

TRASH MATTERS:

EXPLORING DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT, AND CULTURE THROUGH GARBAGE



E-waste recyclers in China. Source: Foreign Policy, "Inside the Digital Dump"

Gallatin School of Individualized Study
New York University

Professor: Rosalind Fredericks
Office: Room 618, 1 Washington Place
Office Hours: Tues. 2-6pm
Contact: rcf2@nyu.edu

Course: IDSEM-UG1786
Semester: Fall 2014
Time: Thurs. 3:30-6:10pm
Location: Room 501, 1 Wash. Pl.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course considers the production, management, and disposal of garbage as a dynamic cultural phenomenon that can lend insight into a broad array of questions at the nexus of environment and development. Most broadly, unpacking waste's deep political and cultural dimensions provides for critical reflection on urbanism, social relations of difference, global economic processes, and people's relationships to nature. After exploring theories of waste and value, the course examines a broad selection of historic and contemporary geographies of waste from New York to Bangladesh for insight into specific debates and phenomena inscribed within these larger themes. Specific topics will include: the role of discourses and practices of waste in patterns of injustice and segregation; concepts of pollution governing debates on sustainability and the urban environment; formal and informal labors of garbage management and questions of stigma and rights to the city; global waste circulations and capitalist globalization; the transformation of value and meaning involved in diverse processes of recycling; waste-based social movements and rebellion through disorder; the art of rubbish.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To critically reflect upon the creation and destruction of value through examining discourses and practices of waste.
- To explore concepts and histories of development in a diverse set of contexts, from New York City to Bangladesh, through a close examination of the politics of consumption and disposal.
- To better understand questions of sustainability, urban ecological design, and people's relationship to nature in the city through unpacking our relationship to trash.
- To consider the role of stigmatized labor in constructing and upholding gender, race, and class difference.
- To consider our own practices of consumption and waste through examining the specific waste geographies of New York City.
- To explore a set of social movements and artistic practices derived from the creative power of waste.

REQUIREMENTS

- Class attendance, participation, and leading discussion

You are expected to read all assigned materials, attend all classes, and participate actively in discussions. If you are unable to attend class, you must let me know and come to my office hours that week. If you miss a film screened in class, you must view it in your own time. You will only be allowed one unexcused absence during the semester without penalty. Consistent lateness will be penalized as well.

You are expected to help lead class discussion for one week during the semester. Working with a partner also assigned for that week, you will be expected to make a short presentation on the week's topic (about 10 minutes) and to come up with some points of discussion for analyzing the assigned texts.

- Writing Assignments

Essay #1: Theorizing Waste

Drawing on the readings for Week 2, write a short paper describing why waste provides a particularly insightful lens into understanding environment, development, and culture. Describe the complexity of waste as a cultural phenomenon and use this to reflect on relations of uneven development, unequal social relations, and people's relationships to nature. Be sure to draw on and cite all four texts and feel free to draw from the additional readings. Length: 3-4 pages (12 pt. font, double-spaced). *Due Tuesday, September 16th.*

Essay #2: Movie Write-Up

Write an essay analyzing the film that you watched during the week of October 2nd. The analysis should briefly summarize the film but, most importantly, provide a critical analysis of how the film treats the subject at hand. Who do you think was its intended audience and how did that shape the narrative? What was the goal of the film? Did it fairly portray the

subject matter and what might have been missing? How does the film take into account the special qualities of waste? What insight is revealed? Length: 2 pages (12 pt. font, double-spaced). *Due Sunday Oct. 5th.*

Essay #3: Garbage in Gotham

Drawing on Weeks 3, 4, 6 and the field trip to Fresh Kills Park, write a short analytical paper considering the politics of garbage in New York City. You can choose your own focus, which may be the collection system, the labor force, or the contested history of disposal, but be sure to make an argument in analyzing that subject. You must cite at least 3 class readings, but feel free to draw on additional resources. Length: 5-7 pages (12 pt. font, double-spaced). *Due Sunday, October 26th.*

Essay #4: Global Garbage

Choose a topic from Weeks 8-13 on global garbage. Drawing on at least three of the course texts and 3 additional readings, provide an in-depth analysis of the topic that incorporates and goes beyond what was discussed in class. Additional reading from the syllabus and further research will help you to analyze the topic further. For instance, you could draw on a new example or geographical place to provide a comparison to the examples provided in class (e.g. examine e-waste in Ghana or garbage rebellions in South Africa). Length: 8-10 pages (12 pt. font, double-spaced). *Paper Due: Sunday, December 7th.*

Late policy: Turning assignments in on time is very important in this class. If you need to request an extension, you must do so well in advance of the assignment's due date. Unless you have received an extension from me (only granted for serious/ medical issues), lateness will be penalized as follows: each day that your paper is late, your grade will drop 1/2 of a grade point (e.g. from a B+ to a B). You are required to inform me if the paper is going to be more than two days late.

Course Grades:

Attendance/Participation/Leading Class Discussion	25%
Essay #1 Theorizing Waste:	15%
Essay #2 Movie Write-Up:	10%
Essay #3: Garbage in Gotham	20%
Essay #4: Global Garbage	30%

OFFICE HOURS and CONTACT

I will hold office hours on Tuesdays from 2:00 to 6:00pm in my office by appointment. You can sign up for office hours here: <http://goo.gl/5i46R>. If you are unable to meet during my office hours, email me to schedule a separate meeting.

Email: I am best reached by email at rcf2@nyu.edu. Although I do encourage you to stay in touch with issues of concern, I also urge you to be considerate with your emails. I will do my best to reply within 24 hours.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect,

responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

READINGS and FILMS

Required readings for the course are listed in the weekly syllabus. All readings are either available at the NYU bookstore, through the library's electronic resources (with a link on NYU Classes), or in the library's reserves. Additional readings are listed as a starting place for further research for the papers and class discussion.

Required Books

Required readings for the course are listed in the weekly syllabus. Background readings are also listed, for further research. All readings are either available through NYU Classes, in the library's reserves, or at the NYU Bookstore.

Rogers, Heather. 2006. *Gone Tomorrow: The hidden life of garbage*. New Press: New York, NY.

Nagle, Robin. 2013. *Picking Up: On the Streets and Behind the Trucks with the Sanitation Workers of New York City*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

MacBride, Samantha. 2013. *Recycling Reconsidered: The Present Failure and Future Promise of Environmental Action in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. [Also available as Ebook]

Bullard, R. D. 2000. *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (3rd ed.). Boulder: Westview Press.

Related Films

The following is a list of some relevant films which will either be screened in class or you are encouraged to watch in your own time. Some films can be viewed online and others are available in the Avery-Fischer Center at Bobst.

Wasteland (Dir. Lucy Walker) (2011)

Garbage Dreams (Dir. Mai Iskander) (2009)

Gone Tomorrow (2002)

Ghana: Digital Dumping Ground (2009). PBS.

Exporting Harm: The High-Tech Trashing of Asia (2009).

BAN

DIVE! (Jeremy Seifert)

Welcome to Lagos (PBS)

Voyage of the Mobro 4000 (2013)

Plastic Bag (Werner Herzog) (2009)

Trashed (Dir. Bill Kirkos) (2007)

T-Shirt Travels (2001)

The Clean Bin Project

Away: A Story of Trash (2011)

Other Resources

Discard Studies Blog: <http://discardstudies.com/>

Story of Stuff Project: <http://storyofstuff.org/>

MIT Trash | Track Project: <http://senseable.mit.edu/trashtrack/>

TRASH MATTERS
EXPLORING DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT, AND CULTURE THROUGH GARBAGE
COURSE SYLLABUS

Week 1. Introduction
(September 4)

Week 2. Theorizing Waste and Value: Environment, Development, and Culture
(September 11)

Moore, Sarah A. 2012. "Garbage matters: Concepts in new geographies of waste." *Progress in Human Geography* no. 36 (6):780-799.

O'Brien, Martin. 1999. "Rubbish-Power: Towards a Sociology of the Rubbish Society." In J. Hearn and S. Roseneil, eds., *Consuming Cultures: Power and Resistance*. St. Martin's.

Scanlan, John. 2005. "Garbage Metaphorics." *On Garbage*. London: Reaktion Books. Pp. 13-55

Douglas, Mary. 2004. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Routledge. [Selections]

Concepts from the Discard Studies Compendium [Selections]

Additional Reading:

Anderson, Warwick. 1995. "Excremental Colonialism: Public Health and the Poetics of Pollution." *Critical Inquiry* no. Spring:640-669.

Gregson N and Crang M (2010) Materiality and waste: Inorganic vitality in a networked world. *Environment and Planning A* 42: 1026-1032.

Hawkins G (2006). *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Hawkins, G and Meucke, S (2003) *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, Rowman and Littlefield.

Rathje, William and Cullen Murphy. 2001. *Rubbish! The Archeology of Garbage*. Tucson: U Arizona P.

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

Strasser, S. (1999): *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash*. Metropolitan Books, New York.

Swanson, Maynard W. 1977. "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909." *Journal of African History* no. 18 (3):387-410.

Week 3. The Rise of the Discard Society
(September 18)

Rogers, Heather. (2006). *Gone Tomorrow: The hidden life of garbage*. New Press: New York, NY. [Selections]

Film: *Gone Tomorrow* (Heather Rogers)

Additional Reading:

Melosi, Martin V. 2002 [1981] Introduction to *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform and the Environment 1880-1980*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

Week 4. Garbage in Gotham

(September 25)

Miller, Benjamin. 2000. *Fat of the Land: Garbage of New York -- The Last Two Hundred Years*. Basic Books. [Selections]

Burnstein, Daniel. 2006. *Next to Godliness: Confronting Dirt and Despair in Progressive Era New York City*. Urbana: U of Illinois P. [Selections]

Robinson, Joanna. 2016. *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. [Selections]

Robin Nagle, "The History and Future of Fresh Kills," in *Dirt: The Filthy Reality of Everyday Life*. London: Profile Books in association with Wellcome Collection, 2011, 186-212.

New York Solid Waste Management Plan.

Additional Reading:

Fee, Elizabeth. 1994. *Garbage! The History and Politics of Trash in New York City*. New York: New York Public Library.

Gandy, Matthew. 2002. *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Chapters 4, 5.

Griscom, J. H. 1845. *The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York*. New York: Harper & brothers.

Riis, Jacob. 1997. *How the Other Half Lives*. New York: Penguin.

Rome, A. W. 1996. "Coming to Terms with Pollution: The Language of Environmental Reform, 1865-1915." *Environmental History*, 1(3): 6-28.

Week 5. MOVIE

(October 2)

Details TBA.

Week 6. Waste Work in New York City

(October 9)

Nagle, Robin. *On the Streets and Behind the Trucks with the Sanitation Workers of New York City*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux [Selections].

Guest Lecture with Professor Robin Nagle (NYU)

Week 7. Recycling Reconsidered

(October 16)

MacBride, Samantha. 2013. *Recycling Reconsidered: The Present Failure and Future Promise of Environmental Action in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. [Selections]

Guest Lecture with Professor Samantha MacBride (Baruch College, CUNY)

FIELD TRIP TO FRESH KILLS PARK ON SUNDAY OCTOBER 19TH (10AM-1PM)**Week 8. Waste and Environmental Justice in the US***(October 23)*

Bullard, R. D. (2000). *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (3rd ed.). Boulder: Westview Press. [Selections: Chapters 1-3, 5, 6]

Additional Reading:

Girdner EJ and Smith J (2002) *Killing Me Softly: Toxic Waste, Corporate Profit and the Struggle for Environmental Justice*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Holifield R. 2004. "Neoliberalism and environmental justice in the United States environmental protection agency: Translating policy into managerial practice in hazardous waste remediation." *Geoforum* 35: 285–297.

Holifield R. 2009. "How to speak for aquifers and people at the same time: Environmental justice and counternetwork formation at a hazardous waste site." *Geoforum* 40: 363–372.

Ishiyama N. 2003. "Environmental justice and American Indian tribal sovereignty: Case study of a land-use conflict in skull valley, Utah." *Antipode* 35: 119–139.

Pellow, D. (2002). *Garbage Wars: The struggle for environmental justice in Chicago*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA.

Week 9. Toxic Exports: Global Dumping and E-Waste Recycling*(October 30)*

Basel Action Network Annual Report (2012)

Pellow, D.N. (2007): *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. [Selections: Chapter 4 "The Global Village Dump" and Chapter 6 "Electronic Waste".]

Lepawsky J and Billah M. 2011. Making chains that (un)make things: waste–value relations and the Bangladeshi rubbish electronics industry *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 93 121–39.

Film: *Exporting Harm: The High Tech Trashing of Asia*

Additional Reading:

Basel Action Network. 2002. *Exporting Harm: The High-Tech Trashing of Asia*. Seattle: Basel Action Network.

Clapp, Jennifer. 2001. *Toxic Exports: The Transfer of Hazardous Wastes from Rich to Poor Countries*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Crang, M. (2010) 'The Death of Great Ships: Photography, Politics, and Waste in the Global Imaginary', *Environment and Planning A*, 42(5):1084-1102.

Gregson, N. and Crang, M. and Ahamed, F. and Akhtar, N. and Ferdous, R. (2010) 'Following Things of Rubbish Value: End-Of-Life Ships, 'Chock-Chocky' Furniture and the Bangladeshi Middle Class Consumer', *Geoforum.*, 41 (6). pp. 846-854.

GREENPEACE (2008): *Toxic Tech: Not in Our Backyard. Uncovering the Hidden Flows of e-waste*. Greenpeace International, Amsterdam.

Klein, P. 2009. 'Ghana: digital dumping ground', *Frontline/ World*, PBS [online document].

URL: <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/ghana804/resources/ewaste.html>

Kummer, Peiry K. 2011. Basel Convention: Turning wastes into valuable resources – promoting compliance with obligations? *Environmental Policy and Law* 41 (177–80).

- Lepawsky J. (2012). "Legal geographies of e-waste legislation in Canada and the US: jurisdiction, responsibility and the taboo of production," *Geoforum* 43: 1194–206.
- Lepawsky, J and C. McNabb (2010) 'Mapping International Flows of Electronic Waste', *Canadian Geographer*, 54 (2), 177–195.
- Moore, Sarah A. 2014. "E-Waste". In Paul Robbins, John Hintz, and Sarah A. Moore. (eds.) *Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction*, pp. 299–315. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Minter, A. 2013. *Junkyard planet: travels in the billion-dollar trash trade*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Pickren G, 2014, "Political ecologies of electronic waste: uncertainty and legitimacy in the governance of e-waste geographies" *Environment and Planning A* 46(1) 26–45.

Week 10. Global Dirt: Carbon

(November 6)

Readings TBA

Guest Lecture with Professor Jerome Whittington (National University of Singapore)

Week 11. Bodily Burdens, Biocitizenship, and Toxicity: Bhopal

(November 13)

Murphy, Michelle. 2008. "Chemical Regimes of Living." *Environmental History* Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 695–703.

Linda Nash, "Purity and Danger: Historical Reflections on the Regulation of Environmental Pollutants," *Environmental History* 13: 651–658.

Mukherjee, Suroopa. 2010. *Surviving Bhopal: Dancing Bodies, Written Texts, and Oral Testimonials of Women in the Wake of an Industrial Disaster*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [Chapters 1, 3, 6] [Ebook]

Fortun, Kim. 2000. "Remembering Bhopal, Re-figuring Liability," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. Vol 2. No 2.

Additional Reading:

Birnbaum, L. S. and P. Jung (2011). "From Endocrine Disruptors To Nanomaterials: Advancing Our Understanding Of Environmental Health to Protect Public Health." *Health Affairs* 30(5): 814–823.

Broughton, Edward. 2005. "The Bhopal disaster and its aftermath: a review" *Environmental Health: A Global Access Science Source* 2005, 4:6

Carson, Rachel, Darling, et al. (1962). *Silent spring*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin.

Dillon, L. (2013). "Race, Waste, and Space: Brownfield Redevelopment and Environmental Justice at the Hunters Point Shipyard." *Antipode*.

Everest, Larry. *Behind the Poison Cloud: Union Carbide's Bhopal Massacre*. Chicago: Banner, 1986.

Fortun, Kim. 2001. *Advocacy After Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gregg Mitman, Michelle Murphy, and Christopher Sellers, eds., 2004. *Landscapes of Exposure: Knowledge and Illness in Modern Environments*, Osiris, vol. 19. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jody A. Roberts and Nancy Langston, "Toxic Bodies/Toxic Environments: An Interdisciplinary Forum," *Environmental History* 13 (October 2008): 629–635.

Nash, L. L. (2006). *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge*.

Berkeley, University of California Press.

Nixon, Rob. "Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 13 (2007): 14–37.

Petryna, Adriana. *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl*. Princeton:Princeton UP, 2002.

Sinha, Indra. 2009. *Animal's People*. Simon & Schuster.

Week 12. Waste Livelihoods: The Zabaleen of Cairo

(November 20)

Woods, Elliott D. 2011. "Garbage City: For Cairo's Coptic Christians, the future may rise from what others discard." *Virginia Quarterly Review*. Spring 2011, Vol. 87 Issue 2, p4-27.

Fahmi, Wael and Keith Sutton. 2010. "Cairo's Contested Garbage: Sustainable Solid Waste Management and the Zabaleen's Right to the City." *Sustainability* 2, 1765-1783.

Kuppinger, Petra. 2014. "Crushed? Cairo's Garbage Collectors and Neoliberal Urban Politics." *JOURNAL OF URBAN AFFAIRS*, Volume 36, Number S2, pages 621–633.

Melissa Leach & Mariz Tadros. 2014. "Epidemics and the Politics of Knowledge: Contested Narratives in Egypt's H1N1 Response." *Medical Anthropology* 33:3, 240-254.

Additional Reading:

Fahmi, Wael Salah. 2005. "The impact of privatization of solid waste management on the Zabaleen garbage collectors of Cairo." *Environment and Urbanization* 17; 155-170.

Furniss, Jamie. 2012. *Metaphors of Waste: Several ways of seeing "Development" and Cairo's Garbage Collectors*. PhD Dissertation, Oxford University.

Hayami Y, Dikshit AK, and Mishra SN (2006) Waste pickers and collectors in Delhi: Poverty and environment in an urban informal sector. *Journal of Development Studies* 42: 41–69.

Myers GA (2005) *Disposable Cities: Garbage, Governance and Sustainable Development in Urban Africa*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Zapata, Maria Jose and Hall, Michael. 2013. *Organising Waste in the City: International Perspectives on Narratives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Film: Garbage Dreams, New York: Iskander Films, Inc; Cinema Guild, 2009.

NO CLASS Thanksgiving Holiday

(November 27)

Week 13. Waste and Rebellion

(December 4)

Moore, Sarah A. (2009) "The excess of modernity: Garbage politics in Oaxaca, Mexico." *Professional Geographer* 61: 426–437.

Fredericks, Rosalind. 2013. "Disorderly Dakar: The cultural politics of garbage in Senegal's capital city." *Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol 51(3): 435-458.

Liboiron, Max. "Tactics of Waste, Dirt and Discard in the Occupy Movement." *Social Movement Studies* 11, nos. 3-4 (2012): 393-401.

Week 14. Designing Waste Solutions and The Art of Rubbish

(December 11)