* 230—231.

[263] Ira Nadel. 'The Baltimore Catechism; or Comedy in *Underworld.' Underwords: Perspectives on Don DeLillo's Underworld,* 176-198.

process of historiography: 'In *Underworld* I searched out the word-related pleasures of memory, the smatter of old street games and the rhythms of a thousand street-corner conversations, adolescent and raw.'[264] Here we see language posited as a means to recall the past—the closest approximation to re-living it—not in a nostalgic sense, but as a means to rehabilitate it. Indeed, DeLillo's use of non-iterative narration recalls Bill Brown's conceptualisation of repetition as 'the mode of becoming historical.'[265] Brown terms non-iterative narration a historiographical tool that foregrounds the inexactness of historiography as a form (Brown, 73). This reading suggests that historiography's failure to fully disclose the true nature of an event merely amplifies language's own limitations.

DeLillo signals language and waste's relationship throughout *Underworld*, including at the very basic level of plot: Nick Shay recalls that his switch from teaching English to working in waste management was driven by a sense of the affinities between studying linguistic discards and studying material effluvia (*U,* 742). Beyond this, however, DeLillo relates waste to the defunct language of the marginalised and dispossessed. The subversive intent of dialect is at the heart of *Underworld*'s Bronx passages, in which the juxtaposition of present-day and 1970s Bronx serves to emphasise a cognitive dissonance felt on both an individual and collective level. The passages immortalise a now extinct district via the dialect of its inhabitants, and call attention to waste as the stuff unassimilated by history. As Ira Nadel notes, the Sicilian dialect of Shay's Bronx subverts the dominant discourse (Nadel, 188). To speak (of) dialect is to reveal the marginal and particularised, to focus on that which exceeds tradition and authority. It is to recognise, as DeLillo articulates it, that 'language can be a form of counterhistory […] allow[ing] us to find an unconstraining otherness' (*TPOH*, 4). In a similar vein to what I have been arguing, David Cowart notes the dual significance of what he terms the novel's 'archaeology of street discourse' (Cowart, 182). Serving a mimetic function in 'shaping' the world it is meant to represent, the inter-layering of dialects, more importantly, suggests a 'visionary […] language-based rectification of the ills [to which] Nick Shay and […] his generation are heir' (Cowart, 182).

In *Underworld,* language's capacity to disclose and rectify past ills is exemplified by the Italian word 'dietrologia', which Shay notes 'means the science of what is behind something. A suspicious event' (*U,* 280). There is a subtext to all things, Shay tells us: and, as his statement implies, language contains within it the capacity to suggest and solicit as much as the material waste the culture itself excretes. DeLillo's project has cultivated this ethos from as early as *Great Jones Street,* in the drug-dealing Doctor Pepper's articulation of 'latent history'—the history of the unsaid, the unrecorded, or the misunderstood, 'events that almost took place, events that definitely took place but remain

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[264] Don DeLillo. 'The Power of History.' *The New York Times Book Review,* 7 September 1997. Henceforth, *TPOH.*
[265] See Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Culture of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 74.

unseen and unremarked upon [...] and events that probably took place but were definitely not chronicled' (*GJS,* 72). As he notes, 'Latent history never tells us where we stand in the sweep of events but rather how we can get out of the way' (*GJS,* 72-73). The language of latent history is the language of waste, insofar as it is the language of the (historiographically) undervalued. In this sense, *Underworld* itself can be seen as the author's effort to narrate America's own latent history—and, in turn, to suggest the underside to all narrative. Where there is system, there is backlash, with its own terminology, code of beliefs, headquarters and strategy for disruption. The challenge, DeLillo suggests, is to prevent the disrupting force from being subsumed into popular culture and divested of its radical force: to study our culture's effluvia without becoming inured to its import, lulled into complacency.

DeLillo's project reveals the hidden ambiguities and tensions in our repurposing efforts. DeLillo problematizes aesthetic recuperation, and indicates the limits of archaeological investigations of waste, while drawing out the oppressive and corrupt dimensions of the waste management and recycling industries themselves. In his narratives, we see the degree to which late capitalism has co-opted re-use, negating the polyvalent discourses opened up by art. But the objects of our pursuit and our understanding of them change shape and direction as readily as the products we consume and excrete. It is in this instability, and the movement it suggests, that DeLillo locates hope. DeLillo's investigations of language and form seek to wrest order and signification from waste, in an aesthetic that owes much to the historical avant-garde practices we examined in the first chapter. His narratives are as concerned with the politics of waste management and consumer culture and their connection with the mass production of weapons as they are with art's ability to intervene and speak out against these seemingly unstoppable processes, and language's capacity to express them coherently. His recurring interest in the etymology of waste and the history of dying dialects suggests an effort to connect the trans-historical to the contemporary, the universal to the particular, and the trans-national to the local. In connecting urban argot and domestic particulars to global economic crises and ecological disasters, DeLillo's work shows us the links between landfill waste and national ideology, and the paranoid discourses in between.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The environmental crisis is the combined result of a long-standing Western anthropocentric tradition, the modern mechanistic worldview predicated on violent opposition to nature and the capitalist economic system that requires endless growth, expansion and accumulation.[266]

We cannot predict what the overall climatic results will be of our using the atmosphere as a garbage dump.[267]

[P]lanetwide, more every day, the payback keeps gathering.[268]

The central aim of this thesis has been to examine how a selection of novelists have harnessed waste over the course of the 20th century in order to critique capitalist commodity culture, to interrogate capitalist ascriptions of value, and to consider how these affect artistic production, culture, and the popular imagination. This has been an investigation into how novelists have sought, through representations of waste, to liven us to the danger of being 'subsumed,' to paraphrase DeLillo, by our excretions – to make us think about the extent to which capitalism governs how we ascribe value to people and things.

I based my definition of waste on Arjun Appadurai's conceptualisation, in 'The Social Life of Things' (1986), of the commodity as a phase in the life of an object, and on his argument that all objects, theoretically, have the potential to be commodified (Appadurai, 13;15). Building on Appadurai's ideas, I argued that waste, too, is a phase rather than a category—and that in many cases, that phase is not permanent. Appadurai's conceptualisation of the commodity-ness of objects as a moment or process rather than a category provided us with a useful way to frame waste, allowing us to consider the many ways in which objects come to be viewed as waste, as well as the ways in which they are retrieved from the condition of waste and deemed useful once more. Following from this, I posited that all waste (again, theoretically) has the potential to be either recommodified, or to be salvaged and examined in something other than commercial terms. I called this approach to 'reading' waste commercially, historically, aesthetically, or politically 'recuperation,' and argued that any act of recuperation is also a reflection upon the meaning of value. I then argued that the category of waste can extend to human beings, and that the categorisation of humans as superfluous entities is a recurring theme in 20th-century literary depictions of waste, and closely related to the dynamics of capitalism. The term 'human waste' used throughout this study thus denoted both matter produced and disposed of by humans, and humans deemed superfluous.

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[266] Steven Best and Ian Kellner. *The Postmodern Turn* (Guilford Press, 1997), 269.

[267] Paul R. Elhrich. *The Population Bomb* (Buccaneer Books, 1968), 39.

[268] Thomas Pynchon. *Bleeding Edge* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2013), 340.

How objects and people become waste, and how they are retrieved from the waste-phase and either re-entered into the cycle of commodities or considered in non-commercial terms, is intimately bound up with their economic context. Recuperation may or may not be a politically charged act depending on the social codes that govern disposal and the utilization of old things. The novels we examined in this thesis assume recuperation to be something radical—a way of resisting, to some extent, the rules of capital. At the same time, each of the texts discussed is also concerned with the *limits* of recuperation, and with understanding when recuperation becomes simply an extension of the capitalist cycle—a further way of extracting profit, or cooperating with the system.

Examining the depiction of human waste and recuperation across the 20th century has allowed us to consider three pivotal moments in the critique of capitalism. The first moment we examined was the commodification of art – or rather, the *recognition* of the effects of art's commodification on artistic production, and on culture at large. Breton, Loy and de Chirico explore the possibilities of recuperating manufactured waste – which is to say, the potential to turn waste into art, and recognise it as something other than a figure of obsolescence or of obliterated use-value. However, in doing so they come up against an inherent contradiction: the transformation of waste into art necessarily subsumes art into the logic of capitalism, since we can assume that works of art enter the market. I based this reading on Peter Bürger's seminal work, *Theory of the avant-garde* (1974). The works of these novelists, I argued, use waste to both critique the commodification of art, and to transform the novel form: waste provides a means to loosen the strictures of realism, and posit a radical alternative to representing lived experience.

The second moment we examined was the expansion of Fordist rationalisation outside of the US in the aftermath of the Second World War. Samuel Beckett's novels and prose parody the cycle of production and consumption, and his depiction of homeless vagrants immersed in waste shows how one might abstain from participating in the market economy. Waste in this context obstructs production, and provides a means to resist the dominant discourse of efficiency and productivity. Though inspired and influenced by the historical avant-garde, Beckett's resistance differs from their efforts in its implicit acknowledgement that to make art from waste and re-sell it is to subscribe to the logic which radical aesthetics seek to oppose. The only solution, he posits, is to dwell and perhaps even revel in waste, without assuming it will catalyse an epiphany. And, although Beckett is also concerned, like the historical avant-garde, to test the limits of form and alter the scope of the novel, he takes a different approach, focusing not on the depiction of artists re-using waste, but on waste itself. Beckett's bums are thus figures of abstention on two levels: the (commercially) productive, and the *artistically* productive (although of course Beckett himself made a living from writing about them).

The third moment we examined was the transition from the era of Fordism-Keynesianism[269] to a burgeoning neoliberalism. For DeLillo, waste provides a lens through which to examine this evolution, from the beginning of the Cold War through to the end of the nineties, and he uses it to elucidate the role of consumerism in shaping Western political and cultural ideologies in the second half of the 20th century. DeLillo extends the historical avant-garde's and Beckett's search for (and scepticism towards) the radical potential of recuperation, by drawing our attention to the extent to which recycling as a concept has been subsumed by consumer culture, and has in fact become a justification for continued economic growth. Where Beckett proposes an aesthetic of abstention, DeLillo suggests we take a historiographical approach to waste. Waste can liven us to our mistakes, and reveal the darker aspects of the capitalist narrative; but, equally, it can subsume and sink us further into that same narrative. It has both radical potential and the potential to merely strengthen the capitalist system. Through his interlayering of past and present, and his montage style, Delillo mimics the landfills he is intent on investigating and the tensions in value they expose. He shows us the affinities between postmodernist historiography and the narration of waste: both, he indicates, require a non-linear approach.

This concluding chapter extends the ideas discussed thus far to consider literary depictions of waste since the turn of the millennium, and how they engage with capitalism today. We have of course only recently crossed the threshold into the new millennium, but even at this early stage, certain differences in the literary depiction of waste are evident. These features lend themselves to a proto-theory about waste in postmillennial literature as something simultaneously all pervasive and ineffable, which in turn reflects the all pervasiveness of neoliberalism and the ineffability of global warming.

In what follows, I explore the efforts of three recent novels – Jonathan Miles' *Want Not* (2013), Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013) and Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* (2015) – to depict the intangible aspects of waste. These three works break from resorting to visual characteristics, and reflect upon the relationship between the unseen effects of waste (which are invisible to the naked eye, and whose direct negative effect on people is so far removed as to make it difficult for them to engage with the issue), and an unknowable global economic model. Although it is perhaps premature to assume a rupture between the 20th-century novel's approach to waste and the 21st-century's, it is worth considering the extent to which contemporary novelists are approaching waste

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[269] It is worth reiterating that my use of the term Fordism-Keynesianism refers to the actual time period in which these two systems of thought overlapped (from the 1930s to the early 1970s), but that I am aware that during this period they were, in fact, contending with each other. I am thus using 'Fordism-Keynesianism' in the way that David Harvey uses it – to historicise the economic shifts of the postwar period and relate them to the later shifts of the 1970s, without claiming that the systems of thought themselves were part of the same economic project.

differently to their late 20th-century forebears, and what this might say about our understanding of the present time.

We might begin this discussion by considering in what phase of capitalism we find ourselves now, and how the neoliberal model we discussed in Chapter Four has evolved. A proliferation of literature seeking to explain the origins and implications of the financial crisis of 2008 has been published in the last few years.[270] Of particular note are David Harvey's *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (2010), David Graeber's *Debt: The Last 5,000 Years* (2011), and Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-first Century* (2013).[271] Harvey, Graeber and Piketty dissect neoliberalism's role in promoting income inequality and its complicity in what Graeber terms the 'militarization of capitalism,' (Graeber, 382) and address neoliberalism's refusal to acknowledge the limits to growth imposed by – among other things – soil depletion, water pollution, scarce resources, and climate change.

So what do these analyses tell us? As we saw in the third chapter of this thesis, neoliberalism emerged in the 1970s as a response to the first major economic recession of the postwar era – a crisis that Harvey and Graeber attribute to Nixon's decision to unpeg the dollar from the gold standard to pay for the Vietnam War, which caused the price of gold to surge, and the value of the dollar to plummet (Harvey, 32). For Harvey, the crisis provided a justification to dismantle the basic tenets of Keynesianism (also known as embedded liberalism), whose regulatory policies had held sway in the developed world since the end of the Second World War, and, as Piketty notes, dramatically shrank the income gap in these countries (Harvey, 66; Piketty, 294). The implementation of neoliberalism, by contrast, ushered in the deregulation of financial institutions, the privatisation of social services, wage repression, and the normalisation of debt (Harvey, 12; 21; Graber, 377). The gap between what labour was earning and what it could spend was countered, in turn, by the rise of the credit card industry and the encouragement of purchasing even big-ticket items on credit, which allowed even those with little secure income to buy a car or put down a

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[270] It is especially worth flagging Philip Mirowski's *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2013) and Jennifer Wingard's *Branded Bodies, Rhetoric and the Neoliberal Nation State* (New York and Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013). Both are concerned to understand why governments in the most recent economic crashes have gone to the aid of corporate interests and banks rather than citizens, an ethos based on trickle-down economics. Massimo Amato and Luca Fantacci's *The End of Finance* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012) ascribes the financial crisis to the very nature of finance since the 1980s: the illusion of the universal liquidity of debts (which is to say, the fact that they can be sold off rather than redeemed) may give the appearance of reducing the risk of default on the part of individuals, but actually increases the system's fragility as a whole. Wolfgang Streeck makes an important distinction between the first stage of financialisation (in the 1980s), which involved state borrowing and the buying up of state debt by foreign creditors, a second stage (in the 1990s), which saw the rise of consumer debt, and the stage in which we find ourselves now, in which the state bails out banks while having to contend, in turn, with its own creditors (see 'Markets versus voters? The Crises of Democratic Capitalism.' *New Left Review.* Ed. Susan Watkins. Vol. 71 (Sept/Oct 2011): 5-30).

[271] David Harvey. *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); David Graeber. *Debt: The Last 5,000 Years* (New York: Melvill House Publishing, 2011); Thomas Piketty. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

mortgage (Harvey, 17-20; Graeber, 377). Thus where Keynesianism sought to promote consumerism through wage inflation, and Fordism sought to cultivate the ethos of the worker-consumer, neoliberalism cultivated an ethos of speculation (Harvey, 22). This system of credit was facilitated by a newly de-regulated financial services industry, which between the late 1970s and the end of the 1990s relied on an illusion of surplus liquidity in order to enable industrialised nations (and in particular the United States) to maintain economic growth. Key moments in this evolution included the removal of geographical constraints on banking throughout the 1970s; the interlinking, in 1986, of global financial trading and stock markets; and the suspension, in 1999, of the distinction in the US between deposit banking and investment banking (Harvey, 20).

This is of course a simplified account – and proponents of neoliberalism would doubtless find fault in it – but it highlights the central dynamics to which Marxist scholars ascribe the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. These were the banking system's reliance on fictitious capital and the opaque marketing of unregulated financial products targeted specifically at lower-income households.[272] The roots of the global financial crisis, according to this view, are to be found in the very *tenets* of neoliberalism, which cloaks the concentration of wealth in few hands under the rhetoric of individual freedom, sees the volatility of markets as a necessary evil, and makes the state the protector of financial institutions rather than of its citizens.[273] That very same market-oriented mentality was harnessed by the American right throughout the 1990s, to champion the growth of the Internet as 'the latest triumph of American enterprise' – further evidence that capitalism was necessary to both democracy and the fostering of technological innovation.[274] The speculative bubble that resulted – and the ensuing crash – can be seen as symptomatic of an economistic view of the Internet – a space that, for others, should have been a free space governed by altruism and collaboration.[275]

Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, what these readings indicate is the extent to which the speculative dimension of neoliberalism has insinuated itself into all areas of life, and altered the very texture of culture. As Wendy Brown explains it in *Undoing the Demos* (2015), the

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[272] See Harvey, *Enigma of Capital,* 20. Philip Mirowski provides an excellent account of this in chapter three of *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*.

[273] Other important contributions to this discussion include Noam Chomsky's *Profit Over People* (London: Seven Stories Press, 2003 [1999]); Lisa Duggan's *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the End of Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); and Nick Couldry's *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics After Neoliberalism* (London: Sage, 2010).

[274] John Cassidy. *Dot.Con: The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 26.

[275] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the discourse around the open source movement – and its arguable cooption, over the last two decades, by commercial interests – but it is worth noting the wealth of publications that have sought to do so. Of particular note are: David Lancashire. 'Code, culture and cash: The fading altruism of open source development.' *Open Source* 6.12 (December 2001); Gabriella Coleman. 'The political agnosticism of free and open source software and the inadvertent politics of contrast' in *Anthropological Quarterly* 77. 3 (Summer 2004): 507-519; Sara Schoonmaker. 'Globalization from Below: Free Software and Alternatives to Neoliberalism.' *Development and Change* (2007): 999-1020; and Bart Cammaerts.'Disruptive Sharing in a Digital Age: Rejecting Neoliberalism?' *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* (2011), 47-62.

difference between neoliberal ideology and traditional capitalism on a cultural level is that neoliberalism sees the individual as nothing more than 'financialised human capital.'[276] Neoliberalism has us 'self-invest in ways that enhance [our] value or to attract investors through constant attention to [our] actual or figurative credit rating, and to do this across every sphere of [our] existence' (Brown, 32). This economisation of subjects differs from classic economic liberalism in its specific view of leisure, consumption and reproduction as strategic decisions capable of increasing one's future value (Brown, 34). Brown elaborated on these ideas in a recent interview with *Dissent* magazine:

> This is not simply a matter of extending commodification and monetization everywhere—that's the old Marxist depiction of capital's transformation of everyday life. Neoliberalism construes even non-wealth generating spheres—such as learning, dating, or exercising—in market terms, submits them to market metrics, and governs them with market techniques and practices. Above all, it casts people as human capital who must constantly tend to their own present and future value.[277]

This speculative dimension has transformed us from a society that monetises everything and everyone to a society that speculates on the future value of everything and everyone. As Brown notes in the same interview:

> [We are all] tasked with enhancing present and future value through self-investments that in turn attract investors. Financialized market conduct entails increasing or maintaining one's ratings, whether through blog hits, retweets, Yelp stars, college rankings, or Moody's bond ratings.

Based on these different readings, we might term the present moment "advanced neoliberalism" – an intensified, speculative free market ideology that is fundamentally at odds with the basic values upheld by the novelists examined in this thesis.

Where, then, does that leave a radical politics? For Graeber, 'There is very good reason to believe that, in a generation or so, capitalism itself will no longer exist—most obviously, as ecologists keep reminding us, because it's impossible to maintain an engine of perpetual growth forever on a finite planet' (Graeber, 382). In a similar vein, Harvey highlights that the global economic crisis served to revive the anti-capitalist and environmental movements that had dissipated following 9/11 (Harvey, 38-55). Indeed, citing similarities between the revival of environmentalism today and its first emergence during the economic recession of the 1970s, Harvey sees 'times of economic turmoil' as the perfect opportunity to address the interrelation of economy and ecology. Piketty, for his part, argues that an economy left to its own devices will result in levels of income divergence that threaten democracy itself – there needs to be a change, for 'the

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[276] Wendy Brown. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2015).
[277] Timothy Shenk. 'Booked #3: What Exactly is Neoliberalism? – Q&A with Wendy Brown.' *Dissent,* 2 April 2015. http://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/booked-3-what-exactly-is-neoliberalism-wendy-brown-undoing-the-demos. Accessed 11 May 2015.

consequences for the long-term dynamics of the wealth distribution are potentially terrifying' (Piketty, 571).

The above-mentioned views are encapsulated in what one of Thomas Pynchon's characters, in his most recent novel, *Bleeding Edge* (2013), terms neoliberalism's predisposition to:

> liv[e] on borrowed time. Never caring about who's paying for it, who's starving somewhere else all jammed together so we can have cheap food, a house, a yard in the burbs… planetwide, more every day, the payback keeps gathering (*BE,* 340).

However, the passage is tempered – or perhaps undermined – by the fact that the novel itself takes place in 2001, and is thus framed as an omen (and a warning to the reader) rather than as a reflection of public sentiment. Similarly, Graeber, Harvey and Brown's analyses are markedly at odds with the narrative that has dominated discussions about the economic crisis and its causes since 2010. Indeed, 'How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown,' the subtitle of Philip Mirowski's *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste,* pithily conveys the way the crisis has been in fact deployed as 'evidence' of an overstretched state rather than an unsustainable economic model, thus strengthening neoliberal rhetoric and providing the groundwork for further privatisation and austerity policies. In the face of such developments, it is difficult to assert that we are at the endpoint of capitalism (as Jameson's use of the term 'late capitalism', which we examined in Chapter Four, implied), or, indeed, on the verge of revolution, and it would appear that the social and ecological effects of our current economic model are only being questioned by some. The corporate sector certainly remains reluctant to accept environmental policy, and continues to find ways to pressure governments into relaxing it when it suits business interests, while discussion of the environment both at a government and industry level remains centred on its economic ramifications.[278] Environmental regulation since the 1970s has focussed on taxation as the main method to deter use of particular pollutants, effectively allowing companies to pollute as long as they are willing to pay for it. [279] Similarly, the rhetoric of corporations that acknowledge global warming frames the issue as an economic challenge (as exemplified, perhaps, by the former chief economist of the World Bank Nicholas Stern's description of climate change's potential to cut annual Global Domestic Product by the end of the 21st century as 'the greatest market failure the world has ever seen' (Weart, 195)). Such an economistic view ignores the role that the culture of capitalism has played in the environmental crisis, and, in particular, the ramifications of equating individual rights and freedoms with the 'right' to unfettered consumption and disposal. Criticism of

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[278] Naomi Klein provides a useful – and harrowing – account of this in *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate,* 19-20; 83.

[279] See for instance England and Bluestone. 'Ecology and social conflict' in *Toward a Steady-State Economy.* Ed. Herman E. Daly (San Francisco: Freemanc, 1973), 190-214; André Gorz. *Ecology as Politics.* Transl. Patsy Vigderman and Jonathon Cloud (Boston: South End Press, 1980 [1975]); Arran E. Gare. *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

capitalism's conflation of consumption with fulfilment and desires with needs remains largely confined to environmentalist and Marxist discourse. One is reminded of I.G. Simmons's identification, in the early nineties, of the need for 'the nature of the self […] to be redefined' – a task ignored, or 'baulked' at by economists and policy makers.[280]

From the perspective of waste theory, what is perhaps most interesting about this moment is its depiction in recent fiction, and particularly the way that fiction has assumed the threat posed by the environmental crisis and the financial crisis to be both inextricably connected as well as defying expression. As alluded to earlier, if we were to formulate a proto-theory about the postmillennial novel's approach to waste thus far, the most noteworthy aspect to emerge would surely be waste's depiction as something simultaneously all pervasive and inapprehensible – a view significantly at odds with the depictions we have discussed in the first four chapters.

Indeed, the implication of the definition of human waste used throughout this thesis is that it is something *seen* – it is the stuff of landfills, of vacant lots, of city outskirts or the homes of eccentric hoarders. Even nuclear fallout, which is unseen, is made visible in DeLillo: *Underworld* specifically attends to its visible effects, as embodied in the harrowing description of aborted foeti in jars at the Museum of Misshapens near the Kazakh nuclear test site (*U,* 799-803). The jarred evidence of the fallout's devastating effects underscores the novel's concern with consequence and aftermaths – with the ramifications of particular forms of use-putting – and can be seen as one of many instances in which to make waste visible is also to begin a reparative process. Similarly, the idea of waste as a phase in the life of an object, a phase characterised by the object's (temporary or permanent) loss of use or commercial value, presupposes that what we are dealing with is a material entity that can be visually apprehended and even touched. The basis for this reading was, of course, the texts under discussion. Each of the writers we examined in the last three chapters engages with waste as a sensory thing (something that can be held in one's hand and sniffed with one's nose) whose amenability or resistance to interpretation reassures us that we still retain some kind of agency – if only the agency to say we don't know what to do with it. This sense of waste as something seen is reflective of the cultural contexts in which the novels reviewed were written. We might argue that the 20th century is interested above all in the *image* of waste, that it conceives of waste's hold on (or hiddenness from) the public imagination as something palpable, and that it assumes waste itself to be legible. The story of waste we have examined, in other words, is a story about processes and traces of processes*,* and about the extent to which those traces can be read. My use of the term 'human waste' underscores the extent to which capitalism relegates people to the status of rubbish, and the extent to which fiction makes that relegation a subject of enquiry by rendering ambiguous

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[280] I.G. Simmons. *Interpreting Nature: Cultural Constructions of the Environment* (London: Routledge, 2013 [1993]), 54.

the distinction between people and things. Breton and de Chirico invite us to consider human waste as a magical apparition from which one might develop a new aesthetic credo, while Loy asks us what happens when the development of an aesthetic credo takes on the appearance of paid labour, and the artist himself is treated as a waste item to be put to use. Beckett posits waste as a disruptive force capable of interrupting production (through the depiction of things that literally get in the way, and people who refuse to participate in the market economy) and critiquing our systems of valuation (by satirising processes such as inventorying and consumption). Finally, DeLillo asks us to look upon the effects of postwar mass consumption, and to recognize, in the landfill, a sign that all is not well in the state of global capital. Each of these approaches allows us to 'manage' something that threatens to exceed our understanding, to broach the distance between the thing feared and ourselves, and to conceive of the thing as something that can be redressed. Taking our cue from Strasser, Whitaker, and Rogers' different historical analyses of early 20th-century waste management, we might say that these very different literary approaches all seek to make literature a steward of human waste, and through that stewardship, to point out capitalism's wrongs.

By contrast, one of the salient aspects of postmillennial literature is a sense that such stewardship is no longer possible. There is simply *no language,* now, with which to articulate something so culturally embedded. Elaine Scarry puts forth a very similar argument to this in her analysis of our incapacity to properly conceive of, let alone confront, issues such as anthropogenic climate change.[281] In a 2010 interview with Ken Hiltner, Scarry described this incapacity to fully comprehend climate change as its resistance to 'aesthetic imagining,' which she likened to the notion of aesthetic distance in the theatre:

> It was often said […] that in the theatre you have to be at the right aesthetic distance to experience the play. If you're too close, you see the safety pins on the costumes and it ruins the effect, and if you're too far away everything is miniaturized and you can't accept it. And I think that this question may well be right, that apocalypse is what happens for all those things that are happening at a distance—it incapacitates us because they're outside our own sensory horizon, either by being much too long or much too short' (Hiltner-Scarry, 273).

Michel Faber makes that resistance to 'aesthetic imagining' the central focus of *The Book of Strange New Things* (2014), in which a Christian missionary sent to another planet hears (via emails from his wife) about the ecological and financial disasters occurring on planet earth, but is unable or unwilling to truly assimilate the news.[282] His wife's daily updates about the latest economic collapse, earthquake or flood, the garbage piling up outside of their house and the absence of food on shop shelves 'don't feel real' as they are 'just so alien to [his] life' on his planet (*BSNT,* 359). Faber frames

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[281]Ken Hiltner. 'Interview with Elaine Scarry.' *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century.* Eds. Stephanie LeMenager, Teresa Shewry and Ken Hiltner (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 273.
[282] Michel Faber. *The Book of Strange New Things* (London: Canongate, 2014). Henceforth, *BSNT.*

this incomprehension as a 'failure of compassion' – an inability to empathise with anything beyond our immediate context that recalls Fredric Jameson's identification of the absence of 'sympathetic participation' in subject-object relations under late capitalism (Jameson, 371). In Faber's novel, that lack of 'sympathetic participation' (*BSNT,* 359) is not coincidental – rather, it has been cultivated by the corporation for which the missionary works, and is seen as essential to the project of colonising the new planet they are seeking to make habitable (*BSNT,* 532; 542). It is precisely the inability to comprehend, or be affected by, the annihilation of planet Earth, and the capacity to forget its history and their own past, that renders the missionary and his fellow employees suitable to their work.

One way of understanding the texts reviewed in the previous chapters – particularly DeLillo's, but also, to an extent, Beckett's and the historical avant-garde's – is as projects that still assume the possibility of broaching something conceptually out of reach and whose long-term implications are frankly unfathomable. They attempt, in other words, to materialise that which cannot be materialised. Read in this light, the mannequin figures in de Chirico's paintings are efforts to imagine what human reification *looks* like – to put a face, so to speak, to the dehumanising tendencies of capitalist production. Such a figuration is of course self-contradictory, since depersonalisation is not something visible. It is the mannequin figure that allows us to make that imaginative leap, and that allows us to believe that the issue is containable, and even reversible. In a similar way, we find waste deployed in Loy, in Breton, and in Beckett and DeLillo, as a way to visualise particular kinds of 'wrongs' and to imagine their reversibility. Loy's junk collages, which she created from scraps scavenged in the Bowery district of New York, are attempts to visualise social inequality. The depiction of human waste – that is, objects cast off by humans, and humans deemed superfluous – in the works of these different writer-artists allows us to *see* the stultifying effects of commodification on art, the homogenising effects of Fordist rationalisation, and the ecologically devastating effects of overconsumption. In contemplating a mound of rubbish or the human beings sifting through it, we are invited to contemplate the processes by which the mound came about and those scavengers came to rely on it, and we are invited to think about redressing them – a reaction that is difficult to evince through the depiction of gases that have already insinuated their way into the atmosphere and changed the structure of the living entities therein.

The investigation into waste's unseen characteristics in Miles', Pynchon's and McCarthy's novels suggests that we are moving towards a conceptualisation of waste as matter that can neither be apprehended visually, nor sifted through or treated as a relic. This is not to say that the novels abstain completely from visual description, or indeed that they are not concerned with the historical. Rather, my contention is that they repeatedly gesture towards something just outside the

visual frame that we cannot see – towards another dimension to waste, and to the capitalist economy, that eludes us. While it is perhaps early to definitively assess what this means for the novel form, or the literary interrogation of capitalist excess, it is worth considering these novels as indicative of a new approach to waste – one that relates the unseen to the logic of neoliberalism and specific cultural anxieties about climate change. The works discussed in this last section extend the critiques of the historical avant-garde, Beckett, and DeLillo, but they indicate the untenability of subverting the productivist paradigm through a discourse on waste in a landscape that is suffused with it. Where the 20th-century novels discussed so far deal with waste matter that is visible and potentially readable, a matter of aesthetic re-working, subversive dwelling, or historical investigation, Pynchon's, Miles' and McCarthy's novels ask us to recognise waste's intangible properties, how far its effects might have reached, and to recognise that even language may be incapable of redeeming their effects. At the same time, the attention both Pynchon and McCarthy's novels give to the (now closed) Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island suggests a desire, a longing even, for the days when the major problem waste posed us was the expense (and space) taken up in housing it, and cast a new light on their 20th-century forebears.

'There lies a darker narrative'[283]:
Silicon Alley, Fresh Kills and the Deep Web in Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*

Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013) frames this postmillennial dimension of waste as a mystery – a thriller, in fact. Published in 2013 but set in the midst of the 2000-2002 dot-com crash and the months just prior to and immediately following 9/11, the novel effectively takes up where DeLillo's *Underworld* leaves off. But where DeLillo examines waste as a metaphor for the Cold War's legacy and its complicity in promoting overconsumption, Pynchon considers it in relation to the burgeoning online world. Moreover, he explicitly reminds us, time and again, that the story of postmillennial garbage and the Internet is above all a story about 'late fuckin' capitalism' (*BE,* 308). This is a novel in which everything relates back to the 'holy fucking market' (*BE,* 338) – people's lives, their buried secrets, the built environment and the national consciousness are all products of the neoliberal context, in which waste symbolises the soon-to-be re-commodified, as well as the radical (if not *anarchic*) potential of the online sphere. Indeed, the novel's very title draws attention to these concerns, referring to the term for technology with 'no proven use, high risk, something only early-adoption addicts feel comfortable with' (*BE,* 78). Where the term 'cutting-edge' refers to the latest development of a product, device or idea, 'bleeding-edge' refers to an earlier embryonic,

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[283] Thomas Pynchon. *Bleeding Edge* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2013), 137. Henceforth, *BE.*

speculative, phase, in which the product's future is undetermined, and largely reliant on the willingness of investors to finance its development.

The novel's plot is likewise acutely concerned with the shape of things to come. Very briefly, *Bleeding Edge* traces the quest of an unlicensed fraud detective, Maxine Tarnow, as she investigates a series of regular sums being paid out from a leading computer security firm to a defunct online company, hwgaahwgh.com (short for 'Hey, We've Got Awesome And Hip Web Graphix, Here!'). Pynchon interlaces this narrative with that of a number of hackers, cyberpunks, and digital entrepreneurs. These include two acquaintances of Maxine who are developing a virtually animated guide to the Deep Web[284] called DeepArcher (a pun on 'departure'), which is designed to enable individuals to escape the constraints of the real world. The novel's plot is self-consciously set against the backdrop of a New York in transition (a city recovering from the shocks of the dot-com boom that transformed Manhattan in the 1990s, the ensuing crash, and the subsequent attacks on the Twin Towers), and the transitional nature of the yet-to-be colonised Deep Web is repeatedly likened to an urban neighbourhood vulnerable to speculators. As one of Pynchon's characters terms it, what we are dealing with is 'post–late capitalism run amok' (*BE,* 138). On the edges of these discourses are whispered references to global warming, and a suggestion that 9/11 is merely the first of many disasters in the making.

In some cases, the anxieties expressed in Pynchon's figuration of waste itself, in *Bleeding Edge,* are not new, but merely amplifications of long-standing concerns about the pace of change under capitalism. For instance, the extensive passages he dedicates to recalling the trendy bars and office spaces once housed by the now-empty buildings of 'Silicon Alley'[285] vividly recall Walter Benjamin's descriptions of the Paris Arcades – defunct spaces Benjamin viewed as exemplifying the transience of capitalist modernity, whereby today's novelty is tomorrow's relic.[286] Thus, for instance, we follow Maxine into the empty office spaces of hwgaahwgh.com:

> another failed dot-com joining the officescape of the time—tarnished metallic surfaces, shaggy gray soundproofing, Steelcase screens and Herman Miller workpods—already beginning to decompose, littered, dust gathering (*BE,* 43).

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[284] Also known as the HiddenWeb, Invisible Web, or DeepNet, the Deep Web is a term used to define the parts of the Internet that are not indexed and therefore not accessible by standard search engines. The term was coined by BrightPlanet founder Mike Bergman, who likened a standard Internet search to the act of dragging a net across the ocean's surface (the term Deep Web in this analogy connotes the proliferation of content that remains outside the scope of a surface search, but which can be accessed by non-traditional searches). The term Deep Web should not be confused with the Dark Internet, which refers instead to network hosts that no one can reach – not even through non-traditional networks – or with the darknet, which are secretive networks that form a subsection of the Deep Web. See Michael K. Bergman. *The Deep Web: Surfacing Hidden Value* (BrightPlanet LLC White Paper, September 2001). Accessed online: http://brightplanet.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/12550176481-deepwebwhitepaper1.pdf.

[285] Silicon Alley was the name given to the area of Manhattan where the tech industry grew in the 1990s (as a counterpart to California's Silicon Valley); it has since become a metonym for the New York City tech industry as a whole.

[286] Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Bellknapp University Press, 1999). Henceforth, *AP.*

This depiction of the newly made obsolete recalls Walter Benjamin's understanding of the empty spaces of the Paris Arcades as a way to re-think – in fact, to *awaken* from – the 19th century's dream-myth of its own modernity. Benjamin described his project as a literary montage of 'the rags, the refuse' of the 19th century (*AP,* 460; [N1a,8]). As Esther Leslie frames it,

> The *Arcades Project* asks how a mythic dream consciousness, such as the longing for dream fulfilment in the commodity or the idea of love satisfied in prostitution or the desire for human union through imperialism, can be rattled, forced to wake up from the wishful thinking it indulges. Perhaps assertion simply of the actuality of commercial brutality would suffice.[287]

Maxine's perambulations through the vacant spaces of what was once Silicon Alley are similarly imbued with a somnambulant quality, leaving the reader frequently unclear as to whether what is being narrated is past or present, lived or dreamed. The recent past is framed as a nightmare whose legacy the characters cannot yet fully grasp – and, Pynchon suggests, from which they have yet to awaken. This impression is amplified by Maxine's disorientation in hearing the sound of a clicking keyboard in one of the rooms of the empty office, which leads her to wonder whether she has 'entered some supernatural timewarp where the shades of office layabouts continue to waste uncountable person-hours playing Tetris' – a depiction that spectacularly relates the notion of time-wasting to the capitalist valuation of labour-time (*BE,* 43). The source of the sound is soon attributed to mundane causes – it is merely a lingering ex-employee making use of the Wi-Fi – but it heightens the sense of colliding temporalities that pervades the entire novel.

However, what sets the text apart from Benjamin's (and the Surrealists') articulations of obsolescence is that it views obsolescence to be a *temporary* condition. Pynchon repeatedly reminds us that at the dawn of the new century, nothing remains uncommodified for long. Thus each visit Maxine makes to a different area of the city sparks a reflection regarding its likely redevelopment and gentrification— indeed, even the disembowelled space of Ground Zero, after 9/11, is recognised as 'future real estate' (*BE,* 328). Each building, in this context, is a 'sitting duck, asking to get torn down someday soon and the period detailing recycled into the décor of some yup's overpriced loft' (*BE,* 42). Neoliberal ideology, as Wendy Brown teaches us, sees all things in terms of their future value: failed businesses in this context are merely entities in need of a good portfolio manager and the right investor.

This spirit of redevelopment is explicitly framed, quite early in the novel, as a putting-to-use of waste. We see this when Maxine attends her children's eighth-grade graduation, where the commencement speech is given by a radical septuagenarian, March Kelleher, who tells a 'parable nobody is supposed to get' in lieu of a normal speech (*BE,* 112). The parable is about a powerful

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[287] Esther Leslie. 'Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*' in *Benjamin Papers/militantesthetix.html* (http://www.militantesthetix.co.uk/waltbenj/yarcades.html). Accessed 1 May 2015.

ruler who travels the world in disguise in order to rule over his people without being perceived. He meets an old lady who spends her days collecting rubbish, a woman who 'kn[ows] everything and is the guardian of whatever the city thr[ows] away' (*BE*, 113). The ruler offers her money to forget having seen him, and when she refuses his payment, claiming that 'Remembering is the essence of what I am,' he offers her a job, which she refuses before disappearing forever (*BE*, 114). To the baffled audience, March asks:

> "Who is this old lady? What does she think she's been finding out all these years? Who is this 'ruler' she's refusing to be bought off by? And what's this 'work' he was 'doing in secret'? Suppose 'the ruler' isn't a person at all but a soulless force so powerful that though it cannot ennoble, it does entitle, which, in the city-nation we speak of, is always more than enough? The answers are left to you" (*BE,* 113-114)

For a reader of novels about waste, the old lady of the parable, like March Kelleher herself, recalls DeLillo's Klara Sax, who also deals in waste and speaks in parables, or Beckett's bums, who wade through waste but refuse to make it profitable. And as the novel unspools, it becomes evident that the soulless force in the parable is late capitalism, and its underlying logic – what Harvey terms 'a process in which money is perpetually sent in search of more money' (*BE,* 108; Harvey, 40). Hence, as March tells Maxine, 'every building you love, someday it'll either be a stack of high-end chain stores or condos for yups with more money than brains' (*BE,* 115). Again, we are reminded of Wendy Brown's understanding of the pervasiveness of neoliberalisation:

> Neoliberalization is generally more termitelike than lionlike…its mode of reason boring in capillary fashion into the trunks and branches of workplaces, schools, public agencies, social and political discourse, and, above all, the subject. Even the termite metaphor is not quite apt: Foucault would remind us that any ascendant political rationality is not only destructive, but brings new subjects, conduct, relations, and worlds into being (Brown, 36).

Indeed, what is truly terrifying about this is precisely the *hiddenness* of that productive force. Like the ruler in the parable, neoliberalisation produces its subjects without their even realising it. The scavenging old lady of the parable in this context is a figure of resistance who is alive to the aspects of the system that no one else notices. She who never forgets embodies what Maxine later describes as the 'the landfill of failing memory' – she is a repository for everything that this economic model razes (*BE,* 267).

Pynchon juxtaposes these impressions of the city space as a victim to the whims of capital against depictions of the hinterland of the Deep Web – and it is in this juxtaposition that we find the crux of the narrative, which in turn both echoes and modifies the ideas put forth by the historical avant-garde, Beckett and DeLillo. For Pynchon depicts the Deep Web as an anarchic counterforce to the endless expansion of global capital. The Deep Web, in *Bleeding Edge,* is a space where 'advertising is still in its infancy' (*BD,* 35), while the very structures through which users move – the

links and nodes that connect different pieces of content – are the product of anonymous hackers 'all over the world,' each of whom follows the 'hacker ethic [of] doing their piece of it, then just vanishing uncredited' (*BE,* 69). The portal to the Deep Web, DeepArcher, is in turn posited as a 'virtual sanctuary to escape to from the many varieties of real-world discomfort' – a place 'way down' in the deep recesses of the Internet's underbelly, where one might lose hours, even days, in a kind of cyber-flanerie:

> Before long, Maxine finds herself wandering around clicking on everything, faces, litter on the floor, labels on bottles behind the bar, after a while interested not so much in where she might get to than the texture of the search itself (*BE,* 76).

DeepArcher thus combines the poetic dimension of urban wandering and scavenging, and the radical dimension of the first avant-gardists. It is a place safely out of view from commercial enterprises, a place where the whole point is to waste time, and to 'get lost' in something akin to the Surrealist tradition (*BE,* 76). Again, however, what distinguishes this postmillennial depiction of subversion from the early 20th-century figurations of a Breton, Loy or de Chirico is the pervasive awareness of its short-lived nature, the knowledge of the space's vulnerability to development and commodification.

Indeed, time and again, Pynchon reminds us of the extent to which the dissemination of the Internet was perceived, in the nineties and early 2000s, to symbolize 'the victory of (US-led) neo-liberal free market capitalism.'[288] Much of the discussions about the Internet itself, in the novel, can be seen to reflect upon the co-option of the Internet, in the mid-nineties, by the rightwing-libertarian 'New Economy' movement, which was defined by market populism, and intent on harnessing the Internet to overturn the regulatory market intervention policies of the nation states (Lovink, 8).

Crucially for our purposes, Pynchon relates that awareness of the incipient commodification of the Deep Web to a postmillennial nostalgia about garbage. We see this in the novel's most melancholy passage, as Maxine and March drive past Fresh Kills landfill – as it is in the process of being closed – and the rehabilitated space at its heart, known as the Island of Meadows. In the ensuing two pages, Pynchon masterfully weaves the soon-to-be closed landfill into a meditation on the economic forces of global capital, the industrialised world's 'addiction' to oil, the landfill's coterminous marginality and centrality to the city's economy, and the paradoxes implicit in its rehabilitation. The landfill, Maxine meditates, gathers 'everything the city has rejected so it can keep on pretending to be itself,' but it functions, as well, as a kind of repository for the city's collective unconscious:

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[288] Geert Lovink. *Dynamics of Critical Internet Culture: 1994-2001* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2009), 7.

> Every Fairway bag full of potato peels, coffee grounds, uneaten Chinese food, used tissues and tampons and paper napkins and disposable diapers, fruit gone bad, yogurt past its sell-by date that Maxine has ever thrown away is up in there someplace, multiplied by everybody in the city she knows, multiplied by everybody she doesn't know, since 1948, before she was even born, and what she thought was lost and out of her life has only entered a collective history (*BE,* 170).

The landfill here is perhaps the only place where, in the era of individualism, a collective history can even occur. The fact that it is soon to be closed – and the uncertainty regarding whether it will indeed be rehabilitated or simply sold off to the highest vendor – endows the passage with added poignancy. Maxine has previously noted that the future of '100 acres of untouched marshland' of the Island of Meadows is precarious: 'given the real-estate imperatives running this town' (*BE,* 167), it is only a matter of time before the space is turned into prime real estate, another victim of the market.

Pynchon then complicates this discussion: for Maxine is suddenly struck by the affinities between Fresh Kills and the Deep Web, and between the Island of Meadows and DeepArcher:

> As if you could reach into the looming and prophetic landfill, that perfect negative of the city in its seething foul incoherence, and find a set of invisible links to click on and be crossfaded at last to unexpected refuge, a piece of the ancient estuary exempt from what happened, what has gone on happening, to the rest of it. Like the Island of Meadows, DeepArcher also has developers after it. Whatever migratory visitors are still down there trusting in its inviolability will some morning all too soon be rudely surprised by the whispering descent of corporate Web crawlers itching to index and corrupt another patch of sanctuary for their own far-from-selfless ends (*BE,* 168).

Maxine's visualisation of the landfill as a network of 'invisible links' that eventually gives way to the 'unexpected refuge' of the Island of Meadows – a place 'exempt from what happened' and 'what has gone on happening' – reminds her of the uncommodified space of DeepArcher. And just as the rehabilitation of the landfill into a marshland threatens to be but a temporary moment of respite before the land gets sold off to real estate developers, the creative, anonymous sprawl of DeepArcher risks falling prey to the indexing and speculative logic of late capitalism. The anarchic possibilities of this space are temporary: as Phil Mirowski notes, while promoted as a form of anarchic production, open source content eventually makes its way into the market. Thus work originally cherished by its producers 'as a direct expression of their individuality' amounts to voluntary unpaid labour, and has in fact 'become so prevalent in the current neoliberal era that some have suggested it actually constitutes a novel form of economic organization, or incipient mode of production, if they indulge in Marxist terminology' (Mirowski*,* 142). A hacker acquaintance of Maxine's reiterates this same sentiment later in the novel, noting that:

> once they get down here, everything'll be suburbanized faster than you can say "late capitalism."
> Then it'll be just like up there in the shallows. Link by link, they'll bring it all under control, safe and respectable (*BE,* 241).

It is a startling analogy, not only in its figuration of DeepArcher as an ecosystem vulnerable to the digital equivalent of industrial development, but in its figuration of the Deep Web itself as a kind of digital scrapheap from which one might potentially derive meaningful, as-yet-uncommodified, fragments of experience. Pynchon elaborates on this vision of the Deep Web as a landfill elsewhere in the novel, as the same computer hacker explains to Maxine that the Deep Web was initially meant to be 'mostly obsolete sites and broken links, an endless junkyard' where 'adventurers will come […] someday to dig up relics of remote and exotic dynasties' (*BE,* 226). According to this logic, DeepArcher is, in turn, a veritable repository of digital matter for repurposing – matter created by 'geeks' following a 'hacker ethic' that disallows commercial gain, for visitors intent on escaping the commercialised world. Indeed, Maxine draws explicit parallels to the Deep Web's resistance to development in her reference to Robert Moses, the engineer responsible for Fresh Kills as well as for the Cross-Bronx Expressway that displaced thousands of families in the 1960s, noting that 'If there were a Robert Moses of the Deep Web, he'd be screaming, Condemn it already!' (*BE,* 241). Thus Maxine's night-time exploration of Deep Web videogames is a foray into aesthetic materials 'one way or another deemed too violent or offensive or intensely beautiful for the market as currently defined…' (*BE,* 240).

Such a figuration of the hinterland of the online world as a 'dump, with structure' (*BE,* 226) is startling to a waste theorist accustomed to dealing with the effluvia of industrial production. Pynchon takes us, here, into an entirely new realm, inviting us to consider how our understanding of novelty, obsolescence, regeneration and resistance might translate in the virtual sphere – a sphere in which waste itself is not a material aftermath or visible entity, but a series of defunct links.

Moreover, Pynchon expands this discussion to suggest another dimension to the Deep Web—something akin, perhaps, to the reproachful nature of actual landfills, with their potential to harbour uncomfortable secrets, and to remind us of sins that, like the ruler in March's parable, we would prefer to forget. We see this in Maxine's exploration of the Cold War sites of the Deep Web – spaces as harrowing as DeepArcher is inspiring:

> Broken remnants of old military installations, commands long deactivated, as if transmission towers for ghost traffic are still poised out on promontories far away in the secular dark, corroded, untended trusswork threaded in and out with vines and leaves of faded poison green, using abandoned tactical frequencies for operations long defunded into silence . . . Missiles meant for shooting down Russian prop-driven bombers, never deployed, lying around in pieces, as if picked over by some desperately poor population that comes out only in the deepest watches of the night. Gigantic vacuum-tube computers with half-acre footprints, gutted, all empty sockets and strewn wiring. Littered situation rooms, high-sixties plastic detailing gone brittle and yellow, radar consoles with hooded circular screens, desks still occupied by avatars of senior officers in front of flickering sector maps, upright and weaving like hypnotized snakes, images corrupted, paralyzed, passing to dust (*BE,* 241).

As much as the Deep Web suggests the marginal and uncontained, it is also testament to the nation's secrets – to all the things that get left out of official histories. Maxine's father reminds her, in fact, that the Internet itself was conceived during the Cold War, by men with 'attaché cases and horn-rims, every appearance of scholarly sanity, going in to work every day to imagine all the ways the world was going to end' (*BE,* 418). The result of these endeavours, DARPAnet, was a product of the 'pure terror' that underlay the apparent idyll of the Eisenhower years (*BE,* 419). Seen in this context, the Deep Web is a graveyard for the nightmares of the Cold War era – the broken remnants of terror, a digital equivalent to DeLillo's basements of Cold War memorabilia where the 'lost men to history' go to relive the past.

Where, then, lies redemption? One place, Pynchon suggests, is in the world of online gaming – a form that he repeatedly frames as an aesthetic on par with the realist novel, allowing players to visit, among other places, exact replicas of their city in a previous era (in this case, New York before the most recent wave of gentrification). In these spaces, objects are re-imbued with their 19th-century realist function, the only difference being that the reader-gamer is allowed to intervene and manipulate them in a way that the bourgeois readership of Dickens or Zola could only have dreamed. Another place is in a state of mind that embraces the ambiguity of life in the post-digital world. We see this most clearly in a disorientating passage, towards the end of the novel:

> Out of the ashes and oxidation of this postmagical winter, counterfactual elements have started popping up like li'l goombas. Early one windy morning Maxine's walking down Broadway when here comes a plastic top from a nine-inch aluminum [*sic*] take-out container, rolling down the block in the wind, on its edge, an edge thin as a predawn dream, keeps trying to fall over but the airflow or something—unless it's some nerd at a keyboard—keeps it upright for an implausible distance, half a block, a block, waits for the light, then half a block more till it finally rolls off the curb under the wheels of a truck that's pulling out and gets flattened. Real? Computer-animated? (*BE,* 431).

This is one of many moments, in the novel, in which Pynchon devotes a paragraph or more to describing waste as something more than an inert remainder: the waste object, here, is imbued with something approximating a life force. That vibrancy is amplified by the uncertainty regarding where, in fact, the waste-dance is occurring. Are we in the real world, or online? Is the container a material entity, or an agglomeration of pixels, the work of 'some nerd at a keyboard'? Are we witnessing something happening, or the *representation* of something happening? The questions remain unanswered (and of course, one could argue that either way, we are witnessing a representation, since the waste-dance is occurring in a novel) but then, perhaps, they are beside the point. For what Pynchon draws our attention to in this depiction is not the physicality of waste, but its connotation of liminality. As in the other passages mentioned thus far, the emphasis is on waste's in-betweenness. Pynchon conceptualises waste as an object or space *on the verge*— of being understood, interpreted, put to use, or of no longer making sense. This is a novel about

aftermaths and forebodings – about what it is to be aware of change as it happens, and to wonder about, and fear, the implications of that change. In this context, it little matters whether the phantasmagoric things one sees – or thinks one has seen – are occurring in the material world, online, or in a dream. What matters is that one is there to experience them.

Pynchon's postmillennial novel asks us to read the effluvia of the digital world both as historical relics and subversive tools in an as-yet-unwritten future. His twinning of landfill waste with the dark matter of the Deep Web broadens our 'sense' of what waste is, where it resides, and what form it can take, suggesting that waste can be an invisible, intangible entity as much as a seen thing. His conceptualisation of the Deep Web as a space for cyber-flanerie and creative acts of subversive resistance as well as rumination over the recent past can be seen to combine the ideas of the historical avant-garde, Beckett and DeLillo in new and important ways. Similarly, his comparison of the vulnerability of the rehabilitated marshlands of Fresh Kills to that of the uncommercialised spaces of the Deep Web draws our attention to the fragility of *any* recuperative act – any attribution of value outside and apart from the logic of capitalism – reminding us that, as March Kelleher tells Maxine, 'there's always a way to monetise anything' (*BE,* 349).

Scavenging for 'the only *truthful* thing civilisation produced': Jonathan Miles' *Want Not*

Jonathan Miles' post-millennial, post-recession waste novel, *Want Not* (2013) extends the ideas discussed thus far, but focuses in particular on the redemptive possibilities of scavenging. Miles' novel juxtaposes the narratives of two dumpster-divers, a millionaire debt collector, and an obese linguist concerned with developing a semiotic system to warn future civilizations from approaching our radioactive leftovers.[289] Set in New York in the immediate aftermath of the global financial crisis, the novel deploys waste to examine what it means to live in a world that runs on desire and speculation. However, it does so retroactively: the anxieties of the recession's aftermath are narrated via flashbacks and recollections that, like the scavenged items collected by Miles' central, dumpster-diving protagonists, promise to shed light on the present. In this context, waste offers the potential to redress past wrongs, but – and this is where Miles departs from DeLillo, and recalls, in fact, Beckett – the attempt to interpret it proves to be too late. A tension between hope in waste and despair over its intransigency is what drives the novel throughout.

For Miles' dumpster-divers, Micah and Talmadge, waste is:

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[289] Jonathan Miles. *Want Not* (New York: Mariner, 2014 [2013]). Henceforth, *WN.*

like some barely known wormhole into another dimension of society, the flip side, the ass end, where everything is genuine and raw because it's not meant to be seen […] the only *truthful* thing civilisation produced (*WN,* 222).

To live off society's discards is not only to be morally righteous, but also to be privy to 'the secret files of mankind, dragged weekly to the curb' (*WN,* 222). Indeed, for Micah, scavenging provides the closest approximation to abstention from participation in the capitalist economy, since garbage itself remains the 'only pure crop' civilisation has ever produced: while 'land, air, water, people, animals [have] been commodified,' garbage is 'free, in every sense of the word' since 'no one […] ever launched a war to claim it' (*WN,* 349). Her view encapsulates the ethos of freeganism, a lifestyle born in the 1990s as part of the environmental and anti-globalisation movements, whose basis was – and is – to survive off discards, and abstain from participation in the market economy.[290] For Micah, freeganism hinges on waste's radical potential. In this sense, her views are analogous to the resistance of Beckett's wandering bums. What Micah eventually realises, however, is that even those who live off the waste stream are to an extent complicit with the economic system they are intent on resisting. It is impossible to live entirely outside of the system, for the grid is everywhere:

Go out into the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The very middle, as far from any land as you can get. And you know what's there? A floating garbage patch that's nearly the size of Africa. One hundred million tons of debris. So tell me where the grid ends. Show me the 'city limits' sign of civilisation (*WN,* 76).

Such a realisation is very different to Beckett's bums' implicit faith in waste as a space of respite, and where Beckett questions the epiphanic potential of waste, here we are led to consider it to be, in fact, both toxic and potentially corrupting. We see this most clearly – and graphically – when Micah and Talmadge's friend, Matty, is tempted by a dumpster full of steaks in the back lot of a local supermarket. Disregarding the DANGER signs surrounding it, Matty jumps into the dumpster and begins filling his rucksack with enormous steaks. Matty has, until this point, been extremely sceptical of the freegan lifestyle, but in contemplating the mounds of steaks he realizes:

It was *free,* man, it was like wheeling your cart past the cashier and right out the fucking door, it was just like discovering back in college that every song you wanted was free for the downloading on bit.torrent networks. When he'd stuffed his backpack to the point of unzippability, he tried cramming the meat down harder, which didn't do the trick, then knelt there agonizing over what to leave behind (*WN,* 228).

Matty's epiphany, here, is not a political awakening, but rather a realization of the profitability – or at the very least, cost-saving capacity – of dumpster-diving. This is not a critique of capitalist excess, but rather a realization of just how the freegan lifestyle might be manipulated for personal

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[290] Tristram Stuart provides a useful overview of freeganism and its origins in *Waste: Uncovering the Global Food Scandal* (New York: Penguin, 2009). See in particular 220-231.

gain. Miles' emphasis on the frantic quality of Matty's scavenging, and on the paralysis of choosing between different items, highlights the resemblance between his approach to dumpster-diving and ordinary bargain-hunting. It is desire, and ultimately greed, that drives this search.

In an almost Dickensian vein, then, Miles punishes Matty: a few moments later, Matty hears a 'click' and realizes that the dumpster he's been rifling through is actually a trash compactor. In the ensuing passage, Miles describes Matty's near-suffocation by waste in minute detail. We watch as the weight of the backpack weighs Matty down as he tries to climb out, and the individual bags of trash bear down upon him as the compactor churns:

> He felt the soft pressure of the ram pushing a buffer wall of bags into him, then a single bag rolling onto his head as another one flattened itself on his face, then an intensified pressure as the air in the bags welled and then with deafening gassy bangs the bags blew, in quick succession like microwave popcorn, and he could feel the backpack growing harder and tighter against his ribcage and the sharp corner of something in a bag behind him being drilled into his ass cheek […] He needed air, but his nostrils were goo-clogged […] an instinctual inhale brought a film of polypropylene into his mouth, and his lungs began thrashing (*WN,* 232-233).

The trash compactor's activation also sets in motion Matty's subsuming by his own desires. Ignoring the DANGER signs, he has followed temptation, and allowed himself to be driven by consumer desire rather than moral righteousness. The trash-compactor takes on an almost ghostly quality, here, wreaking vengeance on Matty's greed. Miles stops just short of a tragic ending – Matty is saved by one of the supermarket employees, who switches the machine off just as it is about to vacuum-pack him to death – but he has nevertheless made his point. This is the thing that will ultimately kill us: greed, and its residues. Waste is not something that can be managed, here, or in which one can dwell and thus remain outside the constraints of the system. As Matty dumbfoundedly staggers out of the compactor, 'stripped of thoughts, a reasonless zombie operating on purely sensory consciousness,' we are livened to the stultifying nature of the capitalist machine, and its by-products' very literal capacity to quash us (*WN,* 233).

As well as depicting waste as all pervasive and overwhelming, Miles posits it as exceeding articulation. One of the novel's protagonists, the linguist Elwin Cross Junior, is invited by the management of the New Mexico Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), a nuclear waste repository, to take part in an interdisciplinary panel tasked with preventing future civilisations from settling in the vicinity. The challenge is that no language has ever lasted more than a millennium, while nuclear waste has the capacity to last 24,000 years. The WIPP is not an invention, but a real site, and the project Miles depicts is based on a number of real-life interdisciplinary endeavours that took place between 1970 and 1990 to ameliorate the public's resistance to the construction of nuclear waste

depositories in the western states. [291] Indeed, the view of the project expressed by Elwin's father, an octogenarian historian in the late stages of Alzheimer's, can be seen to encapsulate the response of (real-life) environmentalists who opposed the project: 'All the terrible effort of human civilisation, the great big arc of it. And in ten thousand years the only intelligible trace of it might be your "keep out" sign in the desert, stuck in a big heap of trash' (*WN*, 96). It is the ultimate irony that the thing we expend so much energy looking to remove or hide is ultimately that by which we will be remembered, and that those remains will outlast any of our sign systems. Waste, here, very literally defies articulation.

Moreover, Miles subtly references one of the solutions proposed by two linguists involved in one such project, in Nevada, which consisted of breeding a species of cat that would change colour in the presence of radiation. By disseminating a mythology of fear and dread around the 'ray cats' through songs and folklore, governments would be able to propagate a message that might 'morph over time' but still 'get pulled through over millennia.' Within the novel, Miles references this proposed mythology in his depiction of a rumour in Elwin Senior's nursing home, that the nursing home's cat's visit to a resident's room is a death omen. The Alzheimer-plagued Elwin Senior does not even remember the rumour—he only remembers his distaste for the cat, a sharp, inexplicable dread that mirrors that which the WIPP scholars (both in the novel and in real life) sought to evince from future inhabitants. Elwin Senior's fear effectively gives us a glimpse of the effects of the WIPP, and highlights its absurdity. By interlacing references to the Nevada project's proposal to foster a collective fear in his depiction of Elwin Senior's own instinctual fear, Miles reveals a hidden pathos in the project itself. What does it say about civilisation, if we have to actively foster fear and dread around the things we have produced in order to co-exist with their remnants? Ann Larrabbee's analysis of the WIPP is especially telling, in this regard, for she notes that such spaces are:

> layered with cultural meanings that are so contradictory that their messages all have a certain inherent irony. These monuments to safety are built around a continuing disaster that will unfold for thousands and thousands of years, barring some miraculous technological fix. And they stand in demarcated territories now considered experimental zones, where assertions of certainty are undermined by incomplete understandings of polluted ecological systems and unfolding social changes. [292]

The discussion between Elwin Junior and Elwin Senior implies the absurdity of codifying the danger of our emissions while continuing to produce them. In contrast to DeLillo's view of waste as

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[291] The original report of these investigations, published in 1993, is freely available online: Kathleen M. Trauth, Stephen C. Hora and Robert V. Guzowski. 'Expert Judgment on Markers to Deter Inadvertent Human Intrusion into the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant', Printed November 1993 by Sandia National Laboratories. http://prod.sandia.gov/techlib/access-control.cgi/1992/921382.pdf. Accessed 14 May 2015.

[292] Anna Larabee. *Decade of Disaster* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 53.

something that can, ultimately, be read historically and reclaimed through language, Miles posits it as an entity that defies expression and that will likely annihilate future civilisations.

Miles' novel complicates Beckett's figuration of scavenging and waste-dwelling, and DeLillo's understanding of waste's legibility. It suggests the enduring relevance of those discourses today, but invites us as well to consider whether recuperation of the vanguardist and Beckettian variety is even possible in the 21st century. The capitalist grid having swallowed everything, even the oceans, it is unclear where the margins are anymore from which a countercultural voice might speak.

'There's always [an oil spill] happening'[293]: Ubiquitous waste and pattern seeking in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*

Like *Bleeding Edge* and *Want Not,* Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* is also a quest for meaning in the chaos of postmillennial capitalism, and it makes the inapprehensibility of manufactured waste a central part of that search. Where Pynchon's search is embodied in a detective and Miles' in dumpster-divers, McCarthy depicts it through the meandering explorations of 'U,' an in-house anthropologist for a global consultancy firm based in London, who spends his days 'purveying cultural insight' to extract 'some kind of inner social logic' from people's consumption habits. The novel itself, structured in 164 numbered paragraphs but containing little plot, is driven by various loosely interlinked Internet searches that resembles the project spearheaded by his company:

> It was a project formed of many other projects, linked to many other projects—which rendered it well nigh impossible to say where it began and ended, to discern its "content", bulk or outline. Perhaps all projects nowadays are like that—equally boring, equally inscrutable (*SI*, 13)

From this description, one would not immediately assume that U's company is, essentially, a market research firm, and the U himself is a glorified market researcher. But that is perhaps what renders the novel's premise so eerie. McCarthy intuits that it is people who juxtapose consumer data against large-scale sociological trends in order to 'divin[e], for the benefit of a breakfast-cereal manufacturer, the social or symbolic role of breakfast' who are ultimately in control of the shape of civilization (*SI,* 31). This eeriness is amplified by the fact that U's approach to market research incorporates concepts lifted from classic anthropology and French poststructuralist theory. Over the decades, he has perfected the science of 'feeding vanguard theory, almost always from the left side of the spectrum, back into the corporate machine' (*SI,* 31). Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou, in this context, are tools for understanding the primordial desires that drive consumption – an analytical process he justifies by claiming that what he is enabling is 'not simply better-tasting cereal or bigger profits for the manufacturer, but rather *meaning,* amplified and sharpened, for the millions of risers

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[293] Tom McCarthy. *Satin Island* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015), 38. Henceforth, *SI.*

lifting cereal boxes over breakfast tables, tipping out and ingesting their contents' (*SI*, 32). Thus throughout the novel, we follow U in his work as he

> unpicks the fibre of a culture (ours), its weft and warp—the situations it throws up, the beliefs that underpin and nourish it—and let a client in on how they can best get traction on this fibre so that they can introduce into the weave their own fine, silken thread, strategically embroider or detail it with a mini-narrative (a convoluted way of saying: sell their product) (*SI*, 21).

It is a frightening thought, for the production of cultural meaning to be in the hands of breakfast cereal manufacturers and their marketing teams – and yet as 21st-century readers we cannot fail to recognize its accuracy. And, as the explanation in parentheses indicates, U's work is a product of the knowledge economy under neoliberalism: the semantics in which he cloaks his work obscures its underlying intent – the use of behavioural analysis to speculate the market potential of products (a practice known, in real life, as 'future scoping' or 'trend analysis'). His searches for the hidden logic that ties together the collection of news clippings and inventoried lists he has hung on his office wall are likewise aimed, ultimately, at helping others make a sale. Where Beckett's characters make lists that defiantly and spectacularly defy any logic or intent, U's are squarely aimed at increasing his own stature in the field of corporate anthropology, as well as the stature of his firm. Thus U's rhetorical question, early in the novel, that 'who's to say what is, or might turn out to be, related to what else?' (*SI*, 34) signifies not only the interconnectivity of all things but a recognition of their economic interdependence. The search for patterns that drives both his anthropological report on 'the First and Last Word on our age' (*SI*, 56), and his company's project is inextricable from the commercialisation of those patterns and their capacity to shape the future.

McCarthy puts waste at the heart of this pattern making. We in fact meet U as he sits in a waiting room at Torino-Caselle airport, watching news coverage of an oil spill on his laptop screen. He soon notices the images reflected in surrounding glass display cases of luxury goods: 'oil flows and reflows on a watch's face,' creating a 'collage-effect' that then expands as the news channels on the airport television screens begin to carry the story (*SI*, 9). Slowly, U is surrounded by these mediated images of oil. While the oil spill itself is most likely a reference to the BP spill of 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico (U himself never mentions its exact location), the vision of oil reflected on the various surfaces is an evident reference to the embeddedness of oil in everything we consume.

We are reminded of the spill again, when U tells us that his company ethos is based on his boss' conceptualisation of the Tower of Babel, whose significance, he argues, is its status as a relic rather than its embodiment of hubris. 'What actually matters isn't the attempt to reach the heavens, or to speak God's language. No: what matters is what's left when that attempt has failed' (*SI*, 43). The tower 'becomes of interest only once it has flunked its allotted task' – once it becomes waste (*SI*, 44). Likewise, cultural production, for U's boss, consists of putting the defunct to use: it is

an object's uselessness that 'sets it to work: as symbol, cipher, spur to the imagination, to productiveness […] The first move for any strategy of cultural production […] must be to liberate things—objects, situations, systems—into uselessness' (*SI,* 44). According to such a view, it is in effluvia that companies should be looking for insight into how to grow their market share – corporations have much to learn from Surrealism and de Chirico's Scuola Metafisica.

For this same reason, U becomes obsessed with the oil spill – a perfect example if ever there was one of something that has 'flunked its allotted task' (*SI,* 44). What is perhaps most disquieting, though, is that U's concern with the spill links directly to his anthropological sensibilities, as expressed in his recollection of Claude Lévi-Strauss's view of civilisation's destructive effects. Paraphrasing Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques* (1955)*,* U notes that

> What the anthropologist encounters when he ventures beyond civilization's perimeter-fence is no more than its effluvia, its toxic fallout. The first thing we see as we travel round the world is our own filth, thrown into mankind's face' (*SI,* 130).

Anthropology – a tradition borne out of Western imperialist thought – only serves to accelerate the cataclysmic effect of culture. What we find, upon visiting other cultures is not the exotic other but evidence of the outcome of our industrial processes—the 'other side' of our culture. In the context of the novel, the passage takes on an amplified meaning, appearing as a judgement of both U's own corporate anthropology (which seeks to shape culture itself), and of globalisation's ecologically devastating effects. Lévi-Strauss' sentiment casts new light on the reflection of the images of the oil spill on the luxury items in the airport, reminding us not only of the ubiquity of oil in so much of what capital produces, but its ecological effects. Situated alongside U's growing doubts regarding his complicity in his company's ambiguous but far-reaching project, the passage appears as an omen – a warning against the direction in which he and his fellow participants in the information economy are headed.

The following section corroborates this impression: following these ruminations on Lévi-Strauss, we witness U have a vivid dream about Fresh Kills landfill. In the dream, U flies over a series of superimposed images of cities, arriving, finally, at an illuminated island lit up by the glow of an immense, 'regal' trash-incinerating plant (*U,* 131). The name of the island on which the dream-landfill is situated is called 'Satin Island' – a mangling, he assumes upon waking, of the real life 'Staten Island' (*SI,* 132). And he recognizes that if the city he has just flown over is 'the capital, the seat of empire,' then the island is:

> the exact opposite, the inverse—the *other* place, the feeder, filterer, overflow-manager, the dirty, secreted-away appendix without which the body-proper couldn't function; yet it seem[s], in its very degradation, more weirdly opulent than the capital it serve[s]' (*SI,* 131).

The landfill is posited as a necessary component to the body of civilisation, an unsavoury entity that is ultimately more important than the thing it helps sustain. For the reader who has read Beckett, DeLillo, Pynchon, Sharp and Miles, such a depiction is perhaps not so compelling, appearing merely to echo the above authors' conceptualisation of waste as the uncanny other to capitalist expansion. However, where McCarthy's passage departs from these prior depictions is in its framing. Note, firstly, that the landfill occurs in a dream – it is an *imagined* space. Secondly, the source of the dream, Fresh Kills, no longer exists: as U frantically searches the Internet for insight into the dream's meaning, he discovers that Fresh Kills has been closed since 2001, and that in its place are miles and miles of nature parks. Thus as well as a dream, this is a memory that pulls us back into the last century. Thirdly, U visits the landfill at a remove – first in sleep, and then virtually, through online research, as he downloads images of the landfill when it was still open, and seeks an etymological connection between the words 'satin', 'statin' and 'Staten' (*U,* 133). This aesthetic distance is reinforced by U's recognition that the landfill resists interpretation. In contemplating the photographs of Fresh Kills he has taped to his wall, U notes that in contrast to other subjects over which he has obsessed, *'These* images—the piles of rubbish, barges, seagulls—see[m] to resist all incorporation into any useful or productive screed' (*SI,* 134). There is no connection between the words 'Satin' and 'Staten' or between the landfill in his dream and the images of it on the web – nor can he find a link between the landfill and the oil spill he has been following in the news. Waste is presented here as something that resists our efforts to 'strategically embroider' it into a narrative, commercial or otherwise.

McCarthy continues to redefine our sense of waste's tangibility in the novel's final passages, as, in the spirit of 'who's to say what is, or might turn out to be, related to what else,' U decides, during a work trip to New York, to take the ferry from the city's mainland to Staten Island and visit the rehabilitated landfill of Fresh Kills. Again, McCarthy takes a different approach to that of the waste novelists we have discussed throughout this thesis: for U never actually reaches, or in fact *sees*, the landfill. Instead, while riding the ferry, he watches a filmed montage sequence of the island – a 'compilation of vague and generic scenes' showcasing its attractions – followed by an image of it from above, in which it appears 'out of time, past all statutes and limits, to some other place where everything, even our crimes, have been composted down, mulched over, transformed into moss, pasture and wetland' (*SI,* 167). Following this viewing of a mediated image of the landfill redeemed, made over, and returned back to nature, the ferry arrives at the island, and U decides not to dismount. Instead, he decides that:

> [t]o go to Staten Island—*actually* go there—would have been profoundly meaningless. What would
> it, in reality, have solved, or resolved? Nothing […] Not to go there was, of course, profoundly

meaningless as well. And so I found myself, struggling just to stay in the same place, suspended between two types of meaninglessness. Did I choose the right one? I don't know (*SI,* 171).

Where the dream-image of Fresh Kills appears as a mere repetition of previous depictions of landfill waste and its reproach to consumerism, McCarthy's deferral of U's visit to Fresh Kills, and refusal to make it visible, takes us into entirely new narrative territory. What we have been given is first a dream of a landfill, then a sequence of online images and a filmed montage, and, finally, a decision to abstain from viewing it, and a critical judgment that the landfill is not, after all, where the story lies. The ethos of the passage is entirely at odds with the historical avant-garde's aesthetic of reparation, from Beckett's jubilant descriptions of excrement and junk-dwelling and from DeLillo's historiographic approach. Moreover, the fact that a character obsessed with making connections voices this judgment endows the moment with a further anticlimactic dimension: if *he* can't find the connection, it means there is no connection to be found. If he decides the landfill is meaningless, it surely must be.

One way of reading this non-visit to Fresh Kills and its alleged meaninglessness is as a refutation of narrative's capacity to make meaning, a wilful subversion of the narrative arc that would have the protagonist visit Fresh Kills, experience catharsis, and then return home, humbled into buying biodegradable items and, say, deciding to leave his job or do some other upstanding thing that reaffirms our faith in life itself. By 'preferring not to' complete the trip to Staten Island, U can be seen to challenge our assumptions about what realism should or can do – a reading substantiated by McCarthy's own criticism of contemporary realism's alleged failures, in a recent essay in the *London Review of Books*.[294] In the essay, McCarthy suggests we consider the concept of realism in relation to different definitions of the 'real,' beginning with Michel Leiris's conceptualisation of it as the tip of the bull's horn in a bullfight, where the bullfight stands for literature itself (McCarthy, 21). The 'real,' in this scenario, has nothing to do with 'the empirically understood world' and 'certainly nothing to do with authenticity' (McCarthy, 21). Rather, it recalls the Lacanian definition of the 'real,' as that which is 'unassimilable by any system of representation' (McCarthy, 22). This in turn shifts the author's aim from 'depicting [the] real realistically, or even well' to approaching the 'real' in the full awareness that, 'like some roving black hole, it represents (though that's not the right word anymore) the point at which the writing's entire project crumples and implodes' (McCarthy, 22). The real, in other words, is always threatening to sabotage the writing project itself, its very presence reminding us of the work's own tenuousness. In this sense, U's ascription of meaninglessness to Fresh Kills, which the reader intuitively associates with the anthropological work he has failed to complete, can be seen to comment on *Satin Island*'s

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[294] Tom McCarthy. 'Writing Machines: Tom McCarthy on Realism and the Real' in *London Review of Books* 36. 24 (18 December 2014), 21-22.

constructed quality, but also – and relatedly – to openly reflect upon writing's limitations. To not go to Staten Island, to not look at the landfill, is, in this case, a means to undermine narrative's capacity to make the world legible, and explain the inexplicable. This attendance to the meaninglessness of the landfill – and the meaninglessness of that meaninglessness – can be seen as a direct counter to the artifice of realism: rather than a moral or a climactic discovery, we are offered an honest acknowledgement, not unlike that of a Molloy or a Malone, that not all lived experience is meaningful.

But McCarthy's second reference in his exploration of the real is perhaps even more revealing. Here, McCarthy draws on the concept of 'formlessness' Georges Bataille delineated in an essay in the magazine *Critical Dictionary,* to suggest that we read the 'real' as the material dimension of an object. For Bataille, McCarthy notes, 'existence is a relentless and ongoing process of deformation' that 'releases objects, and the world, the entire universe, from all categories of the knowable and denotable until they "resemble nothing."' Viewed from this perspective,

> a thing's real would consist in its materiality: a sticky, messy and above all base materiality that overflows all boundaries defining the thing's – and everything's – identity. It thus threatens ontology itself. "Matter," Bataille writes elsewhere, "represents in relation to the economy of the universe what crime represents in relation to the law" (McCarthy, 22).

To capture the 'real,' the writer must contend with the stickiness and messiness of matter, and recognise too the limits of its legibility. It would run counter to this understanding of the 'real' for U to decode Fresh Kills, or introduce it into his writing. In this context, the point of Fresh Kills – and, indeed, the point of the oil spill – is to defy our efforts to read it. Indeed, if we might consider this defiance in relation to U's boss's view that 'any strategy of cultural production' must first 'liberate things—objects, situations, systems—into uselessness' (*SI,* 44), the reason, in narrative terms, for the landfill's purported meaninglessness becomes even more apparent. For the landfill to be put to epistemological use (to, in other words, divest it of its imaginative capacity to threaten the economy of the narrative), it must first be stripped of all other functions – recognised, in other words, as something that has 'flunked its allotted task' (*SI,* 44). To ascribe the landfill meaning would be to impede its incorporation into U's company's grand project.

As well as ascribing U's interrupted journey to Fresh Kills to McCarthy's own views on realism, I want to suggest another, socio-political, reading of this ending and to the novel's earlier engagements with waste. Beyond self-consciously commenting on the limits of representation, U's non-visit to Fresh Kills, like his obsession with other forms of waste, speaks to a specific set of postmillennial anxieties relating to the environment and the economy. McCarthy's text suggests one need not visit Fresh Kills, today, to comprehend the extent of our consumer ills – one need only open a browser window and scroll through the day's news to see 'our own filth, thrown into

mankind's face' (*SI,* 130). Such a view is borne out by other passages in McCarthy's novel, in which we find repeated references to the pervasiveness of waste and ecological disasters, as attested by U's recurring preoccupation with learning about an oil spill that occurred in the novel's opening pages. References to the oil spill are made on nearly every page, as it permeates U's dreams as he sleeps and colours his perception of the world around him when he is awake. This seeping of the oil spill into his thoughts might, he suggests, be seen as a direct result of what he calls its 'generic' nature. Anthropologists, U tells us, are interested in phenomena that reflect a broader pattern, allowing one to extrapolate a larger idea from the apparent particular (*SI,* 35). In this regard, oil spills are an ideal subject, since 'there's always one happening, one that's recently transpired or, it can be said with confidence, one that's on the verge of happening' (*SI,* 35). In a similar vein, the novel suggests, pollution, fallout and wreckage are part of the very texture of capitalist civilisation. Understand that, and you understand civilisation itself.

Indeed, the pervasiveness of oil imagery suggests itself as a kind of counterpart, or extension, or at the very least metaphorical equivalent, of the anthropological project 'formed of many other projects' in which U's company is involved, which, he explicitly tells us,

> will have had direct effects on you; in fact, there's probably not a single area of your daily life that it hasn't, in some way or another, touched on, penetrated, changed; although you probably don't know this (*SI,* 13).

Just as there is always an oil spill happening or about to happen, the corporate anthropology of U's company pervades every sphere of culture. In this context, U's assertion of the pointlessness of visiting Fresh Kills is indicative of a broader message. McCarthy is suggesting that it is unnecessary to look at *any* discrete instance of waste, be it a landfill site or an individual item of trash – for the landfill (the oil spill, the fallout) is all around us. Waste is no longer the underside of culture, as U first perceived it in his dream – it has *become* culture. As Micah in *Want Not* intuited, the capitalist grid is everywhere, and so, too, are its effluvia. U's own complicity in a system that not only investigates social behaviour but *engineers* it highlights the source of the issue. What we are dealing with is not where to put waste, or how to offset its ecologically damaging effects, but with the embedded nature of consumerism and the speculative quality of neoliberal ideology – a ubiquity made possible as much by information workers such as U, as by waste managers like DeLillo's Nick Shay.

However, the pervasiveness of which U speaks also has an aesthetic dimension. We have been repeatedly reminded throughout the novel that anthropology deals in fiction – in the narrative underlying things and the patterns that connect them. Mid-way through the novel, U expands on this idea in a daydream. Obsessing over the poor reception to a presentation he recently gave at a conference, U begins to mentally re-write the event, imagining himself giving a talk on his beloved oil

spill. In the ensuing daydream, he envisages himself developing an anthropological theory based on '*the* Oil Spill—an ongoing event whose discrete parts and moments […] have run together, merged into a continuum in which all plurals drown' (*SI*, 103). The daydream grows more animated, as he imagines himself seducing his audience with a different interpretation of the oil spill:

> You might say that what we're observing is ecological catastrophe, or an indictment of industrial society, or a parable of mankind's hubris. Or you might say, more dispassionately, that we're observing a demonstration of chemical propensities. But the truth is that […] Beneath all these dramas, I'd say, and before them, we're observing, simply (gentlemen), differentiation. Differentiation in its purest form: the very *principle* of differentiation […] Behind all behaviour, issuing instructions, sending in the plays—just as behind life itself, its endless sequencing of polymers—there lies a source code. This is the base premise of all anthropology (*SI*, 104).

This is, in effect, a mere rephrasing of U's boss' concept of the Tower of Babel: like the ruined tower, the oil spill is framed not as a 'parable of mankind's hubris' but rather as a subject of enquiry in its own right, an entity deserving of attention due to its difference from the matter it stains. The oil spill, U argues in his daydream-speech, is aesthetically transformative, and deserving of awe. It augments the animals whose fur and feathers it tars, turning them into 'Living Pompeians! Victims of the Oil Gorgon!' and re-casts the rocks on which it sticks, 'mak[ing] them rockier' (*SI*, 106). Moreover, he argues, there is no shame in stating such admiration, since it is merely a counter to the arguments of environmentalists, which are also rooted in aesthetics: 'They dislike the oil spill for the way it makes the coastline look "not right", prevents it from illustrating the vision of nature […] as sublime, virginal and pure' (*SI*, 107). Admiration for an oil spill is not misplaced, 'for what is oil *but* nature?' (*SI*, 108).

Now, as with the rest of U's musings, we can assume that we are not to take this interpretation of the aesthetics of oil entirely seriously – these are not McCarthy's views, nor are we expected to be convinced. The daydream is intended, rather, to convey the extent of U's abstraction from the actual politics of oil – recalling, in a way, the self-centredness of the solar energy expert in Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2010), who has built his reputation on climate change research he has stolen from a deceased colleague, whose interest in the field is driven by hubris, and who similarly weaves the topic of energy renewal into a grand narrative about human enterprise[295] – and as an intellectual exercise, demonstrating just how far his abstractions can lead him. Spanning six of the novel's 164 numbered paragraphs, the oil daydream takes on the shape of a spill, spreading on and on until U runs out of ideas. But for a reader of novelistic representations of waste – for the fictionalisation of waste, and the forms it can take – there is a different dimension to this section. Like the non-visit to Fresh Kills, U's daydream-speech is an exercise in futility, an experience of waste at a remove – mediated, imagined, and indeed, since he doesn't

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[295] Ian McKewan. *Solar* (London and New York: Jonathan Cape, 2010). See in particular 152-154.

actually give the speech, not even articulated. And, like the first image of the oil spill in the opening pages of the novel, McCarthy gives us waste in the abstract – waste not seen or witnessed first hand, but from a distance. The oil spill of the daydream, like the oil spill in the opening pages and the dreamed landfill, is depicted as all pervasive and imbued with the promise of some deeper (ontological or aesthetic) meaning, while ultimately holding that meaning just out of reach.

McCarthy's *Satin Island* links the pervasiveness of ecological disasters and waste to the tentacular quality of the information economy under neoliberalism. The role of market research (or corporate anthropology) in shaping culture and breeding new forms of consumption is shown to be as uncontainable and mysterious as an oil spill, the extent of its reach impossible to quantify or to foretell. McCarthy links the market economy and waste through the representation of surrealistic images of oil spills reflected on displays of luxury objects, but he suggests that this relationship is too embedded to be changed and that the spirit of avant-gardism itself has become part of the productivist paradigm. Waste is no longer the dark underside of culture, but part of culture. We can apprehend waste in the 21st century at any moment via a simple online search. At the same time, accessing it in this way makes it appear remote, recalling what Elaine Scarry terms the 'incapacitating' dimension of waste, the extent to which that which occurs 'outside our own sensory horizon' fails to shock us into action (Hiltern-Scarry, 273).

The future of waste

The texts discussed in this concluding chapter use waste to challenge neoliberalism's cultural and ecological effects. The story they tell is a dark one, and suggests that waste in this phase of capitalism is something that can be neither contained nor represented in the ways deployed by novelists in the 20th century. Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* posits the growth of the Internet as a failed opportunity for a radical alternative to capitalism. We might even term his characters 'digital Surrealists' in their exploration of the Internet's avant-gardist potential, and in their efforts to salvage fragments of it from commodification.

Jonathan Miles' *Want Not* livens us to the fact that in the 21st century, there are few – if any – ways in which one can truly live outside the capitalist grid: even a Beckettian style of living in and off of waste is a tacit form of participation. Moreover, as attested by the eventual eviction of the novel's dumpster divers from the building in which they have been squatting, the bureaucratic framework of advanced neoliberalism makes off-the-grid living - such as that outlined in Beckett's novels - impossible. In the 21st century, the logic of capitalism has become all encompassing.

Finally, Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* seeks to articulate the inapprehensible nature of waste today. Like the oil spill that so enthrals its protagonist due to its apparent interrelation with every

aspect of the economy, from manufacturing to the price of gold – and, too, like the project in which the protagonist's company is involved – waste is impossible to isolate, for it touches everything. McCarthy's oil spill serves as a visual metaphor for something that is, in fact, anything but visible: an economic model, and a set of cultural values, that have altered the very fabric of our society without our realising it. As his protagonist's non-visit to Fresh Kills attests, there is no need – or no point – to go 'look' at waste, for we are already steeped in it.

The apparent defeatism manifest in the aesthetic responses discussed in this chapter – and the implication that a radical aesthetics, in the early postmillennial neoliberal economy is not possible – is also a call to arms that extends the efforts of their 20th-century forebears and allows us as well to read them in a new light. Pynchon, Miles and McCarthy harness waste to identify free market capitalism's role in spiralling class inequality, civil unrest, and ecological devastation in order to explode popular conceptions about that model. The story they tell is harrowing, but telling it is necessary, providing a counter to the rhetoric that equates laissez-faire economics with democracy and consumerism with happiness, and that sees nature as purely a resource for producing goods.

Each of the texts discussed in this thesis has introduced us to very different responses to capitalism, to the culture(s) that capitalism fosters, and to the roles of art within these contexts. Each text examined has invited us to consider waste in a different light: metaphorically, as a sign of a system gone awry, or literally, as an obstacle to production; as a reproach to our compulsion to consume, or as a means to shock and arrest us into thinking otherwise; as something produced and expelled by humans, or as a category to which humans themselves are relegated. And, too, we have seen waste posited in redemptive terms. Surrealism envisages the discard as material for aesthetic production and as a source of epiphanic discovery; Beckett's vagrants' scavenging games and endless list-writing parody the totalising logic of capitalist production and consumption, showing how waste can be utilised to resist commercialisation; and, finally, DeLillo's garbologists, archivists, and waste managers show how waste might be investigated as an artefact, allowing us to find, in and amongst the brand names and advertising slogans, a glimpse of our common humanity. Similarly, we have seen recuperation cast alternately as a means to radically alter the course of artistic production and challenge consumerism's obsession with novelty, and as a means to further squeeze out profits and extract use. Indeed, we have seen how the radical potential of both waste *and* recuperation are always at risk of being neutralised, or assimilated.

Perhaps the most salient reason we have addressed these literary depictions of manufactured waste and recuperation is the relevance they have for us today, as 21st-century readers and (however unwitting) participants in the global(ised) market economy, which has, since the 1980s, been modelled on neoliberal ideology. The paths traversed by the historical avant-garde's junk

artists, Beckett's gloriously unproductive vagrants and DeLillo's philosophical waste-managers remain acutely relevant to contemporary discussions about capitalism's effects on culture, on social well-being, and on the environment. Moreover, reading these works today, at a time when awareness of the ecological crisis has never been higher, and at a time of acute doubt regarding the future of capitalism itself, gives us a new perspective on them, and on the contexts from which they emerged.

The vast difference between the historical avant-garde, Beckett and DeLillo's deployment of waste and the aspects of capitalism they criticise have allowed us to consider how much our understanding of capitalism's effects has changed. Our knowledge of capitalism's environmental effects casts new light on Breton, Loy, and de Chirico's re-appropriations of waste to challenge the commodification of art under capitalism. These haunting depictions of waste were not borne out of an ecological sensibility, and yet they uncannily anticipate the ideology of re-use that has governed environmentalist thought over the last thirty years, as well as the ethos of environmentalist art that has emerged from that discourse.[296] Beckett's narratives remain relevant to contemporary discussions about social inequality under capitalism – an aspect of his work that remains regrettably under-discussed. Finally, the evolution of both contemporary environmental discourse and neoliberal ideology since the publication of DeLillo's *Underworld* allows us to effectively historicise the novel as reflecting a *moment* in the critique of late capitalism, rather than as broadly representative of contemporary culture. Indeed, DeLillo's more recent engagement with global warming, an unpublished play titled *The Word For Snow* (2007)*,* suggests the author's own recognition that we have moved beyond the problem of where to put waste, and must now face how to manage its *effects.*[297] Moreover, the approach he takes in this play, depicting a dystopian future in which the material world has been obliterated and replaced by the words used to describe it, can be seen as indicative of a broader shift in the aesthetics of waste. The fact that the play is not available in print makes analysis of its contents difficult; however, the very fact that it engages with the effects of environmental wreckage as something inapprehensible and intangible is, itself, indicative, and lends itself to the discussion at hand.

My contention, throughout this thesis, has been that the literary depictions of waste of the last century still have much to teach us. Loy and de Chirico, Breton and Beckett, DeLillo and Pynchon,

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[296] For an exhaustive account of environmentalist visual art from the 1970s to the present day, and its relationship with different strands of the environmental movement, see Linda Weintraub's *To Life: Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet* (Berekely, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

[297] DeLillo's play was one of nine works on the topic of climate change commissioned to be performed at the 2008 New York University Humanities Festival, which took place during the week immediately preceding Earth Day 2008, and whose theme was climate change. The play remains unpublished and has only been staged once (in July 2012, by the Future Ruins theatre company), and is absent from DeLillo scholarship, although the 2012 production did receive favourable reviews by *The New York Times, The Independent* and *The Guardian.*

McCarthy and Miles, illuminate and complicate capitalist ideology in important ways, and reaffirm art's capacity to critique the status quo. The historical avant-gardists' subversive use of waste, Beckett's meanderings, and DeLillo's garbology are perhaps inadequate when it comes to describing our situation today, but they – and Surrealism in particular – are exemplary in their combativeness, in their assumption, in other words, that even at its most cryptic, waste has something to reveal. In their very different interpretations of waste – as a magical cipher, a sign of marginality, a moral reproach to capitalist excess, or an artefact – these authors throw into relief the extent to which the economic system under which we live influences our engagement with the material world environment and our fellow humans. The novels discussed in this thesis invite us to re-examine our ascriptions of value, and to reflect upon the ways in which capitalism shapes our perception of objects and people and, relatedly, our aesthetic and moral judgments. The depictions of manufactured waste in these narratives enjoin us to relate to inanimate matter and to each other in other ways; to look at that world and at each other at a slant; and to see them for something other than their use-value.

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