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Trash Talks: Revelations in the Rubbish

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Print publication date: 2016

Print ISBN-13: 9780190239350

Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: April 2016

DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190239350.001.0001

Combing through the Trash

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DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190239350.003.0002

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter observes how snoops of various stripes rummage through trash in search of what promises to be significant information about people's lives. It examines what it is about the stuff people toss from sight or put out of mind that makes such material a treasure trove for a motley batch of searchers: distressed fans of Bob Dylan, garbage archaeologists such as William Rathje, psychoanalysts such as Freud, and others seeking knowledge of their targets' habits and proclivities. Drawing on Supreme Court opinions concerning Fourth Amendment protections of privacy, developments in the emerging field of garbology, and the history of psychoanalysis, it highlights differences among "gotcha" aims of celebrity gossips, "j'accuse" goals of narcotics agents, and therapists' hopes of returning patients to health by unearthing buried thoughts.

Keywords: trash, Fourth Amendment, Supreme Court, Dylan, Rathje, garbology, archaeology, Freud

It's an aphorism almost in tatters from overuse: one person's trash is another person's treasure. A friend of mine has never purchased a pencil—not because she doesn't use pencils or

can't afford a new one, but because early in her life she realized that she prefers stubs found on schoolroom floors to any other version of that handy implement. It has long ceased to be a novelty for artists to grasp the aesthetic potential in abandoned city lots, defiled beaches, and other rich sources of refuse. Cities such as Oslo actually import waste and trash from other countries, seeing in landfills the promise of an endless supply of energy-generating fuel.¹

The trash-to-treasure journey of special interest here begins with the rifling through of rubbish bags and bins in the expectation that they will yield quite personal information—perhaps good old dirt—about individuals, communities, civilizations. But just what and just how much can be gleaned from combing through the trash?

(p.9) Trash as Forensic Evidence

The assumption that our trash speaks volumes about us—or at least significant paragraphs—is firmly held by both those who make it their business to rummage through other people's garbage and those who insist that such searches constitute an unjustifiable invasion of privacy or unreasonable appropriation of property. (It also is an assumption crucial to the work of some archaeologists, as we shall learn a bit later.)

There are probably few statistics about how frequently or with how much fervor the activity sometimes referred to as “trash reconnaissance” goes on. I'm speaking here not of those scavengers and dumpster divers looking for food to eat and castoffs to use but of those seeking insight about their targeted subjects based on what's in the trash. The fact that some cases of garbage-rummaging have captured the attention not only of celebrity watchers but the justices of the Supreme Court of the United States suggests that we're anxious and uncertain about just what our garbage does or doesn't tell about us, should or should not be used to reveal about us.

In the early 1970s an obsessed fan of Bob Dylan, A. J. Weberman, began sifting through the garbage can outside the home of Dylan and his family in New York City's Greenwich Village. Weberman reportedly had become disenchanted with his former hero for allegedly abandoning his radical roots and betraying the legions of fans who supported his rise to stardom. Not content simply to write abusively about Dylan

and find out ways to get him on the phone, Weberman started practicing what he called “garbology” to get the dirt on Dylan. (“Garbology” was defined by one follower of the affair as the “study of human refuse in an attempt to **(p.10)** divine ill-begotten truths”;² the term quite recently was beatified for inclusion in the *Oxford English Dictionary, OED*.)

Whatever is yielded by searches such as Weberman’s—the likes of which continue to be one of the perils of the trade for celebrities—something remarkable emerges from public reaction to such investigations. Those disturbed by someone pawing through another person’s garbage often describe the trash as “sacred.” For example, a neighbor of celebrity garbology victims is reported to have found the activity “incredibly creepy. It’s like nothing is sacred.”³ Weberman himself took pains to say that he did not find Dylan’s garbage “sacred, the way some people do.”⁴

Moreover, Weberman and other trash prowlers typically have been depicted as being not just “creepy” but also “pathetic” or “unnaturally curious.”⁵ For example, the main character in Ryuichi Hiroki’s 2000 film *Tokyo Trash Baby*⁶ is a young woman with an obsessive crush on a young man living in her apartment building. She routinely retrieves his trash bag from the basement and spends most of her free time adoringly going through it, convinced that despite not having met him she can come to know him intimately, to be in touch with him through examining his trash; at the same time she can protect herself from being rejected by him, from being herself treated as disposable.

There appear, then, to be some robustly held views about the special nature of the relation between us and our garbage, and **(p.11)** accordingly about the character of people who don’t understand or honor that relation. What is it about us, and about our trash and garbage, that might account for this rather fierce sense of offense or intrusion or over-stepping of boundaries?

Most of us probably don’t want other people combing through our trash. If pressed, we may not be able to be very articulate about just why. But it seems less hard to figure out why someone engaging in illegal behavior would be bothered by such searches, especially when carried out by or for law

enforcement officials. Your trash could provide damning evidence of your law-breaking activities. Should it be allowed to do so?

The conditions under which one's trash could be incriminating is at the heart of a case decided by the Supreme Court of the United States in 1988. William Greenwood was living in Laguna Beach, California, when he came under suspicion from a local police investigator for drug trafficking. The police officer, Jenny Stracner, had no hard evidence against Greenwood but had received information that a truckload of drugs was en route to his house, and she knew that a neighbor had been calling to complain about frequent late-night traffic there. Stracner did some of her own firsthand surveillance, observing considerable coming and going of visitors in the wee hours and following a truck from the Greenwood residence to a house already under investigation for similar reasons.

At this point Stracner decided that to gather enough evidence to obtain a search warrant for Greenwood's house she would find a way into the next best thing: his garbage. But, perhaps concerned about evidence tampering or the appearance thereof, she didn't pick up the trash herself. She simply asked the regular trash collector to do so and to make sure that it did not get mixed into the more general collection. The trash collector complied, and Stracner at last had enough dirt on Greenwood to be granted a search warrant **(p.12)** for his house. Greenwood and someone else residing there at the time were arrested, but returned to the house after posting bail.

Greenwood sued the state, insisting that searches of one's trash need a warrant no less than searches of one's home. The Superior Court of California decided in his favor, holding that both the state's own constitution and the Fourth Amendment to the US Constitution prohibit warrantless searches of trash. The police indeed had had warrants for searches of Greenwood's house, leading to his arrest, but those warrants were based on unwarranted searches of his garbage. The prosecutor took the case to the next level, but the Court of Appeal affirmed the lower court's ruling. The California Supreme Court found no reason to review the decision reached by the Court of Appeal. Greenwood appeared to be free and his garbage to be safe from further unwarranted snooping.

The Supreme Court of the United States, however, taking note of a number of cases like Greenwood's popping up across the country, thought that the time had come to clarify the law of the land concerning the nature of a person's relation to her trash. And so arose the 1988 US Supreme Court case *California v. Greenwood*.⁷

The primary legal instrument employed by Greenwood's lawyers was the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States (and its all but identical cousin in Article I, Section 13, of the California State Constitution):

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and **(p.13)** particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Presumably Greenwood's case would have been a non-starter if trash were not considered a plausible candidate for the kind of protection the Fourth Amendment is meant to provide. The question the Supreme Court took itself to be answering was whether in this particular case the warrantless seizure and search of Greenwood's garbage by the police was permissible under the Fourth Amendment. Justice Byron White, writing for the majority, ruled that it was allowed; Justice William Brennan, writing for himself and Justice Thurgood Marshall, argued in dissent that it was not. How did the majority reach its decision? On what grounds did the dissenting justices disagree? What do their deliberations have to tell us about just how sacred, or in any event inviolate, is our relation to our garbage?

The Fourth Amendment does not prohibit all searches and seizures of personal belongings and effects. Those undertaking such searches must be prepared to demonstrate that their proposed actions are not "unreasonable," neither baseless nor vaguely defined. Those requesting Fourth Amendment protection also have to meet certain requirements: their expectation of privacy must be accepted by society as "objectively reasonable" (*Greenwood*, 40).

Think for a moment about the following routine, familiar to millions of household trash-makers around the country: you put your garbage and other unrecyclable stuff in opaque plastic bags (except in those communities in which you are required to use transparent ones), seal them, and try to remember to get them to the curb in time for the regular pickup. All going well, the waste collectors swing by and toss your rejects, along with those of others, into the cauldron at the back of their truck. Further commingling of individual household trash occurs at the dump or landfill, where similar trucks disgorge their contents.

(p.14) On the basis of such familiar routines, Greenwood's lawyers maintained that his having put his trash and garbage in sealed opaque plastic bags entitled him to expect that the contents of the bags, identifiable as his, would remain private even though placed, as in fact required by municipal rules, on public ground; they insisted that he had every right to expect that the bags would be tossed in with those of others, and then be left at the dump.

The majority concluded that Greenwood's expectation of privacy was not "objectively reasonable," that Greenwood "exposed [his] garbage to the public sufficiently to defeat [his] claim to Fourth Amendment protection." Here's why:

It is common knowledge that plastic garbage bags left on or at the side of a public street are readily accessible to animals, children, scavengers, snoops, and other members of the public. . . . Moreover, respondent placed [his] refuse at the curb for the express purpose of conveying it to a third party, the trash collector, who might himself have sorted through respondent's trash or permitted others, such as the police, to do so. Accordingly, having deposited [his] garbage "in an area particularly suited for public inspection and, in a manner of speaking, public consumption, for the express purpose of having strangers take it," . . . respondent could have had no reasonable expectation of privacy in the inculpatory items that [he] discarded. (*Greenwood*, 40)

In short, everybody knows or certainly could easily and should know that the imagined smooth and uninterrupted journey of one's trash from inside the house, to the curb, to the truck, and finally to the dump, is an illusion. Even if you've spent

extra money for stronger bags, you shouldn't forget about the habits of **(p.15)** raccoons, rats, dogs, and cats; you shouldn't rule out possible meddling by intrusive types such as children, scavengers, and snoops. And for all you know—and apparently should know—the trash collector may start pawing through your stuff or willingly offer up the goods to the police. It's just not reasonable of you to think otherwise, given such common knowledge.

The majority insisted that its decision was fully consistent with earlier Supreme Court cases involving the Fourth Amendment. Many lower level courts, the majority claimed, did not hesitate to deny the applicability of privacy rights in the case of trash. During that period of time in which your trash is still identifiable as yours but placed by you “outside the curtilage,” beyond the boundaries, of your property, you have no claim to Fourth Amendment rights against search and seizure. The trash is yours in the sense that it can be traced to you, but it is no longer yours in the sense that once you put it on public grounds not only is it likely to be open to inspection and even appropriation by others, but police need not seek a warrant to take it and open it and use it against you. Having disposed of it, you've lost control over its disposition. So sayeth the majority of justices.

Writing for the dissent, Justice Brennan expressed considerable chagrin over the decision of his colleagues in the majority:

Scrutiny of another's trash is contrary to commonly accepted notions of civilized behavior. I suspect, therefore, that members of our society will be shocked to learn that the Court, the ultimate guarantor of liberty, deems unreasonable our expectation that the aspects of our private lives that are concealed safely in a trash bag will not become public. (*Greenwood*, 45–46)

Trash can talk, but, Justice Brennan insists, that doesn't mean that just anyone has the right to make it squeal. He is confident that **(p.16)** most of his fellow citizens would agree. He also argues that careful consideration of earlier cases shows that the Supreme Court in fact has understood the Fourth Amendment to protect one's privacy in matters as intimate as the contents of one's garbage.

After all, Justice Brennan points out, people put sealed letters and packages in the mail, sending them off to be carried by public means to their intended recipients, and Fourth Amendment jurisprudence has consistently required warrants for searches of them. The Court has refused to distinguish between “worthy” and “unworthy” containers of personal effects—a closed paper bag is no different in this regard from a locked suitcase; what matters is whether the container has been closed to “conceal the contents from plain view” (*Greenwood*, 47). If I were carrying a closed garbage bag, any representative of the law wanting to peep into it without my consent would have to get a warrant; surely the same is true if someone happens to be using such bags “to discard, rather than transport, his personal effects. Their contents are not inherently any less private, and Greenwood’s decision to discard them, at least in the manner in which he did, does not diminish his expectation of privacy” (*Greenwood*, 49).

Nor, Justice Brennan continues, should the Court judge such expectation to be diminished in light of the possibility that some two- or four-legged creature *might* meddle with one’s trash. The law doesn’t consider the mere possibility that a burglar might break into one’s home to be adequate grounds for dismissal of Fourth Amendment protection against such intrusion (*Greenwood*, 54).

Justice Brennan thinks the majority at least avoided one wrong turn in its judgment: it did not rely on a theory of “abandonment” that the Court discredited in earlier cases (*Greenwood*, 51). While discarding one’s trash might seem to amount to abandonment of it and thus abandonment of the very grounds on which to claim **(p.17)** Fourth Amendment protection, there is a strong strand in the history of “trash search doctrine”⁸ according to which it is *privacy* and not only *property* for which protection is provided (for example, the Court had ruled in *California v. Rooney*⁹ that the fact that a telephone call is made in a public phone booth does not mean that its contents are open to surveillance absent a warrant). Placing one’s trash in a sealed opaque container on the curb so that it will be picked up by a designated collector at a specific time in order to reach a specific destination constitutes abandoning it in the sense of putting it out of one’s

immediate control but hardly constitutes behavior exhibiting no intent to preserve the privacy of its contents.

Moving beyond Court precedent, Brennan cites non-judicial support (including an article in *Esquire* written by Mr. A. J. Weberman himself) for the view that

a single bag of trash testifies eloquently to the eating, reading, and recreational habits of the person who produced it. A search of trash, like a search of the bedroom, can relate intimate details about sexual practices, health, and personal hygiene. Like rifling through desk drawers or intercepting phone calls, rummaging through trash can divulge the target's financial and professional status, political affiliations and inclinations, private thoughts, personal relationships, and romantic interests. It cannot be doubted that a sealed trash bag harbors telling evidence of the "intimate activity associated with the 'sanctity of a man's home and the privacies of life,' " which the Fourth Amendment is designed to protect. (*Greenwood*, 50)

(p.18) In closing, Justice Brennan expresses alarm at the picture of society he thinks the majority has sketched: one in which

local authorities may command their citizens to dispose of their personal effects in the manner least protective of the "sanctity of [the] home and the privacies of life" . . . and then monitor them arbitrarily and without judicial oversight—a society that is not prepared to recognize as reasonable an individual's expectation of privacy in the most private of personal effects sealed in an opaque container and disposed of in a manner designed to commingle it imminently and inextricably with the trash of others. (*Greenwood*, 55–56)

The *Greenwood* case was neither the beginning nor the end of judicial deliberation about whether people are entitled—in the United States, anyway—to think that their sealed trash is not to be searched and seized by police or other authorities without a warrant. The stories behind such cases can be both entertaining anecdotes and cause for alarm. For example, not long after *Greenwood* was decided, a Federal Appeals Court, in *United States v. Scott*,¹⁰ refused to consider it a violation of

the Fourth Amendment when police painstakingly put back together the carefully shredded records of a bookkeeper accused of fraud against the IRS.

Greenwood and *Scott* certainly shore up the case to be made for the revelatory power of trash and garbage. But at the same time they bring to our attention ways in which our relation to trash can be quite perplexing. On the one hand, as Justice Brennan pointed out, trash is thought to “testify eloquently” to the personal habits of those who generate it, to their political preferences, romantic **(p.19)** inclinations, and all manner of thoughts and attitudes and activities not necessarily meant for public consumption. On the other hand, trash is by definition what we have thrown out. We have deliberately distanced ourselves from it, cast it out of the orbit of our care, implicitly declared that we are or must be done with it. We might be sorry to have done so, or might be glad, but such a distinction won’t be apparent in the higgledy-piggledy pile in the trash can. Indeed, long before our trash comes to be commingled with that of others, the once disparate elements of our own rejectamenta¹¹ are unceremoniously commingled at home. The severance of our former relation to them is reflected in the absence of any preferential differentiation obvious among them: there’s little indication of how well or how poorly we thought of each piece, of how welcome or unwelcome they were, of their relative desirability, their standing as items of endearment or disgust. The carton that once contained the delicious peach cobbler ice cream might well be cradling within it scraps of the dutifully eaten but unseductive broccoli. (Celebrity garbologists may lament this loss of preferential detail; legal authorities probably don’t care.)

Trash speaks of us, even as its status as trash signals a significant distance between it and us. We can get rid of our trash, but it doesn’t quite get rid of us. That is why it lends itself so readily yet confoundingly to arguments over what is to be considered private. We may well not be concerned if others know, search through, or make use of what we toss out—we may just not care whether it remains private, whether its knowability remains subject to our control. But when we do care—even though we consider the trash **(p.20)** no longer to be part of us (we’re tossing it out, after all)—we may not want others to know what it still has the power to reveal.

Still, beyond yielding potentially embarrassing or incriminating information, exactly *what or how much* do searches through our trash have the power to uncover? Quite a lot, according to the researcher whose work in garbology is cited in the *OED*'s entry for the term—and, he insists, it's primo stuff, of incomparable value.

Trash as "Setting the Story Straight"

It is clear that A. J. Weberman and Justice William Brennan were guided by firm beliefs about the nature and significance of what a person's trash can tell us about him or her.

Weberman was assuming that as a result of rummaging through Dylan's trash he could paint an unfavorable portrait of Dylan's character—one at odds with Dylan's public persona. Justice Brennan's dissent articulates a belief not incompatible with but much broader than Weberman's: our trash offers eloquent evidence of all aspects of our lives, whether what is revealed puts us in a negative or a positive light. No matter what it might say about us, it qualifies for Fourth Amendment protection of "the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures."

Justice Brennan's impassioned plea implies that what is in a person's trash is at least as revelatory of that person as what she might choose to put on display for all to see. Weberman's approach has a further implication: that the contents of trash can tell not just a different but a closer, more accurate, more complete story about a person than what she is inclined to present for public consumption. Weberman's belief finds firmer and more explicit expression **(p.21)** in the work of garbage archaeologist William Rathje, according to whom trash provides an epistemologically *privileged* resource for understanding the nature of human life.

Rathje for many years led teams of graduate students at the University of Arizona in the Garbage Project, a long-term examination of local landfills. He and Cullen Murphy published the results of the Garbage Project's research in *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage*.¹² In addition to the *OED* reference to Rathje and the Garbage Project in connection with its definition of "garbology," references to Rathje's work abound in the growing body of literature on garbage and waste.¹³ How

well do this über-garbologist's enticing claims about the special epistemological riches of the landfill stand up?

Unlike A. J. Weberman or narcotics agents in southern California, Rathje and his team engaged in social science-sanctified snooping: though they did not identify garbage as belonging to any given individual or family, they explored such matters as demographic differences in what people throw out and possible discrepancies between what people say they eat and what their garbage reveals about their actual consumption (not surprisingly, we under-report how much candy, ice cream, and bacon we eat and over-report our intake of cottage cheese, skim milk, and high-fiber cereal [Rathje, 71]).

Rathje makes some striking claims about the particular kind of epistemological access garbage provides. He does not stick to **(p.22)** modest remarks such as saying that landfills provide "valuable insights" (Rathje, 4) or that archaeology might be understood as "the discipline that tries to understand old garbage" (Rathje, 10). No, Rathje argues more strongly that the garbage in which archaeologists traffic actually produces more reliable evidence than the stuff gleaned, for example, by historians: historians are "understandably drawn" to evidence such as the "remains of the tombs, temples, and palaces of the elite ... filled with personal histories as recorded by admiring relatives and fawning retainers." But "garbage has often served as a kind of tattle-tale, *setting the record straight*" (Rathje, 12 [my emphasis]). Indeed, against what he sees as the pretensions of the historians, Rathje insists that "what people have owned—and thrown away—can speak *more eloquently, informatively, and truthfully about the lives they lead than they themselves ever may*" (Rathje, 54 [my emphasis]).

At various points in *Rubbish!* Rathje offers arguments to back up his view about the superior epistemological advantages of garbage archaeology. He notes the well-known tension often found between our "beliefs, attitudes, and ideas" on the one hand and "the picture embodied in the physical record" (Rathje, 12–13) on the other: the archaeological record of 18th-century life in "Colonial Williamsburg," for example, belies the tourist image of it as a pristine, garbage- and manure-free village (Rathje, 52–53). At the same time, he acknowledges that physical evidence should not be thought to

point unambiguously to people's behavior or the conditions under which they live. Savvy garbologists know that the absence of a magazine such as *Playboy* in household trash doesn't necessarily mean that no one in that household reads it, but that perhaps it is to be found in a non-identifying trash bin down the road (Rathje, 57–58).

Rathje also points out that most of the research conducted by his team was unobtrusive in the sense that the people **(p.23)** whose behavior was being assessed were not aware of that fact, certainly not when they were actually throwing out the trash and garbage (Rathje, 20). In thereby reducing “one of the great biases inherent in much social science” (Rathje, 20)—the tendency of interviewees to skew their responses to protect themselves or please investigators, for example, or simply the fact that people are bad judges of how much they waste even when they are explicitly asked to keep track of it (Rathje, 69–70)—Rathje claims to have produced more accurate and reliable information about people's actual practices than would have been possible if the investigations had not been carried out “from the back end” (Rathje, 14).

Moreover, Rathje suggests that on the whole, people are so uninterested in or concerned about what they throw away that they are likely to be puzzled by what garbage archaeologists discover:

The profligate habits of our own country and our own time—the sheer volume of the garbage that we create and must dispose of—will make our society an open book. The question is: Would we ourselves recognize our story when it is told, or will our garbage tell tales about us that we as yet do not suspect? (Rathje, 11)

There is no doubt that “we do not necessarily know many things that we think we know” (Rathje, 245)—including how much garbage we actually generate (“the sheer volume of the garbage that we create and must dispose of” [Rathje, 11]). And perhaps it is true that “what people have owned—and thrown away—can speak more eloquently, informatively, and truthfully about the lives they lead than they themselves ever may” (Rathje, 54), though this presumably depends upon garbologists being around to channel **(p.24)** what the stuff says. As Rathje tells it, garbologists emerge as more reliable sources concerning significant features of people's habits and

activities than people themselves or the dissimulating historians who write about them. Rathje doesn't seem to consider the possibility that there might be other claimants to bragging rights as deliverers of profound revelations about our lives. Are trash-makers, garbologists, and historians the only possible contestants or the only plausible winners? What is the nature and scope of the knowledge that garbage-sifting yields?

Rathje does lay out some fairly specific ideas about the particular kind of information garbage archaeology offers that goes beyond pointing out that people have a foggy, sometimes self-serving notion of their own waste practices. Demographic studies of garbage serve some very practical ends. For example, makers of a specific brand of cat food can find out just how loyal their customers are from a systematic haul of their trash (Rathje, 16); garbage studies can assist in the "rational governance of communities": municipalities need to know how much waste they actually generate, what they actually do with it, and how it might be reduced; garbage statistics can be of use in "any endeavor that demands detailed knowledge of the behavior (including the relatively private behavior) of large groups of real people" (Rathje, 135): are upper-class families more likely than middle-class families to purchase and use canned soup? (Rathje, 135-136).

Rathje provides much sturdier support for these modest findings than he does for his bold claims about the superior eloquence and broad truth-revealing properties of trash. What might account for his splashier proposals? Disciplinary pride may be a factor, but such pride is hardly peculiar to garbage archaeology. Nor are claims along the lines of "if you want to know what **(p.25)** people are *really* like, look at ____." Candidates for filling in the blank have included "their cities," "their architecture," "their food," "their garbage," "their art," "their laws," and "the condition of their women and children." If the presence of "their garbage" on the list is at least *prima facie* plausible, it is in part thanks to the kind of work done by Rathje and his teams of hermeneutically inclined garbologists.

Disdained commodity though it be, garbage offers a useful, if ironic, reminder of one of the fundamentals of

critical self-knowledge—that we do not necessarily know many things that we think we know. (Rathje, 245)

Rathje has presented some good reasons for thinking that important information lurks in our landfills. But he hasn't yet provided convincing evidence for the more extravagant claims he makes about the epistemological access garbage offers—its alleged unique capacity to render humanity an “open book.”

Garbage In, Garbage Not Out

The job of trash haulers puts them in a professional relationship to garbage different from that of researchers such as William Rathje and his crew. That doesn't mean they never engage in the kind of hermeneutical and epistemological speculation characteristic of their garbology counterparts. A sanitation worker interviewed by television reporter Charles Kuralt some years ago described what his work enabled him to glean about his customers: it's “better'n being a psychiatrist. I can tell you anything you want to know” (Rathje, 55).

(p.26) This vivid comparison echoes a not uncommon image of psychiatrists or psychotherapists as trained to “get the dirt” on people (whether or not such people are the analysts' willing patients). The familiarity of the comparison might well pique the interest of trash mavens: in boasting that the physical stuff people toss out provides even better insight into their lives than the psychological material a therapist or analyst might unearth, the sanitation worker's analogy invites us to think of our complex psychological furniture as including a mental trash bin—as if there's a lot on our minds or in our hearts we wish to get rid of but unlike our trash and garbage it cannot be seen or smelled or put into plastic bags.

The wry trash hauler is not alone in thinking that such psychological stuff might, along with the physical matter we discard, be thought of as matter fit for the trash. As we shall see, Sigmund Freud's descriptions of his patients' efforts to banish unwelcome thoughts and wishes from consciousness are filled with images of expelling, rejecting, or otherwise trying to discard and disown those thoughts and wishes. Indeed, Freud implies that there is a strong resemblance between the processes by which we try to keep physical waste and garbage out of sight, or at least out of mind, and those by which we try to keep what we fear is unsavory or undesirable about ourselves out of consciousness. This is not to suggest

that Freud saw himself as a kind of sanitation worker, combing the trash bins or scouring the sewers of the psyche. On the contrary, he was acutely aware that the kinds of explorations he was opening up as a psychoanalyst were widely considered disreputable because of the nature of the material he claimed to be uncovering.

What follows hardly constitutes a detailed examination or critique of Freud's voluminous writings on the nature and goals **(p.27)** of psychoanalysis (let alone the massive secondary literature on Freud and Freudianism). But given the importance of the notion of "repressed" psychic material in Freud's work, the sanitation worker's analogy invites us to wonder: did Freud in any way treat such repressed material as resembling more familiar and more visible examples of trash or garbage? Did he think such material provided especially revelatory information about a person?

Repression: Where Does That Repressed Material Go?

A relatively early version of Freud's account of repression can be found in "Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis,"¹⁴ a series of talks Freud delivered at Clark University in 1910. In cases of hysteria and other neuroses, he argued, there emerged.

a wishful impulse which was in sharp contrast to the subject's other wishes and which proved incompatible with the ethical and aesthetic standards of his personality. There had been a short conflict, and the end of this internal struggle was that the idea which had appeared before consciousness as the vehicle of this irreconcilable wish fell a victim to repression [*Verdrängung*], was pushed out of consciousness with all its attached memories, and was forgotten. (*Lectures*, 23)

(p.28) The repression allows the patient to avoid the pain of mental conflict. For example, a young woman whose older sister has just died becomes aware of entertaining the idea that the sister's husband would now be free to marry her. But this realization revolts her, and she banishes the thought. However, she pays a heavy price for doing so: she falls ill "with severe hysterical symptoms" (*Lectures*, 24).

Freud then offers this analogy to help provide "a more vivid picture of repression and of its necessary relation to resistance" (*Lectures*, 25):

Let us suppose that in this lecture-room and among this audience . . . there is nevertheless someone who is causing a disturbance and whose ill-mannered laughter, chattering and shuffling with his feet are distracting my attention from my task. I have to announce that I cannot proceed with my lecture; and thereupon three or four of you who are strong men stand up and, after a short struggle, put the interrupter outside the door. So now he is “repressed” [*verdrängt*], and I can continue my lecture. But in order that the interruption shall not be repeated, in case the individual who has been expelled [*Herausgeworfene*] should try to enter the room once more, the gentlemen who have put my will into effect place their chairs up against the door and thus establish a “resistance” [*Widerstandt*] after the repression has been accomplished. If you will now translate the two localities concerned into psychical terms as the “conscious” and the “unconscious,” you will have before you a fairly good picture of the process of repression. (*Lectures*, 24)

(p.29) Much closer to the end of his career, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*,¹⁵ Freud uses somewhat similar terms to describe attempts to get rid of unwanted thoughts or wishes:

A tendency arises to separate from the ego [*vom Ich abzusondern*] everything that can become a source of such unpleasure, to throw it outside [*nach aussen zu werfen*] and to create a pure pleasure-ego which is confronted by a strange and threatening “outside.” . . . [S]ome sufferings that one seeks to expel [*hinausweisen will*] turn out to be inseparable from the ego in virtue of their internal origin. . . . In order to fend off [*zu erwehren*] certain unpleasurable excitations arising from within, the ego can use no other methods than those which it uses against unpleasure coming from without, and this is the starting-point of important pathological disturbances. (*Civilization*, 66–67)

Throw the boisterous disruptive impertinent man out of the lecture hall; throw the noisy disruptive shameful thought into the unconscious.¹⁶

Notice that though the noisy interrupter is tossed out of the hall, he does not disappear. Indeed if he had, there would have been no need for anyone to stand at the door to make sure he couldn't get back **(p.30)** in. This is not an insignificant detail, since according to Freud, what gets repressed is in a sense out of sight but not out of mind: it is out of consciousness, yes, but there is more to the mind than consciousness. As we've just been reminded, Freud suggests that we use the same or something like the same methods to try to "fend off" or "expel" unwanted mental contents as we do to avoid or get rid of unwanted stimuli from without. But that doesn't mean that employing those methods necessarily leads to successful results, if the measure of success is the degree to which the unwanted matter actually is expelled. The man in Freud's analogy has been successfully rejected from the hall, but he remains outside. He hasn't disappeared.

That a painful event can be lost to memory doesn't mean it has ceased to exist. It remains "in the patient's possession" (*Lectures*, 22): "*But the repressed wishful impulse continues to exist in the unconscious*. It is on the look-out for an opportunity of being activated, and when that happens it succeeds in sending into consciousness a disguised and unrecognizable *substitute* for what had been repressed, and to this there soon become attached the same feelings of unpleasure which it was hoped had been saved by the repression" (*Lectures*, 26, emphasis in the original). Wishes may "have undergone repression, but have been able, in defiance of it, to persist in the unconscious" (*Lectures*, 46); "in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish" (*Civilization*, 68). And far from weakening its force and influence, repression strengthens a wish, since once repressed it "cannot be influenced and it is independent of any contrary tendencies" (*Lectures*, 53). However, it need not stay repressed and can be retrieved, for "in suitable circumstances ... it can once more be brought to light" (*Civilization*, 68). Those "suitable circumstances" can be provided by the well-trained psychoanalyst.

(p.31) In an attempt to further illuminate how repression works, Freud draws upon archaeological images to describe the way in which unwanted mental phenomena get buried in the unconscious. Recounting the preservation of Rome's history in the ruins and remnants of walls and buildings, he remarks: "Remnants of ancient Rome are found dovetailed into

the jumble of the great metropolis which has grown up in the last few centuries since the Renaissance. There is certainly not a little that is ancient still buried in the soil of the city or beneath the modern buildings" (*Civilization*, 69).

But Freud is not fully satisfied with the analogy. He notes that if contemporary Rome contained as much of the past as in fact is retained in the human psyche, "in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one," we'd find not only the "Pantheon of to-day, as it was bequeathed to us by Hadrian, but, on the same site, the original edifice erected by Agrippa" (*Civilization*, 69), which is not and could not be the case. Moreover, routine demolition and replacement are characteristic even of cities with relatively peaceful pasts. So while the preservation of Rome's history in its buried remains provides an image of the psyche with its forgotten but still existing memories, at the same time what is known about the psyche and its workings reveals some of the limitations of the analogy, showing us "how far we are from mastering the characteristics of mental life by representing them in pictorial terms" (*Civilization*, 70).

Freud considers one or two other possible images or models only to caution, in the end, "we are not in a position to represent this phenomenon [the "forgotten" wishes and dreams deep-sixed in the psyche] in pictorial terms" (*Civilization*, 70). But at the same time attempts to do so have not proved fruitless, for they serve to temper the certainty of the belief that all forgotten memories still exist and encourage us to **(p.32)** embrace the more qualified claim that "it is rather the rule than the exception for the past to be preserved in mental life" (*Civilization*, 71). But "preservation" [*Erhaltung*] can be misleading: the symptomatic expression of what is buried in the psyche is deferred, and the very process of unearthing it transforms or disguises many of its features. Neither the patient nor the analyst is in the fortunate and highly unusual situation of those who dug into the volcanic ash covering Pompeii and found the inhabitants and their city in much the same condition they were when Mount Vesuvius erupted.

According to Freud, then, when thoughts or wishes conflict with our strongly held ideals, we may succeed in forgetting the thoughts and wishes to avoid the pain of such conflict. But that

does not mean they disappear. Though certain pictorial analogies may help us begin to understand the repression of those wishes and the relocation of them in the psyche despite our earnest efforts to expel them, such analogies—the man thrown out of the lecture hall, the enduring remnants of a city such as Rome—aren't adequate to the task.

In addition to analogies explicitly drawn by Freud, images of expelling and tossing out appear regularly in his descriptions of the manner in which the person feeling under threat by her wishes or ideas tries to rid herself of them. This should not be surprising. According to psychoanalytic theory, the patients were repressing material they thought so disgraceful or shameful or frightening that to keep it out of the sight of others was not sufficient; they had to hide it from themselves.

Recall Freud's example in the *Lectures* of the disruptive man being tossed out of the room: "Strong men stand up and, after a short struggle, put the interrupter outside the door. So now he is 'repressed' " Or his account in *Civilization* of how a patient "seeks to dispel" "displeasure" coming from inside, to "throw it outside." Freud's descriptions of attempts to banish **(p.33)** unwanted wishes often carry a strong sense of urgency and intensity. For example, in the essay "A Childhood Recollection from 'Dichtung und Wahrheit,' " Freud recounts at some length what seems to be a common reaction of young children to the unwanted arrival of younger siblings: with a vehemence bordering on violence, they throw crockery or other breakables out the window. Freud argues that it is not just the pleasure of doing something naughty or of making something break that accounts for such behavior. No, "this 'Out!' seems to be an essential part of the magic action and to arise directly from its hidden meaning. The new baby must be got rid of [*fortgeschafft*]." ¹⁷ And if for any reason the child fears entertaining such a notion, the very thought of throwing out the new sibling must itself be thrown out. Unlike the defenestrated dishes, however, the unwanted wish can't be flung out the window. Recall:

In order to fend off certain unpleasurable excitations arising from within, the ego can use no other methods than those which it uses against unpleasure coming from

without, and this is the starting-point of important pathological disturbances. (*Civilization*, 66–67)

So, then, Freud's descriptions of patients as expelling unwanted material from consciousness, trying to dispose of it, get rid of it, are not at all unlike, indeed sometimes are compared by him to, familiar gestures of throwing stuff out, of marking material as rejectamenta ready for removal, for being hauled away, transported out of sight, rendered virtually nonexistent.

(p.34) There are differences, of course, between everyday gestures of tossing stuff out and the rejection of unwanted wishes and thoughts: not all our ordinary trash is stuff we are desperate to remove out of fear that it will provide evidence of our shameful ways. And throwing out the trash typically is something we knowingly and intentionally do. Moreover, if it isn't pawed through and confiscated by scavengers, snoops, or social scientists and other garbologists, the trash does get hauled away, probably to be commingled with that of others at the landfill or incinerator. In these ways, discarding stuff no longer wanted around the house is different from expelling thoughts and wishes so threatening that their being tossed out of consciousness does not depend, cannot depend, on our being aware of trying to do so, and the removal of which from the psyche is in fact not achieved.

Still, gestures of tossing, expelling, expurgating, and rejecting occur in descriptions of how both physical stuff and psychological matter are treated. And as an image of repressing psychological material, throwing out trash has some advantages over pitching out the boisterous audience member Freud described in the Clark Lectures: the disruptive person is depicted as distracting and unpleasant, but the image doesn't capture the fear or shame Freud suggests is so often associated with unwanted thoughts and wishes. There are lots of reasons for wanting to get something out of sight, hearing, or awareness; the reasons for the patients Freud describes include a strong sense of revulsion or shame or threat. The kinds of conflicts he notes seem to involve something like a desire to get rid of moral or aesthetic trash or rubbish, threatening proof of one's own trashy self. Though the interrupter is tossed out, he is not treated in a way that

suggests his behavior was considered shameful or fear-inducing.

(p.35) Another comparison comes to mind, especially in connection with Freud's interest in archaeology and the layered history of cities. Given his views that what gets dispatched to the unconscious moils and rumbles about, making its continued presence known through the patient's symptoms, one might compare the unconscious to a poorly functioning sewage system. We fill the latter with biological and other wastes that we flush away in hopes of never seeing or smelling them again. But when malfunctioning, such a system gets all clogged up, and our earnest efforts at expulsion are rewarded with foul odors and stinky seepage. The return of the repressed.

The suggestion being made here is not that Freud included explicit allusions to trash or waste or garbage or sewage in his efforts to illuminate the process of repression. But such analogies seem apt in capturing the nature of what he describes when thoughts and desires are repressed. That a similarity might in fact have occurred to Freud seems quite possible, given his great interest in the history of Rome, whose ancient water and sewage systems long have been among the wonders for which the city is renowned, and his rich acquaintance with London and Paris, whose notorious garbage and sewage crises involving the fouling of the Thames and the Seine must have been known to him.¹⁸ Moreover, punning on the German word for filth, in letters to his friend Fliess he described aspects of his work (including that in connection with his self-analysis) as "tramping along in the *Dreckology*," and creating "'dreckological [*Dreckologisch*] reports."¹⁹

(p.36) At the same time, though concepts of expelling, rejecting, and tossing out appear frequently in Freud's accounts, he would have been eager to downplay any suggestion that what his patients created and he treated was material fit for the trash. For several reasons he would have been very reluctant to publicly and explicitly draw attention to similarities between the contents of what his patients tried to expel and the trash and garbage and waste in backyards or front yards, on the streets or in sewers and rivers. Though it may be hard to imagine now—decades after accounts of "the triumph of the therapeutic" and debates over the powerful effects on public life of "therapeutic culture"²⁰—Freud and his

professional colleagues were vulnerable to charges that the work they were engaged in was disreputable. One reason that the reputation of psychoanalysis as a serious profession was far from well established was the assumption that Freud and others were trafficking in what was filthy, dirty, and scandalous; they delved into matters such as sexuality and excrement that were considered not proper or worthy objects of inquiry.²¹ Freud himself had said, "Dirtiness of any kind seems to us incompatible with civilization," and "We do not think highly of the cultural level of an English country town in Shakespeare's time when we read that there was a big dung-heap in front of his father's house in Stratford" (*Civilization*, 92).

(p.37) In response, Freud tried carefully to dignify the psychoanalytic project through his characterizations of the work involved. In comparing the ruins of Rome's past excavated by archaeologists to repressed material in the unconscious unearthed by psychoanalysts, he arguably was hoping to burnish psychoanalysis with a reputation for scientific aspiration (Freud did a considerable amount of undeniably scientific work early in his career).²² As Sabina Hake points out, a connection with the "historical significance" of a profession such as archaeology "validate[d] ... [psychoanalysts'] cultural preferences as members of the educated middle class." Given the "scandal of psychoanalysis," Freud usefully based "his daring advances into the realm of the unconscious on the solid foundation of tradition, at least with regard to his choice of tropes. In so doing, he gave psychoanalysis an aura of respectability."²³ And indeed, how could anything unseemly or suspect be going on if the investigations of the psychoanalyst resembled those of the archaeologist, and if Freud could explain repression using perfectly innocent scenes such as disruptive people being sent from the lecture hall?

Moreover, if Freud believed that his patients already felt shame about what they were trying so hard to keep from their own awareness, he would not want to further burden them with the possibility that the material they hoped to expel was too far outside the range of acceptable topics of conversation to be alluded to, let alone examined. Indeed, Philip Rieff has pointed **(p.38)** out that Freud's comparison of the work of the

psychoanalyst to that of the archaeologist exhibited a kind of respect for the patient.²⁴

In addition, Freud thought it crucial to retrieve what had been expelled, to uncover what had been buried: in that sense he was refusing to regard it as the kind of thing that ought to be got rid of, that was fit for the trash or the sewer. He thought that bringing it back to consciousness was crucial to the patient's recovery. There is valuable treasure there. The patient may have thought it must be trashed, that it was fit only for the rubbish bin, but the analyst knew otherwise. It was treating the material as trash that was the problem.

The Repressed as Psychic Pay Dirt?

This takes us to our second main question about Freud: did he think of the contents of the unconscious as providing epistemologically privileged information about the patient? Was combing through the detritus hauled up from the unconscious going to yield primo pay dirt about the patient?

In considering this, let's look again briefly at the various elements of the psychoanalytic picture of the patient and the analyst:

1. The patient regards something that she has thought or wished to be so repugnant, so at odds with her consciously expressed values, that it must be expelled.
- (p.39)** 2. The undesirable material is dispatched to the unconscious, but it has not thereby been got rid of: it remains in the deep recesses of the psyche.
3. The repressed material pushes to emerge from those recesses, and is resisted.
4. Nevertheless it re-emerges, albeit in a disguise: neurotic symptoms.
5. However ingenious the disguise, it can be seen through by appropriately trained and skilled analysts, who can also provide ways of dealing consciously and fruitfully with the conflict that is its cause.

The job of the analyst, as Freud saw it, is to retrieve, with the help of the patient, what has been banished to unconsciousness and make it available for inspection and possible use. Did he think that the analyst is thereby in a position to reveal information about the patient that is in some

sense “truer,” “deeper,” more epistemologically privileged than anything else about her?

There is no doubt that Freud thought of repressed material as importantly revelatory of a person’s thoughts and wishes, significant precisely because it had been rendered inaccessible to the person herself and those close to her. But it’s not clear that he regarded what was repressed as somehow *more* revelatory of the person than what she and others were more readily and consciously aware of. What gets tossed into the unconscious is in the patient’s eyes a source of shame or fear. The shame or fear arises from a perception of conflict between what one has thought or wished and strong norms making such wishes taboo. The conflict has to be recognized and dealt with to get rid of the debilitating symptoms that are caused by it and betray its continuing existence. All going well, **(p.40)**

the psycho-analytic method of treatment is then able to subject this process of repression to revision and to bring about a better solution of the conflict, one compatible with health.²⁵

The aim of the analysis is to help “effect a recovery” (*Lectures* 22). The recovery requires the unearthing of the truth that one has had certain thoughts or wishes. Also, as a result of the analysis a more complete picture of the person becomes available and in that sense a better, fuller picture of her emerges. But Freud doesn’t seem to have regarded the forgotten truths retrieved in psychoanalysis as more significant than those more readily acknowledged by the patient. They are necessary to the whole picture of the patient but do not occupy its center, however much damage their interment has done. In fact, reducing the sense of the patient’s shame or fear in having certain thoughts and wishes seems an unlikely outcome if as the result of the analysis the patient concludes that what has been revealed about her tells the “real” story about her, the big story, the heart of the story, “the dirty truth.” Freud may believe that psychoanalysis provides the best access to what has been festering in the unconscious, but that doesn’t mean he treats what is thereby unearthed as “truer” of the patient than what is more readily accessible. The patient on her way to health has integrated the formerly banished information into her understanding of herself, not

decided that she is after all simply and only the nasty girl she feared she was.

Was Freud as sanguine as William Rathje about trash providing epistemologically superior access to people's lives? Much of (p.41) what Freud says suggests that the aim of psychoanalysis as he understood it was not the "gotcha" of celebrity trash reconnaissance, or the "*j'accuse*" of narcotics agents, or the "we've got a leg up on all the other professions" of some garbage archaeologists, but rather the promise of removing a patient's neurotic symptoms, of dissolving a sense of shame rather than trying to induce it.²⁶

Attempts to "get the dirt" on someone by combing through their trash may end up throwing some "dirt" back onto the investigator. Though the cases of A. J. Weberman, the Tokyo Trash Baby, Kuralt's sanitation worker, and Freud are not the same, in each case, being understood to be a collector or scavenger of the trash of others threatens to sully one's reputation or standing. Weberman and the Trash Baby have to fight off the impression that they are just plain creepy; Kuralt's garbage hauler is eagerly presenting an interpretation of his work at odds with a much less favorable understanding of the nature of his labor; Freud hoped to benefit from having his work compared to that of an archaeologist but not to that of a sanitation worker. On the other hand, neither the narcotics agents who went after Billy Greenwood's trash, nor Rathje and his crew appear to have had to fight off being contaminated by their working closely with (p.42) others' discards. We shall consider the imputation of such contamination at much greater length in Chapter 3. But first we pause to explore a tendency in humans quite at odds with worries about people going through one's trash: unmitigated boasting over how wasteful one can afford to be.²⁷

Notes:

(1.) Serious questions remain concerning the safety of processes used to convert waste into energy.

(2.) Seth Rogovoy, "The Bob Dylan's Who's Who," <http://expectingrain.com/dok/who/w/webermanaj.html>.

(3.) PageSix.com, "Prowlers Target Celebs' Trash," *New York Post*, October 27, 2008, <http://pagesix.com/2008/10/27/prowlers-target-celebs-trash/>.

(4.) Robert Mayer, "Dylan's Having a Heap of Trouble with His Garbage Can These Days," *Toledo Blade*, May 30, 1971, C 6.

(5.) JayBird, "Someone Went through Mary Louise Parker's Trash and Told Page Six about It," *Celebitchy*, October 27, 2008, http://www.celebitchy.com/18327/someone_went_through_mary-louise_parkers_trash_and_told_page_six_about_it/.

(6.) *Tokyo Trash Baby*, directed by Ryuichi Hiroki (Arcimboldo, 2000), DVD.

(7.) *California v. Greenwood*, 486 U.S. 35 (1988). Hereafter cited as *Greenwood*.

(8.) Gordon MacDonald, "Stray Katz: Is Shredded Trash Private?" 79 *Cornell Law Review* 452 (1994): 455, 477.

(9.) *California v. Rooney*, 483 U.S. 307 (1987).

(10.) *United States v. Scott*, 975 F.2d 927 (1st Cir. 1992).

(11.) I first came across the wonderfully vivid word *rejectamenta* when reading Heather Rogers's *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* (New York: New Press, 2006).

(12.) William Rathje and Cullen Murphy, *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

(13.) Rathje's admirers include not only food waste investigators such as Jonathan Bloom, *American Wasteland: How America Throws Away Nearly Half Its Food (And What We Can Do about It)* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2010), 186, but those with broader philosophical concerns such as John Scanlan, *On Garbage* (London: Reaktion, 2005), 138.

(14.) Sigmund Freud [1910], "Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, 11: 1-56, <http://www.pep-web.org.libproxy.smith.edu:2048/document.php?id=se.011.0001a#p0003>. Hereafter cited as *Lectures*. Freud's many queries about the nature of repression began at least as early as "The Interpretation of Dreams" [1900], *Standard Edition* 5: 588-609, and include an essay entitled simply "Repression" [1915], *Standard Edition* 14: 141-158. But it is in the *Lectures* and, as we are about to see, in "Civilization and Its Discontents," that he offers vivid analogies in hopes of depicting the mechanics of repression.

(15.) Freud [1930], "Civilization and Its Discontents," *Standard Edition* 21: 57-146. Hereafter cited as *Civilization*, <http://www.pep-web.org.libproxy.smith.edu:2048/document.php?id=se.021.0057a#p0064>.

(16.) Anthony Storr has pointed out that Freud was not committed to the view that there was a piece of mental equipment called the "unconscious," and that he was content to treat "unconscious" as an adjective rather than a noun. *Freud: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 60.

(17.) Freud [1917], "A Childhood Recollection from *Dichtung und Wahrheit*," in *Standard Edition* 17: 151.

(18.) This possibility is not included, however, in Carl Schorske's delightful description of Freud's complex feelings about differences among Vienna, London, Paris, and Rome. Carl E. Schorske, "Freud: The Psycho-Archaeology of Civilizations," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Third Series 92 (1980): 52-67.

(19.) *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904*, translated and edited by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1985), 290, 291, 294, 295, 300.

(20.) See, for example, Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (New York: Harper, 1966); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in the Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978).

(21.) In an entry on Psychoanalysis that Freud contributed to the 13th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, he posits that the “strongest reason” for the “forcible rejection of the new teachings” of psychoanalysis “was undoubtedly the general disinclination of mankind to concede to the factor of sexuality the importance that is assigned to it by psycho-analysis.” “Psycho-Analysis,” *Standard Edition* 20: 269. Freud thought that the achievement of “adult sexuality” required the repression of “coprophilic elements” in the sexual instinct. “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love,” *Standard Edition* 11: 188. Ridding ourselves of intense interest in our own biological waste is among the requirements of “civilized” sexuality.

(22.) See “Abstracts of the Scientific Writings of Dr. Sigm. Freud (1877–1897),” *Standard Edition* 3: 223–257.

(23.) Sabine Hake, “*Saxa Loquuntur*: Freud’s Archaeology of the Text,” *boundary 2*, 20, no. 1 (Spring, 1993): 155–156.

(24.) Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (New York: Anchor, 1961), 45. But Rieff also points to an aggressive side of the comparison: the analyst but not the archaeologist sees the past as “an incubus on the present,” an enemy of both patient and analyst and needing to be taken control of.

(25.) Freud, “A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-analysis,” *Standard Edition* 17: 137.

(26.) In *Darwin’s Worms* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), Adam Phillips has argued that Freud was deeply skeptical about “the whole notion of getting at the truth about a person’s life” (85). Indeed, Phillips goes on, “the more Freud elaborated psychoanalytic theory the less impressed he was by the knowability of the human subject” (94). Phillips develops this view at greater length in *Becoming Freud: The Making of a Psychoanalyst* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

(27.) The New York Metro American Studies Association conference on DIRT in December 2010 provided me a welcome opportunity to give a brief presentation of some of the ideas discussed here and to meet a particularly congenial group of DIRT mavens. A considerably shorter version of this essay was delivered as the 53rd Katharine Asher Engel Lecture at Smith College and published in *The Massachusetts Review* 52, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 313–325. I'm very grateful to members of the DIRT conference, especially organizers Hildegard Hoeller and the late Patricia Yaeger, the Engel Lecture audience at Smith, and to Jim Hicks and Michael Thurston at *The Massachusetts Review*.

