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Abstract: The aim of this article is to illustrate the political dimensions of modern waste disposal practices by comparing the representation of garbage, filth, hygiene, health and efficiency during the emergence of the modern kitchen at the beginning of the twentieth century with today's discourse of ecology, recycling and global responsibility. At issue will be mechanisms of identifying, collecting and handling trash in modern homes that are set in very specific contexts of normalization and deviance. With regard to the notion of an "aesthetic regime" as developed by Jacques Rancière, an assumption the paper both works with and tries to make plausible is that political matters not only emerge in the realm of deliberate action and public debate, but are fundamentally played out in the realm of sensual perception, notably through everyday ways of seeing as embedded in mundane practice and discourse.

From the Ethos of Housekeeping to the Doctrine of Ecology:

Paradigm-Shifts in the Politics of Domestic Garbage-Disposal

Laura Moisi

Garbage, refuse, trash, rubbish, waste—no matter what name we give the things that we throw away, they constitute a basic condition of our lives today. Disposable food packaging, one-way bottles, cans, and plastic bags let the significance of trash in our everyday routines become strikingly evident. But the logic of disposability goes beyond the mechanisms of capitalist economies, the use of plastic materials and consumption habits. Trash implies a process of drawing

distinctions that are at heart political—distinctions between good and bad, worthy and unworthy, able and limited, clean and messy, protectable and dispensable. Trash is "matter out of place," writes anthropologist Mary Douglas in her classic study *Purity and Danger* from 1966 (40). Trash may surround us only as long as it is not seen, hidden in garbage-bins that are themselves placed out of sight. As soon as garbage becomes visible, it is at the wrong place, disturbing a sense of order and regularity and therefore, it has to disappear. To that effect everyday practices of garbage-disposal in modern societies are guided by the fundamental *invisibility* of trash. Urban life depends on a fluent, always intact public waste management system that gives the impression that garbage is effortlessly disappearing. "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," writes Robin Nagle in her book *Picking Up* (Nagle 4). Nagle shadowed the workers of the New York City Sanitation Department over several months, observing and joining in their arduous daily work of picking up tons of bags filled with household garbage, loading the heavy garbage bags into the truck, and driving the trucks to collection sites at the margins of the city. In describing the challenges of the everyday job of sanitation workers in the city, Nagle employs metaphors of military service in order to emphasize the cultural battle against waste, as well as the physical force that picking up large, heavy trash bins and placing them into the garbage trucks entails: "This army makes up New York's Department of Sanitation, the largely unknown, often unloved, and absolutely

essential organization charged with creating and maintaining a system of flows so fundamental to the city's well-being that its work is a form of breathing, albeit with an exchange of objects instead of air molecules" (Nagle 4). At the same time, there are forms of trash that we cannot see, because they are invisible to us; forms of microscopic, toxic waste that we do not perceive, because we lack ways of depicting them (Schoonover 485). There is a "potentially violent vitality intrinsic to matter," as Jane Bennett writes—a dark side and piercing force of decaying substances that question our understanding of materiality as such (61).

Though invisible or overseen, unwanted and expelled, trash is increasingly becoming a central theme for new ideas on how to live together on a global scale in the future. The ethos of recycling today addresses not only questions about garbage per se, but implies a broader universe of meaning: ecology, sustainability, political engagement. The present article wants to explore, in a preliminary manner, the impact of trash on ideas of private responsibilities, social belonging and dissent by comparing the discourse on filth, hygiene and health during the beginning of the 20th century in the US and in Germany with today's discourse of ecology, recycling and global responsibility. At issue will be the mechanisms of identifying, collecting and handling trash in modern homes that are set in very specific contexts of normalization and deviance. The main goal is to outline the political dimensions of garbage beyond the paradigm of

ecology, and rather with regard to the framing of "others" and "otherness" that is effected in discourses and semantics of trash.

The point this paper wants to make with reference to garbage-disposal is that politics occurs not only in public spheres of "official" politics, but also in the private, domestic lives of individuals, where practices and acts are invisible to others. Garbage and garbage-related phenomena bring up crucial political matters in the realm of sensual perceptions, not just in the realm of deliberate action. The following questions will be addressed: Why is trash not only an issue for environmental perspectives, economical considerations, and technological concerns, but also an eminently political matter? To what extent does garbage-disposal amount to a dirty habit on the one hand, and an act of social responsibility on the other hand?

Drawing on Jacques Rancière's understanding of politics, the article will address modes of legitimizing social exclusion of individuals on the borders of society through the sensual qualities and ambivalent semantics of trash. Rancière presents an account in which political situations are inseparably connected to the sphere of aesthetics and questions of perception. On this view, 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 dividing of the world into beings that can speak and others can merely utter sounds. It is about a distribution of the way we see things and hear voices, which is perceived as "factual" and based on reasonable assessments rather than arbitrary cultural norms—an unequal distribution in the

very framework of meaning that determines what it means to speak, to possess language.

Politics, understood in this way, is not about institutional practice, but about the very idea of a "position," a job or simply a space that certain individuals are supposed to occupy, about who can and who cannot take part in political practice, about what is shared among all individuals, who has part in it and who is excluded from the basic common. Speaking of an aesthetic regime indicates that before we engage in deliberate debates about politics, we already have an order of seeing, speaking and being in which all arguments operate, a perceptual universe which designates to some individuals the evidence that their voices can express meaningful sentences, while the voices of others are considered as mere "noise" (Rancière *Politics* 6). Given this characterization of politics, we can ask how household garbage contributes to an aesthetic configuration of private living spaces, a sense of order that is keeping the other in its place.

The Politics of Modern Trash Culture

The distinction between private and public life plays a crucial role in modern trash culture. As soon as individual domestic garbage containers go out the door of a person's home, garbage turns from a personal item to an issue for the entire community, taken care of by institutionally organized waste-disposal systems. Dominique Laporte argues in his account of a "History of Shit", translated into English in 1978, that modern institutions and the specific relation between private and public life they imply, were fundamentally explored and

developed in the context of human excretions. Feces were seen as one of the most basic "individualities" and personal belongings, and, not unlike money, as exemplary of "one's own business" (Laporte viii). Due the fact that human excretions are paradigmatic examples of "privacy" and personal belonging, they stand in a dialectical relation to the public. "As a 'private' thing—each subject's business, each proprietor's responsibility—shit becomes a political object through its constitution as the dialectical other of the 'public'" (10). In this regard, one could go as far as saying that "the history of shit becomes the history of subjectivity" (viii). Accordingly, garbage is on the one hand an intimate, personal belonging, providing a sense of individuation. On the other hand, trash is something we do not want to be connected to, do not want to be placed or seen in proximity to.

Sonja Windmüller, in her impressive account on the cultural history of trash, argues that garbage, as we know it today, is a fundamentally modern phenomenon (33). While concerns about refuse date back to the 14th century, in the face of modern industrialization, a new awareness and domestication of garbage is emerging. In this view, the modern quality of trash developed during structural transformations that increasingly impacted all areas of life at the end of the 19th century: industrial mass production, rapidly growing cities, the formation of public waste management systems, and the differentiation between solid waste materials and liquid waste materials that it implied (34). At the same time, new scientifically informed ideas of health and hygiene appeared that addressed the

issue of collecting and removing garbage. Accompanied by newly propagated insights into hygiene and health and in face of novel fears of contagion, garbage was displaced from the centers of evolving cities and from the unremarkable presence in everyday affairs, and transported to the peripheral margins of both homes and cities. The logic of leaving garbage behind developed as a driving motor for the project of modernization (36).

In this key, I will now deal with the following question: How do theories of hygiene and dirt, the development of consumer markets, new forms of food packaging, and the cultural changes of the kitchen at the beginning of the twentieth century influence the relation of individuals to garbage? The claim in the following will be that the cultural transformation of the kitchen at the beginning of the twentieth century involved fundamental changes in the physicality of garbage and its perceptions, changes that have laid the foundation for modern trash culture. The guiding questions of this analysis of garbage-disposal in early modern kitchen designs are these: How do people create a relation between "visual appearances" and "moral attributes" with regard to the function, design and rationale of modern kitchens (Freeman 1)? In which ways were the goals of modernity and moral virtues lived out through material culture, and what role did garbage play in it? What relations between what is visible and what can be said, between what can be done and who can do it are formed with regard to the spatial arrangement of garbage in modern homes? Do the rationalized kitchens of the 1920s and 1930s

bring about a specific hierarchical order of clean and dirty, of decay and growth, which relate questions of social belongings to material arrangements in the home?

The Political Semantics of Hygiene: Race, Class, and Nationalism

As theories of disease and hygiene have changed over time, perspectives on dirt and cleanliness have been called into question, too. In 18th-century Europe, miasmatic theories were popular, suggesting that diseases were the result of foul air and bad smells (Cox 42). In this regard, there was a strong emphasis on fresh air, ventilation and "purifying" rooms by means of perfumes that would disguise bad smells (42). While these theories did not attribute dangers to decaying matter itself, they did promote the separation of bad smells from living areas, encompassing newly drawn divisions between "clean" and "dirty" substances and activities in the home (43). During the 19th and early 20th century, bacterial explanations such as the germ theory—the idea "that disease was transmitted by microscopic particles"—had a transformative effect on domestic cleaning and came to replace miasmatic theories (Branham 11). Given that bacteria could be neither smelled nor seen, housekeepers developed new understandings of when something is clean and when it is dirty (Cox 43). While in the past cleaning was done "in response to set routines, with tasks undertaken regularly on a daily, weekly or annual basis," in the homes that developed since the twentieth century, cleaning was performed according to perceptible cues of dirt

on cupboards, floors and clothes (54). Because things were now cleaned whenever needed, this meant that the cleaning was "never done" (55).

The new doctrines of microscopic dangers not only generated new attention to visible and invisible dirt, they were deeply entangled with and articulated in terms of race, class and poverty (Cohen and Johnson xvi). As Branham points out, "[t]he new germ theory that influenced reform in hygiene and standards of cleanliness at the end of 19th century also influenced the population's understanding of nationalism" (18). Germ theory shifted the possible locus of sickness, infections, and dangers from specific places to specific individuals. Furthermore, the assumption was that the dangers are not visible to the human eye, or perceptible by odor, and that those dangerous particles disseminate from one individual to another. The increasing popularity of germ theory coincided with the development of manufactured cleaning products. Advertisements for sanitary products, as well as guidebooks on cooking and housekeeping conveyed a symbolic correspondence between "white" and clean on the one hand, and any kind of presumed non-whiteness and dirt on the other hand. The employment of a semantics of invisible danger, hidden invasion, and "toxicity" prompted nationalistic ideas of "true" Americanhood (11).

Kristi Branham's account of marketing campaigns and advertisements for washing machines and cleansing tools demonstrates that the ads employed representations of women that were supposed to be

exclusively white and middle-class. The moral obligation—especially attributed to women—to keep the house clean, to expel dirt, garbage and suspicious materials, was far from a politically neutral demand. Rather, attitudes on dirt and health dangers were framed in terms of class, gender, and racial inequalities. In addressing hygiene standards of branded cleaning products, advertisements often adopted a racially connoted language of health and medicine. For example, an advertisement pamphlet for a large commercial laundry company deployed a comparison between industrial laundry services and the backyard of an African-American laundress. The pamphlet states that families should be cautious of the "old fashioned, unsanitary household methods" and the "unknown sanitary conditions […] where disease germs may start their journey to your home and children" (18). This was clearly meant to suggest that laundry done by African-Americans might result in contamination. Campaigns for laundry services often used terms such as "free of impurities," attesting to the social norms and ideals of clean air, clean linen, clean, pure food, and personal cleanliness (18). "The symbolic war against dirt and contamination played out most prominently against those who did not meet the American white ideal" (18). Questions of how do handle refuse also operate on the semantic level of expelling suspicious, invisible dangers, and toxics outside of the private sphere. This, then, accounted for what can be called a politics of waste: the pronounced nationalistic and racialized undertones of theories of dirt and domestic cleaning.

The Ethos of Efficient Housekeeping in Modern Kitchens

New ideas of hygiene and health commanded novel ways of handling food, clothes and one's own body in the home. Influenced by the movement of Taylorism and Scientific Management, home economist Christine Frederick attempted to professionalize and standardize housework and the use of kitchens. In her book *The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home* (1919), Frederick heavily draws upon an analogy of the modern kitchen with an industrial work space, turning the kitchen into a small private factory dedicated to consumption. Many of the features of today's kitchens—the so called fitted kitchen as we know it today, which combines storing boards and utilities into one—can be linked back to Frederick's ideas of rationalization.

Like most housekeeping guidebooks at that time, Frederick's manuals were specifically written for the "American housewife," implying an idealization of middle-class, white womanhood. Making housekeeping attractive to middle-class women meant re-conceptualizing housework in opposition to "drudgery," physical effort, and "labor," which was associated with work performed by poorer economic classes (*The New Housekeeping* 100). Instead, housework that would be practiced with the right products and standardized technique was portrayed as work that would be done effortlessly (100). Designers as well as home economists of that time provided narratives of the "self-contained" and autonomous kitchen, suggesting that rationalized kitchens will liberate women from physical labor. On this view, the

social status of domestic duties was transformed from the work done by household employees to an issue of privilege with regard to access to the efficient methods, knowledge, and equipment, turning the housewife into a manager or technician overseeing sophisticated machinery instead of a mere worker stuck with heavy manual labor.

Frederick considered the layout of the kitchen to play a key role in facilitating standardized and optimized routines of cooking, cleaning and removing waste. In the so-called efficiency studies that she conducted, Frederick measured the time intervals and single steps involved in doing a housekeeping task, such as preparing a specific meal or clearing away the table. The principle according to which "[n]o kitchen can be standardized if there is not a definite place for each article," as Frederick puts it, establishes a specific location for left-overs, food debris and other refuse (*The New Housekeeping* 55). In her book *Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home* (1920), Frederick remarks that dust is the "big enemy of the houseworker" (484). With regard to waste and refuse, Frederick emphasizes that "garbage is to be handled in a sanitary manner" (*Household Engineering* 55). She further suggests incorporating an "opening" installed in the kitchen surface for food debris and garbage "so that the refuse falls at once into the pail without any handling whatever" (56). Frederick greatly emphasizes the benefits of such a disappearing element of waste in terms of "sanitation" and health, claiming that even though handling garbage is an "unpleasant" task, it might be seamlessly incorporated in the housekeeper's daily

routines. Frederick emphasizes the importance of regularly tossing out debris and refuse, before fouled substances can divulge bad smells in domestic spaces (*Household Engineering* 75). When suspecting fouled vegetables and rotten fruits in the home, she suggests to take into account all kinds of sensual modalities, the feel, the smell, the taste of food, in order to determine if it is still good or if it is garbage. Different kinds of smells and feels of the counter top (sticky or smooth) are supposed to act as markers of dirt and filth, according to the device that just because something looks clean, it does not mean it is clean. However, disposing garbage in the appropriate manner is not only important because of health and sanitation, but also—and crucially—because of the economic efficiency it helps to establish with regard to the other, more important tasks in the home (Frederick, *Household Engineering* 75). Easy disposability thus becomes a primary, foundational feature of a well-designed kitchen.

The discourse on professionalizing housework and turning the kitchen into an efficient tiny factory also emerged in Germany during that period, culminating in the so called Frankfurt Kitchen designed by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky in Frankfurt in 1927 (Flagmeier 9). This kitchen is based on exact measurements of the anticipated workflow and it became an idealized model for the kitchen as a modern work station and a quasi-factory. Like a biological organism, the modern kitchen was developed based on a rhythmic cycle of ingestion and waste, on a "process of elimination" (Lupton and Miller 1). The

Frankfurt Kitchen typically has an opening for the waste produced during the cooking processes—an invisible hole, in which the domestic waste can instantly disappear. As a resulting effect that the architect Margarete Lihotzky did not intend, the prototype Frankfurt Kitchen—a kitchen that was intended to increase the quality of life for women—tended to make women feel like they were "servants" (Heindl 69). Women were supposed to buy consumption goods, then disappear into this tiny work-kitchen, cook meals for the family and then bring them out to the living room. After the meal she would retreat back to the kitchen, where there is room for only one person anyway, clean the table and put the dishes away (69).

The modern kitchen that evolves under imperatives of hygiene and efficiency designates a fixed place for the disposal of garbage: the dark space underneath the kitchen sink. On the one hand, garbage undergoes an ambivalent "domestication" as it acquires a permanent place in the realms of modern homes, placed inside a hidden corner of the build-in structures of the kitchen. But at the same time, the standardization of housework contributed to an incorporation of practices of expelling. The standardization of housekeeping tasks turned motions of disposing—throwing dirt, garbage, rotten food, packaging materials out of the home—into anticipated movements, included in the time-space-calculations of rationalized housework. Meanwhile, the specific motions of disposing, the time-interval and location of the bin were meant to fit the female body, which served as the standard template for putting the work-kitchen into practice. The

routines of disposing garbage and the moral duties of keeping a clean home as conceptualized by the home economic doctrines instituted a confinement of female perception to dirt or cleanliness. The imperatives of housekeeping designated women to the preparation of meals and then getting rid of excess, and thus, in effect, representing an aesthetic regime that assigned women "their place" inside the home and identifies their capabilities with household duties.

During the beginning of the twentieth century, feminist thinkers developed alternative ideas on housekeeping—for example, concepts of collaborative housework, inspired by socialist movements, that would distribute the responsibilities for cleaning and cooking among the men and women living in a community. While these ideas ceased in face of developing consumer markets and the assertion of the nuclear family, they nevertheless have fundamentally challenged the assumption that women were naturally suited for household activities. Feminists of later generations questioned women's role as householders again in fundamental ways, addressing the issue of domestic work as exhaustive, yet unpaid labor. Ann Oakley, in her sociological study from 1974 ("Housewife"), found that British housewives were working seventy-seven hours a week and suffered from isolation, excessive demands, stress and time pressure as much as assembly-line-workers (Oakley 222). Oakley emphasized that housework diminished women's equal rights and opportunities to find work outside the home, since it confined them to the private spheres of domestic live. While Oakley saw housework itself as problematic

and depreciating for women, other feminists have argued that it is not the housework per se that is devaluating, but the fact that it is a kind of work that is not financially rewarded (Cox 57).

While women still perform the majority housework today, fewer people would assert that this is "women's 'natural' role" (57). Yet until this day, tens of thousands of women from poorer economic countries leave their homes every year to clean houses and take care of families in richer parts of the world. "The stigma of working with domestic dirt means that domestic workers find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle, which defines domestic cleaning as low status because it is done by women, and women as low status because they deal with dirt" (64). Domestic cleaning amounts to a large global economy today, in which economically disadvantaged groups are still thought to be more suited for working with dirt, and the proximity to this dirt still degrades the people who clear it away (65). As the "work" status of housework itself was something that feminist thinkers were engaging critically with, this article claims that the routines in dealing with garbage are an exemplification of the status of housework as "invisible, marginalized, devalued" (Choi and Patton xiv).

Overall, the modernized kitchen generated today's condition of garbage as proximate and close on the one hand, and invisible as well as separated from meaningful practices that make up a "home" on the other hand. As a result and "by-product" of the rationalization of housework, garbage was given its own, very specific place among other household devices and materials, a fixed presence in human

domestic life and daily routines. In this view, domestic garbage emerged as a type of entity in its own right systemically during the modernization and rationalization of the kitchen in the early twentieth century. But at the same time, garbage has not yet been noticed as an item with actual meaning and impact in the order of the home.

The political role of garbage in this broad historical scenario can be understood as follows. First, practices of disposing are part of those tasks in housekeeping that go unnoticed until they are no longer done. Thus, garbage-disposal, along with cleaning and cooking, contributes to the invisibility and devaluation of housework. Second, garbage presents a semantic field addressing questions of hygiene, cleanliness and fears of contamination and thereby sustains bio-political nationalistic narrative of inclusion and exclusion that tends to focus on the status of marginalized individuals. Especially the recursive appeal of dirt, infections, and extrinsic dangers that are *invisible*, spurned a heightened awareness of national boundaries and patriotic narratives. The home thus becomes a practical and discursive model for the nation—a kind of tangible, metaphor enacting and enforcing ideas of nationhood and proper belonging. The moralized responsibility to keep a clean home attributed to women was enacted against a background of social conflicts of class and race. Third, middle-class women were addressed by marketing campaigns and advertisements as powerful and privileged, in so far as they had access to technological devices for housework tasks, which was again narratively framed as having someone or something else—in this

case, the technological "servants"—doing the work for you. This could be seen as a deluding rhetorical trick to keep women in their place, while at the same time sustaining the common order of tasks and roles into higher and lower, privileged and subordinate.

The Meaning of Garbage in the Age of Ecology

Plastic bags polluting the sea, large amounts of food thrown out every day, contributing to environmental dangers and exhibiting the unjust distribution of commodities in today's global economy, and likewise freebee plastic bags handed out at supermarket cashiers, pose new critical questions for present societies. The ethos of garbage today confronts us with the basic question of what garbage is in the first place. Are disposable items, such as plastic cups and convenience food packaging, already "garbage" at the moment they are bought, or do they become waste only when they are actually tossed into garbage bins?

Categorizing and separating trash according to plastics, paper, bottles and cans is the dominant mode through which we encounter trash today. Recycling—separating materials so that they can be later collected and recovered for future uses—seems to be charged with a pedagogical impulse and it is often used as a way of teaching children "responsibility." Taking care of one's garbage properly amounts to an expression of social engagement and environmental awareness. At heart of the ethos of recycling and the paradigm of ecology lies an approach to garbage in terms of idealized concepts of "nature" and circular flows. Already at the onset of modern garbage-disposal we

can find the close relation that bathroom and kitchen designers in the early twentieth century saw between human forms of generating "waste" and concepts about natural processes. Idealizations of natural, harmonic, and circular process were guiding the layout of the modernized bathrooms and kitchens, built as rooms that would metaphorically perform "metabolic functions." Modern kitchens in the early twentieth century developed according to ideals of rhythmic cycles of intake and excretion, bodily processes of consuming food and laying waste. The kitchen itself was conceived of as a dynamic, quasi-organic entity, taking-in commodities in and laying waste (Lupton and Miller 1).

However, while understandings of nature in the early stages of kitchen design combined metaphors of bodily processes with principles of an economy and efficiency (as exemplified by the concept of "streamlining"), today's environmental discourse relates trash mainly to a mystification of natural ecologies. Under the paradigm of ecology and sustainability, nature is a harmonic, balanced process that is then disrupted by human "footprints." The dominant symbols of today's aesthetic regime of trash are based on a harmonic idealization of nature, such as the "green dot," which displays the idea of nature as a circular process. This is based on the assumption of a principal divide between nature and culture, matters of human concern, and matters of natural facts. The very concept of recycling implies the idea of bringing trash back into the cycle of "nature," yet issues of garbage-disposal, processes of transportation,

and controversial landfills are inherently technological and environmental concerns, human and non-human, at the same time.

Recycling one's own garbage appears as a form of political participation or activism that is taking place on a material level, by interacting in a specific way with everyday things. In this regard, material objects play an important role in the understanding of democratic practices and citizenship (Marres 8). But can it be that recycling rather confirms and legitimizes the hidden presence of garbage than confronting the deeper political issues? By identifying the issue with garbage on an individual level, the urgency for larger scale collective approaches is down-played. Recycling one's own trash becomes merely another demonstration of individualized self-optimization. In the face of the 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," that are presumed at the margin of society—the blame of wrongful discarding practices and thoughtless disposal-practices often being put on poorer economic groups, immigrants, and allegedly uneducated community members. This points strikingly to the way that garbage draws boundaries in social structures and defines spaces of belonging to a political, presumed ethically aware community. "There is politics because the common is divided," writes Rancière ("The Thinking of Dissensus" 1). On this note, the claim of the present paper is that a distinction between worthy and thoughtful versus problematic and mindless forms of

garbage-disposal is at play, dividing the common meaning of trash among those who supposedly articulate and reflect social concerns through disposing garbage and those who are supposed to simply perform a dirty habit by thoughtlessly "tossing things out."

In this regard, people labeled as "hoarders" may be thought of as providing an alternative scenario of the meaning of trash and a sensual disruption in the cycle of consumption and garbage-disposal. In "healthy" households, garbage is *invisible:* The waste bin is hidden in a dark corner underneath the kitchen sink. In contrast to that, individuals that refuse to remove from sight their used-up materials, packaging, or rotten food, are pathologized and since the most recent edition of the DSM V (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders, Fifth edition) considered as having a mental disorder in its own right. In the home of hoarders, the amount of deteriorated, used-up products becomes perceptually dominant: food begins to smell, piles of conglomerated substances starts to melt together with furniture, transforming the domestic living areas from spaces for the circulation of objects into spaces that are occupied by putrid, elusive stuff. While the suffering that individuals labeled as compulsive hoarders endure may be very real, people who hoard do not always think of their behavior as an illness, nor do they necessarily consider themselves to be suffering. In this regard, reducing complex material arrangements in one's home to a mental disorder can be very problematic (Herring 6). In any case, framing someone's refusal to dispose objects solely in terms of psychological pathologies amounts

to a form of body politics that is played out in the field of domestic duties and trash culture.

Hoarding comes down to a visual, olfactory, and overall sensual disruption in the cycle of consumption and garbage-disposal today. Not only the visual confrontation with garbage accounts for the fascination with hoarding, it is also the pungent smell of rotten substances that presents a typical reaction to the presence of garbage in the hoarder's home on the many TV shows, documentaries, and reports on hoarders that circulate today. The home of hoarders brings into light what should not have been seen, it makes it impossible to withdraw from the pungent smell of rotten food and packaged goods, turning the spaces of the home from the place where objects circulate into a disruption. This kind of disruption in aesthetic regimes of disposability in the home reveals how political imperatives pertaining to personhood and adequate mental functioning are played out through material cultures of normalization and deviance. Hoarding presents a breakdown in basic housekeeping norms, a form of resistance and breakdown in aesthetic regimes of domestic waste—consciously or unconsciously, wittingly or not—mounted against the social imperative to remove the traces of one's consumption from sight. In this way, the interaction of hoarders with objects considered "trash" might be understood as subversive *political* practices, in the sense that they conspicuously disrupt the daily routines of making garbage disappear in contemporary societies.

One notable 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 evidences 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." Risks and dangers in this regime of ecology are attributed to those who are allegedly unwilling, unable, or unmotivated to participate in the everyday practices of ecological sustainability.

Trash and the Logic of Dissensus

This account of the politics of household garbage adds 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" (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 5). In this regard, the structural developments in the modern homes of the twentieth century have brought about a specific distribution of the ways we see, touch, oversee, separate, and recycle waste, and thus how the daily routines of disposing and recycling garbage amount to a specific aesthetic

regime. Notably, this is a regime that defines the spaces that some individuals are meant to occupy—thereby shifting the boundaries between the public sphere and the private, the political, and the personal. Most importantly, this regime determines, and often de-legitimizes, the equality of those at the margins of society.

In the introduction to his translation of Rancière's *Dissensus*, Steven Corcoran remarks that consensus "is defined by the idea of the proper and the distribution of places of the proper and improper it implies" (2). In contrast to that, the logic of dissensus refers to a certain "impropriety," which blurs the boundaries between a fact and its interpretation, revealing the chance-like character of drawing the boundaries between those who belong to political life and those who don't in the first place. While each hierarchical order relies on a logic of the "proper" that distinguishes between different domains and capacities "based on the supposed propriety of their place and function of their activity," dissensus exerts a logic of equality that "reveals the arbitrariness of that distribution for political participation" (5).

It has not been until recently that garbage as an issue arose, that it became "the buzzword of this decade" and the "correct concern" (Schneider and Strauven 411). At the moment that garbage itself becomes a distinct political issue and the sorting of leftovers becomes a practice that can be either right or wrong, littered objects take on ambivalent roles, from obnoxious refuse to art pieces with a voice and something to "say." In recent artistic installations that explore

garbage as a central theme, transforming what has been perceived as trash into art, one might see an illustration of a democratic principle, suggesting that when it comes to the issue of garbage, all human subjects are addressed and have the right to be equally concerned. But behind this story, many different issues regarding the status of garbage and its effect on communities arise. For example, in different cities around the world and recently in the Romanian city of Timisoara, volunteer participants have installed an enormous plastic bridge floating on a central-city river built entirely out of disposed plastic bottles. The obvious aim was to raise awareness and concern about the habit of disposing plastic trash into lakes and rivers. Garbage as a politicized object is given a stage in various artistic endeavors and projects of urban planning. Making visible what has been (mostly) hidden before, bringing to light what has not been perceivable, is what amounts to the politics of garbage today.

Trash as a kind of thing is only beginning to reveal that it is "able and ready to concern itself with the community," performing a core principle of *Rancièrien* politics (Rancière, *Dissensus* 93). Trash today opens up a new field of politics that is concerned with the ways we live together on a global scale. Trash turns into a political subject at the moment that it challenges and transforms the terms of political action, the visual field of decay and loss, once it moves beyond the already known and the already legitimized ways of political life. In this regard, the political understanding of garbage as a cosmos of conflicts, after having been around but gone mostly unnoticed in

modern homes and modern kitchens for several decades, poses new questions and challenges for contemporary societies. This article meant to provide a preliminary synopsis of the way that garbage emerges at the center of modern life as we know it. It is a pressing issue that needs to be further explored and examined.

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