

Toward a New Theory of Waste: from “Matter Out of Place” to Signs of Life.

Joshua Réno - 2014



(Max Pixel, 2022)



(Stockvault, 2022)



(National Wildlife Federation, 2022)

The Basics

WHO: JOSHUA RÉNO

WHAT: AN ARTICLE THAT ARGUES THE LABELING OF MATTER AS 'WASTE' IS AN ARBITRARY AND ANTHROPOCENTRIC TASK.

WHERE: BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY

WHEN: 2014

WHY: To deconstruct the human-animal binary in the Eurocentric eye, highlighting how waste is symptomatic of spatiotemporal continuation.

Reference: Reno, J., 2014. *Toward a New Theory of Waste: From 'Matter out of Place' to Signs of Life. Theory, Culture & Society*. New York, Binghamton University.

Question to consider:

What is 'waste' to you?



(Flickr, 2022)



(Picryl, 2022)



(PxHere, 2022)

Summary:

- ◆ Material matter has agency, therefore waste is not merely a human symptom.
- ◆ Waste is bio-semiotic as an example of life. A trail of flux (Ingold), change, vitality and embodiment of matter. (Prelinguistic communication, encoded culture). *“Organisms must engage with the world around them within the perceptual and behavioural limitations of their developing form” (Reno, 2014).*
- ◆ Waste is merely something that has been categorised based on its ‘use’ to an individual or collective. *“Waste is also material after it has been categorically rejected” (Reno, 2014).*
- ◆ Waste is symptomatic of some fundamental problems of the Anthropocene – Aka, Labelling, Human exceptionalism, Pollution. *‘when did matter stop mattering’* – (Barad, 2003).
- ◆ Human-Animal Binary – (Scat).
- ◆ In a new materiality's perspective it highlights the systems of thinking - Actor-Network theory (Law and Callon, 1982). How non human actors engage with human ones in a constantly shifting network where materials are defined and redefined in their relationships, (Recycling, Income, Raw material).

Scholarship:

- ◇ 'To purge the earth of garbage' as zero waste initiatives would have it, 'would be to destroy our own reflection'. Supporting the claim that waste acts as a symptom of human existence, (John Knechtel, 2007: 9).
- ◇ *Animals are somewhat like children. They have no clear identity and they have no bad intentions. If they deposit their excreta in my private territory, it is hardly an intrusion into my life. Animals do not intrude. However, when I suspect the owner of the dog to be behind the dog's behaviour my discomfort and disgust will grow. The owner is intruding through his dog. The neighbour's dog's shit found at my door is metonymically my neighbour's shit.* (Geest, 2007: 392) Waste is about intention or use rather than location or state; supports the concept that there is a human-animal binary.
- ◇ High and low, private and public, sanitary and unsanitary, civilised and animalistic (Stallybrass and White, 1989). Similarly to that of Darwin's theory and Mendel's Law it is how things are received.
- ◇ "Dirt is matter out of place" (Douglas, 1966). Supports the argument that something is only considered 'dirty' once it is removed from its intended use. However Douglas also has an arguably anthropocentric view of 'dirt' as a response to human activity rather than that of material agency – "rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience" (Douglas, 1966).
- ◇ "Personhood then is also in the mesh-- it may look solid from a distance, but as we approach it we discover that it is full of holes" Timothy Morton (2013). Hyper objects are real events or phenomenon so vast that it is beyond human comprehension; this supports material agency and a non human concept of waste as global disasters arguably create waste by moving matter out of place.
- ◇ Bio-Semiotic paradigm: Experimental fact and claim about code.

Key words:

- ◆ Spatio-temporal - belonging to both space and time or to space-time.
- ◆ Biosemiotics - "life" the production and interpretation of signs and codes and their communication in the biological realm.
- ◆ Human-Animal Binary - the divide that separates the human from all other animal beings.
- ◆ Symptomatic - serving as a symptom or sign, especially of something undesirable.

Activity:

Interact with the materials I asked you to bring...

- How does it feel?
- Is this waste?
- Why did you choose those materials?
- What did you interact with first?
- How do you feel?

Reference list:

- ◇ Douglas, M. (2001). 'Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo', Routledge: London.
- ◇ Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." Signs, vol. 28, no. 3, The University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 801–31, <https://doi.org/10.1086/345321>.
- ◇ Flickr, (2022). [image] Available at: <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/bike/4605158221>> [Accessed 24 January 2022].
- ◇ Knechtel J (2007). Introduction. In: Knechtel J (ed.) Trash. Cambridge, MA: Alphabet City Media/MIT Press.
- ◇ Max Pixel, (2022). [image] Available at: <<https://www.maxpixel.net/Plastic-Bottles-Network-Garbage-631625>> [Accessed 24 January 2022].
- ◇ Morton, T., (2013). Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World. Minnesota: Minnesota Press.
- ◇ National Wildlife Federation, (2022). [image] Available at: <https://rangerrick.org/crafts_activities/3-ways-to-play-in-the-dirt-to-celebrate-earth-day/> [Accessed 24 January 2022].
- ◇ Picryl, (2022). [image] Available at: <<https://cdn10.picryl.com/photo/2005/01/01/trash-and-debris-litter-the-streets-near-a-standing-house-in-downtown-banda-e0aa2f-1024.jpg>> [Accessed 24 January 2022].
- ◇ PxHere, (2022). [image] Available at: <<https://pxhere.com/en/photo/906062>> [Accessed 21 January 2022].
- ◇ Reno, J., (2014). Toward a New Theory of Waste: From 'Matter out of Place' to Signs of Life. Theory, Culture & Society, [online] 31(6), pp.3-27. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284351435_Toward_a_New_Theory_of_Waste_From_Matter_out_of_Place_to_Signs_of_Life> [Accessed 19 January 2022].
- ◇ Stallybrass P and White A (1986) The Politics and Poetics of Transgression. New York: Cornell University Press.
- ◇ Stockvault, (2022). [image] Available at: <<https://www.stockvault.net/photo/239878/birds-eating-garbage>> [Accessed 24 January 2022].
- ◇ Van der geest, Sjaak. (2013). The social life of faeces: System in the dirt. In: R. van Ginkel & A. Strating (eds) Wildness and sensation: An anthropology of sinister and sensuous realms. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, pp. 381-397 (2007).