

## SCENES OF TRASH: AESTHETIC ORDER AND POLITICAL EFFECTS OF GARBAGE IN THE HOME

LAURA MOISI

[moisilau@gmail.com](mailto:moisilau@gmail.com)

Laura Moisi studied Cultural History and Theory at the Humboldt University in Berlin, where she completed her Master of Arts with a thesis on “The Verdict of Things: Reflections on a Political Ecology of Non-Human Entities.” She is currently a research assistant and PhD Candidate in the DFG-research group “Automatisms” at the University of Paderborn in Germany. In her work she focuses on the intersection of material culture, discard studies and political theory. Her PhD thesis explores the political significance of garbage-disposal in the home and the cultural meaning of trash. Her research interests lie in the field of political philosophy, media ecology, feminist thought, and material culture studies.

### KEYWORDS

non-humans, the nonhuman, aesthetic order, discard studies, cultural theory, feminist thought, political philosophy

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# Scenes of Trash: Aesthetic Order and Political Effects of Garbage in the Home

## Abstract

The article discusses the role that non-humans and simple everyday objects play in political matters. It relates ideas of political theory to recent work in discard studies by asking how certain narratives and cultural appropriations of waste shape the way that political ideas are articulated. The paper employs Jacques Rancière's understanding of politics as a distribution of the sensible with respect to acts of disposing of waste in the home. At issue are politically relevant distinctions such as those between private matters and public concerns, visible and invisible spheres of participation, clean and dirty work. The article explores how, on the one hand, visions of modernity and the future are expressed through the meaning of waste and how trash, on the other hand, is articulated in political terms. The approach is interdisciplinary, ranging from political philosophy and feminist thought to cultural theory, with a specific interest in phenomena that address politically relevant issues through the language and aesthetics of waste.

## 1 Introduction: The Politics of Things

Perhaps our panic about our own filthiness, as much as our ambition and curiosity, is what has sent us running to the stars.<sup>1</sup>

Non-human artifacts and simple everyday objects are deeply involved in the way we think about political questions. The things that become politically relevant can be as grave and hazardous as nuclear waste or polluted water, or as ordinary and uneventful as a free plastic bag in the supermarket. Objects present themselves as political beings when they make a difference: a difference with respect to issues of equality, with regard to forms of exclusion, or in relation to revolt and dissent — when they become “matter [that] comes to matter.”<sup>2</sup> The politics of things can be witnessed in very different ways: in protests against the global exploitation of water and crops; in the phenomenon of green or ethical consumption, that is, the idea of moral responsibility when it comes to buying clothes or toys; in issues of environmental injustice and the distribution of environmental risks and benefits, as, for instance, in situations where toxic materials and pollution harm the health of those living in marginal communities and poorer economic areas. Likewise, specific objects and items of clothing, such as the *hoodie*, figure as a symbol for racial profiling as well as a sign of political dissent and emancipation. These forms of political protest, discrimination, and crisis point to an undervalued field of research within the study of culture: the involvement of things in our understanding of

systemic injustice and political action. Asking to what extent simple objects are not just neutral participants in human existence, but rather vitally involved in the realm of politics — in issues of justice and equality — points to new questions in material culture studies and political thought.

Authors such as Jane Bennett, Bruno Latour, and Mel Y. Chen have recently provided distinctive accounts of the political agency of non-human entities — for example, worms, stem cells, electricity, metal, toxins, and food.<sup>3</sup> While Latour has generally challenged traditional assumptions of nature-culture binaries in the social sciences, pointing to the fundamental entanglement of human and non-human agency, Jane Bennett has spelled these ideas out in terms of a vital materialism in her book *Vibrant Matter*. Mel Y. Chen, in turn, has articulated how matter that is considered inanimate, still, or deadly spurs debate around sexuality, race, and affect. In her book *Animacies*, Chen explores the blurry division between the living and the dead, subject and object, human and animal.

Although the methodologies of these authors differ, their work manifests a shift from focusing exclusively on the deliberate participation of human subjects to inquiring into the role of non-human entities in thinking about cultural and political issues. The idea behind this perspective is that some crucial political processes emerge not only through deliberate choices and communication, but also through the way that we interact with things on a daily basis. From this perspective, focusing on the role of ordinary objects with regard to political issues also entails a shift from imagining the political sphere as a well-defined space of action to seeing it as a messier and more entangled realm.

As Noortje Marres points out, considering the political engagement of things implies not simply the *extension* of already-existing concepts of representative democracy to include non-humans, but rather amounts to a transformation of the category of political participation itself.<sup>4</sup> Asking how, not if, material participation occurs, Marres foregoes the question of whether material things are “in and of themselves” capable of political agency. Instead, she argues for a perspective in which the political engagement of things is not to be thought of as competing with human political agents, but as closely intertwined — a situation we can already observe in everyday life.<sup>5</sup> As Marres emphasizes, by “locating participation in everyday material practices,” we already grant ma-

terial objects a central role in political engagement, especially when it comes to domestic life and the politics of sustainability.<sup>6</sup> This perspective on the active involvement of things in our social and political lives poses new questions for the study of culture: How are political processes mediated by objects? What role do things play in transforming the spheres of political action, from public zones to private households? Why is it that politically motivated material practices “are frequently criticized or disqualified as improper or ineffective forms of engagement, in part because of the way they entangle subjects in contingent, everyday and often dirty stuff”?

In this paper, I discuss the politics of non-human entities with a specific focus on dirty stuff: household garbage and the everyday routines of producing, separating, and discarding waste. With reference to the political thought of Jacques Rancière, I argue that waste and waste-disposal practices contribute to an aesthetic order that places not only things, but also individuals, on symbolic scales of cleanliness, worthiness, and belonging. Drawing on Rancière’s notion of politics as a “distribution of the sensible,”<sup>7</sup> the paper discusses how objects labelled as trash can be thought of as politically implicated non-human agents. Given the prevalence of other approaches to the nonhuman, such as eco-criticism, new materialism, or actor-network theory, an engagement with aesthetic regimes that structure perceptions of waste may contribute to a further understanding of non-human agency in issues of inequality. While research into the agency of non-human entities mostly emphasizes the uncontrollable agency of “vibrant matter,”<sup>8</sup> the notion of an aesthetic regime highlights the role of a precedent division of the world into those who matter and those who don’t. The key role that the aesthetic dimension — sense and perception — plays in Rancière’s political understanding allows for an analysis of the implication of physical matter in maintaining or disrupting a symbolic social order.

In the following section, *Aesthetic Regimes and the Politics of Waste*, the paper introduces the notion of an aesthetic regime, as employed by Jacques Rancière, relating it to the political effects of waste. Then, section three, *Political Ecologies of the Home*, deals with ideas and metaphors of human bodily processes that guided structural developments of the home in general and kitchen designs in particular in the early twentieth century. The fourth section, *Cooking, Cleaning and Scrubbing: The Work of Waste*, traces narratives of waste in the literature on standardizing and optimizing housework, as addressed by Christine Frederick’s *Household Engineering: Scientific*

*Management in the Home* in the 1920s, and as exemplified in the Frankfurt kitchen, designed by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky in 1927. Finally, the last part of the article, *Material Engagement and the Aesthetic of Ecology*, discusses the recent discourse of sustainability, recycling, and the paradigm of ecology with regard to the political relevance of trash today. The main point this paper drives at is that politics transcends the sphere of the ‘official’ public and may occur in the private, domestic lives of individuals. The goal is to show how the “wastescapes”<sup>9</sup> of the home and the ordinary practices of producing, concealing, and recycling waste are entrenched in ideas about civility, ecology, and personhood.

## **2\_Aesthetic Regimes and the Politics of Waste**

The notion of politics as employed in the present paper is based on a central idea in Jacques Rancière’s work on political thought: namely, that politics comes down to a “partitioning of the sensible,”<sup>10</sup> to the formation and disruption of a specific order of hearing, seeing, and being. Rancière presents an account in which political situations are inseparably connected to the sphere of aesthetics and questions of perception. He argues that the fact that some individuals are considered political beings, while others are not, is not a result of deliberate argumentation, but of a preceding sensual division of the world into beings that can speak and others can only utter sounds.

In this account, politics refers to “the configuration of a specific world, a specific form of experience in which some things appear to be political objects, some questions political issues or argumentations and some agents political subjects.”<sup>11</sup> As Rancière points out, “(s)peaking of the ‘space’ of democracy is not a mere metaphor,” but rather refers to the “distribution of places, boundaries of what is in or out, central or peripheral, visible or invisible.”<sup>12</sup> The notion of a partitioning of the sensible refers to the idea that some political structures and hierarchies are not simply expressed through abstract concepts and arguments, but rather appear as “perceptive givens.” Speaking of an aesthetic regime in these terms indicates that, before we engage in deliberate debates about politics, we already have “evidence of a perceptive universe”<sup>13</sup> — an order of seeing, speaking, and being — in which all arguments operate, a universe which characterizes the voices of some individuals as capable of expressing meaningful sentences, while the voices of others are considered as “noise.”<sup>14</sup>

It is important to note that this aesthetic order, the confinement of human voices to specific traits and abilities, is also a configuration of a world in which things cohere in a certain way, while political emancipation is the disturbance of this coherence. With regard to the notion of political ecologies, humanity can be thought of as “coarticulated” with animality and inanimate matter “in ways that are soundly implicated in regimes of race, nation, and gender, disrupting clear divisions and categories that have profound implications ramifying from the linguistic to the biopolitical.”<sup>15</sup> Given this characterization of politics, we can ask in what way the appearance of household garbage, and the acts pertaining to it, are part of such an aesthetic configuration of the world. This account of the politics of waste attempts to add to the idea that the “enactment of the political principle rarely — if ever — appears in its purity, but there is politics in a lot of ‘confused’ matters and conflicts.”<sup>16</sup> In this regard, I want to discuss how the daily routine of producing and disposing of waste amounts to a specific aesthetic order — a regime that defines the spaces which individuals and objects are meant to occupy.

The meaning of the words *garbage*, *trash*, and *waste* differs in historical uses and etymology. While garbage refers mostly to food and organic waste, and waste to things that are not entirely consumed or left over, trash denotes more generally the idea that certain objects or ideas are worthless. However, when it comes to the ways we describe items that we dispose of, these words are often used interchangeably — a semantic fluidity that reflects the way trash itself is a transient category of things. Attempting to provide a definition of garbage, Michael Thompson proposes in his pioneer study *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* distinguishing three categories of objects from one another: the *durable* — an object that maintains or increases its value over time, such as works of art; the *transient* — an object that decreases in value, such as most of our everyday tools and belongings; and a third, an invisible or hidden category: namely *rubbish* — that which has zero and unchanging value.<sup>17</sup> However, when we try to capture those sensations that define the physical confrontation with garbage in words — the smell of rotten fruit, the appearance of adulterated milk and the decaying, fibrous, and fluid consistency of spoiled goods — we reach a boundary of semantic description and abstraction. As Roland Barthes once wrote, language has the ability to deny, forget, and dissolve those things that in reality exist — in other words, “when written, the word shit doesn’t smell.”<sup>18</sup>

In fact, garbage itself is an object on the edge, on the verge of being valuable or worthless, essential or redundant, visible or invisible. In many homes today, an object turns into trash as soon it is placed into the trash bin. The act of expelling and re-locating an object into the hidden container underneath the kitchen counter is what constitutes it as garbage. “Waste is an orphan object,” writes Brian Thill in his enthralling *object lesson* on waste, suggesting that waste is a kind of thing without a home, a thing that is always out of order and at the wrong place. Things that have become waste seem to “respect no boundaries; they create their own lines of flight and vectors.”<sup>19</sup>

“Garbage has a stubborn ontological persistence that I had never fully appreciated until the first day I worked with a crew,” writes anthropologist Robin Nagle.<sup>20</sup> After shadowing the daily work of sanitation workers — picking up tons of bags filled with household garbage, loading the heavy bags into the truck, and driving the trucks to collection sites on the outskirts of the city — Nagle decided to join the New York Sanitation Department herself. In her book *Picking Up: On the Streets and Behind the Trucks with the Sanitation Workers of New York City*, she describes her experiences with working with garbage, pointing to the sense of perpetuity that the presence of trash evokes:

Garbage Is, always. We will die, civilization will crumble, life as we know it will cease to exist, but trash will endure, and there it was on the street, our ceaselessly erected, ceaselessly broken cenotaphs to ephemera and disconnection and unquenchable want.<sup>21</sup>

Nagle highlights the importance of continuity and endless repetition when it comes to removing waste from private homes, from restaurants, from city streets, and the apocalyptic consequences that human beings would face if the continuous work-flow of garbage-removal should one day stop: “Just as a cessation of breath kills the being that breathes, or the stilling of tides would wreck life on earth, stopping the rhythms of Sanitation would be deadly to New York.”<sup>22</sup>

In her theory of abjection, Julia Kristeva describes abjection as “one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable.”<sup>23</sup> The sensation of disgust towards decomposed foods, mold decay, the smell of sweat gives rise to an experience that exceeds our well-defined categories of matter and life. As a sensual confrontation, which is played out through odors, touch, and physical repelling, the abject offends our self-understanding as living beings and reveals the

possibility of crossing the line between life and death, health and sickness, value and rotteness. With regard to this substantial crisis in human experience that the abject brings about, Kristeva writes that “[i]t is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”<sup>24</sup> What the abject, the rubbish, the cadaver disrupts is the very conditions — the ordering and organization principles — upon which we base our everyday routines.

### **3\_Political Ecologies in the Home**

In the following, I discuss how design concepts of the modern kitchen in the twentieth century were guided by specific political ecologies — by material structures that were meant to symbolize natural processes of bodily digestion and clean, waste-free architecture at the same time.

As Ellen Lupton and Abbott Miller point out, the modern kitchen was born at the end of the nineteenth century “out of campaigns for sanitary and social reform, the expansion of the suburban middle class, the growth of water, gas, and electric utilities, and the rise of the corporate food industry.”<sup>25</sup> What role did ideas of human nature play in designing domestic spaces of consumption? How were designers at the beginning of the twentieth century guided by technological visions of the future and notions of digestive cycles? Regarding the structural principles employed in the, Lupton and Miller note that “the modern home molds ‘consumerist’ bodies, trained to embrace the logic of the consumer economy and its cycle of ingestion and waste.”<sup>26</sup> In this regard, modern bathrooms and kitchens were built according to metaphors of natural metabolism, as rooms that would perform processes similar to the organic function of digestion.

The excretory aesthetics of the modern kitchen is particularly exemplified by the concept of *streamlining*. The then-very popular design principle was implemented in the newly developed kitchen spaces, reflecting “a surreal conflation of the organic and the mechanical” and describing “the path of a particle in fluid as it passes beyond a solid body.”<sup>27</sup> Improving the efficiency of the material work space in the kitchen by means of streamlining meant a convergence in speed, efficiency, and cleanliness. The molded forms of streamlining produced an “excretory aesthetic, a material celebration of natural and cultural digestive cycles,” simultaneously embodying the economic idea of closed substance cycles and the organic processes of natural, yet purified and clean



digestion.<sup>28</sup> The kitchen came to symbolize the production ideal of the factory space, with linear arrangements of work tables that would ensure a continuous flow of activity. The prototype of the continuous kitchen became powerful in the 1930s and has prevailed in its basic logic up to the present day.

Built according to models of rhythmic cycles of intake and excretion, modern homes were thought of as quasi-organic beings, performing rhythmic processes of digestion themselves. This animacy of the kitchen as the space for rhythmical digestion opens up a perspective in which the kitchen itself is conceived of as a dynamic, quasi-organic entity, taking commodities in and laying waste in turn. Producing waste is portrayed as something that domestic spaces do. The modern home that evolves under this paradigm of biological digestion designates a fixed place for the disposal of garbage: the dark space underneath the kitchen sink. The space of the kitchen is imagined at the crossroads of the private and public sphere — in continuous contact with the public life of consumer markets, but at the same time hidden in the private sphere of the family household. While the household represents the sphere of reproduction and private life, it also acts as the central knot in an ecological system — taking commodities inside and excreting waste outwards, which in turn spurns the national economy — combined with an aesthetics of disappearing when it comes to garbage as such.

On the one hand, garbage undergoes a *domestication* and a catharsis of its wastefulness as it acquires a permanent place in the new realm of modern homes. On the other hand, waste bins are typically located in hidden areas of the kitchen, invisible and concealed from sight, in this way adding to the idea that garbage is an orphan object — an object which, as soon as it becomes visible, has to disappear. As Brian Thill notes, it seems to be a crucial part of envisioning futuristic worlds, particularly in science fiction, to think of them as waste-free:

The ability to eliminate, contain, hide, or transcend landscapes of waste has been one of the most enduring visual and linguistic signifiers of traditional utopian science fiction [...], whereas nearly every dystopia must embed its share of trash, filth, scunge, and wreckage.<sup>29</sup>

A critical perspective on the political implication of domestic garbage becomes apparent with regard to the semantics of germ theory, which strongly influenced the design of modern kitchens. In the 1910s and 1920s, germ theory inspired the use of non-porous materials for walls, kitchen floors, and table surfaces, as well as the general shift to

built-in kitchen cabinets. The material implementation of germ theory signified the aesthetic obsession with the hygienic cleanliness of the modern kitchen.<sup>30</sup> However, the employment of a semantics of invisible danger, hidden invasion, and toxicity prompted nationalistic ideas of ‘true’ Americanhood. As Kristi Branham points out, “(t)he new germ theory that influenced reform in hygiene and standards of cleanliness at the end of nineteenth century also influenced the population’s understanding of nationalism.”<sup>31</sup> At the start of the twentieth century, germ theory — the idea “that disease was transmitted by microscopic particles” — came to replace the miasma theory, “a belief that disease and plagues were the result of a noxious or putrescent environment, or ‘bad air’.”<sup>32</sup> Germ theory shifted the possible locus of sickness, infection, and danger from specific places to specific individuals.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the assumption was that the dangers were not visible to the human eye, or perceptible by odor, and that those dangerous particles disseminate from one individual to another. The moral obligation, especially attributed to women — to keep the house clean, to expel the dirt, garbage, and suspicious materials — was thus far from a politically neutral demand. Instead, it implied metaphors of social and racial contagion. Kristi Branham argues in her essay “Hung Out to Dry: Laundry Advertising and the American Woman, 1890–1920” that “(a)vertisement campaigns for laundry products employed nationalistic ideals about the true American woman set against popular fears regarding racial contamination.”<sup>34</sup> “The symbolic war against dirt and contamination played out most prominently against those who did not meet the American white ideal.”<sup>35</sup> Branham further points out that “laundry becomes a metonymic expression of women’s love for family in order to serve corporate and nationalist interest.”<sup>36</sup> The question of garbage-disposal also operates on the semantic level of expelling suspicious, invisible dangers and toxins from the private sphere. This, then, can account for a politics of waste: First, the idea that nature recycles is built into the prototypical modern home, and second, the pronounced nationalistic undertones and racialized connotations of housework.

#### **4\_Cooking, Cleaning and Scrubbing: The Work of Waste**

The socioeconomic and political impact of domestic housework — the fact that washing dishes, putting clothes away, sweeping and mopping floors are today still unpaid or very poorly paid tasks, to a great extent performed by female migrant workers — has been addressed by a number of scholars, feminists, and researchers on the modern

care economy.<sup>37</sup> The argument that I want to develop in the following is that the routine of disposing of garbage and the moral duties of keeping a clean home as conceptualized by the home economic doctrines in the 1920s in the United States, as well as a few years later in Germany, can be thought of as an aesthetic regime of waste. The idea of standardizing housework according to principles of scientific management, a movement led by Christine Frederick in the 1920s and 1930s, presents an aesthetic order that associates female perception with dirt or cleanliness, and confines female bodies to the preparation of meals and tasks of disposing of excess.

At the time when various institutions, industries, and corporations adopted new principles of efficiency and standardization, the concept of the home was profoundly questioned, too — by designers, representatives of new markets, as well as feminist thinkers. The “industrialization of agriculture, weaving, sewing, furniture-making and other traditionally domestic forms of manufacture” of the nineteenth century led to ideas of a similar industrial centralization of housework.<sup>38</sup> Some feminist home economists developed visions of collaborative housework and housekeeping tasks performed by central civil services.<sup>39</sup> Others voiced their ideas on the future of housekeeping by attempting to transform the very meaning of housework, turning it from a degraded form of work into something as appealing as a scientific discipline, while at the same time further restricting the social mobility of women — confining them ever more resolutely to the boundaries of the home. With soap-making, sewing, and other domestic activities transferred from personal responsibility to the professionalized, industrial factories, the main tasks that housework consisted of from then on were cleaning and cooking — both types of work in which the respective products are to be consumed immediately. Housework is thus “invisible, marginalized, and devalued.”<sup>40</sup> It is the kind of work that is noticed only when it is not done — “we notice the unmade bed, not the scrubbed and polished floor.”<sup>41</sup>

The ethos of rationalized and effective housekeeping, giving rise to cultural appropriations of the figure of the housewife, was a central concern of so-called home economists in the progressive era in America. *Home economics* emerged as an academic discipline in the 1890s with the aim to guide women in spending their time and money efficiently.<sup>42</sup> In the 1920s, home economists such as Christine Frederick and Ellen Swallow Richards faced the dispute over the role of women in the home and women’s striving for political power by emphasizing the value of domestic work. They published

domestic manuals that addressed the housewife as a management professional in the home. Influenced by the movements of Taylorism and Scientific Management, Christine Frederick attempted to professionalize and standardize the kitchen. In her book *Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home*, Frederick draws upon an analogy of the modern kitchen with an industrial work space, turning the kitchen into a small private factory dedicated to consumption.<sup>43</sup> According to Nancy Walker, “the application of scientific principles to the duties of the homemaker paralleled the ‘efficiency’ movement in the nation’s industrial production, assuring women that they too could benefit in their jobs from developments in science and technology.”<sup>44</sup>

Making housekeeping attractive to middle-class women meant re-conceptualizing housework away from the physical effort and labor associated with poorer economic classes.<sup>45</sup> Instead, housework that would be performed with the right technique and standardization method was portrayed as work that was not only clean, but that would be respected as a profession. Frederick aspired to transform the social status of domestic duties from devalued work to a profession performed by means of efficient methods, knowledge, and equipment.<sup>46</sup> The moral groundings of housework are narratively exposed in terms of care for the family, while, as Walker points out, in post-war America, the family came to serve as a metaphor for the nation: “The family was rhetorically posited as equivalent to the nation, so that a women’s domestic duty was also her patriotic duty.”<sup>47</sup>

Another narrative that gave rise to new concepts of housework was the so-called servant problem, an issue framed by women’s magazines and advertisements for household technology as the lack of servants in the home due to socioeconomic transformations. New tools, machinery for baking and cooking, vacuum cleaners, and washing machines were described as technological servants. The intense debate and discourse around the service problem during the first half of the twentieth century and the underlying assumption of middle-class women that housework ought to be done by servants, “has helped to perpetuate the consistent devaluation of housework and the social superiority that middle-class women (usually white) feel towards the women (often of color) whom they hope to hire.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the framing of the problem with housework as a problem with the lack of servants cemented housework as a kind of service performed — a service for the family, the nation, the economy. In effect, the solution to the servant problem was not found in the “liberating force of technology, but in the

continued gendering of housework, administered by a wife or mother who is at once mistress and maid, industrialist and three-shift-laborer.”<sup>49</sup>

The principles of standardized and efficient housekeeping presupposed that there is “a definite place for each article,” for each single tool and object in the kitchen.<sup>50</sup> The spatial fixture of the objects used for cooking, cleaning, and disposing of waste transformed the very concept of the kitchen as a space. The kitchen turned into a space defined primarily by time measurements and anticipated movements. The call for standardization and rationalization of housework, which implied a strict regulation of women’s time and effort, was legitimized by promising to relieve women of the “drudgery” of housework.<sup>51</sup> In fact — and not at all surprisingly — the time women actually spent on household duties significantly increased from the 1920s to the 1950s.<sup>52</sup>

“Garbage disposal is part of the kitchen problem,” writes Frederick in one of her manuals.<sup>53</sup> She re-conceptualized kitchen work by reducing it to two basic procedures: the preparation of meals and the clearing away of left-overs and waste. Frederick especially sought to transform the space of the kitchen by reducing it to a single room, “replacing pantries with built-in cabinets” in the kitchen.<sup>54</sup> By employing the concept of “creative waste,” Frederick explicitly prompts her readers to maintain the rhythmic circulation of the consumption of goods and processes of elimination intact.<sup>55</sup> In her literature on home management, the domestic space is transformed into a place in which the consumption of goods, the production of meals, and the expelling of garbage involves a cyclical relation. Garbage is simultaneously produced as a positive entity, as something that exists on its own, while being regulated and incorporated into the everyday routines of household work. The ethos of disposal in modernist kitchen spaces as adopted by Christine Frederick involved the cultural production of garbage: through the systematic disposal of garbage and the nationalistic-economic value of *creative waste*, garbage is conceived of in positive terms. In this account, throwing garbage out of the house can be a pleasurable act because it entails the announcement of other items in the future.

Frederick’s experiments in standardized housekeeping, supported by the *Ladies’ Home Journal* beginning in the 1910s, “had a profound impact on the modern kitchen, both in the United States and in Europe.”<sup>56</sup> When Frederick’s *Scientific Management in the Home* was translated into German in 1922, the discourse on professionalizing

housework and turning the kitchen into a tiny, efficient factory also emerged in Germany, culminating in the so-called Frankfurt kitchen designed by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky in 1927.

The Frankfurt kitchen is based on exact measurements of the anticipated workflow, and it became an idealized model for the kitchen as a modern work station. The Frankfurt kitchen typically has an opening for the waste produced during the cooking processes: a built-in slot, into which the domestic waste can instantly disappear. Schütte-Lihotzky's model served as a forerunner for the continuous kitchen, which by the 1930s had become the standardized model for kitchen designs across Europe and the US. The kitchen is turned into the work-kitchen, a tiny room with *metabolic functions*: heating, cooking, food storage, water supply, and removal of waste. As Joachim Krause points out in an interview with Renate Flagmeier on the Frankfurt kitchen, the principle of space-time economy as implemented in this model transforms the very meaning of what a kitchen is, turning it into a space defined by exact measurements of time and movements. As Krause emphasizes, it is remarkable that the extreme limitation of space in the Frankfurt kitchen, compared to previous arrangements and room layouts, is presented as an advantage and improvement in comfort, efficiency, and relief of work load.<sup>57</sup>

The emergence of modernized homes accounted for a domestication of garbage insofar as waste bins were now placed in a hidden corner of the built-in structures of the kitchen. At the same time, the standardization of housework contributed to an incorporation of practices of expelling. The standardization of housekeeping tasks turned motions of disposal — throwing dirt, garbage, rotten food, and packaging materials out of the home — into anticipated movements, included in the space-time economy of rationalized housework. Meanwhile, the specific motions of disposal, the time interval, and location of the bin were meant to fit the female body, which served as the standard model for putting the work-kitchen into practice.

The home as a gendered space — and trash disposal as an unpleasant practice — points to a crucial characteristic in the aesthetic regime of housework and issues of equality. While the standardization of housework operated with the promise of objective and scientific principles, the home persisted as the sphere of the particular, the private. Crucially, the home kept imposing a moral duty on each individual female living in it — mothers, daughters, and wives. In spite of the visions of early home

economists that housework, as soon as it was professionalized, would be perceived as a respectable and influential occupation — not only by family members, but also by the public community — the home persisted as the sphere of *invisible* work and the subjects performing the work were continually devalued. The home as a private space, inhabited by particular individuals, continued to exist in contrast to the public realm, inhabited by equal citizens. While women were expected to spend their time on tasks and duties of cleanliness, health, and hygiene, they were denied the ability to concern themselves with public matters. The lessons of efficient housekeeping served to control the time and effort put into domestic tasks and to associate female perceptual abilities with the sphere of the particular, the private, the personal. Seeing and removing dirt before it is overtly noticeable, disposing of decomposed goods before they begin to smell, taking out the trash before it becomes visible — these are forms of specifically disciplined perception, with trash and dirt imposing the discipline within the parameters of housework and the ideal of the clean and hygienic home.

In light of the feminist protests and movements of the 1960s and 1970s, activists attempted to disrupt the regime of gendered housework by challenging the idea that cleaning kitchen floors, ironing clothes, and washing dishes are simply personal matters. There are two things to note here. First, the home itself was turned into a political matter, challenging the distinction between those who are able to address public matters and those who are not. Second, there was a substantial shift as regards the objects, material arrangements, and the scope of domestic life: feminist activists insisted that those occupations and objects that were thought to be personal matters were things that concerned everyone. As domestic practices — such as washing dishes, cleaning the floor, and emptying trash bins — become politically conflicted and contested actions, the things themselves turned from simple, particular tools into political objects, suddenly charged with moral content, such as persisting injustice. Things making up the material layout of home — the unmade bed, the dirty laundry, or the pile of dishes in the sink — were probed as to their involvement in a history of inequality.

To sum up, the political role of garbage in this broad historical scenario is threefold. First, practices of disposal are part of those tasks in housekeeping that go unnoticed until they are no longer done. Thus, garbage disposal is, along with cleaning and cooking, a factor contributing to the invisibility and devaluation of housework. Second, garbage presents a semantic field addressing questions of hygiene, cleanliness, and fears

of disease and contamination, and thereby provides and sustains bio-political nationalistic narratives of inclusion and exclusion that tend to focus on the status of marginalized individuals. The recursive appeal of dirt, infection, and extrinsic dangers that are invisible spurred a heightened awareness of national boundaries and patriotic narratives. Although it is conceived of as a private sphere, the home becomes a practical and discursive model for the nation — a kind of tangible, live metaphor enacting and enforcing ideas of nationhood and proper belonging. The encouragement of women to feel morally responsible for keeping a clean home is played out against social conflicts of class and race. This points to a fundamental entanglement between the control of women's time, the management of their energies and bodies and the perpetuation of a symbolic order of cleanliness and dirt that targets racialized others, specifically African Americans. The entrenched racism that marked African Americans as less clean and American than whites resulted not only in a symbolic proximity to waste, but one that expressed itself in a very physical way. African Americans were forced to live in areas that often lacked sewers, toilets, or garbage collection services, where rents were “notoriously high, often being doubled when African American families moved in.”<sup>58</sup> Despite adopting new hygiene practices, the structural inequalities in sanitation, housing, and health made African Americans more vulnerable to sicknesses, health risks, and deaths than those living in largely white neighborhoods.

Third, middle-class women were addressed by marketing campaigns and advertisements as powerful and privileged, insofar as they had access to technological devices for housework tasks, which was again narratively framed as having someone or something else — in this case, technological *servants* — to do the work for them, and thus sustaining the common order of tasks and roles into higher and lower, privileged and subordinate.

## **5\_Material Engagement and the Aesthetics of Ecology**

In light of today's discourse of ecology, sustainable consumption, and recycling practices, we can observe another fundamental shift in what it means to dispose of garbage and why it is a political matter. Today, taking out the trash means separating different kinds of trash from one another and placing them in differently colored bins. What role does recycling play in the concept of a sustainable community? Recycling one's own



garbage — separating it into neatly defined categories — is interpreted as a political action, a “material participation.”<sup>59</sup>

While the kitchen designs of the twentieth century employed certain ideas of waste in their makeup and designated a specific space for garbage, the trash bin was usually not the most innovative part of the design process. In constructing the modern kitchen, designers did not seriously consider the location of garbage bins; they were simply hidden away underneath the kitchen sink.<sup>60</sup> However, the next steps in kitchen design, some designers argue, will deliberately focus on garbage disposal. With regard to future kitchen designs and domestic waste, Jonathan and Patricia Poore write: “Our absolute need to look at garbage differently will bring about the next sweeping change. Look for build-in composters and vented cabinets, chutes that carry used materials to storage bins in the cellar or yard, base cabinets that are actually rolling bins.”<sup>61</sup>

Whereas the kitchen models of the 1920s were guided by normative ideas on how modern homes can contribute to national-economical citizenship — through consumption and creative wasting — today, the politics of garbage disposal is played out with regard to global citizenship and globally pressing environmental issues. In the face of the transformation of the home into a political zone, where subjects play out their self-understanding as global citizens through the ethics of sustainable consumption and recycling practices, proposals for new kitchen designs are emerging. The design label Böttcher und Hensel, for example, created a product called New Order, in which domestic waste is collected in a series of colored bags hanging on the wall. New Order won a design competition for “groundbreaking recycling techniques” in Berlin in 2011, which was organized by the city’s waste management company (Berliner Stadtreinigungsbetriebe).<sup>62</sup> The designers attempt to offer a novel system for organizing and separating household waste, a system that is supposed to add to the aesthetic appeal of waste, while at the same time contributing to sustaining the environment.<sup>63</sup>

While the design does present a disruption in the aesthetic order of household waste, which is otherwise hidden behind wall cabinets, it is remarkable that the design product aspires to blend the experience of *fun recycling* with environmental awareness and a very exclusive aesthetic taste. This *stylish* kind of recycling would then indeed account for an aesthetization of trash, but only for the rather ‘clean kind of waste,’ such as paper or packaging. The salience of the messy materiality and obtrusive vitality of waste

might be rather limited. A second noteworthy issue behind the New Order product series is that, because the individual elements are, in effect, bags, they are supposed to be used for shopping as well as for organizing the subsequently generated rubbish, and thereby maintain the deeply rooted idea of a closed substance cycle and natural ecology of the digestive household.

In effect, the environmental discourse on garbage and recycling reduces the political impact of waste to one factor: a human disruption in the harmony of nature. While the global and environmental dangers of the excessive production of garbage are very real issues, by framing the problem solely in terms of *ecology*, we trivialize and distort the messy entanglements of social, economic, and political processes that account for the notorious magnitude of waste today: plastic bags destroying animal wildlife, endangered plant and animal species, diseases and health hazards, giant amounts of food being wasted. We effortlessly turn from the ethics of consumption to the ethics of sustainability, while the aesthetic regime of disappearing continues to dominate our encounter with trash.

By viewing the production of garbage as a basic human behavior in opposition to a self-contained sphere of nature or ecology, we ignore the perspectives of garbage that point to other forms of human and non-human labor. Throwing things into the garbage bin, we usually take for granted that somebody else will have to take care of our garbage once it is out of our hands and homes. Out of sight, out of mind — the aesthetics of disappearing builds upon an aesthetic regime in which there are others — other bodies, other hands, other machines — that will make sure we won't be confronted again with the garbage we have produced. In the face of contemporary environmental discourse, the problem with garbage today is often framed as a problem with individuals or groups that do not recycle, that allegedly don't care about nature, accusations often brought against individuals on the margins of society — the poor, the immigrants, the uneducated. This points strikingly to the way that garbage draws new boundaries in social structures and defines spaces of belonging to a political, ethically aware community. Thus, earlier forms of nationalistic narratives and constructions of belonging are continued in a transformed manner.

To give just one example: social tensions and nationalistic attitudes arose with regard to hygiene and garbage disposal in a recent case of racialized stigmatization and attacks on a community of Roma living in Germany.<sup>64</sup> A few years ago, immigrants

from south-eastern Europe — many among them belonging to Roma ethnicities — moved into a building in the Duisburg suburb of Hochfeld, a building which soon became the focus of media coverage and antiziganist tension among residents in the area. Several media reports, referring to the building simply as the “problem house,” employed images of garbage and waste as the dominating feature in their narrations.<sup>65</sup> Pictures of piles of garbage in front of the building were dominant in the visualizations accompanying the articles. The reports also quoted residents in the Duisburg district who started citizens’ initiatives and campaigns to stop further Roma immigration. When asked about the misconduct of the unwanted neighbors, some of the main reasons given by residents were that the Roma were very noisy, produced a lot of garbage, and did not separate their waste.<sup>66</sup> The piles of trash that were employed in the articles clearly meant to serve as a way of negotiating the political status of certain individuals and refusing them political rights and equality.

The racialized narratives in the conflict in Duisburg were not only built upon the idea that the practice of separating household waste is a natural trait of worthy citizenship and ethical personhood. In addition to that, the alleged unhygienic behavior and unruly practices of garbage disposal were presented as traits of an inherently flawed and culturally deviant Roma community. In hostile nationalistic election campaigns and in some of the media coverage, the Roma are strategically portrayed as an ethnic group naturally close to dirt, trash, and garbage in order to question their social belonging. A semantics of “toxicity” and “animality”<sup>67</sup> is employed as a way of delegitimizing the political claims of the Roma.

## **6\_Summary**

In light of the examples presented in this paper, acts of disposing of waste can be seen as political engagements with an aesthetic regime. On the one hand, the history of kitchen design, as well as the New Order recycling bags, is meant to illustrate how the disposal of waste is deeply rooted in ideas about nature-culture, civil engagement, ecology, and personhood. On the other hand, the case of the racialized semantics of garbage is meant to show how a marginalized ethnic group can have its potential political claims muted by being narratively and visually placed in close proximity to waste.

The examples described in this paper depict Rancière's notion of a "distribution of the sensible" in terms of a symbolic order that characterizes some individuals as worthy, clean, and proper, and others as minor, suspicious, negligible. The intersection between race and gender that is at play in the discussions around housework, care work, or dirty work highlights the idea of an aesthetic regime that allocates spaces, occupations, and capabilities to female bodies and people of color. Meanwhile, the abject, which marks some individuals as below, as servile, and their voices as silent, also has the power to disrupt that same order. As a trace left behind in daily life, waste can be understood not only as matter out of place, denoting the displacement of things considered abject, but also "as a sign of life," as Joshua Reno has recently argued,<sup>68</sup> as a testimony to the lives of others.<sup>69</sup> As a witness to the experiences of others, and as matter on the border of what is visible, tangible, and discursive, waste may thus act as a haunting trace indicative of systemic injustice, pointing to the need for a critical revision of concepts of humanity and equality. In this regard, entities left behind and considered trash may have also the potential to bring about a disruption in the symbolic social order.

This outline of a politics of things sketches new research questions for the study of culture that must be further spelled out. The general claim of the paper is that politics takes place not only in official organizations and institutions, but also in everyday interactions with ordinary objects, in unremarkable acts within the private realm. This overview of a politics of waste provides a way of thinking about the involvement of non-human entities in political issues, in concepts and visions of the future, in emerging technologies and the collective dealing with contemporary global challenges. More specifically, we need to take a closer look at the political functions that are exerted by non-humans — their role in maintaining a status quo, or their potential to disrupt perceptual regimes of evidences — as, for example, when it comes to confronting issues of equality and marginalized identities. This being said, exactly because of the often microscopic and unremarkable character of how these objects and tools perform their roles, the task at hand is difficult. It calls for a micro-perspective on the routine acts and perceptual habits of everyday life — on the boring and regular, on what is usually occupying the least overt attention, explicit deliberation, or exercises of creativity. In this regard, the present essay could only provide an initial perspective that is in need of further elaboration.

In terms of feminist accounts on housework, we could ask, for instance, what the contemporary ethos of sustainability — and the underlying idea of an issue that concerns everyone equally — is doing for demands of political and economic equality. Today, domestic service has become a globalized economy, with thousands of migrant female worker leaving their homes every year to take care of children, households, and the growing numbers of the elderly abroad. Housework is thus often performed by female migrants, poorly paid and in insecure employment situations. When recycling becomes the prevalent imperative in consuming commodities, emptying waste bins and taking out the trash, how does this transform the political meaning of domestic work? What does this tell us about the possible forms and mechanisms of non-human agency? One point in this regard is the power of things to embody abstract principles upon which societies rely and understand themselves in the form of a basic perceptual reality. In the nationalistic-economical setting of garbage disposal, the political agency of things is played out through perceptual evidence of cleanliness, excretion, personal hygiene, and health with reference to abstract principles of germs, contamination, and extrinsic dangers. The threats and risks of an unclean home are tacitly aligned with the dangers associated with the poor, the working class, or racialized others. In environmental discourse, on the other hand, colors and symbols such as the green dot, the yellow garbage bin, or the recyclable paper bag function as perceptual symbols of an abstract idea of ecology. The practices of separating garbage, sorting plastic cups, packaging, bottles, and cans into neatly defined categories turns the global, politically swamped and messy problem of garbage into a clearly defined ethical problem of individuals and their private homes. Risks and dangers in this regime of ecology are attributed to those who are seen as unwilling, unable, or unmotivated to participate in the everyday practices of ecological sustainability. In the end, the question is what political impact ethical commodities, elaborated garbage disposal tools and new technologies, ecological visions, and eco-friendly designs of the home will have in shaping the way we live together in a globalized world.

## **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Brian Thill, *Waste (Object Lessons)* (New York/London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 49.
- <sup>2</sup> Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.3 (2003), 801–831, here: 801.

- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010); Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Matterings and Queer Affect* (Duke University Press, 2012).
- <sup>4</sup> Noortje Marres, *Material Participation: Technology, the Environment and Everyday Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Marres, *Material Participation* (cf. note 4), 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Marres, *Material Participation* (cf. note 4), 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Jacques Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics,” in *Reading Rancière*, eds. Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (London/New York: Continuum, 2011), 1–17, here: 7.
- <sup>8</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (cf. note 3).
- <sup>9</sup> Thill, *Waste* (cf. note 1), 12.
- <sup>10</sup> Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus” (cf. note 7).
- <sup>11</sup> Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus” (cf. note 7), 7.
- <sup>12</sup> Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus” (cf. note 7), 6.
- <sup>13</sup> Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus” (cf. note 7).
- <sup>14</sup> Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus” (cf. note 7).
- <sup>15</sup> Chen, *Animacies* (cf. note 3), 159.
- <sup>16</sup> Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus” (cf. note 7), 5.
- <sup>17</sup> Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Construction and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: University Press, 1979), 105–106.
- <sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Maren Sell and Jürgen Hoch (Frankfurt, Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 156.
- <sup>19</sup> Thill, *Waste* (cf. note 1), 23.
- <sup>20</sup> Robin Nagle, *Picking Up: On the Streets and Behind the Trucks with the Sanitation Workers of New York City* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 49.
- <sup>21</sup> Nagle, *Picking Up* (cf. note 20), 49.
- <sup>22</sup> Nagle, *Picking Up* (cf. note 20), 4.
- <sup>23</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” in *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, eds. Neil Badmington and Julia Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2008), 245–266, here: 245.
- <sup>24</sup> Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection” (cf. note 23), 247.
- <sup>25</sup> Ellen Lupton and Abbott Miller, *The Bathroom, the Kitchen and the Aesthetics of Waste* (New York: Kiosk, distr. Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 41.
- <sup>26</sup> Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 1.
- <sup>27</sup> Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 65.
- <sup>28</sup> Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 2.
- <sup>29</sup> Thill, *Waste* (cf. note 1), 44.
- <sup>30</sup> Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 3.
- <sup>31</sup> Kristi Branham, “Hung Out to Dry: Laundry Advertising and the American Woman, 1890–1920,” in *Home Sweat Home*, eds. Mimi Choi and Elizabeth Patton (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 18.
- <sup>32</sup> Branham, “Hung Out to Dry” (cf. note 31), 18.

- 33 Branham, “Hung Out to Dry” (cf. note 31), 18.
- 34 Branham, “Hung Out to Dry” (cf. note 31), 1.
- 35 Branham, “Hung Out to Dry” (cf. note 31), 18.
- 36 Branham, “Hung Out to Dry” (cf. note 31), 1.
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- 38 Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 11.
- 39 Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (cf. note 37).
- 40 Mimi Choi and Elizabeth Patton, *Home Sweat Home* (cf. note 37), xiv.
- 41 Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, “The Manufacture of Housework,” in *Socialist Revolution* 5.4 (1975), 26.
- 42 Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 12.
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- 45 Frederick, *Household Engineering* (cf. note 43), 11.
- 46 Frederick, *Household Engineering* (cf. note 43), 100.
- 47 Walker, *Shaping Our Mothers’ World* (cf. note 44), 33.
- 48 Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 14.
- 49 Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 15.
- 50 Frederick, *Household Engineering* (cf. note 43), 55.
- 51 Frederick, *Household Engineering* (cf. note 43), 100.
- 52 Mimi Choi and Elizabeth Patton, *Home Sweat Home* (cf. note 37).
- 53 Frederick, *Household Engineering* (cf. note 43), 55.
- 54 Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 45.
- 55 Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 7.
- 56 Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 43.
- 57 Joachim Krause, “Vom Kochtopf zur Fassade bauen,” in *Schaukasten. Die Frankfurter Küche: Eine museale Gebrauchsanweisung*, eds. Renate Flagmeier and the Werkbundarchiv (Potsdam: Brandenburgisch Universitätsdruckerei und Verlagsgesellschaft, 2012), 20–35, here: 37.
- 58 Rosie Cox, “Dishing the Dirt: Dirt in the Home,” in *Dirt: The Filthy Reality of Everyday Life*, eds. Elizabeth Pisani et al. (London: Profile Books, 2011), 37–73, here: 61.
- 59 Marres, *Material Participation* (cf. note 4).
- 60 Lupton and Miller, “The Aesthetics of Waste” (cf. note 25), 3.
- 61 Jonathan and Patricia Poore, “Kitchen Design for Recycling,” in *Garbage* 1.1 (1989), 18–24.

- <sup>62</sup> “Gestatten: Ihr neuer Mülleimer,” Trenntmöbel, accessed November 20, 2016, <<http://www.trenntmoebel.de/>>.
- <sup>63</sup> “Trenntmöbel,” Berliner Stadtreinigungsbetriebe, accessed May 30, 2014, <<http://www.trenntmoebel.de>>.
- <sup>64</sup> Recent studies indicate prejudice, discrimination and racism directed at the Romani people in Germany, cf. a study conducted in 2013. Markus End, “Gutachten Antiziganismus: Zum Stand der Forschung und der Gegenstrategien,” in *Romnokher: Ein Haus für Kultur, Bildung und Antiziganismusforschung*, ed. Daniel Strauß (Marburg: RomnoKher Mannheim, 2013), PDF version last accessed November 20, 2016, <[https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Datien/Gutachten\\_Antiziganismus\\_2013.pdf](https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Datien/Gutachten_Antiziganismus_2013.pdf)>.
- <sup>65</sup> Kristian Frigelj, “Mit Zuzug der Roma prallen Welten aufeinander,” in *Welt.de*, February 25, 2013, accessed May 30, 2014, <<http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article113882481/Mit-Zuzug-der-Roma-prallen-Welten-aufeinander.html>>; “Sinti und Roma in Duisburg,” in *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, accessed May 30, 2014, <<http://www.derwesten.de/thema/sinti-und-roma-in-duisburg>>.
- <sup>66</sup> Andreas Wyputta, “‘Die müssen weg, fertig’: Osteuropäische Roma im Ruhrgebiet,” in *Die Tageszeitung*, November 13, 2012, accessed May 30, 2014, <<http://www.taz.de/1105347/>>. This article, which engages critically with the situation in Duisburg, quotes a neighbor saying that he wants the immigrants to “go away” because of the waste they supposedly create.
- <sup>67</sup> Chen, *Animacies* (cf. note 3).
- <sup>68</sup> Joshua O. Reno, “Toward a New Theory of Waste: From ‘Matter out of Place’ to Signs of Life,” in *Theory Culture & Society* 31.6 (2014), 3–27.
- <sup>69</sup> Reno points to the limitations of theorizing waste solely as a human principle, or as “matter out of place” (Mary Douglas) and argues for an understanding of waste that acknowledges the processes of abjection of other, non-human species. In this regard, Reno points to an understanding of waste as a *sign of life*, as waste functions as a marker of the aliveness and the ongoing processes of living of both human and non-human creatures.