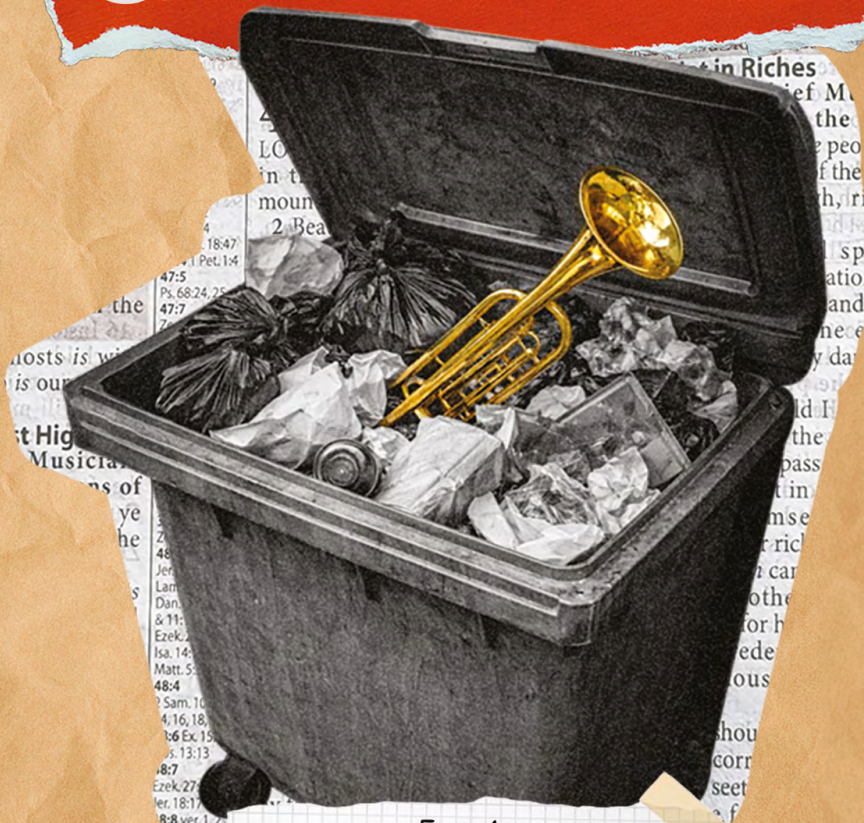
All that glitters is not GARBAGE



Edited by
Benedict E. Singleton

mayfly

All That Glitters Is Not Garbage

Adventures In Rubbish Theory

Edited by Benedict E. Singleton

Published by Mayfly Books. Available in paperback
and free online at www.mayflybooks.org in 2026.

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ISBN (Print) 978-1-906948-82-5
ISBN (PDF) 978-1-906948-83-2

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To Michael Thompson, creator of Rubbish Theory, who passed away as this book went to the printers. Theorist, inspiration and friend – your wisdom and memory shall for ever be Durables.

What others are saying about *All That Glitters Is Not Garbage*

"Benedict Singleton and collaborators have produced in this book a valuable object: a 'Durable' (I hope) in the language of Rubbish Theory. It not only introduces those new to Rubbish Theory in a highly accessible way, but it also shows how the application of Rubbish Theory can provide new perspectives and insights across a wide range of disciplines and contexts, from the legal personhood of rivers to concepts of sustainable development in cities. Thompson's Rubbish Theory opened my eyes to a whole new way of seeing the world. This new book I suspect might well do the same for a much wider audience."

Daniel Black, Research Director, University of Bristol Medical School (Population Health), UK and Daniel Black + Associates | db+a.

"The symbolic distinction between what is valued and non-valued constitutes a powerful social, political, and historical force. In this book, Singleton elegantly introduces Rubbish theory as a sharp analytical lens for uncovering the cultural, structural and material dynamics that shape such processes of distinction, and brings together an impressive variety of studies and themes that will engage readers across a wide interdisciplinary spectrum. *All That Glitters Is Not Garbage* brings with it a positive message that there is always hope for the discarded."

Magnus Boström, Professor of Sociology, School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Örebro University, Sweden.

"*All That Glitters Is Not Garbage* presents an intriguing set of case studies, bringing attention to an overlooked anthropological tool. This approach, termed Rubbish Theory, dances very near archaeological theory, in that both are applied to learn more about the life of objects and their changing contexts. Indeed, archaeologists are familiar with the struggle to make objects speak about their history. Their work requires careful examination and flexible interpretation of objects, such as how to explain the discovery of palaeolithic spear points in a medieval grave, Chinese rice bowls buried in Roman trash, or the extraction of a person's birthplace and travels from their bones. I am excited to see how Rubbish Theory can be productively applied to ongoing archaeological research. Let's see what happens when adroit thinking meets holes in the ground!"

Carole L. Crumley, Professor emerita, Department of Anthropology, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, USA; Professor emerita, Centre for Biodiversity,

Department of Town & Country, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Sweden. Executive Director, Integrated History and Future of People on Earth (IHOPE) https://ihopenet.org/

"Michael Thompson's classic *Rubbish Theory* (1969, 1979) blended together classic social theory, ethnography, and art theory and practice in an edgy, iconoclastic burst of inspiration that challenged our thinking about how societies produce (and overturn) the regimes —and objects—of value and stigma with which we live. In this edited collection Benedict Singleton and co-authors have rescued from neglect, updated and revitalized Rubbish Theory just when we need it desperately to parse the chaos of the clashing value systems of the Trump/Putin era. In a series of globally diverse, lucid and accessible analytical case studies (including one by Thompson himself) exploring such enticing topics as wool, biofuels, the legal personhood of nature, indigenous tourism, porcelain forgeries, "mine parks," our inconstant remembrance of death, gentrification, and more, this volume embodies a refreshingly open and curious approach to understanding the infrastructures—and inertias and inconstancies—of power and cultural, economic and social capital. It offers both roadmaps for the beginner and critical interventions on social hierarchy and conflict. Singleton's Rubbish Theory will seduce the most recalcitrant students into social analysis (Rat and Mole from the Wind and the Willows make an appearance, as do interior designers and sock puppets); both playful in spirit and quite serious on questions of comparative value and power, it reminds us, humbly but powerfully, that people not only can, but will, change the ordering systems that now dominate us with such apparent irreversibility."

Laurie Kain Hart, Professor of Anthropology and Global Studies, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles, USA

"Long unavailable, Michael Thompson's *Rubbish Theory* has re-emerged as a remarkably prescient account of how value, waste, and durability are socially produced. This volume creatively extends Thompson's insights through ethnographic, historical, and political case studies—from pottery and wool to rivers, biofuels, and the circular economy—a range of topics befitting Thompson's singular tome and demonstrating its continued relevance. Like rubbish itself, Rubbish Theory endures."

Joshua Reno, Associate Dean for Strategic Initiatives; Professor, Department of Anthropology, Binghamton University, USA

"In Michael Thompson's book, '*Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*,' he theorised how objects acquire different values through social construction and deconstruction of values. The value of objects navigates three principal categories, such as: transient, rubbish, and durable. The fluidity or otherwise of these categories depends on the social consumption of the object and its value over a length of time. Hence, what object is retainable (and for how long) or discardable (and for how long), for instance, is an outcome of its social value. In addition, the traction of its passages across categories is equally dependent on consumer behaviour. *All That Glitters Is Not Garbage: Adventures In Rubbish Theory* is an attempt at extending the theoretical insights of *Rubbish Theory* into different thematic subjects and geographical regions of the world, thus shifting it away from its original focus on social anthropology and socioeconomics of consumption. I am fascinated by the depth of quality research and critical thought invested by authors in their analysis of *Rubbish Theory*. Readers from diverse disciplines, especially students of consumerism, sociology, climate change and sustainability scholarship in general, will find the book most relevant. I highly recommend it."

Professor Ikechukwu Umejesi, Environmental Sociologist and Deputy Dean: Research, Partnerships and Innovation, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Fort Hare, South Africa.

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Zach Tate is a professor of Art/Ceramics at Arkansas State University, USA. His work has been shown internationally throughout Scandinavia and Asia and nationally at galleries, universities, and museums in the United States. He is also an accomplished author, writing for numerous ceramics and craft publications. He is an avid grant writer, funding his creative research and scientific research focused on rice biowaste and amorphous silica.

Michael Thompson was Emeritus Scholar at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Laxenburg, Austria. An anthropologist, his early research was on the processes by which something second-hand becomes an antique, or a rat-infested slum part of our glorious heritage ("Rubbish Theory" 1979/2017). His later work focused on the democratization of decision processes in areas that have tended to be treated as merely technical. He passed away on 17 March 2026.

Marie Widengård is a researcher in Environmental Social Science at the School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her work explores the politics of nature and resource governance—spanning land, forests, water, mining, fisheries, and energy. She primarily draws on political ecology, science and technology studies, and posthumanist perspectives to conduct ethnographic research in Sweden, Jamaica, and Zambia. Marie is the co-curator of Sweden's Transformed World Exhibition 2045, where her chapter is exhibited at fossilfreenation.se.

Introduction: all that glitters is not garbage.

Benedict E. Singleton[1]

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"Everything is new until you throw it away" was the exasperated answer my father gave to me after I had asked him what the definition of *new* was. My sister and I seized on this, ribbing him mercilessly by chanting "everything's new until you throw it away. That's what our father says."

Dad gets his own back though often enough. He once tricked me into believing for quite some time that a tea-time treat of Eccles cakes (a flaky, sweet pastry filled with currants) was due to it being "Eccles Cake Day", a nationwide tradition. This is something my family continues to mark if ever there's an opportunity to scoff Eccles cakes. Thus, within one family, the status of Eccles cakes has been raised above many other treats.

What these two anecdotes illustrate (apart from something about the Singleton family) are the human processes of ordering. The first involves a series of simple yet tricky questions: when is an object actually *new*? At what point does the newness status of something change? Is it when it is made? Or when it is purchased? Or perhaps when its colours have begun to fade? Is it something than can be preserved with care as many collectors of toys or other items try to do? Is it when a forgotten item is rediscovered and valued far beyond its original price? The second anecdote illustrates a child's awareness of the coincidence of unusual, somehow extra valued foods, and unusual, extra valued times in English culture. How various objects are marked as extraordinary or normal and valued accordingly in different times and contexts.

Such orderings are the central concern of Rubbish Theory, the topic of this collated volume. Rubbish Theory presents a sociological theory

of valuation, which provides a tool for tracking how some objects come to be feted and valued in society, with appreciation increasing as time goes by, while others decline in value either immediately or gradually and are eventually pushed out of sight and out of mind as Rubbish (Thompson, 2017). This book demonstrates to social scientists (and other academics) the wide utility of Rubbish Theory across disparate areas of study. The chapters in this volume apply Rubbish Theory to knowledge politics, urban planning, integration projects, nationalism and many other topics. Through this the authors demonstrate that people enact ordering projects and social organisation through a huge variety of social practices that go beyond clearly formalised systems. Furthermore, those seeking to disrupt existing ordering projects tend to look to that which has been discarded for inspiration.

Introducing Rubbish Theory

"What is Rubbish Theory? Where has it come from?" The enquiring reader may well ask. Rubbish Theory's originator, social anthropologist Michael Thompson, has addressed the second question in chapter 10. There he explains how the theory came into being with the original 1979 publication of the book *Rubbish Theory. The Creation and Destruction of Value*. He then goes to discuss its continued development, which he links to the Theory of Plural Rationality, a theory of the link between social organisation and worldviews, which he subsequently developed alongside Mary Douglas and others. In relation to the first question, I here offer a succinct summary for any newcomer who wishes to dip into the chapters that make up this book.

At its heart, Rubbish Theory relates to how humans order objects through social processes (cf. Kendall and Wickham, 2001). Humans cannot handle the infinite nature of reality and thus seek to organise the universe to render it manageable. Within this ordering process, categories of objects emerge alongside concomitant valuations and attributes. Several points proceed from this basic need. Firstly, different categories are valued differently and accorded different status within the overall system. Secondly, by socially ordering the universe, humans

conceptualise certain objects as being in the correct or incorrect place. A classic example of this is anthropologist Mary Douglas's definition of dirt as "matter out of place" (Douglas, 1966[2002]). What defines dirt is its position within the social order rather than intrinsic or universal properties. To give a familiar example, a definition of weeds in a garden is plants where they should not be.

Rubbish Theory develops from these points. It makes a structuralist argument that it is possible to identify basic, universal structures that underlay efforts to order the world. It presents several categories of objects and a description of the social processes that order, compete and contest them. Through the ordering of objects, society itself is organised. Rubbish Theory also highlights the social labour inherent to any conceptualisation of value. Value is thus not inherent to any given object (although obviously physical properties may and often do play a role in an object's eventual value [cf. Thompson, 2017: 113]). Instead, *value is a social relationship*, social transactions between people that concomitantly order the world so it can be acted upon. Analysis is thus firmly grounded in structuralist, Durkheimian social science, with its interest in how social organisation and action generate ideas and beliefs, which in turn feed back into social structures. Rubbish Theory provides a schema for scrutinising and comparing these different ordering systems and the social organisation that underpins them (Singleton, 2021).

"Objects" within Rubbish Theory are broadly defined. They can take the obvious form of physical items that have had properties imposed on them by human social life – consider any DIY tool such as a hammer for example. Humans, as physical objects, are also subject to this process – for example, contemporary debates in the UK on transgender rights issues highlight the extent that the human body is itself embroiled in a variety of ordering processes. However, "objects" also pertain to ideas (Thompson, 2017: 88). In certain contexts, ideas become thing-like. These ideas are generated and communicated socially and are constrained and influenced by human valuation systems. For example, in his writing Thompson describes

how memories of ancestor figures gain object status within the lineage system of the Tiv of West Africa (Thompson 2003: 320). Many societies objectify certain ideas as part of enacting their social order.

For me, how ideas can be objects is well illustrated by the work of Terry Pratchett (1948-2015), the bestselling fantasy and science-fiction author most famous for his *Discworld* series. Within Pratchett's writings, the human tendency to treat ideas as objects is a recurrent theme. For example, in one novel, *Hogfather*, a memorable exchange occurs between Death and his granddaughter, Susan. Death lists a series of idea-objects that are integral to human life in many contexts (Pratchett, 1996: 270):

> "All right," said Susan. "I'm not stupid. You're saying humans need... *fantasies* to make life bearable."
>
> REALLY? AS IF IT WAS SOME KIND OF PINK PILL? NO. HUMANS NEED FANTASY TO BE HUMAN. TO BE THE PLACE WHERE THE FALLING ANGEL MEETS THE RISING APE.
>
> "Tooth fairies? Hogfathers? Little—"
>
> YES. AS PRACTICE. YOU HAVE TO START OUT LEARNING TO BELIEVE THE *LITTLE* LIES.
>
> "So we can believe the big ones?"
>
> YES. JUSTICE. MERCY. DUTY. THAT SORT OF THING.
>
> "They're not the same at all!"
>
> YOU THINK SO? THEN TAKE THE UNIVERSE AND GRIND IT DOWN TO THE FINEST POWDER AND SIEVE IT THROUGH THE FINEST SIEVE AND THEN *SHOW* ME ONE ATOM OF JUSTICE, ONE MOLECULE OF MERCY. AND YET—Death waved a hand. AND YET YOU ACT AS IF THERE IS SOME IDEAL ORDER IN THE WORLD, AS IF THERE IS SOME...SOME *RIGHTNESS* IN THE UNIVERSE BY WHICH IT MAY BE JUDGED.
>
> "Yes, but people have *got* to believe that, or what's the *point*—"
>
> MY POINT EXACTLY.

There is a lot going on in this exchange. One interpretation is that human existence ultimately requires belief in an external morality, a fiction for which they must train themselves. However, I see Death as also making a broader point – people seek to enact order on infinite, dynamic and chaotic reality to render it intelligible. Within this some social objects, namely the ideas "JUSTICE. MERCY. DUTY", are accorded particular status – they form the bedrock of values on which society is based. Furthermore, there is often an expectation that these are things that *should* always be with us. Some objects we value for a short time, but others we want to be for ever. This observation is at the heart of Rubbish Theory.

Rubbish is often hard to digest, as anyone who has tucked into yesterday's fish and chips after a night out will agree. As such, I find it useful to divide Rubbish Theory into two parts, which necessarily overlap. The first of these is the categorization of objects, which is the principal subject of Thompson's original book *Rubbish Theory. The Creation and Destruction of Value*. The second part involves the actors that compete over ordering systems – those who "ride the flows" of objects, as Michael Thompson likes to put it (personal communication). These characters are present in the original volume and have been further developed in subsequent publications (Thompson, 2003, 2024).

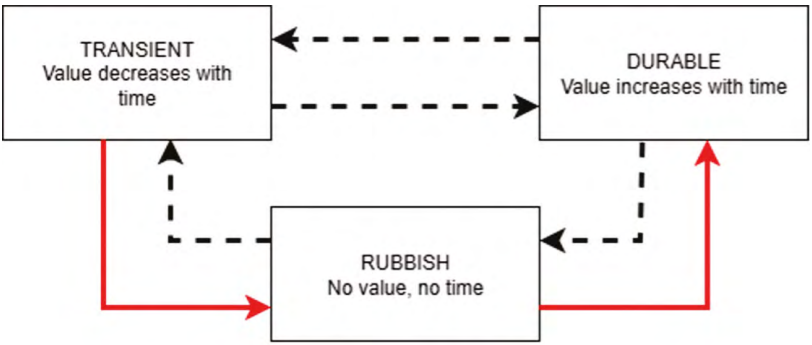
Categories of objects

Rubbish Theory begins with objects. Objects may move between three basic categories (Figure 1). These categories have different characters. Two of these categories are *overt* and consist of objects that have *value*. However, they differ in temporal character. The first of these is the *Durable* category. Objects in this category ("Durables") are conceived as gaining value over time. A classic example of this could be a piece of Ancient Greek statuary or a piece of fine art in a museum, with the increasing distance from its creation rendering the object more valuable. Within any given ordering, Durables are considered basically eternal even if this is clearly impossible in a cosmic sense (Thompson,

2017: 113). This status does not emerge "naturally" or in some linear fashion. Anyone who has studied art galleries or museums becomes quickly aware of the amount of material and symbolic work that goes into maintaining the value of the objects within. This is clearly the case for Ancient Greek statuary and fine art, where different pieces (and different eras of production) may go in and out of favour – each society reinventing which ancient (or new) materials are idealised as eternal.

The second category within the Rubbish Theory model is *Transient* objects ("Transients"). In contrast to Durables, the value of Transients decreases over time. Good examples of this are cars, which become cheaper to purchase as time goes by in most circumstances. Likewise, luxury food items also typify this process – fresh caviar is prized more highly than the batch opened last week! The destiny of Transient objects is to eventually become worthless. Of course, as with the Durables above, in practice there may be all sorts of social actions that affect this process. For example, collectors of vintage cars may put considerable energy into bucking the trend, maintaining the value of their prized vehicles even as the rest of the society moves on.

The third category of objects, *Rubbish*, differs from the other categories because it is *without value*. Transient objects eventually become Rubbish. However, there is more to it than this. Within Rubbish Theory, Rubbish is that which remains outside of the ordering system. Infinite reality is too great to be incorporated in any human ordering of the world; Rubbish is the residual reality unaccounted for by human ordering practices. It is thus largely an *implicit category*. Thompson makes two points around this. Firstly, due to its implicit nature, Rubbish has been omitted from mainstream economic thinking. Secondly, Rubbish has an important role as a potential source of Durable objects (Figure 1). Objects that were originally Transient, declined in value and disappeared as Rubbish, can, through social practice, be transformed into valuable Durables (Thompson, 2017). Examples of this are the contents of ancient middens that delight archaeologists and take pride of place in museum collections, or artists such as Vermeer or Van Gogh who become feted and "rediscovered" after their deaths.



The basic Rubbish Theory hypothesis. The solid boxes denote overt cultural categories; the broken-line box denotes a covert category. The solid, red arrows are the transfers that theoretically happen; the broken, black arrows are the transfers that theoretically do not happen because they contradict the value and/or time direction that define the various categories. Adapted from Thompson (2017: 4).

Figure 1: The Rubbish Theory Hypothesis

A feature of the implicit Rubbish category is that people often become most aware of it when it is in the wrong place. Rubbish appearing in the wrong place may elicit reactions akin to the breaking of taboos or public morality (Thompson, 2017). Most societies invest resources to ensure Rubbish ends up in the correct place and that it remains there, out of sight and mind. This is illustrated by waste management systems in many countries, where household waste is transported to the tip or landfill and dumping or littering in the wrong place is prosecuted. Similar processes are applied to people – most racist systems involve overtly or covertly labelling people and controlling their whereabouts. For example, in Sweden, the country where I live, there has been a public debate about the presence of *tiggare* (beggars), often of Romanian or Bulgarian Roma origin, who have become an ever-present feature outside many grocery shops. These people's presence presents a direct challenge to Swedish orderings of society. In mainstream Swedish public discourse, there should not be any beggars or homeless; the state takes care of all and should safely house people. Many Swedish people find being asked to

give money very difficult and the practice often provokes feelings of anger and embarrassment. Of course, the presence of *tiggare* obviously generates different reactions, including charitable initiatives. However, I have personally witnessed Swedes verbally abusing beggars, and the town of Eskilstuna took the extraordinary step of banning the act of begging in particular public places (Gagnert Dalgren, 2019). All these exclusionary actions are interpretable as efforts to remove "Rubbish" from public view. Likewise, the Russian invasion of Ukraine (ongoing at time of writing) has been depicted as an attempt to eradicate the "anomaly" that is the existence of an independent Ukrainian state, language and identity. In this framing, what "should" exist is a greater Russia. Russian aggression is thus framed as an attempt to eliminate an inconvenient reality of existence (Kuzio, 2022). Furthermore, in many places, orderings of waste and people overlap, with marginalised groups bearing the brunt of environmental pollution and injustice. Waste and population management thus often reflect overlapping orderings of "Rubbish" (cf. Agyeman & Evans, 2006; Bullard et al., 2008; Davies & Mah, 2020).

To sum up, humans expend social and creative energy imagining and enforcing orderings of value, and numerous, variable systems are unfolding in different times and places. Thus, an object can exist simultaneously within different ordering systems – called "games" within Rubbish Theory (Thompson, 2017: 91). The only real limit to the social processing of objects is the nature of reality itself. Accounts of technological disasters often provide examples about when "Rubbish"—residual—information suddenly makes its present felt. For example, investigations of the *Challenger* and *Columbia* shuttle disasters highlighted how institutional ordering practices ignored what in hindsight was glaringly obvious information pointing to looming catastrophe. In this case, "deviant" information was "normalised" to prevent it from disturbing the dominant ordering of reality upon which the shuttle programme was based (Vaughan, 2016). This highlights the dynamism of reality, and it is important to emphasize that Rubbish Theory does not posit a static world. As in

new materialist accounts of studying waste, things in the world have effects independent of human social constructions, and this will affect whether and how they are recognised as "objects" (cf. Bell, 2018). Even so, the extent to which the inherent nature of something affects its positioning in any given ordering system is highly variable, and one should remain cautious about assuming that an object's place in a system is a given. After all, human excrement in contemporary Sweden is considered Rubbish from the moment it is produced and should be flushed rapidly away, whereas in other parts of the world, such objects have value as sources of fertiliser and building material. Enacting an ordering of value is a political and social process, and the properties of different objects will affect how easily they may be pushed into the categories of Rubbish Theory. Rubbish Theory is thus neither a purely constructivist nor materialist theoretical approach[1] – objects matter, but so does the process of ordering.

Power and actors

Figure 1 illustrates the movement of objects within an ideal type of society. Thompson calls this "class society". To Thompson, Class Society as an ideal type is defined by "lots of stratification and lots of competition, and the transfer from Transient to Rubbish to Durable are such that the inevitable changes in power are quickly reflected in matching changes in status" (2003: 326; see also Singleton and Kronsell, this volume).

In a Class Society, certain movements of objects *should* or *should not* happen under "normal/expected" circumstances. Transient items should eventually deteriorate to Rubbish and may become raw material for Durables. "Forbidden" transactions do periodically occur.

1 This unwillingness to pick a side is probably part of the reason for the materialist criticism of Rubbish Theory which contends that it views objects as "passive and inert, just waiting to be endowed with meaning and value" (Greeson, Laser and Pyyhtinen, 2020: 156). Such an interpretation contrasts strikingly with the many accounts of discarded Rubbish *making itself heard* and causing sudden transformations to the dominant ordering system (e.g., Thompson, 2017). Even if Thompson, as a social anthropologist, is most often interested in the social action concomitant to ordering, it seems an odd reason to write Rubbish Theory off, as Greeson, Laser and Pyyhtinen do.

Where this is small scale (e.g., Rubbish to Transient deals among scrap dealers) it seldom threatens the social order. Thompson himself illustrates this through a life history of car, the decline in value of which was arrested by canny salesmen and periodic investment (2017: 35-6). The ultimate destination of the object remained Rubbish, and these activities did not challenge the established ordering system. However, forbidden action that disturbs the logic of the system tends to elicit strong social reaction. For example, over the past couple of years the environmental activist group Just Stop Oil has been in the news for a series of protest actions which include vandalising works of art in public galleries (e.g., Gayle, 2022). According to Rubbish Theory, part of the reason such actions garner a high-profile is because they violate the ordering logic of the class society. By damaging a Van Gogh painting, Just Stop Oil protestors perform a deliberate act of *category* vandalism as well as vandalism of a particular object. Fine art as Durable objects *should* continue eternally. Throwing soup over a painting reveals its vulnerability and challenges the values undergirding the social order. Indeed, moments of social disorder or breakdown may see the sudden transformation of the old order's Durables into Transients (Thompson, 2017). Such examples (scrap dealers, environmental protestors) draw attention to something that is *not* shown in Figure 1: the various groups of actors who are maintaining, altering or tinkering with the ordering system and through this exerting power.

Within the basic Rubbish Theory framework, different groups are engaged in political struggles to influence the dominant ordering system. Put differently, Rubbish Theory asks who it is that converts Rubbish objects into Durables. In a stable Class Society this transfer is clear; the conversion process is the privilege and co-constructive of particular social groups. However, who occupies such a social position is never static, with people competing to define Durables and setting trends. Class Societies as contexts have two features relevant to value orderings. Firstly, there are considerable status differentials within a Class Society – there are distinct groups. Secondly, within Class Society,

it is possible for individuals to compete to assert their right to order objects and to effect the transfer of Rubbish to the Durable category.

In such societies, Thompson identifies three groups who are actively involved in this struggle. Alongside these are two other groups who for different reasons are largely uninvolved with the competition over ordering (although they may be very much subject to it). The three active groups are irreverently called "High Priests", "Crashers Through"[2] and "Levellers" (Thompson, 2003; 2017). Taking these groups in turn:

- *High Priests* are preoccupied with maintaining the status quo. They seek to preserve extant Durables and prevent change. In Thompson's writing, this archetype is exemplified by literary critics who define and protect an extant canon of great (Durable, feted) authors (2003: 325). Conservative politicians seeking to defend the "cultural security" of the UK provide a depressing and somewhat different example of High Priest-like behaviour (Syal and Rahman, 2023). These examples highlight that High Priest gatekeeping can be marked by both intellectualism and arrogance, ignorance and bile.
- *Crashers Through*, on the other hand, actively try to redefine what is Durable and so modify the class system (Thompson, 2003: 325). In literary terms, Crashers Through bring to prominence "new classics", arguing that other authors may also be "guilty of literature" and worthy of comparison with established names (e.g., Butler, James and Mendlesohn, 2004). Crashers Through are prominent in many new artistic movements, but also in societal pushes to for example extend rights or suffrage to marginalised groups. In this they may ally with the third group, Levellers (cf. Singleton and Gillette, 2023).

2 In *Rubbish Theory* these are referred to as "Knockers Through". In this book, I have opted to use the updated nomenclature Thompson employs in later writing.

- *Levellers* also challenge High Priests. They differ from Crashers Through in that they seek to eliminate hierarchies altogether, while Crashers Through wish to maintain some hierarchy, but change what it comprises. Levellers push for an egalitarian approach. Literary Levellers would argue that all books are equally valuable – pulp fiction is as worthy as any dusty classic. In terms of social rights, Levellers generally argue for the dissolution of all iniquitous orderings – all should be equally valued in society. In terms of the model outlined in Figure 1, Levellers "[flood] the Durable category" (Thompson, 2003: 325) and in doing so diminish the status and power of those maintaining the existing ordering system.

A key point to understand about these groups is they are not static. Rubbish Theory envisages a dynamic system and as various actors are more or less successful in their activities they may find themselves playing a different role in a changed system. The counterculture iconoclasts (Levellers or Crashers Through) of yesteryear may find themselves today's High Priests! A second key point is that society is heterogenous, which means there will be multiple games in play. Thus, an individual (or group) may play one role in one social context with its concomitant ordering system and a different one in another. Likewise, objects may be enlisted in multiple different games at the same time (see Widengård, this volume) and indeed, there may be competitions to enact a particular game (and its concomitant roles) within a given context (cf. Thompson, 2017: 91-100).

The two "inactive" groups are less well-defined in Rubbish Theory, although they are accorded considerable importance in Thompson's other work (see Thompson, this volume). These are termed "Losers Out" and "Hermits". Losers Out[3] are largely defined by their lack of

3 Several names are applied to Losers Out in Rubbish Theory. I have chosen to use the later unifying term Thompson coined in later writing.

impact on the ordering system. They find themselves at the bottom of the pile (Thompson, 2003: 325; 2024: 235) and are characterised by their lack of access to Durables. They represent a reserve of people who can be converted into members of other groups in certain circumstances as well as the group where a change in the ordering system may dump former High Priests, Crashers Through and Levellers. Losers Out are often those in society blamed for being feckless wastrels, simultaneously condemned for being disengaged from political life while also having limited capital within the dominant ordering system (cf. Douglas, 2004). However, this does not mean that their actions do not affect ordering systems. For example, in his original writing on gentrification processes Thompson describes multiple groups of Losers Out occupying the London streets that middle-class Crashers Through and High Priests are in conflict over (2017: 62-4). In this account, Crashers Through sought (successfully) to redesignate historic slums as "heritage" worthy of preservation in the face of the High Priests of urban planning. At the same time, the Losers Out (working class Londoners and immigrant groups) expressed diverse and different orderings of value. These orderings followed a different set of rules and were largely invisible to the Crashers Through and High Priests fighting over the transfer of objects from Rubbish to Durable. Hermits, by contrast, are those who seek to remain aloof from a given ordering system (Thompson, 2003: 330). As a group, Hermits are not described in Thompson's original book on Rubbish Theory. In later work, they described as seeking "conviviality without coercion" (Thompson, 2024: 237). Hermits are depicted as choosing to disengage from the politics of ordering and competitions of value, being content with "a relaxed an unbeholden self-sufficiency" (Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990: 19; Thompson, 2024: 237). Hermits, if they have a professional occupation, are generally depicted as involved in fairly individualistic activities that have limited opportunity for increasing returns of success. Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky. describe owner-drivers of taxis and office caretakers as examples of hermits (1990: 19). In Rubbish Theory terms, Hermits try to avoid influencing or being influenced by orderings of different objects.

Viewed through a Rubbish Theory lens, many societies can be considered Class Societies to varying degrees. In his monograph on Rubbish Theory and in later writings, Thompson mentions various potential alternatives. For example, he describes classical Indian caste systems as a possible example of a "caste society", where status and power are separate from the control of the transfers of different objects (Thompson, 2017: 8; 2003: 326-7).[4] Similarly, he describes situations where there are few or no restrictions on the transfer of objects into the Durable category, which causes it to collapse (if everything is Durable, nothing is). Some highland New Guinea cultures in classic ethnographies are cited as potential examples of this, alongside Margaret Thatcher's "enterprise culture". Finally, he suggests a society characterised by low status differentials and low competition could exist, citing examples displaying elements of it from the English Lake District and Tibet (Thompson, 2003: 327). Thompson argues that in practice these alternatives to class society are often unstable and/or short lasting. It thus is unusual (but not impossible) to find a situation where social status and material resources are totally separate, where societal status has been frozen regardless of wealth. Similarly, the situations where there are absolutely no restrictions to the transfer of Rubbish to the Durable category (and thus there is no Durable category) are rare and possibly temporary.

Muck and brass. Experimenting with Rubbish Theory.

Looking across the chapters that comprise this volume, one is immediately struck by their eclectic nature. A wide range of topics are covered, and the authors show considerable creativity in combining

4 A light-hearted description of a Caste Society is provided by a famous sketch from the 1960s British comedy, *The Frost Report*. In it, three actors (John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett) aligned in order of descending height articulate and visualise the UK class system, which is depicted as a Caste Society. At one point, the representative of the upper-class (Cleese) ducks down to illustrate that he actually has less money than the middle-class representative (Barker). However, the upper-class representative is still looked up to by Barker because the middle-class are "vulgar" (BBC, n.d.). Funny as it is, and illustrative that wealth and status do not automatically go hand in hand, examination of wider UK society quickly pinpoints greater social mobility than the sketch allows.

Rubbish Theory with a range of other social theory to productive effect. Collectively, we have taken considerable inspiration from Thompson's own fondness for diverse subjects. Even so, it is possible to identify patterns within the contributions. I thus divide the chapters into two sections. The first section, *Rubbish Cases*, comprises applications of Rubbish Theory to diverse cases from around the world. These illustrate the theory's utility. The second, *Rubbish Theorising*, comprises chapters that discuss Rubbish Theory itself. In this group, authors problematise aspects of Rubbish Theory and present ideas for theoretical development.

Rubbish Cases

The chapters in this section are ordered roughly according to the scale that they focus upon, from the individual level up to national and international applications of Rubbish Theory. Collectively, these chapters illustrate the applicability of Rubbish Theory as well as its user-friendly nature. This latter is exemplified by the diversity of contributors, which includes authors whose day-to-day life typically does not involve wrestling with social theory.

Starting at the individual level, the first two chapters comprise personal reflections on their authors' professional lives. They describe the authors' efforts to balance the conflicting imperatives of multiple ordering systems professionally. Chapter 1, by potter and ceramics teacher Zach Tate, describes the tension that emerges between his desire to be acknowledged and validated as an artist by the High Priests of the art world and his need to earn enough through selling his products to put food on the table. He describes an early career experience when his failure to sell his wares despite their artistic quality highlighted a lacuna in his education. He was able to produce art as defined by the cognoscenti of the art world; however, this was unappealing to the people around him upon whom he depended upon for sales. Tate reflects on his learning process, which was both awkward and painful. This highlights several points. Firstly, managing conflicting valuation systems is inherent to succeeding (or just

surviving) as an artist. Secondly, this management is an emotional process, an additional and perhaps unrecognised form of labour (cf. Hochschild, 2012) inherent to creating art. Finally, the case arguably points to the value of integrating Rubbish Theory into artistic training to prepare future artists for the compromises they may confront.

Chapter 2 deals with another emotional subject, death and dying. Paul Dempster, a hospital chaplain, moves the lens from the author to the contexts within which he works. Writing with Benedict Singleton, Dempster draws upon his professional experiences and role in managing death, providing examples of the ordering of objects within a care home for the elderly and a hospital chapel. He argues that the ordering of objects is integral to the emotional, social and political management of death (or knowledge of its inevitability) in the care home. He describes the ritual behaviour that emerged around a discarded ("Dorothy's") sock and interprets this part of managing the economy of memory in the care home. Ultimately, not everyone can be remembered forever and there is a process of drawing a veil of forgetting. The retention of Dorothy's sock is a bottom-up way for care home staff to maintain her memory – keeping her spirit Durable. This then becomes a source of pain and implied resistance when management decide that it is time to move on from Dorothy's memory – demanding a Durable be reclassified as Rubbish. The sock contrasts in fascinating fashion with a second abandoned item in the care home, Jeannie's chair. This chair is retained as a Durable in the care home to impart lessons about what good care is. In contrast to Dorothy's sock, care home management retain the Durable in order to enforce particular behaviour among the staff. The contrast is clear, Jeannie has become an official ancestor whose story imparts a lesson, whereas Dorothy remains a cult figure for the backroom staff. The contrast between the cases highlights the Rubbish Theory point that the right to convey Rubbish to Durables is the privilege of certain groups and some transfers of Rubbish are arguably more political than others. This is a theme that Maris Boyd Gillette takes up in her chapter in the second part of the book. Dempster continues his reflections by discussing an issue that arose within his chaplaincy

team around the disposal of two statues within their chapel. Largely worthless to the team, they found it difficult to dispose of them due to their history as a gift for past care of a dying person. Dempster uses this to discuss the discomfort oblivion causes, with many of us wishing that our memories be Durable, when obviously most cannot be.

In chapter 3, Firouz Gaini explores the changing valuations of wool during the history of the Faroe Islands. Wool as an object is ubiquitous on the Faroe Islands. The islands' many sheep shed it, and it constantly blows on the wind. Furthermore, for long periods of history, wool was the main export of the islands, vital to its economy (Wylie, 1987). However, in the modern era, Faroese wool is considered Rubbish, and this former gold is burned. Wool-culture and woollen garments however are the objects of some contestation in Faroese society. By drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson, Gaini shows how knitting patterns and styles of clothing have formed part of imagining the Faroese community since the mid-nineteenth century. In the contemporary Faroe Islands, wool remains political, with different actors competing to enact valuations around woollen garments. Gaini highlights these processes showing how wool and woollen garments are embroiled in political enactments of contemporary Faroese identity.

Continuing to widen the analytical lens, chapter 4 applies Rubbish Theory to a postcolonial context. In this chapter, Rickard Lalander, Juliana Porsani, Magnus Lembke and Kari Lehtilä apply Rubbish Theory to indigenous community tourism in Ecuador and Brazil. Indigeneity as a concept is ripe for Rubbish Theory analysis. A considerable element of many colonial orderings is the idea that indigenous and local cultures and populations are Transient, destined to become Rubbish and needing to be replaced by the values of colonial society (Elkins, 2022; Randell-Moon, 2023; Sharma, 2020; Wolfe, 2006). In their chapter, Lalander et al. combine Rubbish Theory with Decolonial Theory to explore four cases in Ecuador and Brazil. In each of these cases, indigenous peoples have leveraged tourism to effect decolonial transformations of dominant ordering systems in their society. They thus transform objects classified as Rubbish to Durable status. Lalander et al. highlight how this has

been carried out through a conscious process. The communities have collectively reflected upon their cultural objects and symbols and drawn upon them to challenge dominant colonial orderings, seeking to change their status both within their community and wider Ecuadorian or Brazilian society. Lalander et al. highlight how indigenous groups actively resist the colonial order by Crashing Through objects considered Rubbish into the Durable category.

Processes of Crashing Through are always interesting, often inspirational and usually tell us something about the distribution of power. This is a theme that Benedict Singleton and Annica Kronsell take up in their chapter, which rounds out the first section. Singleton and Kronsell apply Rubbish Theory to three cases where efforts were made to accord legal personhood to rivers, in Ecuador, India and Aotearoa New Zealand. Legal personhood for nature is often framed by its advocates as a radical initiative, which entails considerable change in the (unsustainable) ordering systems of a given society. However, viewed through the lens of Rubbish Theory, the three cases reveal that the amount of radical change differs very much from case to case. In the case of India, efforts to institute legal personhood largely reinforce the dominant ordering system, with the right to Crash Through objects remaining largely in the hands of extant dominant groups. By contrast, the case of Aotearoa New Zealand indicates the largest transformation of the overall ordering system. This chapter thus highlights how Rubbish Theory allows the analyst to take a step back and gauge what is truly at stake. It also highlights how the manipulation of extant value systems may be conscious acts, rather than simply dependent on the vagaries of fortune.

Rubbish Theorising

The first two chapters of the second section collectively present a discussion of the movement of objects as conceived by Rubbish Theory. Each highlights a movement that is largely ignored in Thompson's original theory, the movement of Rubbish to Transient objects. In Thompson's book this is considered a minor practice,

seldom troubling hegemonic value systems (2017: 115). It is the practice of the "tatter" or "rag and bone man", a small-scale, entrepreneurial individual who is active in extracting value from Rubbish, often on the margins of society. However, chapters 6–7 suggest that this process and these people may deserve more attention than Thompson accords them. Each of these chapters in their own way looks at activities seeking to engender sustainability in contemporary societies, which involve drives to reorient value systems to reduce harmful waste. They highlight how identifying when something definitively becomes Rubbish is not always clear and obvious[5]. Furthermore, it very much depends on what game is being played and where different actors stand in each game. Chapters 6 and 7 therefore draw attention to this and prompt reflection.

Staffan Appelgren, in chapter 6, applies Rubbish Theory to a topic that Rubbish Theory seems made for, the work of interior reuse designers – "redesigners". It draws on an ethnographic case study of a studio of Swedish redesigners, following their efforts to produce new objects based on circular economy principles. The circular economy is a model for resource utilisation that seeks to continue to use existing materials as much and for as long as possible. Its purpose is to reduce waste to a minimum and create further value in objects by extending their lifespan (European Parliament, 2023). As a concept, it has emerged due to trends of increasing consumption and waste production in many parts of the world. Appelgren argues that Rubbish Theory in its original formulation largely reflects a linear economic model and argues that the redesigners he observes raise questions about aspects of Rubbish Theory. He argues that redesigners' observed activities at times seem counter intuitive within Rubbish Theory. Appelgren also contends, from a new materialist perspective, that Rubbish Theory's focus on social categories risks underappreciating the role played by socio-material characteristics and the histories of the objects redesigners work with. However, Appelgren also reiterates the importance of Rubbish as a category as a source of new Durable

5 Much like the question of when something is "new" mentioned at the beginning.

objects and consequently its role within social change. In this, Appelgren raises an interesting question for the circular economy – if waste were to be eliminated, from what would new Durables emerge?

Marie Widengård, in chapter 7, is also focused on how things classified as waste can gain value – another apparent case of value being extracted from Rubbish before its inevitable consignment to oblivion. Widengård's case study explores the regulatory experiences of two fatty acids within the Swedish biofuel sector. These objects, Palm Fatty Acid Distillate (PFAD) and Crude Tall Oil (CTO) are chemically very similar but have undergone quite different classificatory and regulatory paths. In this chapter, Widengård employs Rubbish Theory to explore the different games and concomitant value systems that were extant within the Swedish regulatory system and wider policy landscape. She takes inspiration from the work of Mary Douglas (1966[2003]) and Brendon Swedlow (2007) to describe how different actors make purity and pollution claims to affect how PFAD and CTO are ordered and valued. In this account, PFAD is ultimately rendered Rubbish, while CTO remains part of the Swedish biofuel industry. Widengård thus highlights how the categories of Rubbish Theory are co-constructed with regulatory frameworks, narratives and interests. Value is always being renegotiated, a process that creates winners and losers. In this case, Widengård argues the classification processes around PFAD and CTO ultimately benefited the Swedish domestic biofuel industry while freezing out the palm-oil industries of other countries, notably in the Global South.

Raising questions about Rubbish Theory's limitations is also the subject of chapter 8. Rather than focusing on apparent Rubbish to Transient transfers, Hannah Saldert and Benedict Singleton focus instead upon Durable objects. Their chapter discusses a case of urban planning in Gothenburg, Sweden, specifically the building of a new park in what was formerly an industrial area that had since become wasteland. They interpret these activities as part of an effort to enact the Durable object Sustainable Development. Utilising a dramaturgical lens, they focus on the "backstage" activities that public

officials need to enact and maintain this Durable. They highlight the fact that Durables, whilst idealised as eternal, often require considerable maintenance and decisions have to be made over the nature of what is to be maintained. Saldert and Singleton describe how "frontstage" Sustainable Development comprises three equal and mutually reinforcing elements. These are the so-called social, economic and environmental "pillars" of sustainability (Boström, 2012) However, backstage, public officials find themselves weighing these pillars and prioritising some over others. As such, Saldert and Singleton show that throughout the development of the park the economic and social pillars of sustainability were prioritised, with the environmental pillar somewhat marginalised. This chapter thus does three things. Firstly, it illustrates the subtle possibilities enabled by a Rubbish Theory analysis, which allowed the teasing out of a largely hidden conflict within a dominant ordering system. Secondly, as with several other chapters here (Appelgren; Gaini; Lalander et al.) it shows the productivity of employing Rubbish Theory in complement with other theoretical traditions. Finally, it highlights an activity (the backstage politics of maintenance) that is integral to many Durable objects, affecting the eventual form they take. It foregrounds the question of how this can be illustrated and understood within Rubbish Theory. Potentially, one could speculate that within any effort to maintain a Durable may be another competition to order objects – Rubbish Theory within Rubbish Theory.

Also inspired by Rubbish Theory, Maris Boyd Gillette seeks to develop the category of Rubbish in chapter 9. Gillette argues for the utility of Rubbish Theory while pointing towards several areas that she believes could be developed. In making this argument, she examines two contexts drawing on her research in China. The first is the pottery manufacturing town of Jingdezhen. Here, Gillette describes how the potters themselves have been revalued successively in modern Chinese history. She then goes on to discuss the manufacture of fake "ancient artefacts". The second context is the efforts by the Chinese government to utilise abandoned mines as sites for heritage-based tourism. These

cases highlight several things. Firstly, transfers of objects from Rubbish to Durables may happen faster than Thompson credits. Secondly, Gillette argues for a distinction to be made between different types of Rubbish objects, which she calls "Despicables" and "Residuals". Despicables" are objects that are deliberately marked as Rubbish in an ordering system, whereas "Residuals" are objects that find their way into the Rubbish category without being specifically marked as such. Gillette argues that this distinction matters when Rubbish is transferred to the Durable category. Residual-to-Durable transfers largely result in the Durable category expanding. Gillette illustrates this by describing Chinese government efforts to move a Residual (former mines) into the Durable category as heritage (a process that is incomplete). By contrast, Despicable-to-Durable transfers are more likely to be "revolutionary" and result in other formerly Durable objects being ejected from the category. Gillette illustrates this by describing the revaluations of potters and factory owners following the Chinese revolution. The formerly Despicable potters became the emblems of revolutionary modernity, whereas the high-status factory owners were purged. Finally, staying in Jingdezhen, Gillette describes the deliberate production of fake antique ceramics, framing this as a deliberately covert transfer of Rubbish to the Durable category. She argues that this is not considered within Thompson's original theory and the consequences of it could be elaborated.

Rounding out the volume is a contribution by Mr Rubbish Theory himself, Michael Thompson. In his inimitable style, Thompson provides a brief history of Rubbish Theory and how he has developed his thinking since it was originally published. In this chapter, he presents his vision for Rubbish Theory going forward, describing how he sees it as part of the broader Theory of Plural Rationality[6] that he and many colleagues, including Mary Douglas, Steve Rayner and others, have been much preoccupied with (6 and Mars, 2008; 6 and Richards, 2017; Douglas, 1970[2003]; Douglas, 1982; Douglas, 1992;

6 A theory that as Thompson notes has borne many names over the years, including Cultural Theory, Grid-Group theory and the Theory of Sociocultural Viability.

Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Thompson, 2008b; Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990; Thompson, Grendstad and Selle, 1999; Verweij, Ney and Thompson; Verweij and Thompson, 2011). Wider in scope than Rubbish Theory, the Theory of Plural Rationality provides a typology as an analytical tool for examining social organisation, culture and politics. In his chapter, Thompson maps the actors described by Rubbish Theory (High Priests, Crashers Through, Levellers and Losers Out) onto the Theory of Plural Rationality's social solidarities (Hierarchy, Individualism, Egalitarianism, Fatalism) and argues that contexts where different actors are responsive to one another are better able to find creative solutions. These "clumsy" situations are the desired-for endpoint of institutional design. Thompson's contribution facilitates further reflection upon the cases that make up the rest of the volume by asking how clumsy the situations being depicted are. His chapter presents an optimistic vision, hopeful that by embracing sufficient diversity in planning, wicked societal problems can be tackled. He sees the revaluation of Rubbish Theory from Rubbish to Durability as a sign of the times, where the dominance of High Priests in planning has been shaken by modernity's failures and challenges.

A theory of everything?

This volume comprises the single largest group of academic texts utilising Rubbish Theory ever to be collected in one place to date. Collectively, the contributions amount to an argument for the utility and value of Rubbish Theory. In essence, they take up the challenge that Joshua Reno made in his introduction to the new edition of *Rubbish Theory* (2017) – it is high time that the theory be rescued from the tip, polished up and placed alongside other social theories in the hallowed scientific canon. In this section, I make a general argument for the value of Rubbish Theory by drawing together several points that emerge when the volume is taken as a whole.

A striking feature of the chapters is their eclecticism. While there is a skew towards environmental issues and anthropology[7], the array of

7 A reflection of this book's origins within Gothenburg University's School of Global Studies.

different subjects covered is impressive. The geographical focus is also varied. This speaks to three linked features of Rubbish Theory, its user-friendly nature; its general applicability as a structuralist theory; and what it particularly brings into focus.

Rubbish Theory's user-friendliness shone through from the onset of this project. From the contributing authors only three (Gillette, Singleton and Thompson) had previously published work utilising Rubbish Theory. Even so, this diverse group of scholars immediately saw the applicability of Rubbish Theory to their own domains of expertise. This book scrutinises ordering projects across social scales and around the world. We see the ordering practices of individuals, industries, institutions and nations. Likewise, chapters focus on multiple different countries within Europe, Asia, the Americas and the Pacific, and deal with northern, southern, colonist and indigenous social contexts[8]. Some might consider user-friendliness a trivial point. I however disagree. Given the inaccessibility of much social theory, articulating a theory that feels intuitive to people from disparate academic and social backgrounds is no mean feat. Further, in addition to clarity, Thompson's provocative language and iconoclastic approach have appeal and shock value. Many people are surprised to realise that they are effectively ordering some points of view as Rubbish or unaware that they are unconsciously standing in the role of High Priest when in their own eyes they are highly progressive or radical! In sum, my experience using and communicating about Rubbish Theory is that many people find its terms intuitive and thought-provoking, quickly seeing novel applications in their own research – even if they then find that Rubbish Theory's nuance requires considerable thought. Taken together, I believe these chapters reveal, to paraphrase Mary Douglas, that as a general social theory Rubbish Theory is good to think with, regardless of whether one uses or argues with it.

That the contexts that Rubbish Theory has been applied to are diverse speaks to a further argument integral to this book. As a

8 Indeed, several chapters in this volume as well as other articles elsewhere (Singleton, 2021; Singleton and Gillette, 2023) arguably counter the claim that Rubbish Theory is unsuitable for decolonial research (cf. Bell, 2018).

structuralist theory, the argument is that the categories and actors that Rubbish Theory identifies—Durables, Transients, Rubbish, High Priests, Crashers Through and Levellers—may be found everywhere. This understandably may draw the ire of social scientists that recoil from universal categorisations. This is understandable given the way such categories have been employed throughout history. Likewise, in emphasising the importance of social categorisation, objects may be rendered inert (Greeson, 2020: 156) and their individual natures and histories overlooked (see Appelgren, this volume). My hope however is that the collected chapters show firstly that it is possible to minimise the damage done in applying structuralist analytical tools by using them sensitively and in a mindful manner. Integral to doing this is to retain an awareness that contexts are unique and dynamic – to be conscious that the devil is often in the detail[9]. Secondly, I believe that it also shows the value of comparison. Instead of taking each case as unique, by comparing evidence from different cultural contexts it becomes possible to test and critique dominant paradigmatic assumptions (van der Veer, 2016). This then allows the researcher to make novel and revealing, and above all, systematic comparisons across time and space, increasing the potential learning across contexts and cultures. Likewise, by exploring common patterns in the social system one can potentially further grasp the material effects and limitations objects impose on social orderings. Thus, Rubbish Theory perhaps provides a way to bridge materialist and constructivist social science as the different stances taken by the contributors to this volume make clear.

Following on from this, my hope is that this book has demonstrated Rubbish Theory's considerable potential for constructive innovation to ameliorate or mitigate problems rooted in different ordering systems. By drawing attention to social roles and behaviours that continue to be enacted in so many contexts it allows for reflection. As such, Rubbish Theory's analytical language can highlight what information and concomitant perspectives are being missed around any given issue. Likewise, with its emphasis on the link between valuation and

9 After all, no tool is suitable for every occasion – "never bring a knife to a gunfight."

social organisation it can explain why alliances between social actors who appear to have a common interest break down – ultimately the desired-for value system was not the same (cf. Singleton and Gillette, 2023, see also Saldert and Singleton, this volume). In doing this, Rubbish Theory's framework makes it possible to anticipate conflict and prepare for it, highlighting the innovatory potential of interactions between orderings (Thompson, 2008a; Verweij, 2011; Verweij and Thompson, 2011) or where ordering systems should be kept apart (Blaser, 2018). In doing this, Rubbish Theory provides an explanation as to why certain behaviours around objects are shocking, and why those embroiled in different games act as they do. Put another way, when actors articulating different orderings meet, Rubbish Theory can help participants identify paths of actions that may have remained invisible if only one order dominated. There is thus potential for novel and innovative connections to be formed across the globe thanks to the shared framework and actors may see where their competing visions of future society resonate or conflict. Rubbish Theory is also a valuable antidote to resting on one's laurels – ordering systems are never finally "done", and games never cease to be played. Rubbish Theory makes clear that all orderings are temporary and in constant processes of making and unmaking. To quote Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*, "Thus destroyers topple empires, make a canvas of clean rubble where creators then can build a better world" (1990: 222).

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Part I

Rubbish Cases

Blue, here is a mug for you: a potter's tale of being stuck in the Rubbish cycle

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Rubbish Theory, as a theory of tastes and preferences is of great relevance to art, artists and craftsmen of many kinds. In this chapter, I, a ceramicist currently employed at a university in the USA, use Rubbish Theory to reflect on and interpret the path my life takes. What follows is a personal reflection, rather than a typical academic book chapter. The text illustrates how competing ordering systems of value influence my professional (and personal) life. Rubbish Theory allows me to articulate some of the most important lessons learned striving to survive as a potter. My intention is to show the relevance of Rubbish Theory in making sense of the competing imperatives the guide much of my life.

I don't come from an art background. Growing up in a middle-class family in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s with parents as teachers and grandparents as farmers, our values were fairly straightforward: "buy what you need", "spend only what you have", and "talk of only what you know". Looking back, I realize that this was a very regional view of the world. Living in the Ozarks, in the Midwest, our vantage point was very isolated and libertarian. In some ways, it was very Zen if not boring. It was designed to set me on a life path bound for security and predictability.

I am nearing 40 at this point in my life. I have been a ceramic artist for nearly 20 years of it and it's fair to say I have been an academic since I graduated university (for the first time) in 2008. In my own awkward way, I enjoy my place in this world. I do not neatly fit in anywhere, which can lead to times of isolation, but also of great relevance as I straddle my feet in several puddles of water.

My mind is in a constant screaming match with itself as I try to

make sense of things. It is hard to buck the archetypal roadmap put forward in my formative years as I navigate through the academy and art world (which are neither practical nor sensical). But there are times when serendipity occurs, and things make sense. I therefore gravitated towards ceramics early on in my career as ceramics is bound up with practicability. The sheer nature of the material, which is the most permanent and resilient art-making medium humankind knows, is associated with function and craft. Function being defined here as "utilitarian" e.g. cups, bowls, pitchers…etc.

It is hard to overstate that there is relatively nothing new in ceramics when it comes to vessels. Pottery's only reference is pottery itself. From Jomon pots in Japan that date back 18,000 years to Mimbres pottery that came from the Native American tribes in the American southeast in 850 C.E., to the Sevres porcelain that bankrupted France in the 17th century, each culture made vessels that first and foremost were designed to contain and bring sustenance to the user. In each of these examples. time and attention was always paid to the foot of the vessel, which dictated how it sat. Thought was given to the handle of the vessel, if there was a handle, which would dictate the ability to hold hot liquids or food. Extreme care was given to the lip or rim of these objects to ensure comfort for the user's mouth as they drank from a cup. This list continues on and on until the object is sitting in front of you. There can be ceremonial utilizations to all of the aforementioned vessels, however, without the *function*, there would be no utility and, thus, the objects would fall into a different category: decorative. As a decorative object with no function, these objects will easily fall out of fashion and be discarded. However, their mere function makes them candidates to be a Durable object, as their function is an intrinsic value for all humans over time.

Humbling experiences

Early in my career, fresh out of university, to make money as an artist, I resorted to selling ceramic wares at the dreaded "local craft market", so often dismissed by the great and the good of the art

world. There is a reality to selling ceramics in these settings that I had not quite understood with my background of: "buy what you need","spend only what you have", and "talk of only what you know". That understanding is that people buy what they think is high status, not necessarily what is good, practical or in good taste (as defined by cultural arbiters of such things). Additionally, coming from the academic realm of making, I knew what good design was and therefore I knew what people wanted or at least *should* want. So, I thought.

With my education securely in my head, knowing more than everyone else at this silly sale, I confidently showed up with a plethora of rough, gestural, loosely crafted objects that spoke to the maker's hand. They were well-studied objects that were divorced from perfection as understood by the common observer. They were purposely contorted to lean and slump. These objects were created with a sense of purpose as well as with an understanding of *function*. They fit well in the hands of the users. They had maker's marks demonstrating their uniqueness. They were *original*. They were high-temperature fired in a reduction kiln with brown, earthen tone yellows, and muted reds. They were a nod to art at a *craft* exhibition.

I didn't sell one all day.

Three booths down from me was another individual selling their ceramic objects. They were in their late 40s and were obviously a hobbyist from how they talked about their "day job". The clay they employed was anemic in color: fired in an electric kiln and devoid of the richness of a high-temperature reduction firing: even more proof that they were likely fired in an impromptu garage or basement studio at their house. Each cup, bowl, and mug was perfectly straight-walled or perfectly bellied out. This could be acceptable if each like-item was exactly the same, but they weren't. No two objects were similar in height or width- there was just a failed attempt to be consistent. There were no throwing lines or evidence that anything had come from the individual who made them- just the inconsistency of someone who was having fun making them. The handles were large, loopy, and incredibly uncomfortable to hold. They resembled large ears which

further increased my disgust for them. The surfaces were all smooth and shiny. Everything was blue.

Their booth sold out before the end of the day!

Aside from being heartbroken, I was also penniless and in despair. I couldn't get over my embarrassment at not selling anything. For me, this sale was an indictment of me, my education, and my understanding of *art*. The second-guessing of "Should I be doing this as a career" was at the forefront of my mind. Getting an art degree had already drawn the ire of my family. Failure to support myself through my newfound education was not going to help convince them otherwise.

I went home that weekend to see my family- to do laundry and get a free meal. I brought several objects from the sale with me to give away to family members as "gifts". When I told them that I brought home ceramic objects for them everyone was excited. That is until they saw them. I could see their expressions fall as I opened the box. Holding back a further bruised ego, I had to ask "What is wrong with them?"

"Well…" said my mom, "they are… I'm just not sure."

"What?" I coughed out. "Is it the shapes? The handles? The size? What?!"

"Do you have anything in blue?" piped my aunt.

"Blue? Do you want them in blue?! What about the…" I was pleading before I was interrupted.

"No, just blue would look better." my aunt repeated. "Blue is pretty".

At this point, I wasn't sure how to act. I just nodded and uttered back, "Blue IS pretty".

In four years at the University, countless hours spent reading and studying about form and function, and countless more in the studio expanding my skills, had I just been taught my greatest lesson in art?

I took back all the things that I brought. Partially because no one wanted them… but I had an idea and I wanted to try something. I left my parents and went back to my studio to unpack my box. In the coming weeks, I got to work remaking each object as close to

the original as I could: every mark, line, and perfect imperfection. As works dried and removed from their successful bisque firing, I prepared the most benevolent blue glaze I could think of to finish them with. It was akin to a Ming dynasty and Delft blue as I could get. It was obnoxiously blue. I dipped each new piece in it and sacrilegiously fired them to their glorious stoneware temperatures. When I opened the kiln, Yves Klein[1] could not have been prouder. My blue period had begun.

I prepared myself for another craft market. Just as before I showed up early to set up. Only this time the confidence and conviction that swelled my anticipation and pride the previous time was lacking. I reluctantly placed on my table each and every pot that I had displayed at the last show, priced just the same. Along with these I opened and unboxed a nearly identical set of blue wares to accompany the original offenders- only these were priced $5 higher. This was a bold move but was it the right one?

Nearly 20 years later I feel like there are some answers to that question.

Hairy potter and the prisoners of Rubbish Theory

In trying to make sense of my memories, Rubbish Theory is helpful. To briefly refresh, Rubbish Theory provides a theoretical model about the ordering of different objects. These come in three categories: Durables (theoretically eternal, gaining in value through time), Transients (decreasing in value through time) and Rubbish (without value, the eventual fate of Transient objects and the source of future Durables. Various actors ("High Priests", "Crashers Through" and "Levellers") compete over this basic schema (Thompson 2003; 2017). However, there are also those who are not involved in any given "game" (ordering system). These "Losers-Out" as Thompson calls them, are defined by their lack of access to and influence over the Durable category (2003: 325). Theirs is thus a world of Transient and

1 French judoka and artist famous for among other things concentrating on the usage of single primary colour, blue. Klein famously produced an exhibition 11 identical monochromatic blue canvases.

Rubbish objects for the most part (Thompson 2017: 62-4). In any given society, there will be multiple games ongoing across diverse contexts, with different social groups more or less invested in them at different times.

Applying this model to my experience, much of my formal education was dedicated to instilling in me an understanding about what art is. Art is in many ways a classic Durable, that which is art is lovingly protected and maintained for as long as possible, with its definition the preserve of particular groups in society. In Rubbish Theory terms, my education was spent learning the rules of this game from High Priests, learning what art is and instilling me with the confidence that I too can create and define Durable artistic objects.

However, when one has left the hallowed halls of the High Priests, art becomes more complicated. The game changed. Indeed, when working as an artist to create art, the artist must first ask themselves a series of questions to understand what and why they are making. The idea of art is subjective enough (even my university teachers acknowledged that). Thus, while we are living in some post-post-modern dystopia it is truly legitimate to ask oneself several things: Who am I making this for? Why am I making this? Who will see this? *Am I hungry?*

The latter of these questions is truly the most important. Squarely with my tongue tucked into my cheek, the ability and willingness to sell something will inevitably decide whether or not one will be able to live off one's art. Sticking to one's guns about what truly Durable art objects are will not put food on the table if customers disagree. Failing to engage with customers' taste games will swiftly lead to game over. There are several factors and scenarios as to how this does and does not matter, but many seem particularly obviously related to Rubbish Theory's model.

The ordering systems people use to organize life naturally affect what one makes, how one makes it and how much one can sell it for. As I said earlier, I grew up in a household and community that put very little value into art. In Rubbish Theory terms, the ordering

game was defined largely without reference to the Durables of the art world. While certainly not necessarily "losers", they are largely Loser's-Out when it comes to the influencing the game over what is or is not Durable art. Fine art as a game is something that they are uninvolved in – which they are perfectly happy about, thank you very much! (Below). *Art* in this case would be described as something conventionally beautiful. Beauty is not something that you necessarily need to put a high commodity price on in the sense of owning an object that has no intrinsic value e.g., my gun is a beautiful piece of art compared to this painting of an eagle that is well rendered. The gun may be well crafted, thus making it beautiful, but it also has a purpose. It is *useful*. Whereas the eagle painting is well rendered but serves the same purpose as the mounted deer head on my mantle. These notions of personification of art and how it is used to describe is perhaps a uniquely American ordering system. But it becomes a true force to reckon with as a maker.

The eagle painting is a mass production, a commodity, and a status symbol of the American lower-middle class which states that you are able to collect "art", but you are not one of THOSE art collectors (THOSE being defined as someone who collects challenging or abstract works – someone who likely listens to High Priests). This is classic behavior of those embedded in a world of Transient objects (cf. Thompson 2017: 63). The larger question that needs to be answered here is not what they are buying, but why are they buying it. The answer goes back to my aunt.

"No, just blue would look better." my aunt repeated. "Blue is pretty".

This view is not unique to my aunt and as an artist should not be surprising to me. Color is often a strong motivator for people. It can manipulate emotion and subversively direct the viewer's feelings about an object. "Between 70 percent to 90 percent of subconscious judgment on a product is made in a few seconds on color alone," says Jenny Ross, the head of concept and design strategy for New Balance shoes (O'Flaherty 2021). Indeed, for many, color is key. 85% of consumers cite color as the main reason for purchasing a particular

product and 80% believe color increases brand recognition (Singh 2006). Similar snap decisions also apply to the things that have already been ordered clearly as art. The time people give to evaluate and judge art in galleries is much less than 90 seconds! According to a study conducted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, if your work does not hit the right note within the initial 30 seconds of getting the viewer's attention, then all of the work you have put into the piece is gone (Smith et al. 2017). This is skewed based on class, social experience, and the perception of good taste – as Thompson describes, different groups are differently invested in the game that is fine art linked to their access to Durable objects (2017, cf. Bourdieu 1984). As an artist, this latter is hard to deal with as individuals who are interested in consuming art, but who haven't studied it or who don't understand what they are looking at, tend to buy art on the perception of what they estimate as good or expensive established from social cues. Essentially they buy art as a competitive act within their own social circles (cf. Thompson 2017: 63). This often amounts for a fondness for the abundant use of faux gold, general love of impressionistic art, old things, or art that is deemed to "emerge from the soul". Again, the latter is a quote I have heard time and time again from art viewers. Enter the blue glaze. According to the research, if one's work is not blue (or whatever the alternative criteria is) then one has potentially missed out on roughly 85% of the average consumers- depending on their current moods. Whatever the High Priests say, one has to be aware that in other games, blue is the color to be competitive.

And that is what I found out 20 years ago. With my new array of blue glazed objects, made to the same specifications as my original earthen-tone wares, yet priced $5 higher, I was able to sell out on everything blue… leaving my non-blue wares looking lonely and forlorn.

From a Rubbish Theory perspective, it is clear that my family cared little for the artistic criteria of High Priests. In their own homes and communities, they enact an alternative valuing system, a different game, where decorative objects are utilitarian, to individual tastes and Transient (they degrade through use). There, they show to friends,

relatives and neighbors that they can "keep up with the Joneses" and have the means to procure decorative art appealing to their own tastes. To which the High Priests of the art world often look askance.

For me, blue glaze proved to be an inflection point between these two orderings: the world of art and the world of the home and hearth.

The game is afoot! Art versus craft

As stated at the beginning I was not raised in a house that valued *art*, good design, or fine craft – fancy things. Rather I was the kid who drew all the time and built elaborate forts out of sticks and branches on my grandparents' farm because it was something to do. I stumbled into *art* as a career through the fortuitous tutelage of a professor at a junior college who caught me drawing caricatures of President George W. Bush in his lecture hall. Through university, traveling, and eventually landing several teaching jobs at universities around the U.S., I have lost the naiveté in making that so many artists spend their careers attempting to recapture (think of Picasso). When it came to survival, it literally paid to abandon the rules of the art game.

The reality that I came to understand early in my career is that there is a difference between a craftsman and an artist. The craftsman can create without deference to an idea or concept as long as it is well made and provides utility. It does not need to be eternal. The artist can create without deference to an audience, skill, or good taste: it is about Crashing Through an idea. Often the artist's dream is to create a Durable object either by conforming to or changing the rules of the art game. This is most relevant in the realm of modern and contemporary art. Sculptor Paul McCarthy, whose work outlandishly pushes the boundaries of political correctness and collective good taste, uses extreme skill to make work that is found to be repulsive and in poor taste by the general public. Kara Walker uses simple drawings in silhouette form that were popularized in the Victorian era to depict narratives of the American Dixie South, exposing the sexual, emotional, and physical abuse levied against African Americans in the United States. Both are of these artists help to clearly demonstrate the

chasm between modern ideas of art and craft as each of these artists is solely pushing a narrative and the art form is merely a vehicle to convey that. Likewise, both are feted by the High Priests of the art world, while also producing items few ordinary people would wish to have in their homes. It is up to the viewer to understand it. While equally valuable and in their purest forms, those engaging in art or craft at its highest levels have reached their own sense of nirvana, choosing to focus on utility or idea. Furthermore, each has their audience and to survive the professional potter needs to understand this. In Rubbish Theory terms, the potter who aspires to being an artist needs to be conscious of both ordering systems.

Ceramics sits at the apex of these mindsets. Being a craft material you are working with the expendable earth. An endless supply of mud-Rubbish that, with the addition of heat, you can create long-lasting objects that will physically last the test of time: humbly sustaining their owners. Museums are full of these objects that have come to be understood as invaluable, Durables in a Rubbish Theory sense. However, there isn't necessarily a great narrative or story of *why* with the ceramic vessel. This is an object that solely and almost uniquely, references only itself. In most cases, form follows function. It does, however, reference the culture in which it was created. There can be a timeless and Durable quality to the simplicity of the humble pot.

As a maker, I believe there is a nobility to creating these objects, and at times a responsibility to carry forward a tradition that is in lockstep with time and the earliest cultures that were created. English potter Bernard Leach, who famously went to Japan to learn about their craft heritage and would later bring the Japanese sense of craft to the Western craft and art world, sums up this idea well:

> "[Soetsu Yanagi's] main criticism of individual craftsmen and modern artists is that they are overproud of their individualism" … [in Rubbish Theory terms, their ability to Crash Through their outputs into the Durable category]… I think I am right in saying Yanagi's belief was that the good artist or craftsman has no personal pride because in his soul he knows that any prowess he

> shows is evidence of that Other Power. Therefore, what Yanagi says is 'Take heed of the humble; be what you are by birthright; there is no room for arrogance'" (Leach 1960: 102).

Sometimes without clear knowledge, all ceramists are working from a template bound within the material and informed by their immediate culture, which inevitably references all of the work that has come before them. This is a dynamic, egalitarian world of crafting Transient objects without any grand vision of making something to be lauded throughout history.

Ideally one would think that as a maker and craftsman, since one is working within this lineage, one is controlling this ordering culture, this game. Perhaps to some extent, I am. I am now a university teacher myself and I mold my students' development. The informed craftsperson is the standard bearer for good design, form, and function. You are taking this knowledge, whether learned or observed and building on it. It is the craftsman who knows how to make a Durable object within their own craft game. However, this doesn't mean that anyone else cares. Thus, in a sense, this craft game must necessarily straddle the art world and that of those locked out from access to Durable objects.

This is perhaps the conundrum of being an artist/craftsperson/ceramicist—I will argue at any time in human history—manifesting in my case with the blue glaze. One spends years honing one's craft, learning from the High Priests, and pouring oneself into work. But then the rent is due, and prospective customers seem to prefer other things. So you dial it back; and as a craftsperson, you *can* dial it back. You *can* rely on the craft as opposed to the art. That is when one truly becomes a craftsperson. You switch it up and make simple forms that are easily digestible for the average consumer, and you glaze them blue. You do this because people like blue and you need to pay your bills so you can continue making your art. There is a narrative you tell yourself that it is ok because you are at least still making and the thing you are making, albeit below the standards of your own game, is still better than what they will buy from IKEA or Wal-Mart. You are at

least making a sand's grain of a difference... hoping that the Durable category is still stable and you are still in charge of it even if my aunt and her ilk have made everything blue. Coming to terms with this has become crucial to my ability to survive at this nexus between different ordering games.

For me as an artist and a craftsperson Rubbish Theory can offer a valuable lens through which to understand the fluctuating systems of value that shape people's lived experiences: even those as complex as art. The highwire act of negotiating the tensions between institutional definitions of Durable art and the often contradictory demands of broader consumer taste is a constant within my own practice. Recognizing and adapting to these overlapping and sometimes conflicting games has been essential not only to my professional survival but to a more nuanced understanding of what it means to make, value, and sustain a creative practice.

Coda

I have always been one to frequent second-hand shops. Before it was in vogue I would go down to the local second-hand stores and flea markets to buy tchotchkes, old pipes, clothes…etc. Call me sentimental or cheap, I love to thrift. Still to this day, I am always looking for a good bargain. The thrill is that you never know what you are going to find. I tend to go with some things in mind, but I am always open to the possibility of finding something that I didn't know I was looking for. I love walking through the china section of these stores and examining the pieces. This is where you can find the discards of what was once in vogue or seen as prized. In general, if this wasn't true, these objects would have been broken or discarded years before. Even if objects are not in vogue, people tend to donate rather than discard for the sake of nostalgia. They are Transient objects on their way to the oblivion of Rubbish, but they're not quite there yet.

It is interesting to see what former owners considered their "good china" and what was their daily wares. You can always tell based on chips, knife scraps, spoon stir marks… etc if the objects were used

regularly, a favorite of someone, or never used at all. Once in a while, you will even come across handmade objects. These tend to be fairly heinous from my High Priestly position as artist/craftsman – with neither sense of form nor function and almost always found doused in blue.

Several years after my initial blue fiasco and subsequent succumbing to the realities of marketing, I made a truly outrageous find in one of my thrift store quests: myself. Tucked away amongst the "Best Boss" cups and box top redemption cups from Post Cereal, sat a blue mug with an unmistakable handle that could only fit two fingers and signed ZNT 12' on the bottom. Marketed at $5 my art had become someone's second hand. The games continue.

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"Rubbish" memorial death objects in care homes and hospitals: dilemmas of remembrance and forgetfulness

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I have spent my professional adult life working and researching in and around death and dying, formally within care homes, informally with funeral undertakers and mortuaries and latterly as a Chaplain within the public hospital system in the UK, the National Health Service (NHS)[1]. The following chapter offers a reflection on the use of Rubbish Theory to make sense of objects, people, and their underlying story, always within the context of death and dying. It thus represents personal reflections and applications of Rubbish Theory, rather than being a traditional academic text. My hope is that it shows how I have found Rubbish Theory to be useful in processing difficult subjects in my professional life and that this is helpful and inspirational to others.

In this chapter, I discuss four objects presented within three auto-ethnographic case studies and relate them to changes in their respective organisations and how they reflect values of care in contexts where people are regularly dying. Two of the studies are from my research into workers' perceptions of death and dying in care homes, which look after elderly patients (see Dempster, 2006; 2008). A further two case studies are situated in the world of acute medical care. In these environments, Durables are created through practices of care. Their enactment and maintenance forms part of the emotional labour

1 This chapter is written from the perspective of one of us (Dempster) whose experiences form the basis of these reflections. Singleton has assisted with the writing. The chapter is arguably the culmination of several theoretical conversations between the two authors over the past 15 years.

that is integral to my work as a Chaplain and that of all Care Workers (Smith 2017). Indeed, the objects associated with the dead take on the status of Durables and it is here that existential conflict is often reawakened. These case studies highlight the challenges of what to do with what is left behind. Namely, what does a Chaplain (or any Care Worker) do with objects which have lost meaning over time or lost association with a person (or the organisational values) or have just decreased in worth for the care Home or NHS department? Such dilemmas are challenging: indeed, they're often literally Rubbish to deal with!

This chapter is organised as follows. In the next section, I briefly reiterate the relevant parts of Rubbish Theory. The section after, Part 1, deals with two case studies drawn from a care home. Part 2 then presents material from my current job as a hospital chaplain. I then round things off with some general reflections from this brief foray into Rubbish Theory.

Making connections with Rubbish Theory through remembering and forgetting

Thompson's (2017) Rubbish Theory provides a model for the valuation of objects. He describes how social processes order objects, placing them within categories of value. Two of these, Transient and Durables are overt categories. Transient objects have value, but this fades over time (think of most food items for example) until they enter a third category, Rubbish. Durables are conceived as functionally eternal (e.g., fine art) and may even gain value over time. Rubbish as a category is of a different nature to other two, it is a category of zero value and represents residual to the value system. Thus, objects are classified, with some being moved out of view into Rubbish. However, Rubbish is of considerable importance, because it is from this category that new Durables may be created – for example, pages from a discarded comic become a valued object of art in a museum. Rubbish Theory discusses the movements of objects through these categories and their political consequences, with

particular social actors exercising power over these processes.

Integral to the processes Thompson (2017) describes is a model of remembering and forgetting. After all, not everything can be remembered. Each of the categories that Rubbish Theory identifies have a particular temporal orientation attached to them. Durables are envisaged as eternal, whereas Transients are considered to have a finite lifespan, to have a duration. Rubbish, in contrast exists outside of time, it exists behind a "curtain of amnesia", in a zone of oblivion (Thompson 2003: 321). Thompson illustrates this through the case of the Tiv segmentary lineage system, highlighting how memory and historical facts become objects in contemporary political struggles. However, this process pertains everywhere. Any given society's commemorations likely can be understood through Rubbish Theory's categories – some names and events are remembered and recited forever, they are Durable. While most other things instead Transiently burn for a while but then are eventually forgotten, becoming Rubbish. Obviously, who or what is remembered is never fully settled and different groups seek to enact their own historiographies.

In this chapter, I utilise Rubbish Theory to explore processes of remembering and forgetting in care contexts. In the cases below, staff in care homes and hospitals draw upon faded and fading memories of cared for people and patients in articulating and enacting models of care. Thus, in Part 1 I discuss care home staff's contests of memory. In these, certain former residents become ancestor figures, represented by relic objects, who come to be invoked within political struggles within the care home. Thus, the defining behaviours of "good care" will be held within the staff's memory of emotional labour (Delgado et al., 2017) and/or organisational memory. Essentially anecdotal stories of care completed to a high standard will be attached (by carers) to named patients, who no longer 'live' in the care home. These become benchmark examples of "good care" for future work (Dempster, 2006; 2008). In this, Rubbish Theory reveals the contests beneath the surface. In part 2, I shift focus to my current role as a NHS chaplain. I describe a puzzle facing myself and my

colleagues, how to dispose of objects that whilst meaningless to us are presumably important to someone. As a case for Rubbish Theory, it is illustrative of the speed by which ordering systems can change and the pitfalls that change can lead to.

Part 1: Interrogating a care home

In a previous life I conducted research on care in and around death and dying in nursing homes (Dempster, 2006; 2008). One finding was that care workers in contexts of change, dying and death often strive for a sense of continuity of care as a protective measure for themselves. This is done through 'narratives of care' whereby the stories of care are collected and consolidated and retold often. Care itself becomes embodied in objects, Durable objects, which protect against the inevitable transient nature of illness, disease and death. In the following example, care workers are the High Priests of memory (cf. Thompson, 2003) – they determine which people are remembered and forgotten within the institutional context of the care home. However, this is inevitably upended if there is a change of staff.

Case study 1: Taught care through a sock.

Death and dying complicate life as well as end it. In care homes this can manifest in something as prosaic as simply discarding unwanted items. This case study focuses on a single sock in the laundry, which is used by care home staff as a teaching device. Whilst the individual carers identify with both object, person, and care offered, the sock is a Durable object, the value of which comes from the lessons that can be learned from it. The irony of an important object being seemingly of little value is not lost on the carers who use it as a device to remember. Essentially it taps into the ethos and values of the care home 'from which it came' and is used to answer some of the deep existential questions surrounding care and our own continuity which often follow us around care homes for the elderly. How do we make sense of our care when people die frequently around us? How do we make sense of their objects and the spaces they inhabited?

Dorothy's sock hung shrivelled from the edge of the shelf in a laundry room within a care home for the elderly. She died peacefully, a dignified 'good death', years ago, and this is the last object in the care home associated with her, apart from her name still marked on a laundry basket for the last room she was in. The death was considered to be the right mix of care, support, time to go, family around, all the hallmarks described by the Lancet in its recommendations for a good death (Sallnow et al., 2022). Like some sort of magic item, the sock was regularly touched by passing staff, particularly by the housekeeper who cared for it. It retained significance as a Durable object despite five years having passed since it was last washed and worn. The housekeeper would tend its memory, keeping it Durable in the minds of carers in the home.

Over time, Dorothy's sock became considered a source of good luck to care home staff, this 'magical thinking' is not unlike a lucky rabbit's foot (Blatchley, 2021). Staff would touch the fabric absent-mindedly as they enter the laundry. I also noticed it functioning like a key. When the sock is touched, the housekeeper is more likely to acquiesce to requests despite her overly busy schedule of cleaning engagements. Carers recognised the importance of this Durable object for the housekeeper and this added to their ritual engagement, encouraging them to remember to touch it. Further, the sock was credited by care home staff as holding mystical power to resolve impossible situations or ongoing difficulties with other care home residents. It thus became a talisman that provides aid to people in the care home. These superstitious qualities themselves are not the source of Dorothy's sock's status as a Durable. Rather it was the stories that emerged around the sock that have given it value. These stories teach important values of what it is to care and how it is to manage the constant bereavement that is a fact of life in a care home, viewed in this case from the perspective of the laundry room. Typically, such pedagogical moments would be prefaced by a staff member using the phrase "do you remember…" and then offering an anecdote of care. Stories prompted by Dorothy's sock included:

- "The sock puppet" – a story of when Dorothy and a carer conversed through sock puppets. They both placed socks on their hands and talked through the socks. It was recalled as a moment of levity and shared pleasure, staff would often laugh and voice similar tales where the conversation held through the socks would resolve some tension, highlighting the importance of this act of care, a moment of deep connection between carer and cared for.
- "The contraceptive sock" – staff would recall the time Dorothy employed the word "sock" as a euphemism for contraception. Dorothy was describing the actions needed for a member of staff's partner to avoid becoming pregnant again – "He needs to wear a sock in bed". This tale highlighted how Dorothy was party to intimate information and took an interest in the celebrations and developments of carers' family lives. An ideal carer-cared for relationship.
- "The 'this little piggy went to market' game" – staff would recall this as example of showing extra kindness to a patient. Although a children's rhyme, Dorothy loved it as she had ticklish feet. It thus was an example of an act of care – staff tickled playfully with her feet prior to putting a sock on Dorothy's foot.
- "Painted toes" and "strange socks" – staff remembered the day they painted Dorothy's toenails and she refused to wear her socks but wanted to show her bright pink toenails to everyone in the home. They also recalled that Dorothy had a "strange sock drawer" with a range of slogan socks which were according to staff "eclectic and weird". Her family continued to buy comedy socks for her to wear until the end of her life. Staff too had bought pairs if appropriate. These last two examples highlight the concept that good care can be mutual and fun.

Although these anecdotes and stories were easy to elicit, Dorothy's sock remained an item that was from the 'lost pile', something that can never be returned to its owner. However, somehow it had not been swallowed up as is the fate of most odd socks. I argue that this is because it retained value in the nexus of care home social relationships past and present. It epitomised the stories, representing good care in the home (despite her death). Ideally, in the minds of the housekeeper, the care regime was seemingly so successful that her sock remained cared for years after Dorothy herself left the care home.

The sock is not the only death artefact in the care home that retains value after its usefulness is seemingly over. Clothes baskets retain peeling labels which continue to display the names of *some* long dead residents, long after their reutilisation by new (living) inhabitants of particular rooms. In other cases, the names of the dead are fully blackened out, (by the housekeeper or a select group of carers), while others simply have a line inked through, maintaining a visual reminder of former residents. Indeed, some ancient labels are physically maintained, being re-sellotaped and mended. This action speaks highly of the names' value – a withering piece of paper that no longer functions as a label remains a reminder of someone who was cared for (well) in the past. When labels finally disintegrate they may be mourned albeit briefly in the same deference as any other important object that cannot be maintained. A "Transient thought" might be given for the person whose name was contained thereon.

All this is suggestive of some sort of memory valuation process in the care home. Memories of some people are treasured by care home staff, while other names are removed from the pantheon, consigned to oblivion (i.e. Rubbish). These basket labelling practices can be seen as an extension of the care home housekeeper's core task of caring – for some residents, care continues after death. Thus, care staff seek to prevent some people's memory disappearing into Rubbish.

In Pre-Reformation times, Catholic masses might be said for the dead, keeping 'alive' the name of a benefactor. In the care home, I commented in my field notes that by looking after these labels,

and corresponding objects the names of past residents are invoked, remembered and cared for. This thus slows the process through which their memories are disposed of, replaced by new people in the care home. In this interpretation, care home workers are thus the High Priests of institutional memory, retaining as Durables the names and stories of some over others. In this care home, such culturally relevant laundry artefacts and attached stories have been hoarded by the housekeeper. I believe they function as aide memoirs which in turn reflect valuations of the care home inhabitants' lives lived as well as personal evaluations of the quality of care the home has provided.

An example of this evaluation emerged in a conversation about Dorothy between the housekeeper and a more senior member of staff, a carer. The housekeeper became increasingly animated and upset that knowledge of Dorothy had been lost. Together they tried to piece together a life from five years ago. All that was retained was Dorothy's name (still visible on a laundry basket), her sock and a few associated anecdotal stories, which contributed to the housekeeper's hazy memory of a good life, care and death. However, to the housekeeper's distress, squeezing morsels of memory was a challenging process, leading to fears that they were false and that stories of Dorothy had been "taken from other patients". Furthermore, to the housekeeper's chagrin, the carer could not associate the sock with the stories or indeed Dorothy herself. The carer lacked a connection to the anecdotes of Dorothy and saw Dorothy's sock as Rubbish, arguing it was high time it was discarded.

This lack of affirmation of Dorothy's memory by a colleague was as palpable as any loss for the housekeeper. I consider this to be for several reasons. Firstly, it highlighted a change in the care home's ordering system. The carer was stripping Dorothy's sock of its Durable status, a political act if successful. Secondly, it pointed to a failure of care, but in this case not to a living resident, but to Dorothy's memory. The housekeeper's efforts had been insufficient to protect Dorothy from oblivion or what Thompson calls "the curtain of amnesia" (2003: 321). For this the housekeeper experienced guilt and regret. Thirdly, I

believe the failure to maintain this Durable object prompted a painful reflection on the housekeeper's own mortality. Durables *should* be eternal, when they are rendered Transient they highlight that all things are ultimately Transient, including human life and memory. As such, part of the housekeeper's distress is the knowledge that all are destined to become detritus, Rubbish stored in the recesses of people's minds no longer linked to the living or the dead, until it is totally gone.

Several weeks after this conversation, Dorothy's sock was 'lost again'. The housekeeper commented "the sock obviously has a life of its own". While I will never know exactly what happened I suspect that following its revaluation, Dorothy's sock was unceremoniously binned. No doubt memories of Dorothy's life and death continued to be edited, and have become attached to other examples of good care within the care home. The tale of her sock highlights something I have noted in my work, many of us would like to think that all human lives are Durable. The memory should somehow never die. However, the process of forgetting is inevitable and emotionally painful. It is also political, which I will return to later.

Case study 2: Chairs and other objects of permanence

In contrast to Dorothy's sock, Jeannie's chair has a permanence that a 'lost and found' jumble item does not. It sits as a guardian outside a room situated in the long corridor of the care home. The chair remains in place outside the former room of its definitive user, Jeannie. Jeannie's chair may not be moved, it is well worn, and it is preferred that no one sits on it for any length of time. It serves almost as a memorial, to the memory of someone whose existence is not actually remembered by anyone currently working within the home.

Its purpose as a placeholder goes beyond its functionality as a seat. It is used to articulate the management mantra of providing good care and not 'missing anything'. The story told is that Jeannie died in the chair and remained sat upright in it postmortem for hours. During that time, the cleaner had talked to Jeannie, commenting on her lack of appetite, whilst giving her room a brisk tidy. Another

carer had hurriedly picked up Jeannie's untouched breakfast, and the receptionist had chucked mail onto the bed. All had cared, but all had missed the all-important fact that Jeannie was dead. Nowadays, as one worker who had recently started (and had not been present for this debacle of care) commented: "Clearly the care home doesn't want another Jeannie's chair incident!".

When I visited the care home, Jeannie was long dead, but her chair and concomitant story remained as an account of events handed down from manager to manager, carer to carer. Her chair has become a Durable object invoked to maintain and discipline the dominant ordering of values within the care home. The significance of her dying in the chair during the day, unnoticed by numerous carers walking in and out of her room, is not lost on the individuals who hear the story. Indeed, the chair embodies a story reminding people of what can go wrong. Jeannie, cared for, but somehow missed, provides a powerful message in a busy care home where staff must deal with just under a hundred residents at any one time. It presents a clear case where the stated moral values of the care home were breached. This is significant, such "morally injurious events threaten one's deeply held beliefs and trust" (Williamson et al., 2021: 453). As such, the hope is that by reminding staff that such things occur it can be prevented from happening again.

Over time, a management maintenance process has occurred in which Jeannie's story is embellished and her chair restored periodically with new metaphoric cushions, to effectively hold its value as a teaching instrument within the care home. Thus, maintaining the Durable has an important role in authorising versions of events that spell out the levels and expectations of care and protect against further moral injury. Reiterating the story to everyone who comes to work at the care home serves to double down the management desire to maintain particular standards within the care home. Jeannie's chair stands for the fact that Jeannie's care was lacking.

Making connections with Rubbish Theory, through remembering and forgetting

Dorothy's sock and Jeannie's chair are illustrative of another feature of human ordering systems. Creative amnesia is often applied to the historical ordering of facts and details. In these cases, the facts may be unimportant (and sometimes deliberately forgotten) unless useful to make a point. Selective remembering and forgetting is integral to any ordering system (one cannot remember everything). In *Rubbish Theory*, Thompson, describes this process drawing on classic ethnography, utilising the genealogical system of the Tiv of Nigeria and Cameroon (2017: 77, 82). I see a similar system in the care home, where "generations" of inhabitants and carers come and go as time passes. Thus, institutional memory is partial and changing, people in the care home know who is there now and then hold a more sporadic memory of people and experiences prior to this. From beyond this "curtain of amnesia" various items are retained – Dorothy's sock and Jeannie's chair, see Figure 1 below. These become representatives of ancestor figures, whose existence is officially indisputable. From this, the values of the care home are reiterated to each generation. Top-down from management and bottom-up from staff, ancestor stories are used to disseminate values, discipline behaviour and maintain organisational memory (Delgado et al., 2017, Dempster 2006; 2008). The extent that such orderings are successful is variable. Based on the foregoing account, the memories (and relics) of both Dorothy and Jeannie are candidates for Durable status. However, it appears that Jeannie's memory, with its management support has been more successfully accorded Durable status than Dorothy's (much to the housekeeper's distress).

In sum, Jeannie's chair and Dorothy's sock embody stories about care, what it should be and when it has lapsed. The storyteller (more often than not a manager, or someone with a vested interest in the care of a patient) will point to the failings of care, reiterate the best bits of care, so that listeners can be sure to get the correct messages of what the care ethos should look like in this home. They provide parables

about what is considered important in the care home. From a Rubbish Theory perspective, the care home is a place where Transient objects (people) flow in and die and are forgotten, transferred to the oblivion of Rubbish along with their possessions. Periodically, certain objects (a sock, a chair) however are rescued from Rubbish as Durables. These Durable objects are used to articulate the values of the care home and as tools to manage the ever-present stresses of death and dying. They are also objects of contention. Jeannie's chair represents a top-down artefact employed by management to discipline staff to maintain caring standards. Contrastingly, maintenance of Dorothy's sock was the preserve of the housekeeper, maintaining a more personal vision of what care and caring entail. These two objects highlight the different "games" (Thompson 2017: 91) coexisting in a care home, an awareness of which helps one understand people's behaviour.

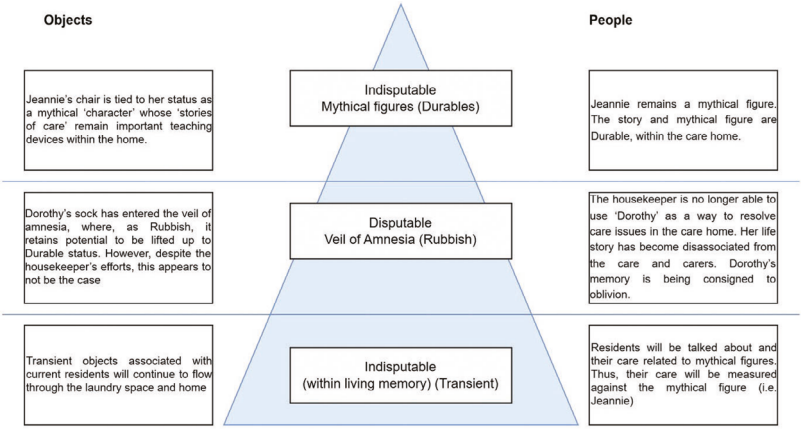

Figure 1

Part II: What to do with them – a chaplain's dilemma

So far, I have applied Rubbish Theory to two case studies of indisputable historical characters who have been cared for and can be identified by people within an organisation. However, what happens when the links to the past are already broken down and dissolved?

What of these Transient objects, destined to become Rubbish? What can we learn of the dilemma's facing workers with objects which have already become completely Transient and dislocated from their original owner or meaning? Case study 3 inhabits a different world of care. The objects reside in a UK National Health Service (NHS) Hospital. Specifically in a Chaplaincy Department based in the East of England. Their inclusion here shows some of the dilemmas associated with how NHS staff manage, maintain or dispose of objects, which change status over time.

Modern chaplaincy, a breakdown service in hospitals of memory

Contemporary UK chaplaincy comprises a professionally trained group of full and part-time practitioners within the NHS providing pastoral, emotional and spiritual support for patients and staff. Their presence within the NHS dates to its 1948 foundation where their presence was stipulated to meet the new national institution's spiritual needs (Swift, 2016). Since then, the NHS chaplaincy role has evolved over the years from being traditional vicars who embody a single faith tradition, often attached to traditional Anglican Christian parishes, to a multi-faith (and sometimes even atheistic) enterprise. Modern chaplains are paid for directly by the NHS, somewhat independent of the sending bodies (churches, faith organisations and groups), which still vet and train them.

The chaplain role is wide and varied incorporating religious rites and rituals from a wide selection of faith groups, involving diverse activities such as naming ceremonies, baptisms, communion, funeral services, weddings, and prayers. There are further subtle secular layers to the chaplaincy role which include teaching and lecturing, psychotherapy and counselling, pastoral conversations, staff trauma support and debriefs and the growing field of staff wellbeing etc.

In our organisation I sometimes describe our role as like a vehicle breakdown service (like Greenflag or the RAC in the UK). The chaplain must be able to quickly deploy to any given emotional, spiritual psychological or wellbeing support situation in the hospital

and beyond in under one hour and offer this 'roadside/bedside' assistance to patients, staff and relatives. From there they can continue to care, signpost or advocate for the person. Indeed "The chaplain will be expected to be a resource for the provision of an ethical, theological and pastoral response to the 'mood' or circumstances of the institution, and to offer actions in response to what is around. Such a resource can only be a product of a chaplain who is fully engaged with the rise and fall of the institution's life, through regular engagement with individuals and the institution as a whole" (Gordon et al., 2011).

NHS hospitals are huge organisations both in terms of the people involved and physical space, which comprise, in Rubbish Theory terms, a huge collection of objects enmeshed in different "games" or ordering systems. This is also true of the hospital's chaplaincy. In my own workplace, uproar over the uprooting of a staff memorial tree prompted reflection within the chaplaincy team of the status of various objects and brought into focus their potential disposal. In the example below, the difficulties of assessing the value of objects are highlighted for the chaplaincy team equipped primarily with a small amount of anecdotal memory. What becomes clear is often that there is no institutional knowledge held by individuals about the importance of objects, or indeed a road map to decipher what they are.

Case study 3: The fall and rise of two statues

The case involves the two carved figures. These twin, wooden objects are approximately 75 cm tall and 50 cm wide, see photographs 1-4 below. The two figures possibly represent a couple of saints, their identities are unknown to the Chaplaincy team[2]. One sits on a plinth in the multi-faith chapel space within a modern Foundation Trust hospital. Across on the other wall, the statue's twin resides, purportedly adding something to the chapel's 'character'. They remain slightly out of sorts, without real purpose or identity.

2 Although an internet search suggests that one is St Peter holding a set of keys and the other is St John the Evangelist holding a cup with a snake in it.

Figure 2: The wooden statues

Historically, the statues' meaning and provenance were unmarked. The chaplaincy team held no records for them. Similarly, there is no information on the statues or nearby wall to make an explicit connection to the hospital or to any particular person. It seems unlikely that they would have been bought specifically for the space as most hospital chapels tend to be dedicated to St Luke the healer. My suspicion is that the statues, like many objects in the chapel space have been discarded by a religious organisation (e.g., a church). Their stay in the chapel is thus part of a Transient object's journey towards becoming Rubbish. These second-hand statues were probably deemed in good enough condition for a hospital chapel. Presumably this also solved any issues the donor had in throwing saints' images on the scrap heap – their disposal is now someone else's problem. At the chapel, they thus continued their gradual loss of value – they continue to age and become less and less in keeping with the ethos of 'modern chaplaincy'.

When I joined the chaplaincy team, the statues had already become disassociated objects, in that no one in the seven-member, full time staff knew anything about them or their provenance. Obviously religious, due to the iconography, nicely carved and turned from a single piece of wood, but they were as one chaplain put it "just there and had been for some time". The length of time they had been there, along with the elaborate plinths somehow helped them retain their

place of prominence (if not value). The previous Lead Chaplain was particularly fond of them, feeling they added to the ambience as "fitting iconography within a chapel space". For her there was an expectation that when one enters chapel space, one is surrounded by familiar images and objects (in this case to that Lead Chaplain's church tradition).

Figure 3: Contextual view of the statues in the chapel space.

However, during a period of renovation, undertaken by a new Lead Chaplain (who along with the rest of the new team was less drawn to Anglo-Catholic iconography), the two statues became a focus of attention and subsequently 'fell' in status. The statues were examined closely, to ascertain their 'value'. A team meeting was called to discuss the merits of the objects and what 'they said or implied' about the Chaplaincy Department. In Rubbish Theory terms, the chaplaincy team articulated its values and the objects through which they were enacted. A period of conflict and reflection occurred, crystallising in a team discussion of the statues. For some of the team, the statues were overly religious and thus worthless, Rubbish to be cast out. Others pondered their previous status: "they are the only items with plinths, did that mean something?". However, without a suitable narrative, the statues sat oddly, seeming redundant in a chapel space which accommodates multiple faith groups and so became Rubbish. What was clear though was that changes to the chaplaincy team warranted

an outward change in the chapel too, reflecting a liberalising process occurring within the team. Dialogically there was a need to justify what 'value' statues bring to the space? What meanings do they transmit? Does their existence and prominence endorse and embody particular spiritual values of the people using the space?

Through these discussions the statues were accorded different valuations and "correct" places within Rubbish Theory. However, in the meetings it was also noted how difficult it can be to dispose of Rubbish. Disposal creates further dilemmas as the statues are not technically owned by members of the team[3]. However, with their changing status, the statues were removed from their plinths and rehomed beneath a covered communion table. This table is not the depository not of saints' relics, as would traditionally be expected, but of 'Rubbish' objects that remain 'too sacred' to throw out. They have no symbolic or structural value to the chaplains that work in the space, but neither can they be disposed of. Personally, I have put a number of items under the communion table over the years, and every time it somehow feels wrong to get rid of these items. Their own status as limbo objects is telling. They reflect the feelings of guilt that members of the team have that these *should* be important objects. As Rubbish Theory predicts, they have been moved out of sight. Presumably, the chaplaincy team hopes on some level that they will just disappear and be forgotten or at least the chaplains' attachment to them will dissolve.

However, as Rubbish Theory tells us, Rubbish may be out of sight, but it remains, immanent as a source of potential future Durables. As it turned out, this was to be the statues' fate. Almost 18 months had passed since the statues' relegation to the zone of 'out of sight out of mind' beneath the communion table. A hospital visitor came into the chapel and commented that "something was missing" from the chapel. Intrigued, the chaplain present enquired as to what they thought was missing. The visitor noted that the statues were gone, commenting that they were important, having been donated as a gift

3 This interestingly highlights the importance of "ownership" as a value within the chaplaincy team. A value that outweighs team members' desire to throw out an unwanted item!

to mark the passing of a relative. In that moment the statues' status and provenance immediately changed, despite remaining unwanted by the chaplaincy. The statues were duly returned to their plinths, once again Durables to be maintained (at least until the benefactor dies and institutional memory again fades). Ironically the visitor had disturbed the curtain of amnesia, highlighting how the statues actually embodied values of pastoral care and memory. These statues were given to recognise the care that the chaplains had given around the death of a loved one. Laden with a history and a message, the statues' status suddenly transformed.

Final remarks

As the introduction suggested, the dilemma of what to do with objects which have lost or changed value can be both challenging and unsettling. To my knowledge, no one has used Rubbish Theory to understand the changing nature and value of memorial objects used and held in places of care, institutions such as the NHS and residential care homes for the elderly. This is a pity, speaking personally, Rubbish Theory has helped me understand clearly the differing points in the trajectory of an object held within our organisation. It has also helped me make theoretical sense of the feelings that arise when I must dispose of certain objects.

The statues highlight that even in ostensibly secular institutions such as care homes or NHS hospitals, objects take on spiritual dimensions (cf. Good, 1993) and function as transmitters for the values people embed or assert in them. However, everyday items like Jeannie's chair or Dorothy's sock can likewise retain similar spiritual nuances. All such objects may become sites of social conflict, where different orders of value are articulated. In the examples I have described, different objects have been lifted from Rubbish into Durables. Sometimes they are cast down as different orders of value (and their concomitant regimes of remembrance and forgetting) are articulated.

So what? You may ask! The task of dealing with depleted death objects is incredibly challenging for care workers. In my professional

life, one thing I have noticed is that death artefacts seem to have a longer durability and hold deeper residual value especially when there is meaning attached (Hallam and Hockey 2021). Hallam and Hockey noted the use of objects brought from home which have significance for patients in hospital. The cherished items were not always ones of great value. Their sentimentality and value was defined in other ways. However, after death this may change. Suddenly a tatty pair of slippers or a threadbare cushion take on much more important roles, in the communication of the all-important anecdotal life story. Indeed, family members may even fight each other for seemingly trivial items which take on Durable status[4].

The system of care and the embodied stories we share mean that the care worker and Chaplain are both faced with the dilemma of offence that might be caused with removing objects from public display despite being Rubbish. Dealing with suffering and mourning people, we are highly conscious of the risk of moral injury that designating 'something associated with someone' as Rubbish may entail. Thus, on a pragmatic level, I find Rubbish Theory helpful in understanding the seemingly endless webs of meaning in which I find myself enmeshed.

There is however a further element to this retention of seemingly useless objects, which I illustrate with a parting case. On my desk, as I write this, sits another object (Picture 4). It is a small, dilapidated silver coated flower stem, an object for holding a single flower. It was found loitering at the bottom of a box containing the hospital's Paediatric Department's emergency baptism kit. The named inscription and date identify this object as 41 years old. I have no story to attach to the object, beyond the simple inscription. But this is enough to stop me from throwing it out. If only there was no name, then it would have gone straight in the recycling bin! However, I cannot abandon this last reminder of an all-too-brief life almost half a century ago. Consigning the child's name to Rubbish would be to admit that *all* lives are ultimately Transient, *even mine*. By holding onto discarded objects, I

4 I recall an occasion where I observed a family arguing vigorously over a deceased patient's false teeth.

and other care workers protect our own lives against feelings of ultimate worthlessness, trying to hold off the grand Leveller who transfers all lives into Rubbish, eventually...

Picture 4: The tarnished flower silver plated flower stem found in the hospital's emergency child baptism box.

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The secret lives of wool. A Rubbish Theory case study from the Faroe Islands

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Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between wool, culture and value in the Faroe Islands. It aims to expand our understanding of the role and meaning of wool in practices ordering Faroese culture and identity. It focuses on (sheep) wool as basic material for patterned knitwear associated with changeable local and global cultural tastes and trends. Wool may be a rather fluffy, shapeless and ephemeral thing, but it can, as will be demonstrated on the following pages, say big and enduring things about the wider ordering system performing Faroese identity. The pattern reprinted in the knitwear also forms part of this chapter's analytical focus. This is because these designs unveil the cultural meanings of the wool. The pattern in the sweater is, so to speak, an expression of the formula transforming Transient wool into a Durable cultural asset. Starting with the wool used in Faroese knitwear—the outcome of the practice of shearing the fleece off a sheep and processing it into a variety of textile fibres to produce yarn—I dig into the social landscape of groups competing and collaborating for the power to define the value of (woollen) things in parallel ordering projects performing contemporary Faroese identity.

The chapter starts with an introduction to the main theoretical concepts employed in the study, before giving a brief presentation of the history of wool in the Faroe Islands. Thereafter, I will discuss the woollen turn in the Faroe Islands and the meaning of knitting patterns. Wool, as Rubbish (almost) denied existence, is now bouncing back. The traditional Faroese sweater became chic and popular far beyond the Faroe Islands when the female Detective Inspector of the celebrated crime series *The Killing* (2007) sported one such

jumper—instead of the usual anonymous black suit—in her thrilling hunt for criminals. According to Faroese knitting festival organisers, talking about the social and cultural dimensions of the practice of knitting, the "interest has grown again among young people" (Nesá and Joensen, 2022) who have discovered knitting as art/fashion and hobby on the Internet (Kristiansen, 2022). As such, the time is now right to once more bring wool into focus. This historical account is then followed by a discussion about an old Faroese sweater unearthed from storage in London and Faroese knitwear in fashion and film. The rest of the chapter is a discussion and analysis of Faroese knitwear and cultural identity today, seen from a Rubbish Theory perspective. I thus explore wool's role in various imagined communities and ordering projects in the Faroe Islands.

Woolly Rubbish

On theory

Drawing on Michael Thompson's original Rubbish Theory (2017), first and foremost his interrogation of the elementary processes distributing and grading the value of special objects (things, people and ideas) in human society (why and how do objects gain or lose value?), I weave discussions on wool, culture and value into the context of the Faroe Islands. The basic Rubbish Theory hypothesis explains the journey of certain objects from the cultural categories of Transient (value decreases) to Durables (value increases) via an interlude as Rubbish (no value). Transient objects have a finite expected life span while Durables have an infinite expected life span (Thompson, 2003). Indeed, direct transfer from Transient to Durable is impossible because of mutual incompatibility, and for that reason the pathway to 'eternal life' depends on a third hidden category: Rubbish. The Rubbish category is residual, hence unaccounted for by human ordering systems, yet a reservoir of possible new Durables. Durables are largely (theoretically) eternal objects that ironically commonly require material as well as symbolic preservation (Singleton, 2021: 397). As Thompson (2017: 5) says:

> If the Rubbish category was not there—if everything in the world was of value, one way or another—no transfer would be possible (you can't go from minus to plus, or vice versa, without passing zero). There is only one smooth path: from Transient to Rubbish to Durable.

People become aware of the Rubbish category when it is in the 'wrong place'. It provokes them to struggle for the protection of their ordering systems. In Rubbish Theory, Rubbish can be seen as a "source of profit or pollution, a resource or a toxicant" (Reno, 2017: xii). Drawing on classic Rubbish Theory in general, as well as some of Benedict Anderson's critical discussions on imagined national communities as 'cultural artefacts', the power of wool in Faroese culture and identity will be interrogated in relation to local practices of the main groups of social actors (Anderson, 2006). This endeavour will draw on a critical interpretation of the material/symbolic twists in the cultural history of wool in the Faroe Islands, and their implications on dominant and alternative constructions on the meaning of the contemporary national (Faroese) cultural identity. The aim of adopting this approach is to reveal wool's qualities and multilayered passage from rubbish thing to eternal idea. Anderson (2006: 4) emphasizes that to understand nations (or 'nation-ness') as special cultural artefacts:

> [W]e need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy.

Anderson's work, which has had deep impact on anthropological thinking on national cultural production and political imagination, is relevant for my study as it can help us understand how shared and coordinated practices shape identities on a broader scale. Anderson's theory on imagined communities emphasises the force and persistence of national sentiments, people's feelings of common roots and cultural continuity, and cultural insiders' images of their communion and coherence. A national culture is therefore something that people

often feel a strong belonging to. The case of the Faroe Islands fits well into this cultural model, and Faroese national culture demonstrates the strong link between culture, nation, identity and value (Nauerby 1996). The Faroese manifest a resilient performance of social coherence and cultural togetherness through shared language, oral traditional knowledge, and deep sense of belonging to the insular place, for instance through their fowling, fishing and whaling practices. This national identity is used to underline the uniqueness of the Faroese and its boundaries. This backdrop makes it intriguing to include Anderson's anthropological perspective on national culture in a Rubbish Theory case study.

The chapter's analysis is based on Thompson's three main agents in the struggle for power and influence concerning the process of (re)ordering value in society: "High Priests", "Crashers-Through" and "Levellers". Each of these have conflicting roles and intentions regarding enacting orders of value. High Priests function as the guardians of the extant ordering system, maintaining extant categorisations of objects. Crashers Through by contrast seek to move new objects into the Durable category, while Levellers seek to eliminate the Durable category itself. These groups are constantly competing to alter or maintain the dominant values of any given society (Thompson, 2003).

My chapter is steered by the question: What does the wool tell us about power, orderings, and values in the contemporary Faroe Islands? The chapter presents critical reflection on the processes of valuation and ordering of (local) sheep wool as a cultural object in transition – from being worthless Rubbish to becoming a (re)valued sought-after fabric for high-end knitwear products in the aftermath of a recent woollen turn in the Faroe Islands.

The woollen turn

Wool has returned to prominence in contemporary Faroese society – following its collapse as key source of economic revenue and the subsequent destructive practice of large-scale wool burning (see

below). This is linked to new knitwear fashion, even if wool has also been rediscovered as material for carpets, artwork, and other artefacts. Wool—grown on a blend of water, air, sunshine, and grass—is a renewable resource, of which the "eco-credentials are enhanced by its long service life and suitability to be recycled" (IWTO, 2020). Worldwide in 2018, more than 1.1 billion sheep produced over two million kilograms of wool for home and clothing textiles (IWTO, 2020). While most of the sheep wool finding its way to the Faroese clothing market continues to be imported from Europe and beyond, the woollen turn has resulted in a renewed interest in Faroese wool. Wool, as Rubbish (almost) denied existence, is bouncing back. New interest in small-scale and local sustainable (organic) projects in the aftermath of international criticisms of the 'use and discard' trend of fashionwear production is giving pure Faroese sheep wool a fresh chance.

The return of the wool is related to objects, ideas and people engaged in discussion and contention on the order of values in the Faroese society today. The new values of wool can be investigated by analysis based on Thompson's three main groups engaged in political struggle for influence over the ordering of things based on value: High Priests, Crashers Through and Levellers (Thompson, 2017). In this way, the woollen turn can be connected to political struggle over the cultural values of the Faroe Islands. While the tripartite model has its limitations, it can serve as an overarching analytic approach to a complex field of study. Concerning the woollen turn in the Faroe Islands, it represents both a general shift and a transition with different avenues towards ordering systems with or without Durables. The relation between wool, knitwear, and pattern is also important, because questions of 'authenticity' and 'Faroeseness' might refer to one or a mix of these objects.

Woollen islands

Sheep aboard ship

Historically, it is not uncommon for the Faroes to be associated with wool or the world's main wool producers, sheep. In the oldest

known text thought to reference the Faroe Islands, the Irish monk and geographer Dicuil's CE825 *De mensura Orbis terrae*, reference is made to an invasion of sheep (Tierney and Bieler 1967). Dicuil records that Irish hermits used to live in the archipelago for nearly a century, but then, following the arrival of Northmen (Vikings), the islands were emptied of anchorites and filled with "countless sheep and very many diverse kinds of seabirds". Similarly, according to the *Færeyinga saga* (the saga of the Faroe Islands), the first Northman to settle the Faroes, Grímur Kamban, observed a flock of sheep resting on the hillside when his boat entered the inlet of Funningsfjørður upon his first arrival in (approximately) the year of 825.

Who was responsible for the arrival of the pioneer sheep population to these previously ungrazed islands is unknown. However, we do know that the flocculent four-legged creatures have been at the woollen heart of the Faroese culture and society ever since. Even the name of the country, the Faroe Islands (Føroyar in Faroese), supposedly means 'Sheep Islands' (Matras, 1959). Today, roughly 74,000 sheep of a hardy short-tailed northern European breed share the islands with 55,000 human inhabitants. Sheep wool was historically known as the 'Gold of the Faroes' but since the mid-nineteenth century, the onset of large-scale deep-sea fishing for export markets (and concomitant economy) has pushed wool to the margins of the economy and culture (Gaini, 2023).

While sheep—a ruminant mammal domesticated by people in the Middle East and Asia between CE11,000 and CE9,000 (Zeuner 1963)—continue to be highly valued, first and foremost as source of prime meat for local consumption, the wool that clings to the half-wild mammals' skin, has by and large lost its value, becoming Rubbish.

Wool and woolwork

Wool (and wool preparation) in the Faroe Islands—today a self-governing country (subnational island jurisdiction) within the Kingdom of Denmark located in the Northeastern Atlantic—has principally been valued as fabric for warm weatherproof clothes. The

wool was washed, pulled, carded, spun, and then knitted or weaved into garments. Plants and crusts from stones from the outfield were traditionally used for wool-colouring. This process, from shearing wool to wearing a new knitted sweater, has many lengthy and complex steps, and the result depends on solid local (traditional) knowledge (Beder, 2010). Wool is often associated with good qualities in discussion about environmental responsibility: wool as vital, organic, natural, ecological, environmentally friendly, and so on (Capelan Köhler, 2017: 27).

Sheep wool is tricky and fascinating as a Transient thing highlighting, as Marilyn Strathern proposes, that a "'small' thing can […] be made to say as much as a 'big' thing" (cited in Capelan Köhler, 2017: 45). As long as sheep are grazing in the fields, there will be wool, and as long as there is wool, there will be textiles for reproduction of patterns. In other words, wool disappears and reappears every year in the Faroe Islands. In the Spring, sheep shed wool that settles on the outfields (and which used to be collected by humans combing the mountain pasture) where unwary birds risk getting their legs entangled in it, and ultimately, in the worst-case scenario, lose their critical flight ability. Wool is also something that can be reused, repeatedly, in the form of garments, even if the value decreases with time. A patterned sweater is not a Persian rug; it does not gain value through (long-lasting) time. Woollen garments were covering the body of the islander for centuries, making her a bipedal human-sheep, and this practice connected the wool to the local (human) culture.

A good yarn about knitwear

While it would be very hard to find a person on the islands categorically dismissing the positive value of sheep and wool in the history and culture of the Faroese society, it does not take much time to discover that the islanders do not speak with one voice about the 'gold' of the Faroe Islands. When you take it out of the dustbin, you need to decide where to place it, and this is not something that is resolved without friction. The wool fibre (deriving from Faroese

sheep) itself does not have many local supporters who might facilitate its transfer to the cultural category of Durables. Small groups of wool entrepreneurs, artists and designers are campaigning for the ascent of Faroese wool in various ordering projects. But even if their initiatives receive sympathy from many groups of people, no doubt linking to 'sustainable living' discourses in international media, the project seems to have limited resonance. On the other hand, Faroese knitwear, based on local or imported sheep wool (yarn) and with Faroese patterns, is in high demand. Within the Faroe Islands they form an important part of orderings of Faroese culture and identity, while they are highly valued as Transient (contemporary) fashion at a global stage. The national dress, usually crafted from wool, silk and silver, is also a cultural battlefield enacting different orderings of contemporary Faroese identity. Let us therefore look closer at some of the developments and practices shaping the relation between wool, culture and value in the Faroe Islands.

Burning gold

In the 1980s and 1990s Faroese wool had ceased to be gold and become trash. "The bag that men used to bring to the mountain to collect wool is now substituted by a petrol can", noted the newspaper Dagblaðið laconically (1991). Instead, wool was gathered and burned in the sheepfold. "It is a sin and a shame to see this!", the newspaper says quoting one of its readers from a small village. However, bar a few reader's pieces in local newspapers every now and then, nobody seemed much to care about the fate of the Faroese wool in the last decades of the 20th century (Gaini, 2023). Concomitantly, Faroese wool appeared to have lost both economic value and cultural meaning. Indeed, many people embracing cheap imported yarn and knitwear even denounced Faroese wool as sticky and itchy. It lost honour and was associated with the hardship and adversity of pre-industrial rural life. This association remains to this day. The woollen sweater is one of a series of symbols depicting "ordinary Faroese" of the village and islands, usually contrasted with a more smartly dressed elite in the

capital, Danes and other foreigners. This caricature of the Faroese man is usually based on an image of the traditional fisher/farmer associated with rural communities (Figure 1). It reflects wool's association with the rural, the traditional and, in its more unpleasant vocalisations, close-mindedness and ignorance.

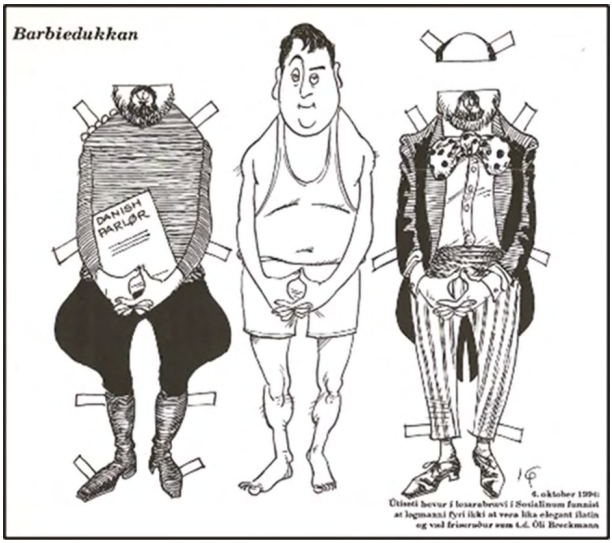

Figure 1: Cartoon from Faroese newspaper (Petersen 1994: 141)
Title: 'The Barbie Doll'. Text in the bottom corner: "A Faroese in Denmark has in a letter to the newspaper Sosialurin criticized the Løgmaður [Prime Minister] for not being as elegantly dressed and stylish in hair as e.g., Óli Breckmann [another politician]." On the right side of the Prime Minister Edmund Joensen you see Óli Breckmann's style; on the left side you see the 'traditional' Faroese village style with woollen jumper. The villager has a Danish phrase book (hinting at a lack of skills in foreign languages and unsophistication) in his hands.

Thus as time passed, the sheep continued to wear wool, but few Faroese could be bothered to process it into yarn for knitting and weaving. The wool went, in Thompsons' model, from being a Transient to Rubbish. It went out of fashion and was substituted by cheap imported use-and-discard clothes signalling a 'modern' deterritorialized lifestyle. Local wool production was kept out of

sight and out of mind, and the smoke of the fire fuelled by woollen 'firewood' was hidden from public gaze. The sheep farmers themselves were more interested in meat production and didn't mobilize to fight for Faroese wool. However, traditional Faroese knitting patterns survived the loss of Faroese wool by being transferred to garments made from similar imported fabric.

Today, most Faroese knitters prefer buying prepared (wool) yarn in stores (as well as online), and much cheap yarn is imported from other countries. Knitting remains a popular hobby, especially among women in their forties and above, but it is also a small-scale income-generating side business for young, mainly female, creative entrepreneurs. New books, documentaries, and vlogs give Faroese testimony to a lively societal conversation about wool, yarn, knitting styles, patterns/colours in knitwear, slow (sustainable) fashion, local entrepreneurship, and so on (Strøm and Biskupstø, 2016). The website binda.fo (2023) is one example of this trend. The woman who created binda.fo, Sandra Sørensen, has also published a book, also called Binda ("*binda*" means knitting in Faroese), based on the information gathered through the website. Likewise, Sissal K. Kristiansen, the owner of the creative knitwear company SHISA Brand, has launched thewoolislands.com. The goal of the website and project, according to Kristiansen, "is to make sure, that all the Faroese wool is being used. For the sake of the environment, the sheep and the Faroese culture" (The Wool Islands, n.d).

When wool as an object is transferred from the cultural category of Transient to Rubbish, the discussion about who and how to convert it into a Durable begins. This leads us to patterns. Can Faroese knitwear patterns lead us to a new stage on the journey from Transient to Durable, from everyday garment to symbol of Faroese cultural identity? The knitwear patterns, most often black on white fabric, have through history been associated with special places (villages) and families in the Faroe Islands. The pattern of the knitwear was therefore an emblem of one's position in society. The patterns survived even when the garments disappear and its owners died, like a narrative behind a book.

Pure patterns

Almost a century ago, in 1932, Hans Marius Debes, nicknamed 'Debes the tailor', published what soon was going to be acclaimed as the bible of traditional Faroese knitting patterns: *Føroysk bindingarmynstur* (Faroese Knitting Patterns). This hugely popular book (reprinted in 1949, 1969, and 2008) was the result of Debes' project collecting as many of the old Faroese knitting patterns that still existed in the heads and hands of the senior islanders as possible (í Dali, 2013). The book, with its 125 patterns, represents a canon against which all new patterns can be evaluated (Gaini, 2023). His book boosted the general Faroese interest in knitting at a time when many people had forgotten the great variety of patterns within their cultural heritage.

Debes' book set the standard for Faroese knitting and defined the 'genuine' patterns to decorate Faroese sweaters and dresses. In the years before Debes' seminal book was published, it had been popular to wear monochromatic sweaters without patterns. Reportedly, a schoolteacher told Debes: "You have made all my pupils wear cross-striped!" (Strøm and Biskupstø, 2016). Therefore, the outcome of the catalogue published by the prominent tailor was also an unintended restriction in people's creativity in relation to the practice of patterning knitwear (í Dali, 2013). *Føroysk bindingarmynstur*, as well as other more recent knitting books, offer knitters instructions facilitating the production of identical standardized knitwear (Figure 1).

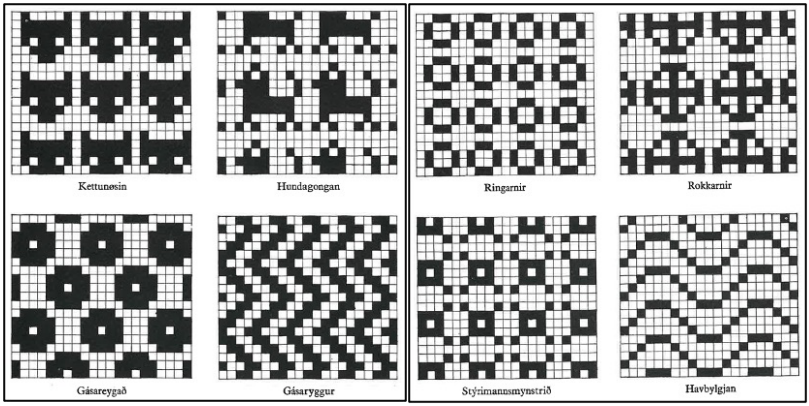

Figure 2: A selection of different patterns from the 'sailor sweater patterns' section of Føroysk bindingarmynstur (Debes 1986: 25+37). Top from left to right: 'The cat nose', 'The dog walk', 'the Rings' and 'The spinning wheel'. Bottom from left to right: 'The goose eye', 'The goose back', 'The officer's (skipper's) pattern', and 'The sea wave'.

The old knitting culture, says textile designer and lecturer Noomi í Dali, was based on basic instruction on different garment styles as well as a creative combinations of pattern compositions without "rules" (í Dali, 2013). The newer pattern books, paradoxically, standardise the knitting process and reduce the space for alternative production and patterning. This social practice is creating something fixed and timeless out of a Transient object. With Debes' canonical book, the value of a series of (national) patterns adorning woollen jumpers and dresses increases, and through this Durables are enacted.

In an article discussing Faroese knitting culture in historic and contemporary perspectives, í Dali reflects on her own orthodox knitting values in a section about the so-called 'festival sweater'. In this story, í Dali's son brings home a knitted Faroese sweater that someone has forgotten at a music festival. Her son wants to keep the sweater, but í Dali is shocked when she sets eyes on it. She exclaims: "I hope no one has seen you in that sweater, it is knitted totally wrong!" (í Dali 2015: 348). í Dali is worried that someone would think that she, his mother, had made a sweater with so many errors. However, following

this, í Dali is prompted to reflect on her own (judgemental) position. Her vision of 'the correctness' of any garment was learned from her mother and grandmother, who had received the knowledge passed down along an ancestral chain through the female line (í Dali 2015: 349). í Dali then explains what was wrong with the 'festival sweater' (patterns, knots, dimensions) based on her inherited standards. She thus interprets the "dishonoured" sweater as an expression of the decline of a knitting culture – a failure to ensure that the proper knowledge was being passed on. This is troubling to í Dali; the existence of such a "wrong" sweater indicates that the Durable is under pressure and there is a risk of knitwear-based anarchy being unleashed.

The publication of pattern books has thus shored up standards of knitting by rendering fixed a map of changing patterns. These have become a trademark of Faroese national culture, even if there are many knitters who experiment from the patterns outlined in the book (including the knitter who so troubled í Dali). They thus create new versions of old patterns (for example turning them upside down) – in dialogue with the process of valuation of objects. Besides patterns, could a woollen garment itself also become a prominent national symbol that strengthens a larger cultural ordering project? As pointed out by Anderson (2006), a garment, or for that sake any other object that people mentally associate with their cultural roots and sense of togetherness, can gain the status of a national symbol through the value ordering system in the Faroe Islands. By wearing the same clothes and patterns, a shared performance of Faroese identity can occur. Let us now look at a piece of cloth that has had a key role in the work of maintaining the high and increasing value of Faroese patterned knitwear.

Old garment, fresh ideas

It is not just knitting patterns which can have a long history. Sometimes, a sweater has a longer than expected life. Indeed, one such sweater came from nowhere to challenge iconic knitting patterns and style and rekindled discussions about Durables in the Faroe

Islands. The object, a beautiful red patterned Faroese sweater, formed part of a cargo seized by the Royal Navy off the coast of Norway during the second battle of Copenhagen in September 1807. It was recently recovered from a long-forgotten container within the (UK) National Archives. It was (re)discovered 217 years after being shipped from the Faroes as a gift addressed to Mr P. Larsen in Copenhagen (Ofori, 2024). It is surprisingly well preserved for its age. Following the container's discovery, a Faroese delegation, including Margretha Nónklett, the head of ethnology at the National Museum of the Faroe Islands, rushed to London to witness its ceremonial opening. The red sweater, she says, is very special: "we have none with this particular design" (Ofori, 2024). The sweater, as well as the stockings and other garments recovered from the bulky parcel post gone astray, gave Faroese wool afficionados new (old) knowledge about Faroese knitting, patterns, and colours (Tjóðsavnið, 2024). The red sweater is, in other words, with its unexpected existence and extensive media coverage, opening the way for new conversations on the value, authenticity and durability of the garment.

This 'miracle' in London was recorded by several international media outlets. However, in the Faroe Islands it received huge media and political attention. Siri Stenberg, the Faroese Minister of Social Affairs and Culture, expressed her wish—and even 'order'—to get the Faroese objects (sweater, socks, private letters, etc.) 'home' as soon as possible. The red sweater, which originally was intended as a personal gift to P. Larsen's fiancé, turned swiftly into a Durable when the Faroese cultural and political institutions embroidered it with cultural value.

Not only is the sweater exotic in the eyes of the present-day islanders because of its old age and curious style, it is indeed also an echo from the future in the narrative of the knitwear as 'glorious heritage' gaining value over time as Durable (Thompson, 2003). In a material sense, it has survived the ravages of time because of its storing in hermetically sealed boxes in a safe depot in London. If it had reached P. Larsen's home as planned, it would have been used for many years, maybe even for two or three generations, but it would finally have turned into Rubbish.

Guns and wool

Talking about the assumed resuscitation of wool, in different places and times, it is necessary to widen the perspective and look at the world beyond the Faroe Islands. The Faroese knitted jumper has gone global. This has increased its economic value, and maybe also its capital as fashionable artifact, but it does not automatically increase the Faroese cultural value of the knitwear. The relationship between domestic cultural ordering projects and internationally valued (yet Transient) fashion will not be discussed in details here, but there is no doubt that international tastes, trends and consumption patterns (for instance in the search for 'authentic' and 'ecologically responsible' products) is capitalised in the struggle for power to halt or advance the transfer of an object from Transient to Durable in Thompson's Rubbish Theory model.

The profile of Faroese knitwear was given an unexpected boost in 2007 when a woollen jumper became an unexpected breakout star of the internationally successful Danish crime series *The Killing*. In the series, when Detective Inspector Sarah Lund is at work in Copenhagen she is (always) wearing a special patterned jumper. Fans in UK, where the series had remarkable success and became something of a cult show, wanted an answer to this essential question about their idol: "Why does Sarah Lund always wear that thick patterned jumper?" (Guardian, 2016). The fans were evidently also eager to get information about where to buy a Sarah Lund-sweater. This sweater, often called the 'star sweater' because of its pattern, was designed and produced by the Faroese high end knit fashion brand Guðrun & Guðrun. The 'snowflake' on the white sweater with black patterns is a special variation of the traditional star motif (Turney, 2014: 25).

The Sarah Lund effect resulted in enormous international demand for Guðrun & Guðrun's 'all-time bestseller' (gudrungudrun.com). Guðrun Ludvig, the brand's creative designer, has explained how she used her father's worn boatsman's jumper as a model, then made it shorter, lighter, and softer. It thus became more aligned towards traditional representations of femininity, although some modern men

also wear it today. The boatman's sweater is as such unremarkable, "just typical working clothes" (gudrungudrun.com), but Guðrun & Guðrun made it slimmer and less colourful (one ground colour, one pattern colour).

With their voguish products, Guðrun & Guðrun, the brand spearheading the creative (commercial) movement behind the woollen turn in the Faroe Islands (together with a couple of other similar internationally-oriented local clothing brands), has connected high-end global fashion's fresh woolly taste to the local search for new meaning in old garments. All these crime series, documentaries, music videos, websites for incoming tourists, and other audiovisual media productions thus promote Faroese knitwear, and to some degree also its link to the sheep that generously turn the islands to a knitter's paradise. As a consequence, wool is, through different cultural trajectories, returning to prominence in Faroese society.

The dress and the rest

Based on this spatial and temporal mapping of the position of wool and knitwear in the Faroe Islands, from the early centuries to the 21st century, a clear image of a transfer from everyday peasant wear (Transient) to national emblem (Durable) appears. The women's sweater unpacked in London is indeed a beautiful garment, but it would not have attracted much attention in the early 19th century. It was just a sweater with a social life soon to be forgotten, leaving no trace. You could say that it was Rubbish—discarded and out of view—until it was rediscovered and immediately converted into a national treasure (Durable) by high-ranking representatives of cultural and political institutions (High Priests). It is taken for granted that the wool was Faroese, but what is in focus is the pattern, shape and colours of the object. Among the High Priests, the object was interesting because of (i) its value as a 'pure' and 'eternal' Faroese artefact and (ii) its curious style, which differs somewhat from what is dominant in 'Faroese' sweaters nowadays.

The High Priests, who strive to define what shall be admitted to

the highest position in the ordering of Faroese culture, did not waste time when they disseminated their narratives about the red sweater. High Priests are interested in maintenance of status quo in society, because they consider any cultural change to be a threat to their privileged status (Thompson, 2017). The knitted sweater, made of wool (Transient), was celebrated as the material manifestation of the national identity (Durable) in discussions that can be interpreted as enactments of orderings of Faroese culture and identity. The Faroese national dress, representing the most fundamental and sacred of all knitted objects, a capital woollen segment of the national project of the island society, has in many cases constituted the battleground of competing views on the 'correct' style and pattern of the dress.

When young provocateurs from the scenes of music and arts have experimented with new versions of the traditional dress, not exactly *comme il faut* among the older generations, they have been the target of accusations stressing their 'un-Faroese' behaviour and attitudes (Gaini, 2008). The Faroese singer-songwriter Eivor was among the first artists to perform in a televised concert intentionally wearing the national dress the 'wrong way' (tight black leather trousers combined with the 'correct' costume on the upper body) in her youth. She was polluting a national symbol. "[I]f uncleanness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order", says Mary Douglas (1966: 53). Therefore, the High Priests' almost obsessive commitment to the exercise of policing and safeguarding the imagined purity of timeless Faroese patterns (as in Debes the tailor's bible of Faroese patterns) and styles (as in the red sweater) is commonly exposed in debate about the national dress. Through the discussion on wool and the national dress, briefly, one can see the enactments of different orderings of contemporary Faroese identity.

Weaving a nation

Raw wool (straight off the sheep) has a short life, traditional knitwear has a longer life, and perfect patterned sweaters and dresses have eternal life (as Durables). They are all connected, and the wool

(whether of local origin or imported) is always at the heart of the story. There are indeed competing ordering projects at play, and the dominant valuation system is always under lighter or heavier pressure from alternative ordering models with other knowledge hierarchies. The presentation of Faroese knitwear with Faroese patterns as national Faroese cultural identity, alongside more prominent symbols as the Faroese language and family, has been essential for ordering projects since the woollen turn, but its muscle is nourished by the deep history of wool and knitting in the Faroe Islands. The High Priests' dominance and large faction of followers from different layers of society is to a certain degree the outcome of the creation of the Faroese 'nation' as an (imagined) community with "deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 2006: 7). Communities, says Anderson, "are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson, 2006: 6). The wool, knitwear and national costume have been associated with the 'cultural roots' of the Faroese in tales, hymns, stories and educational material throughout most of the post-WWII era, but until the woollen turn of the 21st century it was, largely, reasoned as a cultural object feeding sentiments of nostalgia for times gone more than a highly valued cultural object encapsulating knowledge for the future. Seen from this angle, the High Priests are not alone in their mission of maintaining Faroese identity, because all actors, basically, agree on the need to address this issue. What their struggle and disagreement really is about is the nature of Faroeseness.

The knitters represent key actors in contemporary debate about wool and identity in the Faroe Islands. They have experience, knowledge and viewpoints regarding sheep wool (Faroese and other), yarn, knitting style (hand or machine), patterns, colours, and knitwear. They are activists, entrepreneurs, educators, artists, designers, and dealers. Bindifestivalurin, the annual knitting festival in the Faroe Islands, established in 2014, is a meeting place for people who want to revitalize the threatened knitting culture as well as an attraction for 'knitting tourists'. It is a place for connoisseurs who discuss patterns,

knitting techniques, yarn, and wool, who flock to the small town of Fuglafjørður. "The idea of binding stitches, while also binding communities, is their ultimate manifesto", says a journalist writing about the annual festival (Cuttle, 2018).

Blended wool

The High Priests do not have many opponents in the Faroe Islands, but one of group of actors pushing for a slightly altered status quo are the young and upcoming fashion designers and entrepreneurs (Crashers-Through) inspired by styles and patterns from different countries (Gaini, 2023). Guðrun & Guðrun, for instance, considers its collection to be as Faroese as any old sweater found in a chest in a dark cellar. Guðrun & Guðrun would never have become Guðrun & Guðrun as it looks today, says Guðrun Rógvadóttir, "if we had been in Paris, there is no doubt about it" (Rógvadóttir, 2022). Its home is the Faroe Islands and, she stresses "the look *is* what it is because we are located *here*" (my italics). The duo behind the brand love wool and classic patterns, but also enjoy bending the rules ordained by Debes the tailor's canon. While Faroese fashion designers are very careful to highlight their Faroese roots and identities, and the inspiration that they search for in Faroese nature and culture, their products also reflect everchanging trends in international fashion. Fashion, basically, involves people forever casting about for new objects to Crash Through. Within fashion, the Rubbish Theory process is compressed, with new objects (Durables) coming and going very quickly as items are reordered. Fashion is a tricky thing, because every season has its vogue, and yesterday's product becomes Rubbish before you have had much time to enjoy or get used to it. At the same time, Faroese fashion designers, in their projects linking local and global markets and interests, remain deeply engaged in the competition for the delineation of Faroeseness. These designers don't talk much about 'fashion' directly, and Guðrun & Guðrun even explicitly states that they are not interested in (fast) 'fashion' as something that has a short life, hence a Transient character.

Beinta Poulsen, who owns the fashion brand Einstakt (which means unique), says: "We use a lot of hand-knitting, and we get inspired by the old Faroese patterns. Sometimes we use them as they are, and sometimes we mend them a bit into our own" (Kristiansen, 2021). Another Faroese knitwear designer, Jóhanna av Steinum, owner of the brand Steinum, says that she sees patterns everywhere. She explains: "I love using those old pattern books, but the fun part is mixing the old with my own patterns, and patterns that I might find abroad – and the fusing between pattern and colour is the most fun part for me" (Kristiansen, 2021). The designers and entrepreneurs engaged in the woollen fashion business are, in other words, struggling to promote definitions of Faroeseness according to different agendas than the officers of cultural institutions (for instance the curators at the National Museum of the Faroe Islands with their grand 2022 exhibition *Wool is the gold of the Faroes*). Viewed through the lens of Rubbish Theory, one can say that entrepreneurial fashion designers are forever trying to push the boundaries of "authentic Faroese design", boundaries that High Priests elsewhere in society have sought to define.

Wool and identity

Of course, not everyone in the Faroe Islands is interested in wool and knitwear. Some islanders do not want woolen clothing, and especially the Faroese national dress, to be at the top of the cultural valuation hierarchy. They do not own national dress (which is a very expensive investment) and do not plan to obtain one in the future. During the national summer festival, Ólavsøka (the unofficial National Day of the Faroe Islands), which takes place in Torshavn 28-29 July, almost all people who own or can borrow a set in their size will be wearing the national dress in public spaces. It is the largest showcase of the dress of the year. For some people, it is the only day of the year that it is taken out of the closet. Among the others walking the crowded streets of the city centre, you will see some people, especially young people, who are wearing clothes that the majority considers to be unfit for the occasion, as matter out of place, and a cultural provocation against the

harmonious woolly celebrants. Some of these people desire to unmake dominant ordering hierarchies in quest for a more open and inclusive community. This vision also connects them to the tourists visiting the islands, themselves also suddenly obvious in their ordinary clothing (see Figure 3). So, while fashion designers and entrepreneurs discussed here favour modest step-by-step change to the bounds of acceptable "Faroese" clothing as they expand their international businesses (they seek to Crash-through). They see manipulation of the ordering system linking wool to Faroeseness as an opportunity. However, others associate the knitwear code with unfair power structures in Faroese society. These Levellers (in Rubbish Theory terminology) seek radical change and a new social order.

Figure 3: Faroese and international tourist revellers (including this volume's editor, right) at Ólavsøka (Credit: Benedict Singleton)

Eivor's sacrilege in the shape of a mélange of classic Faroese and urban underground attire on the concert stage was an early example of individualized opposition against the sacred status of the national

dress. Taking things even further, the Faroese punk band Joe and The Shitboys is about as far as you possibly can divert from the formal dress code for Ólavsøka. The funny island punks, a team of "bisexual vegans", as they call themselves, follow a long tradition in punk rock of turning hierarchies upside down. As Levellers, they aim to eliminate hierarchies and destabilize ordering systems by, in Thompsons words, flooding the Durable category (Thompson, 2003). Levellers, upholding a principally egalitarian solidarity, want all garments—woollen or not—to be equally valued in society. You could say that artists such as Joe and the Shitboys and the hugely popular Torshavn rapper Silvurdrongurin [The Silver Boy], seek to break contemporary ordering systems by looking in the trash can—at what has been scrapped—for inspiration. With the review of the role of wool, knitwear and cultural values in the society, it is evident that human ordering projects are enacted in a large variety of social practices.

Contemporary Faroese national cultural identity was the outcome of a process of nationalism, which according to Anderson (2006) needs to be understood as a way of imagining/creating community. This point of reference leads us back to the birth of the Faroese national movement in the 1880s. The social and material conditions for cultural imagination need to be explored to reveal the role and value of symbols of the nation through time. The nation, in Anderson's perspective, is inspiring shared knowledge, values, and beliefs among its members who, with the help of media and (print) capitalism, feel a strong belonging to the group (Anderson, 2006). In relation to the discussion about wool and knitwear in the Faroe Islands, we can argue that shared and coordinated practices among the Faroese shape identities on a broader scale. Therefore, competition over correct patterns and styles is also the expression of an effort to steer the imagining and weaving of Faroese identity. Sewing, says one author and artist, "is a way to mark our existence on cloth: patterning our place in the world, voicing our identity" (Hunter, 2019: 298).

Sewing, or knitting, I would then add as a parallel, is also a way of imagining common culture and identity through special patterns and

styles. Value is crucially dependent on the valueless (Rubbish), says Thompson, and the question is therefore also: what is the Rubbish in relation to the contemporary Faroese cultural identity? A person can in principle, individually, decide on to which extent he wants to operate as High-Priest, Crasher-Through or Leveller (and reflect on the consequences of this choice), but she is indeed strongly influenced by her cultural identity, which might make her consider the gatekeeping High-Priest as the 'natural' winner of this trilemma (cf. Bourdieu 1984). The real contest will then revolve around the question of Faroeseness, or ways of performing and communicating the undisputed identity (Durable) in social practices that, for instance, is tested in the valuation of wool. The secret fate of Faroese wool is thus to find itself constantly in different positions and accorded different values within a triple helix of unprocessed wool, knitwear and cultural identity.

Conclusion

The social life of things, like the nexus of wool and knitwear, is organised and ordered by humans in specific spatiotemporal contexts. According to Thompson, it is the social life of things (what we normally label as 'material culture' or 'natural resources'), more than anything else, that uncovers the time/space system "by which we struggle to maintain and transform our lives with one another" (Thompson 2024: 233). This is witnessed in competitions over the nature of Faroeseness in the Faroe Islands, and this chapter has discussed how Rubbish is embroiled in this competition by a range of (human) actors[1]. The post-19th century Faroese identity, born from nation-building projects has fomented a Faroese imagined community (Nauerby 1996). Concomitant to this is a common cultural identity, a Durable object that different actors in Faroese society seek to maintain, police, alter and subvert. This chapter has argued that wool, and the reinvention of a 'wool culture' through the woollen turn, has served as the battery of an engine powering the transfer from Transient

1 Indeed, arguably the key protagonist of this ordering system, the sheep, is rendered invisible and irrelevant within much of the conflict.

to Rubbish to Durable in the different ordering projects through which conflict in Faroese society is woven.

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Value transformations amidst livelihood alterations: Decolonial and Rubbish Theory reflections on Indigenous Community Tourism from below in Ecuador and Brazil

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Introduction

> For us, [Tsáchila tourism] has been a struggle of resistance and of survival. For that reason, the families have organised, enhancing our capabilities day by day (Abraham Calazacón, Mushily, February 2022).
>
> There is power everywhere in tourism (Squire, 1994, cited in Nepal, Saarinen & McLean-Purdon, 2016: 8).

This study deals with emblematic experiences of Indigenous tourism in Ecuador and Brazil. More specifically, we expound upon their potential to catalyse radical value transformations from Indigenous communities' perspectives. These community projects are viewed in this text as expressions of resistance and adaptation through which ethnically defined groups strive to strengthen their own culture and power positions and transform interethnic relations (Lalander, 2023). Several researchers have examined Indigenous tourism, with its combined ethno-cultural and eco-ethical dimensions, contributing simultaneously to the recognition and empowerment of Indigenous cultures and to environmental conservation (Stronza, 2008; Coronado, 2014). Political ecology accounts of tourism highlight how it may lead

to the development of iniquitous social structures and relationships, within and between the social groups involved (Nepal *et al.*, 2016). Unfortunately, a vast number of tourism projects involving Indigenous groups fall short on their promise, being subject to the wider tourism industry's interests and/or being discontinued due to insufficient funding and skills (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Nepal *et al.*, 2016). Unsurprisingly, some authors suggest that tourism ventures are not appropriate or "authentic" livelihood strategies for Indigenous communities, rather constituting a threat to both Indigenous culture and their natural environment (e.g., Villavicencio, 2020).

Historically, Latin American Indigenous peoples have been subordinated and pejoratively portrayed as uncivilised/primitive ("savages", or *Rubbish*), lacking knowledge in relation to dominant sectors of colonial society (e.g., Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1998; Gotkowitz, 2011). Thus, the possibility of Indigenous tourism representing a means for Indigenous empowerment is interesting both empirically and theoretically. It is appealing to scholars and practitioners interested in understanding—and possibly engendering—radical value alterations in societies. In this chapter, we argue that agency from below, i.e., from Indigenous communities, is crucial for comprehending these value alterations, specifically the bidirectional nature of these processes, that is, how the involved community actors intentionally influence changes in how visiting tourists view Indigenous peoples and their culture, knowledges, and practices.

Our theoretical approach is inspired by decolonial thought and Rubbish Theory (Thompson, 2017), and applies a comparative, ethnographic methodology. The aim is to explore a selection of positive experiences of Indigenous-led-tourism using Rubbish Theory as an analytical lens. A deeper engagement in interethnic market-oriented activities is also accompanied by challenges in terms of preserving cultural 'authenticity' and community cohesion. Acknowledging these possibilities and risks, the central questions that guide the research are:

- *How are value transformations perceived by Indigenous community actors amidst socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts related to tourism?*

Theoretically, we likewise ask:

- *How may these tourism projects—controlled by Indigenous communities—be interpreted employing the lens of Rubbish Theory and what does such an approach add to decolonial debates on Indigenous authenticity?*

We should clarify that our intention *is not* to make a grand defence of Indigenous tourism as a silver-bullet to remedy all evils historically inflicted on Indigenous groups. Still, we maintain that it is paramount to reflect on the experiences of ethno-ecotourism deemed positive from Indigenous perspectives, against the historical backdrop of colonialism, coloniality, racism, domination, and marginalisation of populations. Empirically, this chapter builds on previous research by the authors on cases from three settings, two from Ecuador, one from Brazil, specifically: 1) the Kichwa-Amazonian Shiripuno project, 2) the Mushily project of the Tsáchila, 3) the Tsuer Entsa of the Shuar; and 4) the Jaqueira Reserve of the Pataxó people (previously described in Lalander, 2023; Lalander, Lembke & Porsani, 2023; Porsani *et al.*, 2024a; 2024b). These Indigenous tourism projects have several similarities, most importantly they all stem from the communities' own efforts and are thus strongly controlled "from below". As such, the centrality of Indigenous agency in value alterations related to tourism activities is emphasised. Consequently, the central empirical findings on Indigenous tourism dynamics allow a conversation between Rubbish Theory and decolonial thinking, which both focus on value transformations.

The text is arranged as follows. First, the theoretical and methodological frameworks are outlined, followed by the core descriptive case sections. Next, we present analytical reflections on the findings. The chapter concludes by highlighting the potential of Indigenous tourism to engender the radical value alterations posited by Rubbish Theory and desirable from a decolonial perspective.

Theoretical-conceptual approach: a combination of prisms for Indigenous tourism

Our study is inspired by decolonial thinking, an approach within which *coloniality* (or the *colonial matrix of power*) has a central position, referring to the explicit or implicit mechanisms and structures of domination, marginalisation, and subordination arising from stratifications around ethnicity, class and gender, which often characterise postcolonial societies. Thus, *decoloniality* is seen as a project, dream, or vision of a better world (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2007; 2017). This doesn't necessarily demand the complete abolishment of predominant socio-cultural and economic hierarchies but rather calls to strengthen the position of subordinate groups within orders largely determined by powerful external actors. These processes are gradual, probably never-ending, and comprise resistance and socio-cultural adaptation to the other's system (Mignolo, 2017).

Reminding us that these processes are determined by cultural encounters, Enrique Dussel uses the concept of *transmodernity* to debate the coexistence of different perspectives, moments, and cultural values, including worldviews, knowledge systems, and traditions (2012). Many Indigenous peoples/communities are transmodern, that is, they are not "primitive" or "purely ancestral" but rather are interculturally positioned on the edge of modernity. The history of Ecuador, Brazil and Latin America is full of examples of organisational, political, religious, economic, and cultural hybridizations. It is not, therefore, merely a story of closed Indigenous communities unaffected by external processes and structures, nor of a people completely subsumed under forces beyond their control. From the bottom looking up, transmodernity is the tale of an active engagement with modernity, at times taking the form of resistance, at times marked by adaptation, but most often characterised by the simultaneous employment of these strategies (Jackson & Warren, 2005; Lalander *et al.*, 2023).

This decolonial perspective speaks to a key concern underpinning *Rubbish Theory*, namely, the possibility and means through which

self-perpetuating systems undergo change (Thompson, 2017: 27). Accordingly, though from a different standpoint, Thompson also examines social order alterations, unravelling paths through which radical value transformations occur or, in his terminology, how "Rubbish" can be transformed into "Durables". Thompson, who was originally inspired by artwork valuation, asserts that objects fall into one of three distinct categories: Durable, which has "increasing value and infinite expected lifespans"; Transient, characterised by "decreasing value and finite expected lifespans"; and the less recognized Rubbish, which has no value (Thompson, 2017: 10; see also Verweij, 2004; Singleton & Gillette, 2023). In this classification system, the few objects that are deeply treasured such as widely acclaimed art pieces, are permanent or Durable whereas most objects are Transients and lose value after their production until they, typically, disappear. However, in practice, these objects do not simply turn into dust but continue to exist, as Rubbish, "in a timeless and valueless limbo" (Thompson, 2017: 27).

Thompson maintains that socio-economic theory, by focusing on Transient and Durable objects, turns a blind eye to Rubbish-like objects. To him, however, Rubbish represents a building block of value transformation – as Rubbish objects may be discovered and transformed into Durables. Hence, this framework stresses the possibility of seemingly valueless objects acquiring rising values, representing drastic shifts in perceptions of value, affecting not only these specific objects but also the social totality to which they belong. Thompson's theorising resonates with our study in clarifying that radical value alterations concern "not just objects, but also ideas, historical facts, and systems of knowledge" (Thompson, 2017: 66). The author identifies three principal actors engaged in these processes: the 'High Priests', who seek the maintenance of existing hierarchies, the 'Crashers Through', who seek to insert new Durables into the system, and the 'Levellers', who, in the name of equality, aim at dismantling hierarchies altogether. Representatives of these categories may be found on each side of the cultural encounter (Verweij, 2004; Singleton & Gillette, 2023). In our analysis, we use the label of Crashers

Through for the agency demonstrated by innovative Indigenous individuals, acting within collectivist environments and their role in changing the perceived value of Indigenous peoples and culture amidst tourism ventures initiated and controlled from below.

Our case is the history of resistance and adaptation resulting in changing views of Indigenous peoples and culture. While resistance is a bottom-up phenomenon, we prefer to interpret adaptation as a bidirectional process, linked to the encounters between dominant and subordinate cultures. Durability is achieved when both camps of the encounter adapt to each other. Historically, just as the western world has considered Indigenous culture as Rubbish, Indigenous groups might consider Global North culture as devoid of value. What is Durable, Transient or Rubbish is evidently always relationally and situationally conditioned. Consequently, the process of affording Durable value to Rubbish is an outcome of resistance but also of social power relations and mutual forms of adaptation, or as Singleton and Gillette argue: "... groups compete to be the ones defining durables and setting trends that others follow" (2023: 85).

To fathom value transformations catalysed by Indigenous community tourism, it is crucial to bear three things in mind. Firstly, the projects include components of commercialization and commodification of Indigenous culture and identity (*indigeneity*)[1] (Stronza, 2008; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; Coronado, 2014; Lalander *et al.*, 2023). Secondly, no culture, identity, ontology, etc., is static. The innovative Indigenous agents (Crashers Through), individuals or collectives, navigate a complex social and historical landscape where cultures and collectives interact and change over time, fuelled by historical processes of urbanisation, modernization and migration etc. (Thompson, 2017; Barth, 1998; Jackson & Warren, 2005; Dussel, 2012; Lalander *et al.*, 2023). Thirdly, these projects are naturally and automatically outward-oriented activities resting

1 Our simplified comprehension of indigeneity is an articulated albeit floating identity foundation connected both to historical context and territory/space, i.e., territoriality, which is also loaded with meaning (Lalander & Lembke, 2020), "imposed and inhabited, contested and negotiated by different groups of people" (Valdivia, 2005: 285).

on contact between visitors and community members. Given this outwardness, community life is gradually modified, including the values associated with local Indigenous identity and culture. To capture these modifications, we use the term *relative authenticity* (Stronza, 2008; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; Coronado, 2014; Lalander, 2023), implying a socially constructivist view where identity is never entirely authentic but the outcome of asymmetrical intercultural encounters. In our cases, relative authenticity is tightly linked to ecological consciousness. Although ecological awareness permeates Indigenous ethical-philosophical principles on the harmonious interplay between humans and nature, its manifestations are also determined by intercultural encounters, at times taking the form of strategic essentialism.[2]

Methodological clarifications

As indicated, our emphasis on positive cases does not reflect the majority of Indigenous communities' experiences with tourism. However, our selection is not incidental. During the initial research phase, we conducted a deliberate and thorough search of cases of Indigenous communities who were strongly in charge of initiating and managing their tourism project – thus constituting comparable cases of Indigenous community tourism from below. Analytically, we employed an historical-comparative approach. Subsequently, we analysed, on the one hand, each case longitudinally, considering local perceptions on tourism-related impacts on the community over time. On the other hand, we carried out a horizontal comparative analysis between the cases, focusing on similarities and contrasts among the cases (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2014). Moreover, our theoretical-conceptual framework has a significant methodological function, shaping how we examine Indigenous communities and connecting to the study's central arguments, aims, and research questions.

The most important methodological component is ethnographic

2 Conceptually, it is important to clarify that while we primarily refer to Indigenous community tourism in this text, the terms ethno-tourism and Indigenous ecotourism are also applicable.

work in the communities studied, with observations and conversations with protagonists of the selected community tourism projects. Accordingly, the descriptions and analytical reflections of this text are mainly based on the perspectives and value assessments by the Indigenous protagonists themselves. Between 2020 and 2025, we conducted interviews in Spanish and Portuguese (individually and in groups) in the four communities.[3] Likewise, in all localities, we accompanied and observed community representatives presenting themselves to tourists during guided tours and other communications with visitors.[4]

Finally, we should highlight that the ambition of the authors has always been the co-creation of knowledge *with* the Indigenous protagonists. While respecting the ethical principles of free, prior and informed consent in relations with research participants, the rationale of this approach is to conduct research not only *on* but also *with* Indigenous peoples and communities (Lembke, Lalander & Galindo, 2020). This is in line with the logics of a decolonial methodology in terms of relationality and positionality in researchers-participants interactions (e.g., Vásquez-Fernández & Ahenakew pii tai poo taa, 2020; Wildcat & Voth, 2023). The authors have regularly presented and discussed the objectives and advances of the research, offering participants the possibility to provide critical feedback. Table 1 presents a simplified depiction of our methodological strategy regarding data collection and data analysis.

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3 In Ecuador, the lead author has conducted research for over two decades. For this study, a brief pilot visit to the Tsáchila community took place in January 2020, followed by systematic fieldwork across all three communities from February 2022 to February 2025, typically involving one to three weeks per locality each year. In Brazil, Lalander conducted a brief pilot visit to the Jaqueira Reserve in January 2020. The main research was carried out by Porsani during a one-month stay in January 2022, with a follow-up visit in August 2022, including over 50 interviews. Between field visits, the researchers maintained digital communication with key community actors (see also: Lalander, 2023; Lalander *et al.*, 2023; Porsani *et al.*, 2024a; 2024b).

4 However, we must note that tourists were not part of our interview sample, though we have carefully observed interactions between hosts and visitors.

Methodological component	*Data collection process*	*Data analysis process*
Ethnographic work	Conversations (individual & group); Observations of traditions, practices, and phenomena in Indigenous localities.	Interpretation of collected, recorded, and transcribed fieldwork material. Simplified coding around central themes and concepts.
Decolonial & co-creative approach	Work in the field, discussing the themes and challenges with the actors, not only doing research on Indigenous groups.	Follow-up conversations, involving community actors during the analytical process – interactively sharing interpretations with co-creators throughout the writing process.
Historical-comparative analysis	Mapping the socio-historical settings of each locality/group.	*Longitudinal Analysis*: Scrutiny of changes in each case locality over time, identifying transformations. *Horizontal Comparative Analysis*: highlighting similarities, differences, and particularities among cases.

Table 1: ***Methodological strategy***

Indigenous Community Tourism from Below: The Settings

In the following sections, we present results from three Ecuadorian cases and one Brazilian case. They are emblematic examples of the extent that, despite widespread coloniality, Indigenous tourism, initiated and controlled from below, is broadly perceived as strongly beneficial by community members. The order of ideas and argumentative logic of the presentation differs between the cases, following variations of the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences in relation to their tourism initiatives.

The Kichwa Amazonian Community Tourism Centre of Shiripuno

> This alternative [tourism] project has three important missions: 1. To conserve the ecosystem, 2. To protect and maintain traditional culture, 3. Education. All this, to primarily safeguard the conservation of nature and Indigenous worldviews, the *Pachamama*. How to preserve all this and how can we live from this? The very clear word is *Ally Kawsay*, to live in harmony; nature, human beings, and animals (Teorumi Rivadeneyra, 2018).

The Kichwa-Amazonian community of Shiripuno is beautifully situated on the west bank of the Napo River, within the Ecuadorian Sumaco Biosphere Reserve. As of March 2023, it had a population of about 250

people, divided into 63 families (Teo, March 2023). In March 2005, the Shiripuno community decided to initiate a tourism project. The project was backed by the entire community, though primarily carried forward by the women. Teo Rivadeneyra Grefa is the central visionary co-founder behind the tourism project and former President of the community, and he enhanced the centrality of the Kichwa women. We should emphasise the importance of Teo´s network at the time, including the NGO *Planet Heart*. This gave birth to the local *Association of Kichwa Women of Shiripuno-Misahuallí* (Amukishmi[5]), which received initial support from *Planet Heart*. Gradually, tourism evolved into the central livelihood basis of the community. A central guiding rationale for the project was the empowerment of women to challenge patriarchy and associated gender violence – a problem in many Indigenous communities. Hence, the adoption of tourism as a livelihood alternative had three interconnected aims: 1) to conserve nature in correspondence with the epistemic-ontological visions of *Pachamama* and *Ally Kawsay/Buen-vivir/Living well*. 2) to strengthen and disseminate Kichwa identity and cultural values, both beyond and, especially within the community, and 3) to serve educational purposes with a particular eye on enhancing women's positioning within and beyond their communities, according to Teo (July 2023). The importance of enculturing young Kichwa people is emphasised:

> [Our intention is to] encourage our children to value our culture and the importance of our language, that is, Kichwa, also to make them aware of how our grandparents used to live, because many young people and children today are being born in a place like this, that is, in the modern[ity] (Cleidy, July, 2023).

> So, the situation here is to tell young people 'Let's take care of our nature because this is our life, because thanks to nature we have food, we have air to breathe.' [The tourism project] is key... because if we do not maintain our identity and do not preserve our ecology in the environment, we will not have tourists. The tourist comes to see this (Teo, July 2023).

5 Asociación de Mujeres Kichwa de Shiripuno, Misahuallí.

While aiming at enforcing traditional culture, the tourist venture added significantly to established practices of the Shiripuno inhabitants, based on agriculture, fishing and hunting, and artisanal gold panning.

> For me, community tourism is an alternative project to sustain change. Agriculture is the main thing, because with agriculture in our environment comes tourism. If we don't grow all these products, such as cassava, banana, coffee, cocoa, corn, etc., how could we speak of community tourism or alternative tourism? (Teo, January 2023).[6]

In other words, agriculture is not replaced by tourism, it remains central to community life and Kichwa identity and is naturally incorporated in the tourism project. A division of labour has materialised in which men primarily handle tourism attractions such as guided river and jungle tours and health and wellness treatments (including spiritual rituals) and young boys often perform animal presentations (e.g., of monkeys, crocodiles, and snakes). Kichwa women, in turn, ensure that agricultural practices are upheld, though inserted into the context of tourism, as clarified by Marina:

> We value our ancestral customs, so we work every day on this project and provide daily bread for our children, for studies, for illness, for all of us. So, we *mamacitas* [mums] work. We don't have other jobs. We only work in community tourism. We work on crafts every day and what we offer is music, dance and how we prepare the *chicha de yuca* [traditional Indigenous fermented beverage]. There [pointing] we have a beautiful sacred stone [...]. We also present the artisanal chocolate process. We also teach how to walk, we have a path where we have medicinal plants and our crops where we plant cassava, banana, and many products in our area. So, we teach that, as well as gold panning and the craft activity (Marina, January 2023).

6 Likewise, non-tourism economic activities, agriculture and artisanal mining have constituted important back-up livelihood bases, as experienced by the Kichwa during the COVID-19 pandemic (Janeth, March 2022).

Tourism re-energized traditional life by consciously inserting it in a more "commercial" setting, which alongside the exposure to an outside audience implies a value transformation regarding Indigenous culture. In Rubbish Theory terms, Kichwa culture was transformed from broadly having no value for external observers to a more Durable asset, a process accompanied and reinforced by a general recognition of Indigenous rights in Ecuadorian society since the 1990s.[7] To uphold the Durable value of Kichwa culture, in contrast to its previous Rubbish status, the community has actively worked to communicate the significance of Kichwa culture and knowledge to tourists. As a result, these visitors are transformed into more receptive "observers," influenced by broader societal changes regarding the recognition of Indigenous peoples and, importantly, by a deliberate strategic essentialism of Kichwa culture. Thus, safeguarding their cultural identity and the Amazonian environment is both an assertion of their rights as Indigenous people and the employment of a conscious strategy to attract tourists. In this way, they become agents who can influence shifts in value within their interactions with tourists. Reconnecting to Teo's clarifying argument: "If we do not maintain our identity and do not preserve our ecology… we will not have tourists. The tourist comes to see this" (Shiripuno, 1 July 2023).

Tsáchila: Mushily Tourist Centre – Abraham Calazacón

> Most of us are young people from different families, although we do not have any budget from the municipality or the prefecture. No, it's only our own effort, our family heritage (Miriam, January 2022).

The Tsáchila case, Mushily, is located in the Chigüilpe community in the subtropical valley of Santo Domingo, between Quito and the

7 Since the 1960s, tourists—mainly from the West—have sought out Indigenous societies for spiritual and environmental experiences. However, the romanticised and exotic perceptions have partly shifted to a wider recognition of Indigenous culture, reflected in international agreements and revised constitutions (such as in Ecuador since the late 1990s). Moreover, global environmental concerns have likewise contributed to the perceptions of Indigenous tourism as an eco-viable alternative.

Ecuadorian Pacific coast. Formally, Mushily was registered in 2014 as a cultural association (*Centro Turístico Mushily-Abraham Calazacón*).[8] It was founded principally by Abraham Calazacón and his wife Miriam but currently comprises around 17 families. Mushily was based on and inspired by a pioneer in Tsáchila tourism, the Tolón Pelé project, which from 2009 was run by other members of Calazacón's family and operated for eight years and became an established tourist attraction. By changing the value of Tsáchila culture among external visitors and thus inserting new durables into the overall system, the Tolón Pelé founders[9] may be viewed as the initial Crashers Through in Tsáchila tourism. Like most cases of Indigenous community tourism, Mushily lacks sustained external support, but has managed to grow over the years, and unlike several similar Tsáchila projects, it survived the Covid pandemic. The project is described as a success story for the families involved:

> Primarily, all families have been strengthened… Each family also benefits directly in terms of [the collective] income, but they also have their own [individual] crafts, gastronomy, and medicine ventures. Some also supply the restaurant, they bring their dishes, so in a way they also integrate and it's totally mutual, the income that arrives within the place (Sayama, July 2023).

Fundamentally, tourism is viewed as a resistance project by the Tsáchila, to rescue and strengthen its cultural base, and to function as systematic capacity-building for the younger generation. Linked to this, the Tsáchila tourism features the prominent involvement and visibility of women. Earlier, before the recent tourism endeavours, only men could be in charge and "women could not hold any position… [but] over time this becomes truly egalitarian… the woman takes on her own power" (Sayama, July 2023). Hence, the Mushily collective is guided by a vision of livelihood enhancement,

8 The inclusion of the name "Abraham Calazacón" in the project's name pays tribute to the celebrated Tsáchila leader who, until his death in 1981, was the last life-long governor of the Tsáchila. The founder and leader of Mushily is also called Abraham Calazacón.

9 Principally Albertina and Agustin Calazacón, aunt and uncle of Abraham respectively.

cultural empowerment, and, importantly, environmental conservation. The latter must be understood in the context of external intrusions and pollution from industrial activities in the surrounding area:

> We´re always surrounded by the natural environment and this vegetation has helped us a lot to protect ourselves and the Tsáchila culture. We struggle to avoid pollution of our rivers because that is what is threatening to kill our customs, traditions, skills, and talents we have. [...] Children of three or four years old were good swimmers, divers, fishers, and now…neither bathing, nor fishing or hunting is possible anymore. Nevertheless, we continue fighting for the riverbanks, for planting our bamboo and trees so that our medicinal plants and species don't become extinct. So, for us this has been a resistance, a struggle for survival (Abraham, February 2022).

Tourists at Mushily are offered a diverse range of experiences, including guided tours focusing on Tsáchila history, culture, and traditions. A strategically located community store sells crafts and souvenirs, while a restaurant serves traditional cuisine. Visitors can also stay in a cabin and access health and wellness treatments, as well as participate in spiritual rituals, including Ayahuasca ceremonies (Tsáchila healers/shamans are nationally and internationally renowned). This selection of activities extends beyond mere livelihood considerations to encompass a culture-strengthening rationale:

> We share our music, dance, and ancestral medicine, because in that way we maintain and rescue our culture… You can see the space where we welcome the tourists, they get to know our typical Tsáchila clothing, the weaving process, how ancestral medicines are prepared as well… There's also a museum, we even have relics with skins, and food preparation. All visitors will know about the medicines, the caves, and the ceremony with our shamans (Miriam, January 2022).

Reconnecting to tourism as resistance, the conceptualization of "living culture" (*cultura viva*) is essential and can be understood

as a culture in constant modification through encounters with "the other".[10] It thus represents a partial adaptation to (capitalist) modernity through tourism relations, albeit controlled by the Tsáchila themselves. When asked about possible risks of the commodification of Tsáchila culture and identity and their awareness that the product they are "selling" is their cultural identity, Abraham responded:

> That's right, that's the idea... Precisely, the essence has always been our ritual, our ceremony... and it is always with a purpose. If we plant a tree [providing shadow, fruits, and] seed, that tree is charged with energy, with good things. Imagine a tree that is more than 70-80 years old… Connections with the Western world also means life for us, because it motivates us. That's why Mushily says "living culture," because culture is broad, we're not only talking about our culture, but we're also talking about your culture, different cultures of the world [around us] ... In a technological world we are learning, we have the ability, and we grasp quickly (February 2024).

The Tsáchila accordingly recognize that their pursuit of cultural and identity enhancement through tourism involves interactions with non-Tsáchila that further reshape their culture. Their engagement in digital networks, such as social media platforms, and their increased contact with local government authorities within the realm of tourism exemplify these interactions. Consequently, Tsáchila people's engagement with the external world, including through this tourism initiative, has resonated with their culture and identity:

> Let's look at the modern technological issue, it's been a means of allowing us to strategically make [Tsáchila values] known to people from other parts of the world... So, it's been very indispensable... It's been a kind of evolution. The Tsáchila have been observing, listening, perhaps tasting, perceiving, and then changes take place, but from within. It hasn't necessarily been

10 Also, the Kichwa of Shiripuno frequently use the *cultura viva* concept.

> bad, today's generation also studies, prepares and has a profession (Sayama, July 2023).

As reflected in the concluding quotes of this section, some readers may be surprised by the Tsáchila's positive attitude toward change and partial adaptation to surrounding society and cultures, albeit, importantly, on their own terms. Given the historical subordination and discrimination faced by the Tsáchila, along with their previously inward-focused cultural expressions, it is essential to view *living culture* as a process in which they actively envision and embrace change. This process involves economic transformation and social mobility through the strategic commodification of their culture. Similar to the Shiripuno case, the Tsáchila intentionally convey their cultural values and practices to external visitors, who recognize these "items" as eternally valuable, that is, as Durables.

The Shuar Tsuer Entsa Community Tourism Centre

The Shuar community of Tsuer Entsa is situated 23 kilometres from the city of Naranjal, in the coastal province of Guayas, Ecuador. The Shuar people originated from the Amazon, but have migrated to other regions, often because of conflicts in their ancestral lands. This group, currently consisting of approximately 23 families, settled in the area in the mid-1970s (Wajai Mashu, 2002). The Shuar vision of tourism emerged from a desire to create livelihoods that resisted discrimination and cultural oppression, and environmental destruction. As for oppression, one respondent, Rosalía, remembers how painful it was for Shuar families in decades past. At that time, non-indigenous settlers to the area would refer to the Shuar as Rubbish, using the term "*jíbaros*," a colonial pejorative xenonym that indicated their inferiority and savageness (July 2023). Regarding environmental destruction, the legally recognized Shuar territory of Tsuer Entsa—around 480 hectares—has long faced threats from extractive industries pursuing mineral wealth (Julio Wajai Mashu, interview, 2025; Wajai Mashu, 2002; Ecuador Forestal, 2018).

Although the Shuar have not received external financial support, their ideas around tourism progressed through interactions with three Canadian students in the early 2000s and was formalised through the establishment of a community association, a process supported by the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement and the *Interprovincial Federation of Shuar Centres* (CODENPE, 2007; Centro Shuar Tsuer Entsa "Balao Chico," 2007). Some of the key statutory objectives of the association are:

> Rescuing, promoting, and disseminating the values of our nationality, preserving our [Shuar] identity…promoting economic, social, cultural, and professional help for associates…carrying out social programs aimed at achieving a more just and supportive community (Centro Shuar Tsuer Entsa "Balao Chico", 2007).

Since 2002, the Shuar have collectively focused on tourism, and today it serves as the community's primary source of income and main economic activity. The project offers tourists a combination of cultural experiences, such as traditional cuisine and performances, alongside ecological activities like forest tours. However, the main attraction is the variety of natural hot and cold volcanic springs, which are combined with wellness treatments and ancestral healing practices, including Ayahuasca rituals. From a tourist perspective, nonetheless, it is not enough that Tsuer Entsa is a facility with thermal pools. The fact that the project is managed by the Shuar is a crucial attraction to tourists, as is the Amazonian origin of the Shuar. Understanding that visitors find it attractive and exotic to encounter Amazonian Indigenous Shuar in coastal Ecuador, the value transformation enacted by Shuar tourism actors is clearly marked by a modicum of strategic essentialism. However, consciously promoting this mystification or exoticization is a strategy that draws on their pride as Amazonian Shuar (Julio and Patricia, July 2023). Particularly during weekends or holidays, tourists frequently ask to be photographed with the Shuar and their traditional symbols and clothing. Similarly, many visitors show genuine interest in learning about Shuar culture, values, and

traditions, something also evident in our other cases. Overall, Shuar respondents asserted that the transformations brought about by their tourism initiative are profound:

> Thinking of the people who abused us and our parents so much psychologically, now it's different [thanks to Shuar tourism]. Right here and now, [in tourism] we're the first and superior to everyone around us (Carmen, February 2022).

> Yes, it has changed a lot. Before, when [our] people did not develop tourism, there was no money, no income, but now thank God there is income. … We have our culture, our tradition and tourists like that… [The Shuar culture has] become much stronger… [we feel prouder and] recognized (Pinchu, July 2023).

Despite the relative cultural strengthening brought about by tourism, as well as cultural "capacity-building" trips by Shuar to their ancestral Amazonian lands, the group acknowledges, in a constructivist way, that the issue is complex due to inevitable cultural interactions:

> Any difference between the Shuar of before and the one of now? Well, it's really different, now the lifestyle has changed... the culture is becoming mixed. Our children no longer carry Shuar blood [due to mixed marriages]. I feel that the Shuar blood will always be stronger [laughing]. There are relatives who have become mestizo people, but the children are more [Shuar], they want the culture more... they want to be as a Shuar should be (Carmen, February 2022).

Moreover, opposing visions of how Shuar tourism should be controlled and administered have sparked occasional flare-ups, although normally ameliorated through community assemblies. Evidently, the Shuar deal with tourism and livelihood challenges on a regular basis. Regardless, all in all, Shuar respondents express pride and feelings of empowerment, as reflected in Rosalía's words:

> The truth is that we have grown with tourism, not only in life, but also in knowledges. We have developed tourism from the beginning to how it is today. So, I can say that I have lived a beautiful experience. I have learned a lot, how a community is advancing, how small it was and how we are now. Many people congratulate us, not only for the tourism development, but for the learning and spreading of our knowledge (Rosalía, July 2023).

Historically, Shuar culture and people were regarded as inferior and dismissed as "Rubbish." However, they are now perceived as leaders in tourism simply and foremostly by virtue of being Shuar. Indigenous Amazonian culture is thus framing the entire tourism project, including its associated offerings and treatments. From a Rubbish Theory perspective, visitors tend to admire Shuar culture (and its people) much like one would appreciate a piece of fine art. Furthermore, the Shuar are aware of this perception among tourists, which enhances the value of their tourism project. This can be interpreted as a kind of conscious self-objectification, where they to a certain degree transform themselves into some form of human artifacts. In this dynamic, which also applies to the Kichwa and Tsáchila cases, the Shuar must carefully manage this potentially risky intercultural relationship while remaining rooted in their own cultural values. In essence, there is a distinction between producing art and being art.

The Jaqueira Reserve of the Pataxó

For the sake of amplifying our empirical scope beyond Ecuadorian settings, we turn to northeastern Brazil and the Jaqueira Reserve project. This tourism venture is spearheaded by the Pataxó people in Bahía state, an area known for stunning beaches and for being the historical landing site of the first Portuguese vessels. The Reserve is located on the Pataxó Land of Coroa Vermelha, approximately ten kilometres from Porto Seguro – a popular destination among both Brazilian and international tourists. It was recognized as Indigenous territory in 1998 after decades of struggle for formal territorial

demarcation against capital-driven interests (Porsani *et al.* 2024a; 2024b). The idea of initiating tourism took shape within a small group of Indigenous Crashers Through – namely, three Pataxó sisters. As in the Ecuadorian cases, it was launched as a project to protect the environment (the Atlantic Forest) while also strengthening Indigenous culture and livelihoods.

The group did not receive formal institutional support and, in fact, faced resistance from the national Indigenous agency FUNAI (*Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas*). They thus relied on an informal network of supporters who guided them through the process of formalising their community association, "Aspectur" (Pataxó Association of Ecotourism). Aspectur was established in 1999 and has since taken on responsibilities that include enforcing the rules outlined in its statute and manuals (Aspectur, 2011), fostering institutional relations primarily with tourism agencies, handling the economic administration of entry fees, and, increasingly, securing and managing public grants. The name of the Reserve, *Reserva da Jaqueira* (in English, Jackfruit Tree Reserve), is an analogy alluding both to the Pataxó culture and to a jackfruit tree that was felled in the centre of the Reserve but from which new trees had sprouted. As explained by Pataxó members when guiding tourists in the area:

> Two jackfruit trees fell, and their roots were exposed so everyone thought they had died. But, after a while from the trunk of these trees new trees sprouted. They grew strong, […] and today, they are producing fruit. So, I will tell you a bit about the history of the Pataxó people. The Pataxó endured persecution, prejudice, discrimination, [and …] massacres, and the culture fell asleep during a period [and …] almost died. But we organised ourselves and succeeded in revitalising our culture which is producing fruit today.

Shared communal ideas about cultural elements are pivotal when launching projects of Indigenous community tourism. Even before the initiation of the tourism project, the Pataxó were engaged in a process of cultural revitalization, that is, in reinvigorating a relative

authenticity, at once rooted and constructed. To attempt to recover a language that was no longer spoken, the "Atxohã" group was created.[11] Their work unfolded through interviews with elders in Pataxó villages (about the Pataxó history, traditions/customs, language, etc.) and analysis of oral material (e.g., songs, tales) and texts (books and reports containing historical information on the Pataxó people). This empirical material enabled the compilation of an expanding lexicon of the Pataxó language which the group named "Patxohã" – literally "language of warriors". The accumulated knowledge has been disseminated among Indigenous students in Indigenous schools and incorporated into everyday life and tourist activities in the Reserve (Bomfim, 2017).

Jaqueira reserve is currently home to approximately 100 individuals (34 families) whose livelihoods are mostly dependent on tourists. Its attractions are similar to those described in the other cases, combining eco and ethno-related experiences such as guided forest tours, performances, and presentations where Pataxó members share their culture, history, language and perspectives with visitors:

> We thank '*Niamiçu*', who is our creator and God, and you that visit us, we thank you from our heart for your visit […] this place would not exist, and our culture would have been decimated because we have no support from the government, the support we have is from your visit. So, thank you very much for your big encouragement and support. '*Aweri!*' [thanks!]. [Now] you answer '*Ikoyamã*' [you are welcome] (January 2022).

> The world today speaks so much about progress and that Indigenous people are backwards, trailing behind the rest of humanity. […] But when we reflect on this progress, […] we see the people in the cities, people thrown out on the street, asking for money, asking for water, people stealing from each other. […] We see the open sewers that invade the rivers and the ocean, contaminating everything, and we wonder, is this the progress the white men speak about? Are we behind this? If so, we prefer

11 Reinforcing Indigenous language is central to the Ecuadorian tourism projects as well.

> to be savages […] who take care of this land because this is what our elders taught us, and this is what we must teach our children (January 2022).

In the case of the Pataxó, much like the Ecuadorian communities, tourism is viewed as vital to the preservation of their culture and community. By challenging Western notions of progress and modernity, the Pataxó project reflects how Western society can learn from and be inspired by Indigenous cultures and worldviews. Previously dismissed as primitive, or inferior, the Pataxó culture is now emerging as an appealing choice for tourists. This transformation—from being seen as savage, or "Rubbish", to embodying Durability—highlights how the Pataxó invert dominant perspectives through the tourism venture, Crashing Through previously disregarded objects in the process.

Analytical reflections: resistance-as-adaptation and adaptation-as-resistance

Before moving onwards, it is worth emphasising that there are numerous dilemmas, challenges, and risks associated with Indigenous community tourism. These must be dealt with, even in the successful cases of this study. Although all these projects are strongly controlled by Indigenous communities, i.e., from below, they are not shielded from external events and pressures beyond their influence, such as natural phenomena, global and national economic fluctuations, or pandemics, all of which can affect the flow of tourists and consequently the continuation of their activities. Still, the four projects in this article have proved resilient, withstanding the Covid-19 pandemic period through the temporary reorientation of livelihoods toward subsistence activities like agriculture and fishing. Although open to the world around them, the communities have not forgotten, or ignored, traditional livelihood activities (see also Lalander, 2023; Lalander & Ubidia, 2023).

The transformation of values in society is key to both Rubbish Theory and the Indigenous tourism initiatives described in this

chapter. In all four cases, Indigenous community tourism emerged as means to positively reevaluate indigeneity, ancestral knowledge, culture and values (Lalander *et al.*, 2023: 118). In these intercultural encounters, Indigenous actors deliberately use a rhetoric of alterity in relation to tourists, as reflected in the Shuar section. It is thus appropriate to highlight the concerted intentions underpinning these initiatives. These insights clearly align with Rubbish Theory, which highlights societal diversity and the cultural boundaries that influence values and perceptions across different backgrounds (Thompson, 2017: 117). Thompson notes that plural values can lead to contradictions—one group may see an object as worthless, while another values it highly. However, in contrast to Thompson's view that value transformations occur almost by chance, the Indigenous community tourism cases discussed here involve deliberate collective evaluations by individuals committed to creating a different world and as argued elsewhere, enacting decoloniality (Porsani *et al.* 2024a; Lalander, 2023).

Still, tourism-related activities are not "traditional" livelihoods of Indigenous communities, compared to agriculture, hunting and fishing. Evidently, the tourism projects imply the necessity of adapting to external dynamics, resulting in the surge of a relative form of authenticity. This is shaped by strategic modifications and the "commodification" of Indigenous culture, on the one hand, and by historically rooted understandings of cultural identity, on the other. Following a similar line of argument, Fisher and Smile (2016) emphasise the significance of Rubbish Theory in tourism studies by showing how touristic sites become places where distinct views and multiple meanings co-exist. In our view, these encounters result in bidirectional processes of adaptation, steered by Crashers Through within Indigenous and non-Indigenous society alike. They entail the question about the "authenticity" of tourists' experiences as well as of the indigeneity of the hosts (Stronza, 2008; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; Coronado, 2014; Lalander *et al.*, 2023).

The commodification of culture indeed poses risks, including the reinforcement of stereotypes, yet it also offers opportunities for

communities to engage with tourists on their own terms, fostering mutual learning, respect and exchanges. In cases like Shiripuno, Mushily, Tsuer Entsa and Jaqueira, communities actively work to reframe and communicate their cultural narratives to visitors, transforming perceptions of Indigenous people and cultures as "Rubbish" to valuable cultural assets. In other words, a modification of Indigenous culture takes place, energised by inviting outsiders to share, appreciate and be inspired by Kichwa, Tsáchila, Shuar and Pataxó ways of life. Through strategic engagement in tourism, these groups not only articulate their living cultures, knowledges, and ecological awareness, but also challenge Western notions of progress and modernity. This proactive approach enables them to become agents of change, while performing the delicate balancing-act between resistance and adaptation.

Nonetheless, adaptation is merely one side of the coin. Assisted by Rubbish Theory, we can discern another common feature across the cases: a decolonial struggle aiming at altering dominant trends and views. In this sense, our cases describe Indigenous people's active resistance against the status quo, targeting concrete material realities as well as abstract values. This is demonstrated in the Ecuadorian communities' perceptions of tourism as resistance. Likewise, it emerges in the Pataxó portrayal of Indigenous people as warriors that have struggled against and survived the centuries-long colonial project, describing Western culture as ecologically destructive and exploitative of Indigenous peoples. The revaluation of their culture is rooted in its irreconcilability with Western (colonial) ways of seeing and being. By projecting Indigenous ways of being and seeing, protagonist voices within Indigenous tourism engage in an open value struggle, challenging dominant understandings of "Durability". Accordingly, based on the combined strategies of adaptation and resistance, Indigenous tourism opens arenas within the very realm of 'modernity' upon which Indigenous peoples seek the transformation of prevailing social views and values that hitherto have supported veiled racism and exploitation. As illustrated by our cases, Indigenous tourism has

generated Indigenous communities that no longer see themselves as subordinate and visitors that perceive their culture as valuable. Such bidirectionality produces Durability.

Although central, the dimension of resistance within Indigenous tourism refers not just to the colonial order, i.e., to the external dimension, but also internally, within Indigenous communities. Reconnecting to the concept of relative authenticity, it is important to underline that no culture is static. Indigenous groups' efforts through tourism to recover and strengthen their cultures do not seek the re-establishment of an original "pristine" era. Rather, the strengthening is consciously balanced against the norms and views of the non-Indigenous, historically dominant, society. It is a reflexive process that ponders both the boundaries between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and respondents' own cultures. As a result of their engagement with tourism, Indigenous Crashers Through may determine that certain cultural aspects or traditions are irreversibly changing or strengthened. Asymmetrical encounters between Indigenous and non-indigenous worlds represent cultural trade-offs.

Indeed, several scholars have suggested that Indigenous peoples' engagement with tourism will always constitute a threat to both their culture and natural environment. While our cases do not encompass the entirety of experiences in Indigenous tourism, they reinforce our perspective that, with the argumentative logic outlined above, these scholars risk falling into a romanticised view of what (authentic) livelihoods, and indigeneity, should entail. Furthermore, they overlook the potential of Indigenous tourism to not only empower historically marginalised peoples but also to facilitate value transformations that contribute to necessary steps towards equality within a world marked by asymmetrical relations. Undoubtedly, these processes are risky or challenging for those in a subordinate position, but the positive effects may include a transformation in status from Rubbish and the reinvigoration of authenticity, albeit in modified form. Regarding our first research question on how value transformations related to tourism activities and impacts are perceived by involved

Indigenous actors, first, in our cases there appears to be a clear link between value transformation of Indigenous culture through tourism and multidimensional empowerment (cultural, socio-economic and environmental). Indigenous actors are consciously orienting their own cultural foundation outwards – as something consumer-attractive to external visitors. Simultaneously, their own culture is modified through these encounters, as exemplified by the Tsáchila vision of living culture, that is, a culture in constant modification. A prime example of multidimensional empowerment from within the communities is the way in which women, who traditionally held a more internal or "reproductive" role within these communities, have gained a more prominent "productive" role in their households as well as more visible public positions thanks to Indigenous tourism. By earning a living through sharing their everyday lives and traditional ancestral knowledge, women achieve a relative pre-eminence in these new livelihoods, alongside leadership roles within their communities.

It is evident that our cases operate within a collective logic that encompasses the community and, indirectly, Indigenous peoples more broadly. Nonetheless, the agency of individuals is central. In all instances, the projects were initially envisioned and driven by specific individuals or smaller collectives—local visionaries or agents of change—who sought to expand the possibilities available to themselves and their communities in innovative ways. We see these people as representatives of the category labelled Crashers Through in Rubbish Theory. These individuals or collectives share a fundamental conviction that alternative livelihoods were both necessary and achievable, especially against the background of ecological degradation and increasing pressures on Indigenous culture. Moreover, they also brought to the public eye a shared lived experience of marginalisation within broader society, a position rooted in their indigeneity but also influenced by other factors such as class and gender. These Crashers Through have challenged the notion that "those people near the top have the power to make things durable and to make things transient" (Thompson, 2017: 26). They have proved that those who live in the

world relegated to "Rubbish" are in no way powerless in the social control of value. Whereas Thompson notes the tendency towards self-perpetuating power relations, he also stresses that the Rubbish category can constitute a transformative and, we hold, transgressive path of value transformations. Given the predominant asymmetric relations, those already in positions of power are obviously central in the mediation of these transformations. Our cases demonstrate, however, that Indigenous communities in a Global South context also are significant agents in these bidirectional transformative processes. While decolonial thinking emphasizes resistance against colonial structures and the empowerment of Indigenous communities, Rubbish Theory explores how items or cultures labelled as Rubbish can gain value. This integrated framework helps in analysing how Indigenous tourism projects revalue Indigenous culture, transforming it into an asset through strategic agency, and revealing that the empowerment and cultural revitalization of Indigenous communities are closely linked with the transformation of Indigenous culture from Rubbish to Durable.

Concluding remarks

Through scrutiny of four experiences of Indigenous community tourism from below in Ecuador and Brazil—namely the Kichwa-Amazonian case of Shiripuno, Mushily of the Tsáchila, Tsuer Entsa of the Shuar, and the Brazilian Pataxó community of Jaqueira—this chapter has provided some reflections on the potential of Indigenous tourism to foment radical value in societies. These Indigenous tourism projects reflect engagements and compromises with capitalist structures. We argue that by reinforcing livelihoods around tourism, these initiatives allow communities to interact with capitalism more on their own terms. These community ventures aim to protect and strengthen Indigenous culture and environments amid capitalist pressures. In the production and consumption of culture, authenticity is never pure or static but constantly reshaped through intercultural encounters. By welcoming tourists and sharing experiences with them, Indigenous groups can deepen their cultural practices and achieve

socio-economic incentives to stay connected to their territories.

By drawing on resources that mainstream society has considered to be Rubbish, i.e., Indigenous culture, knowledges and practices, these communities have enacted new Durable objects, suitable both for tourist appreciation *and* meeting community needs. This involved an active process, which in a variety of creative ways altered the cultural-economic parameters of each community. At times "traditional" practices were strengthened, whereas at others, changes were made (e.g., to "traditional gender roles"). This highlights that the process of converting Rubbish into Durables is both an ontological and a practical struggle for the reshuffling of the social ordering of values. The shared experiences and concerted efforts in these initiatives indicate that radical value transformations can be achieved in a purposeful and coordinated manner, challenging, yet intertwined with, existing postcolonial capitalist structures.

Thus, we assert that Indigenous community tourism, controlled from "below" may constitute a fruitful context for value transformation dynamics that follow Rubbish-Transient-Durable pathways. These should be understood as intentional strategies of resistance from below, accompanied by adaptation in the encounters with "the other", which is likewise in line with decolonial understanding of transformations. Culture and ethnic identity are central to the "ethno-tourism" of each of the four cases. In this sense, the role of culture for Indigenous people working in community tourism is a conscious outwards-reorientation of their ethnic-cultural symbols, that is, in their relations with "the other". This cultural reorientation—which some would call commercialization or commoditization—is intentionally performed by the actors of the Indigenous localities, explicitly using culture in their tourism-related activities and intercultural encounters.

Through the lens of Rubbish Theory, we have highlighted that adaptation is just one aspect of the value transformation in Indigenous tourism, a decolonial resistance process challenging dominant narratives and perspectives being another. By expressing

their own ways of being, perceiving and knowing, Indigenous communities in tourism engage in a value struggle that contests mainstream notions of the Durable category. Through a combination of adaptation and resistance, decolonial Indigenous tourism creates spaces within modernity where Indigenous peoples can advocate for a transformation of prevailing social views and values that have historically perpetuated racism and exploitation. As demonstrated in the cases presented, Indigenous tourism fosters a sense of agency among communities, leading them to view themselves as equals and encouraging visitors to recognize the value of their culture. This reciprocal relationship ultimately enhances transformations towards Durability, which may be either of an essentialist or, as generally in our cases, strategic nature.

In sum, approaching Indigenous community-controlled tourism from a Rubbish Theory perspective allows us to view it as a viable strategy for ethnic-cultural and territorial struggles, as well as for economic subsistence. Furthermore, this perspective reveals Indigenous tourism's potential to catalyse the transformation of values and practices. Such processes aim to transform what has historically been regarded as "Rubbish" into invaluable assets, thereby recognizing the worth of Indigenous peoples, culture, knowledge, lifeworlds, and their environments.

This is accordingly not only a case of strategic essentialism as a kind of necessary evil. Rather, as articulated by several key actors, the very positioning of the Indigenous group in the encounter with the other in itself strengthens and revitalises the culture. As argued, moving from Rubbish via Transient to Durable is a bidirectional process. Reconnecting to the decolonial view, Indigenous culture is strengthened because it acquires a value, not only for the Indigenous themselves, but also, and more importantly, for outside society. It takes two to make something Durable.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the communities for receiving us and generously sharing their experiences, and in particular: Teo, Rocío and Janeth Rivadeneyra Grefa, and Marina Calapucha (in Shiripuno); Julio Wajai Mashu, Patricia and Amada Lequi, Marcelo Carrera, Carmen, Rosalía, Francis and Edison Kitiar (in Tsuer Entsa); Abraham, Kua Luly, Sayama, Miriam, Juan, Augusto and Budy Calazacón (in Chigüilpe); Jandaya, Nayara, Nitynawã, Syratã, Aderno, and Oiti (in the Jaqueira Reserve). We should likewise recognize the importance of a research grant from *Formas – A Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development* (grant number 2018-01232).

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Water people. Legal personhood of rivers and Rubbish Theory

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Introduction

Environmental governance and law have been criticised as rooted in a simplified, objectified, commodified and destructive view of the natural world (Álvez-Marín et al, 2021; Kotzé and Villavicencio Calzadilla, 2017; Merchant, 1980; Pattberg and Widerberg, 2015; Roberts, 2013; Steffen et al., 2011; White, 2018). A suggested remedy is to integrate *ecocentric* perspectives into governance and law to engender transition to sustainable societies (DePuy et al., 2021). As sources of inspiration, environmentalists have looked to non-western worldviews, particularly to the indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) extant around the world. Coterminous with these calls for ecocentrism has been increased awareness that societal transitions need to be *just* (Muñoz Ureña, 2023; Youatt 2017). One legal response to both imperatives is the granting of legal personhood of nature. Over the past decade there have been discussions about assigning personhood to increasing numbers of "things". Examples to date include rivers: e.g., the Vilcabamba (Ecuador), the Ganga and Yamuna (India), the Atrato (Columbia), the Turag (Bangladesh), Mar Menor (Spain), the Magpie (Canada), the Yarra (Australia) and the Te Awa Tupua (Aotearoa New Zealand) (Eckstein et al., 2019). Likewise, other bodies of water, e.g., the Dutch Wadden Sea ecosystem (Suykens, Gilisen, and van Rijswick, 2019: 644) and Lake Winnipeg (Canada) (Eckstein et al., 2019), and mountains, e.g., Mt Taranaki (Aotearoa New Zealand).

Based on an extensive literature review, we explore and compare three examples of attempts to assign legal personhood to rivers in different parts of the world utilising Rubbish Theory. The three rivers in question

are the Vilcabamba in Ecuador, the Ganga in India and the Te Awa Tupua in Aotearoa New Zealand, purposively selected as the examples best attested in the literature. This provides sufficient information to conduct a Rubbish Theory analysis. The bulk of the literature is from the field of legal science, as befits a legal innovation, however, where possible material from other disciplines has been utilised.

Legal personhood of nature has been hailed as a positive development towards a sustainable society (Álvez-Marín et al, 2021; Barcan, 2020; Benöhr and Lynch, 2018; Clark et al., 2019; Gellers, 2021; Greene, n.d.; Hultman, 2020; Kotzé and Villavicencio Calzadilla, 2017; Muñoz Ureña, 2023; O'Donnell and Talbot-Jones, 2018; Rowe, 2019; Studley and Bleisch, 2018; Villavicencio Calzadilla and Kotzé, 2018). It is also in line with scholarly arguments that environmental governance should be inclusive and ecologically democratic (Donoso, 2017; Eckersley, 2020; Hammond, 2020; Pickering et al., 2019; Schlosberg, et al., 2019). The emergence of legal personhood has been hailed as a radical move. It is argued that it may potentially reflect shifting societal power relations when indigenous groups increase in influence and different perceptions of human-nature relations, specifically non-anthropocentric perceptions, are increasingly accepted and officially enacted (Bhattacharjee, 2023; Clark et al., 2019; Gellers, 2020; Ireland, 2021; Morris and Ruru, 2010; Seymour, 2004; White, 2018).

The aim of this chapter is to explore the extent that efforts to turn rivers into water persons or water people is radical when analysed with Rubbish Theory. According to Rubbish theory (Thompson, 2017) objects, i.e. rivers can fall into different categories: as Transient or Durable objects with varying value over time, and Rubbish with no value. Within what Thompson calls "Class Societies"[1], these objects

1 To Thompson, Class Society as an ideal type is defined by "lots of stratification and lots of competition, and the transfer from Transient to Rubbish to Durable are such that the inevitable changes in power are quickly reflected in matching changes in status" (2003:326). It thus differs somewhat from a Marxist usage of the term, with class in Rubbish Theory primarily linked to involvement in the control and enactment of dominant object ordering systems. Of course, this is often linked to relationships to the means of production, so there is overlap.

behave predictably within the ordering system. Transients lose value, eventually become Rubbish. Durables theoretically retain or gain value through time. Rubbish is a residual category, which forms a source of potential Durables. The objects are associated with different actors – Crashers Through (who seek to move new objects [including Rubbish] into the Durable category), Levellers (who seek to flood the Durable category and thus eliminate it) and High Priests (who guard the extant ordering system) (Thompson, 2003). Each of these groups are therefore found riding the downward or the upward flow of value. Through these value changes "our class-based societies are able to continually realign status and power, and thereby perpetuate themselves" (Thompson, 2024: 234). Rubbish Theory argues that action that obviously disturbs the logic of the system tends to elicit strong social reaction. It thus provides a mechanism for assessing the extent that efforts to enact legal personhood for nature are disruptive or cooperative with extant ordering systems. Following this, in this chapter we ask to what extent does the personhood of rivers entail a transformation of the value of rivers, how is this associated with different actors and to a transformation of extant Class Societies?

The chapter is ordered as follows. First, background is provided on the legal personhood of nature. We then describe our selected three cases and discuss each one with Rubbish Theory's schema. The article then concludes arguing that the cases reveal different levels of substantive change to the ordering system of Class Society. Thus, the radical potential of the idea of legal personhood is integrally linked to alterations in the flow of objects within different societies.

Defining legal personhood

Assigning legal personhood to nature implies a transformation of the value of nature. Mostly, it is a part of 'nature' such as a river, that is given legal standing so that its 'rights' or 'values' can be respected. As a legal principle, the failure to uphold this standing can be contested in court. It transforms the value of nature as it becomes "an entity that exists for its own interests and not for the values it contains for others" (Athens,

2018: 206) and implies that nature, rather than simply comprising various 'objects', becomes a legal person/s with an intrinsic value "that can enforce rights against other legal persons" (Hutchison, 2014: 182).

Central to legal personhood is the idea that law is an important element "of the human-political-social system" (Kotzé and Kim, 2019: 3) and aligns with important international milestones like the biodiversity and climate conventions (Burch et al., 2019). These have increasingly pointed to the need for recognition of nature's value in line with what has been articulated by some indigenous cultures across the world. Indeed, the development of nature's legal personhood has occurred within a particular global and transnational context of both state and civil society action articulating an increasing appreciation and awareness of the intrinsic value of nature (Gordon, 2017; Iorns Magellanes, 2016; Kauffman and Martin, 2018b).

There has been considerable transnational advocacy for nature's personhood within the international rights of nature movement (Iorns Magellanes, 2019: 1; Miller, 2019: 357; cf. Kotzé and Villavicencio Calzadilla, 2017). The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (2010) was an important milestone, aided by formation of the International Rights of Nature Tribunal (White, 2018: 138–139). These transnational advancements connect closely with anticolonial movements and trends, incorporating traditional indigenous knowledge into (global) policy and treaty making (Álvez-Marín et al, 2021; Bajpai, 2023; Kauffman and Martin, 2018a). To date, legal personhood has emerged most prominently in countries with embedded settler-indigenous conflicts (Athens, 2018: 192; Jha and Ghosh, 2018) where it attempts to address (post)colonial power relations through inclusivity and a desire to reconcile western and non-western views.

A consequence of legal personhood for nature in most court settings is that nature needs a voice, a representative or a spokesperson. In the literature, guardianship is the suggested form to guarantee human responsibility for nature protection (Iorns Magallanes, 2018: 229; O'Donnell and Talbot-Jones, 2018) and indigenous peoples are often

considered potential guardians because their worldviews are considered in line with environmental objectives. For example, legal personhood in Aotearoa New Zealand recognizes the way that Māori view rivers as their kin, with a life force strongly linked to the people living with the river (Morris and Ruru, 2010: 49; White, 2018).

We discuss three legal personhood arrangements enacted in Ecuador, India and Aotearoa New Zealand and analyse their respective institutional arrangements from the perspective of Rubbish Theory.

Vilcabamba: Conflicting Durables in Ecuador

Vilcabamba, in southern Ecuador, is a river with personhood status that was the first case to be internationally known and thus figures prominently in many academic discussions on the subject. It follows on from Ecuador's 2008 constitution, created through a participatory process (Iorns Magellanes, 2019: 4; Kotzé and Villavicencio Calzadilla, 2017: 416). The 2008 constitution achieved fame in environmental circles because of its outlining of rights for *Pacha Mama* (usually simplistically translated as "Mother Earth" or Nature) and it consciously draws upon the worldviews of Ecuador's indigenous peoples (Álvez-Marín et al, 2021: 168; Clark et al., 2019: 839; Kotzé and Villavicencio Calzadilla, 2017: 404). The idea of Pacha Mama and several other Amerindian concepts such as *Sumak Kawsay/Buen vivir*, have gained popularity among the environmentally focused as promoting a way of life harmonious with nature (Gordon, 2017: 54; Cano Pecharroman, 2018: 6; Iorns Magellanes 2019: 4; Kotzé and Villavicencio Calzadilla, 2017: 417; Merino, 2016). This draws on concepts with complex and deep legacies within Andean thought and practice, with nature viewed as inherent to the social being and nature itself composed of different kinds of other-than-human social beings (Nuñez, 2018; White, 2018). Human-nature relations are seen as integral and comprise a philosophy of life, i.e., a worldview concomitant with a way of life harmonious with nature (Cano Pecharroman, 2018: 6; Gordon, 2017: 54). Scholars have thus stressed how this approach differs from

traditional development approaches as it highlights the unity and relatedness of humanity and nature.

Vilcabamba's personhood emerged in a dispute following the widening of a road by the Loja provincial government, a process that narrowed the Vilcabamba river and increased flooding and erosion of its banks. Two landowners drew on the Ecuadorian constitution and sued on the river's behalf. The court ruled in the complainants' favour and ordered the restoration of local ecosystems. Taking a precautionary approach, the court rejected the provincial government's argument that the road was needed by the local population as part of their "right to development" (Cano Pecharroman, 2018: 7). Instead, the court asserted the importance of protecting natural systems and the needs of future generations (Álvez-Marín et al, 2021: 167). "Indeed, the court explicitly asserts that the rights of some members of the community are inferior to the rights of a healthy ecosystem that sustains larger numbers of people, including… the rights of those very people individually disadvantaged by a decision in favor of the environment" (Clark et al., 2019: 839). Following the case, the contractor was ordered to follow extant environmental guidelines and recommendations by the Ministry of Environment (Cano Pecharroman, 2018: 7). The decision thus asserted that development could (and can) be possible, but appropriate concern for the environment must be shown.

The Vilcabamba case represented a test of an evolving ordering. The Loja Provincial Government argued that their road-building activities were integral to continued modernisation of Ecuador. It was thus part of the maintenance of the Durable "Development". By contrast, the complainants were effectively arguing for the importance of an alternative Durable—"Nature"—compromised by development (Youatt, 2017). In their judgement, the Ecuadorian legal system enacted a compromise, hybrid durable "Sustainable Development". They reiterated that nature has rights that have been damaged but also articulated the view that development and nature need not necessarily conflict. The judgement effectively states that if the Loja Provincial Government had followed extant rules and regulations the conflict would not have arisen.

Although the Vilcabamba case was greatly celebrated internationally among advocates for Nature's rights, its impact domestically is less clear (Clark et al., 2019: 798; Cordero-Heredia, 2023: 218). It is reported that the provincial government partially complied, but that the original claimants complained that they had to pay for certain actions to protect their property (Cano Pecharroman, 2018: 9). The ruling is often interpreted as a distinct step from environmental rights toward legal personhood (Greene, n.d.). This is illustrated in the legal phrasing: "*the river has the right* to its own natural course" (Berros, 2017:38, emphasis in original) and the extension of protection to the "metaphysical as well as physical features of the natural environment" (Iorns Magallanes, 2017: 2). However, commentators have pointed out that the court did not occupy itself with the Vilcabamba river as an individual, with rights and agency. Rather, it was framed as a part of nature or ecosystems, which hold rights (Buława et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2019; Gellers, 2020; Youatt, 2017).

It is thus unclear the extent that efforts to apply legal personhood to Nature in Ecuador and enactment of the 2008 constitution have significantly changed the extant Class Society (cf. Kotzé and Villavicencio Calzadilla, 2017: 426). The fact that individual residents (indeed, in this case US rather than Ecuadorian citizens) could sue on behalf of nature is suggestive of a Levelling process. There appears to be a wider group that has a role in both the maintenance of Durables and a say in the transmission of Rubbish into the Durable category (Cordero-Heredia, 2023: 229). Likewise, it has been suggested that Ecuadorian courts enforcing environmental provisions is significant (White, 2018: 141). Against this is the fact that their complainants' case was seemingly only partially successful, with a mixed response from the Provincial Government. Likewise, the judicial ruling reiterated structures of authority within Ecuadorian society (state rules and regulations; definition of environmental damage largely in the hands of experts and bureaucrats). As such, the evidence that significant change has occurred to the power structures of Ecuadorian society is limited. Indeed, meaningful environmental action has continued to prove challenging in the face of political turmoil, increasing

militarization, financial crises and expanding extractive industries (Cordero-Heredia, 2023; Kotzé and Villavicencio Calzadilla, 2017; Jameson, 2010; Lalander, 2014a; 2014b; Lalander and Merimaa, 2018; Merino, 2016; Cano Pecharroman, 2018: 5; White, 2018: 145).

In Rubbish Theory terms, one can see the legal disputes about Vilcabamba as a conflict over Durable objects within Ecuadorian society: "Nature" and "Development" (cf. Milton, 1999) and arguably a new object "Sustainable Development" (cf. Saldert and Singleton, this volume). The conflict is the manifestation of efforts to Crash Through Nature as a Durable over the past 20 years. In this process, various actors have drawn upon Ecuador's indigenous cultures and peoples as part of wider Ecuadorian political movements (Jameson, 2010). As with other colonial contexts, indigenous groups have provided a source of objects previously considered Rubbish to be eliminated that can be Crashed Through to fashion new Durables and to Level society (Korovkin, 2001). This is embodied by the integration of the concept *Sumak Kawsay* into the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution (Altmann, 2014; Cordero-Heredia, 2023; Putzer et al. 2022). However, while the Vilcabamba case illustrates the process of enacting and maintaining a new Durable, it also reveals that the Ecuadorian Class Society remains much the same, albeit with a wider range of voices integrated. As such, based on the material collected here, it seems the state and legal system continue their position as the main High Priests, having acquiesced to efforts to Crash Through certain objects in the name of guiding environmentally-balanced development.

Rivers of India: Rule by High Priests

In 2017, the Indian State Uttarakhand's High Court declared the rivers Ganga and its tributary, the Yamuna – two of the most polluted rivers in the world – legal persons. This was a consequence of several legal initiatives. Firstly, a resident had initiated a public interest litigation about illegal construction on the river, in which the court ruled that citizens have a right to clean water. The court thus directed the State of Uttarakhand to act on pollution, to clear government owned

riverside land and to constitute a Ganga Management Board within three months. Following the failure of the State of Uttarakhand to do this the High Court granted the Ganga and Yumana and their tributaries and streams legal personhood (Clark et al., 2019: 813-4; Iorns Magellanes, 2019: 10-11; Kauffman and Martin, 2018: 14-5) and declared three legal custodians as the "parents" of the rivers, providing a human face to protect, conserve and preserve the Ganga and Yamuna (Cano Pecharroman, 2018: 8).

Prior to this ruling, the waters of the Ganga appear to be considered a Transient object swiftly converted into rubbish by those polluting it. Indeed, for those discharging waste the Ganga is how rubbish is removed from sight. The actions of the Uttarakhand High Court can thus be interpreted as an attempt to render the rivers Ganga and Yumuna as Durable objects. Drawing on established precedent, the court took inspiration from previous Indian legal rulings on the personhood of Hindu deities but constitutional duties to protect the environment were also cited (Iorns Magellanes, 2019: 18-19), as was the dependence of many communities upon the rivers (Gellers, 2020; Kinkaid, 2019).

The practice of granting personhood to deities has long been part of Indian legal systems and was incorporated into British colonial rule to settle property and entitlement conflicts (Alley, 2019: 4). The declaration of personhood to the Ganga and Yumuna was instituted with reference to religious law (Studley and Bleisch, 2018) and the possibility of a religious object—a deity—being a legal person (Alley, 2019; Buława, 2022: 174; Iorns Magellanes, 2019: 12). In this conceptualization, a duty of care for deities is a responsibility bestowed upon human guardians: understood as protective action in the deity's interest, to ensure survival to the next generation. This contrasts with e.g., a property-based system, where a deity might become an object owned, with no value of its own and unprotected from the possible objectification and exploitation of the owner. The Uttarakhand High Court's decision thus partially drew upon Indian Supreme Court jurisprudence for Hindu deities and upon the Ganga's sacred position

within Hinduism, the largest faith in India (Alley, 2019: 6; Jha and Ghosh, 2018; Kinkaid, 2019).

Ultimately, legal personhood was a temporary measure. The judgement stated responsibility but did not stipulate funding for the protection of the Ganga. The State of Uttarakhand thus appealed the decision to India's Supreme Court and was ultimately successful (Cano Pecharroman, 2018). Disputes also emerged over jurisdiction as Uttarakhand lacks authority over other riparian states (Iorns Magellanes, 2019: 14; White, 2018: 154). There was an unwillingness from various state actors to taking on guardianship responsibilities and accountability (Alley, 2019: 11-12; Alley and Mehta, 2019; Jolly and Roshan Menon, 2021). As such, despite resonating with views of the majority of India's Hindu population the personhood of the Ganga was rendered moot and the Ganga remains heavily polluted and a place to discard rubbish (Bhattacharjee, 2023: 276-7). Legal personhood remains on the table in India (Gellers, 2020: 6). However, critics have pointed out that religious practices themselves may be polluting (Brara and Berros, 2022: 509) and that there are challenges posed by the conflicting imperatives of the Indian state (Kinkaid, 2019).

Examining this story with Rubbish Theory, one can assert that attempts to enact personhood were hardly radical. It followed the rules of the established Indian Class Society – there can be limited flows of Rubbish to the Durable category provided this is carried out by the designated social groups (the officials of the Indian court system). These office holders were the director of the Namami Gange conservation programme, Chief Secretary of the State of Uttarakhand and the Advocate General of the State of Uttarakhand. The ultimate decision of the Indian Supreme Court reiterates this. Effectively, the High Priests ruled on the case and the Ganga and Yumana were not accorded Durable status.

However, on another level, this ruling can also be interpreted as an action to maintain the secular post-independence Indian system. In Bharatiya Janata Party-led India, violent Hindu nationalism is increasingly prominent, with deleterious impact on minority groups,

notably India's Muslim population (Nielsen et al., 2023). As such, accepting the legal personhood strongly associated with that of Hindu gods may potentially also represent assertions of power by dominant groups in Indian society, amounting to an essentialism of diverse local spiritual cultures, both Hindu and otherwise (cf. Alley, 2019; Alley and Mehta, 2019; Brara and Berros, 2022; Jolly and Roshan Menon, 2021; Kinkaid, 2019; O'Donnell, 2018). In Rubbish Theory terms, one could interpret legal personhood as a potential effort to Crash Through the concerns of Hindu nationalism and control India's official ordering systems. In this light, the Supreme Court's rejection of the Ganga's personhood may be seen as resisting Hindu nationalists' efforts to seize control of the flow of objects. In this case, the post-independence system of power was maintained.

In sum, the case of legal personhood for the Ganga and Yumana shows relatively little radical intent. The process was initiated within the established orderings of objects within Indian society, with established High Priests rejecting the idea that the rivers could be rendered Durable. In this, it arguably represents a failure for environmental protection (it seems that it did not lead directly to greater environmental action[2]) but may represent resistance to efforts by other groups in Indian society (such as Hindu nationalists) to change the established ordering system.

Te Awa Tupua: Crashing through Māori worldviews

The river Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui, in English) is the third largest and most navigable river of Aotearoa New Zealand. In the literature on legal personhood, this is usually described as one the most complete and established attributions of personhood to a part of nature. It also sits alongside several other examples from the same country. It is considered exemplary because of its apparent combination of the promotion of ecocentric values that originate among previously marginalised Māori communities (*iwi*) and partly

2 Although, it should be noted that one article asserts that the discussion has been influencing a more pro-environmental legal approach in India (Jolly and Roshan Menon, 2021).

because it addresses justice issues in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand society.

Of the cases discussed here, Te Awa Tupua seems most far reaching. As with the case of the Vilcabamba above, one can say that there has been an effort to Crash Through indigenous (in this case Māori) values into Aotearoa New Zealand's Class Society. This entails the transferral of objects previously considered Rubbish into the Durable category.

The origins of legal personhood for Te Awa Tupua lie in colonial struggles between European settlers and iwi regarding the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi[3] (Kauffman and Martin, 2018a). In 2014, after over 140 years of dispute an agreement was reached granting "the river its own legal identity, with the rights, duties, and liabilities of a legal person" (Cano Pecharroman, 2018: 7). This included title over its own riverbed (Iorns Magellanes 2019: 20) – thus obviating an intractable conflict over ownership (Dawson, 2023: 356). It explicitly addresses the issue of land appropriation and failure to fulfil governance obligations (Athens, 2018: 210-1). Furthermore, the designed guardianship procedures are intended to disrupt colonial power relations. While legal personhood does not remedy all historical colonial wrongs it is framed in the literature as attempt at reconciliation within Aotearoa New Zealand society (Buława et al., 2022; Cribb et al., 2022).

With this, new groups have been appointed with the power to speak for Te Awa Tupua. Many of the actors empowered in this process come from outside established official government bodies, suggesting that there has been transformation of the groups of people with the power to control the orderings of objects in Aotearoa New Zealand (Talbot-Jones and Bennett, 2022; Winter 2019). Based on the material collected here, it seems that Māori groups have been partially successful in enacting a new order, one in which Māori concerns

3 The 1840 Treaty of Waitangi has been described as Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document. It was signed by representatives of the British crown and some indigenous kin groups. Within the treaty, Māori were guaranteed authority over their lands, villages and wealth (Dawson, 2023: 345; Finlayson, 2023: 262). Helpfully, there were differences between the Māori and English language versions (Iorns Magellanes, 2016: 285-8). In 1975 an act of Government was passed to investigate Crown breaches of the treaty; a settlement process has been ongoing ever since (Cribb et al., 2022: 567; Geddis and Ruru, 2021: 255-6).

have equal weight to "scientific" ones (Iorns Magallanes, 2017: 9). In Rubbish Theory terms, Māori Crasher's Through appear to have successfully altered what is considered Durable based on their own cosmopolitical concerns.

Te Awa Tupua incorporates guardians to look after and protect the river's needs or interests i.e., promoting the health of the river and its ecosystem. Māori consider themselves the rightful guardians of the river as part of its life force. There is thus a metaphysical aspect to Te Awa Tupua (Brierley et al., 2018: 2; Buława et al. 2022: 172; Dawson, 2023: 351). However, guardianship within the Te Awa Tupua legal context is not exclusive to Māori. It is organized in the office of Te Pou Tupua which gives the river a 'human face' for everyday governance, which involves straddling government regulation, private property rights, public access and Māori customary rights. It also includes a financial fund to support the river's legal framework (Clark et al., 2019; Dawson, 2023; Rowe, 2019). Te Pou Tupua comprises two people, one nominated by the New Zealand Crown and the other by local iwi. Under Te Pou Tupua are several bodies with varying power and influence 1) Te Karewao, an advisory group; 2) Te Kōpuka, a strategy group; and 3) Te Heke Ngahuru, a loose body of interested persons.

All this is a suggestive of a certain amount of Levelling practice. However, the Aotearoa New Zealand state has not been completely displaced (Collins and Esterling, 2019) – one of two human representatives of Te Awa Tupua is nominated by the New Zealand Crown. Likewise, membership of the various advisory and strategy bodies is not completely open and various potentially important issues (such as ownership of river water and previously extant property rights) are not part of guardianship (Kramm 2020: 308). The class system is more Level, but clearly there are limits. Indeed, what has occurred is that the body of High Priests has been broadened. The Class Society has Levelled but persists (Kauffman and Martin, 2018a: 52). How the different authorities (E.g., "Māori", "Scientific" or "business") manage this widened system of Durables in practice will be of great interest (cf. Singleton and Gillette, 2023). This management

will likely heavily influence a) the extent that established hierarchies of ordering have been meaningfully changed (cf. Hutchison 2014: 182); and b) the extent that Te Awa Tupua management aligns with ecocentric values (as environmental advocates' hope) (Athens 2018; Barraclough, 2013; Brara and Berros, 2022; Collins and Esterling, 2019; Iorns Magallanes, 2018: 238).

According to the literature, Te Awa Tupua "signs a powerful narrative" connecting Māori cosmology with the law's narrative sense, melding the prosaic of the everyday with the sacred other world (Clark et al., 2019: 801–804, cf. Cribb et al., 2022; Rodgers 2017; Talbot-Jones and Bennett, 2022), emphasising human interconnectedness with nature (Collins and Esterling, 2019; Lynes, 2017). Implementation and river management is based on concerns rooted in Māori cosmology without requiring scientific evidence in support (Iorns Magallanes, 2017: 9). Te Awa Tupua is stated to embody Māori conceptualizations of community and river as an inseparable whole, interconnected by a life force (Rowe, 2019: 604) that stretches from the past into the future (Winter, 2020: 283) and entails caring obligations (Exton, 2017:23; Winter, 2020). It is an attempt to shift governance to a co-management model to allow the performance of Māori cosmology and concomitantly ameliorate Māori loss of authority over and relationship to the land (Exton, 2017: 5; Iorns Magallanes, 2017: 8). It is intended to disrupt colonial power relations (Lynes, 2017: 2). Several accounts suggest that Te Awa Tupua's legal personhood is primarily about acknowledging and respecting Māori people rather than environmental protection (Brara and Berros, 2022: 507; Dawson, 2023; Geddis and Ruru, 2021: 253; Rāwiri, 2022; Talbot-Jones and Bennett, 2022: 76). It thus can be interpreted an attempt to Crash Through concepts, ideas and people that the colonial order previously had considered Rubbish into the category of feted Durables of Aotearoa New Zealand.

However, one should not overstate the extent that legal personhood represents a concession to Māori worldviews, indeed some advocates see it as a start not an end point to decolonial action (Rāwiri, 2022). In Māori thought, "everything—human, nonhuman and spiritual—

is interconnected and entwined". As such, a river having personhood makes imperfect sense (Winter, 2020: 286). Te Awa Tupua does not fully represent a Māori worldview nor a complete acceptance of Māori demands (Argyrou and Hummels, 2019: 764; Athens, 2018: 212; Brierley et al., 2018: 5; Exton, 2017: 7; Iorns Magellanes, 2019: 8) but within the literature we examined it was considered as close as it can get within the current Aotearoa New Zealand legal system (Kauffman and Martin, 2018b: 7). Advocates for Te Awa Tupua hope it represents a way to shift to governance that centres on the values of nature (Iorns Magallanes, 2018: 223; Miller, 2019: 358; Youatt, 2017: 48) through the involvement of "multiple sets of people from different backgrounds" (Kauffman and Martin 2018b: 18). In essence that by Crashing Through Māori worldviews a more just Aotearoa New Zealand will emerge.

However, other anticolonial commentators are scathing, characterising the Te Awa Tupua Act as "[looking] less like a change of heart rooted in a fundamental commitment to human rights, and more like a reflection of settler-states selectively endorsing certain human rights that do not ask for, or require, any domestic change" (Collins and Esterling, 2019: 21). This harks to a tension inherent to any decolonial action by colonial bodies. The ultimate decolonial action is a total unmaking of the extant (colonial) order a step that the Aotearoa New Zealand state is probably unwilling to take. A tension thus remains about how Level are people willing to be (cf. Singleton and Gillette, 2023).

In Rubbish Theory terms, Te Awa Tupua appears to represent a largely successful attempt to Crash Through Māori worldviews into the Aotearoa New Zealand class society. However, it remains a class society, but with arguably a broader group of High Priests monitoring the flow of objects. Despite this, decolonial critics at times still call for greater Levelling.

Concluding discussion

In this chapter, we have looked at three attempts to apply the concept of legal personhood to rivers in three different parts of the world.

Advocates of legal personhood for nature hope that ecocentric values can influence governance and disrupt extant power relations by moving to a standpoint that is appreciative of nature's intrinsic values (Bajpai, 2023; Burdon 2020; Gellers 2021; Morris and Ruru, 2010; Seymour, 2004; Studley and Bleisch, 2018). In doing this, much legal personhood of nature literature stresses connections to indigenous groups, worldviews and practices and often connects to rights-based struggles in (post)colonial societies. Often it is presented as a win-win for nature and society.

Advocates of legal personhood for nature interpret these disparate initiatives as emblematic of a similar process – a manifestation of a collective need to integrate ecocentric values into diverse legal systems around the world. We thus interpret this as ultimately radical in aspiration (cf. Bajpai, 2023; Iorns Magellanes 2019: 21; Kotzé and Villavicencio Calzadilla, 2017; O'Donnell, 2023; White, 2018). However, comparing these cases using Rubbish Theory has revealed legal personhood is not inherently radical of itself. Often it is a case of evolution of extant legal precedents (Iorns Magellanes, 2019: 20). In each case, one can interpret moves towards legal personhood as attempting to effect different levels of change to extant Class Societies. Thus, the case of the Ganga arguably presents little challenge to the dominant ordering system (Alley and Mehta, 2019). It has reiterated the role of courts and Indian state authorities to determine the flow of objects from the Rubbish to Durable categories. By contrast, the cases of the Vilcabamba and Te Awa Tupua present clearer cases of attempts to Crash Through objects (indigenous culture) into the Durable category. There are however important differences between these two cases. The Vilcabamba represents an attempt to maintain a new Durable, Sustainable Development, within a largely unchanged ordering system, albeit one with more voices. Based on the material collected here, it seems the state and legal system continue their position as the main High Priests. Te Awa Tupua by contrast appears to exhibit considerably more Levelling. It appears that previously marginalised groups have been able to gain a certain amount of

control within the Class Society. It thus appears in Rubbish Theory terms to have manifested the most radical transformation of dominant object ordering systems. However, as the other cases highlight, this radicalism is not inherent to the concept of legal personhood and rather relates to the extent that the power to order objects is distributed (cf. Marshall, 2020). Rubbish Theory has thus allowed us to add nuance to our understanding of what efforts to enact Legal Personhood entail.

This analysis provokes several reflections on legal personhood itself. Firstly, each of the cases entails the specification of guardianship and responsibility for the enacted person. How should nature be represented and who should do it (cf. Jolly and Roshan Menon, 2021: 482-5)? This is a matter of local politics and is implicated in the success and failure of the different cases. If the guardian abuses their position or does not perform its role legal personhood will have limited impact (O'Donnell, 2023: 331). Thus, the State of Uttarakhand recoiled from responsibility for the Ganga as no extra resources were allocated for this task. By contrast, Te Awa Tupua involved considerable resources and the creation of new institutions. This highlights that enacting a change in the ordering system often requires material and social resources. The third reading in the New Zealand parliament of the Te Awa Tupua Act was celebrated by Whanganui iwi singing a traditional Māori song in the parliamentary chamber (Clark et al., 2018: 800). While it is impossible to judge the actual effects of such actions, it is tempting to see this as an example of the types of social action required to change dominant ordering systems. In this case, the Whanganui iwi brought Māori cultural symbols to the heart of the colonial Aotearoa New Zealand state – an arguably highly radical act that is emblematic of a transformation in governance and guardianship. Thus, if indeed Te Awa Tupua is "successful" as the literature maintains then we would argue that attention should be paid to the symbolic, institutional and material work that effected change in the Class Society.

Secondly, much of the literature on legal personhood argues that by drawing on non-western cosmologies legal personhood presents a way to incorporate ecocentric values into legal systems. However, the lens of Rubbish Theory highlights that this need not necessarily be the case. As described here, legal personhood is an attempt to Crash Through certain objects into the Durable category of a Class Society. The Ganga highlights that these values need not be ecocentric – Hindu religious objects are what are being argued over. As such, the literature's conflation of ecocentrism and indigenous thinking seems problematic (cf. Dawson, 2023: 358). What if Māori representatives of Te Awa Tupua favour (sustainable) development over preservation (cf. Morris and Ruru 2010: 58)? Within the literature, the impression one gets is an assumption that the decolonial concerns of indigenous groups are automatically in alignment with the ecological views of environmentalists. This assumption resembles similar situations that have led to conflict elsewhere (Blaser, 2009; Nadasdy 2011; Singleton and Gillette, 2023; West, 2006).

Likewise, the literature examined views indigenous groups as largely homogenous and united of purpose. This thus obscures the inherently conflictive process of ordering "authentic indigenous values". Such processes are also amenable to Rubbish Theory analysis (see Lalander et al., this volume). There is some suggestion that indigenous rights movements have at times been co-opted by elite groups in several South American countries (Burman 2014; Jameson, 2010; Merino, 2016; White, 2018: 145). Likewise, there are concerns that the concept of "legal personhood" can also be as much a colonial imposition as e.g., property rights (cf. Barcan, 2019; Charpleix, 2018; Chaturvedi, 2019; Dawson, 2023) that "erases the traditional relationships, conceptions, experiences and law of these sites" (Barcan, 2020: 824). Rather than humans and nature being a single whole (as some indigenous groups see it) legal personhood entails separation of essentialized objects. Likewise, according some people the right to speak for those objects, potentially rides roughshod over alternative "conceptions of responsibility, agency and value" (Whyte, 2017: 89,

see also Alley, 2019: 9). In Rubbish Theory terms, legal personhood may be radical, but it may also be a way for particular social groups to retain their privileged place in the Class Society, continuing to control the transferral of Rubbish into Durable status[4]. Such processes are thus very much likely to feed into the success or failure of legal personhood and indeed the perspectives from which it is judged. For example, to labour the point: enacting the legal personhood of a river may have anti-imperialistic aims but still ironically represent colonial impositions if the imperialists remain the High Priests (cf. O'Donnell, 2023). The *process* of demarcating legal personhood therefore matters as much as the fact of demarcation (cf. Eckstein et al., 2019). In sum, based on the literature examined here, affording legal personhood to rivers may or may not promote ecocentric values, environmental protection or decolonisation. Whether it does or not will always depend on the extent that it actually alters the process of ordering different objects.

4 One is reminded of the famous line from Tomasi Di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change" (2007:19).

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Part II

Rubbish Theorising

Rubbish riches – engaging waste in the Circular Economy of reuse interior design

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Introduction

Already when he published his classic Rubbish Theory in 1979, Michael Thompson recognised the importance of Rubbish as a generative force in social life (2017). At the time, the topic of waste was widely ignored in social debate and consciousness. Since then, waste has risen to be an empirical "problem" of enormous significance, not to say urgency, in contemporary society (Franco-García et al., 2019; Gregson, 2023). Partly, this is due to growing waste mountains across the globe, threatening ecosystems and lifeforms. With steadily rising levels of consumption, the challenge of handling the material remnants of contemporary lifestyles is pressing, not least considering that solid waste volumes are likely to continue increasing until we presumably reach a global garbage peak in 2100 (Hoornweg et al., 2015). Related to such challenges, there is great and growing interest in the discarded categories of material culture as sites of potential economic value. This is most clearly expressed by proponents of the doctrine of Circular Economy (CE) (see McDonough and Braungart, 2002 and Webster, 2017 for general introductions) but also evidenced in the rapid expansion of the reuse, vintage and second-hand sector (Baker, 2013; Franklin, 2011; Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Holland, 2018).

In other words, the role and place of waste and discarded objects in society today look rather different from when Rubbish Theory was originally formulated. Given these developments, it makes sense to revisit Thompson's ideas and explore how they may help us think through the role of waste in a society that is increasingly organised according to principles of material circulation and reuse. In what ways

can Rubbish Theory throw light on how waste and used things are valued and revalued in such a context? In turn, what theoretical and conceptual implications could a shift towards a circular society have for Rubbish Theory? Lastly, following Thompson's own recent query, where would we be without Rubbish? (2023).

To answer such questions, this chapter uses insights from ethnographic fieldwork with a group of interior reuse designers (*redesigners*), who create new designs using existing things and materials that they salvage. The redesigners' work is illustrative, as they put many CE principles into practice, focusing particularly on how the value of extant and used things can be captured, maintained and developed. As will be shown, the example of the redesigners illustrates the continued usefulness of Rubbish Theory in highlighting Rubbish as a category of dormant and valueless things lingering on in everyday social life rather than being the irrevocable end of things (cf. Hetherington, 2004). The ethnography shows how this paradoxical category of valuable, yet ostensibly worthless stuff, plays a crucial role in the value-creation by redesigners. The human-thing relationships in the studio, and the redesigners' attunement to liveliness embodied in the rich socio-material layers of things, are likewise vital in this process.

Yet, the case study also raises some pertinent conceptual queries. As will be further elaborated below, Thompson posits the existence of three categories, Rubbish, Transient and Durable objects, and also puts forward the argument that transfer between such categories can only happen in certain ways (2017). The redesigners' work, however, seems to challenge the accepted transfer routes between categories posited by Rubbish Theory. Furthermore, it prompts a more nuanced discussion on what is considered Transient and Durable in a purportedly circular society. The chapter argues that as society moves from linear disposability to circular durability, the notion of what is included and excluded in the system of value classification will change. What in Thompson's original theory constituted external domains of production and consumption, should be integrated into Rubbish Theory's conceptual framework in order to understand the emerging dynamics of value.

Before I outline the key components of Thompson's theory, I should briefly introduce redesign and its relationship to CE. Redesign forms a "concrete" design that, in contrast to conventional interior design, starts design work with things, rather than ideas. For both ecological and aesthetic reasons, the redesigners salvage existing things to upcycle and repurpose them in new interior design projects. The accumulated socio-material history of the things utilised are vital properties that the redesigners attend to in the design-making process (Appelgren, 2019; 2020 for details). Redesign has gained popularity in Sweden alongside general booming interest in reuse and second-hand as a response to climate and environmental concerns (Appelgren and Bohlin, 2015; Hedegård, 2023; Lidström, 2023; Persson and Hinton, 2023). In particular, municipalities and other public bodies have begun exploring ways to replace purchases of new office interior products with reuse alternatives (Appelgren and Bohlin, 2020).

The redesigners, who will be further introduced below, represent a small community, but their activities are emblematic of a broader scope of economic activities associated with the CE model. Distinguishing itself from the take-make-dispose model of modern linear economy, the CE concept proposes an ecologically embedded economy, based on a circular model of production and consumption (Brandão et al., 2020; Eisenriegler, 2020; Lacy et al., 2021; McDonough and Braungart, 2002; Webster, 2017, see Lieder and Rashid, 2016 and Kirchherr et al., 2017 for overviews of CE variants and Corvellec et al., 2022 for an overview of critiques of CE). Rather than continue using finite virgin resources and burden society with hazardous waste, it argues that human societies can become restorative and regenerative through material circulation. A key component in this is that waste should be eliminated by looping it back as resources into new production cycles, with a stress on efficiency and utility (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Morseletto, 2020; van Ewijk, 2018). Promising to resolve the tension between economic growth and ecological sustainability, the CE concept is generally met with enthusiasm and active endorsement by governments, industry and civil society throughout the world (European Commission, 2020;

Ghosh, 2020; Haswell et al, 2024; United Nations, 2015).

This research is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the form of immersive participant observation following redesigners' work in a studio in Gothenburg, Sweden for approximately six months over an 18-month period. During this period, I actively participated in the daily processes of salvaging and redesigning materials in the redesign studio, using a "sensory ethnography" approach to capture the nuanced interaction between people and materials (Howes, 2019; Pink, 2015). This method emphasises learning through all senses—seeing, touching, smelling, listening—allowing for a deep, embodied understanding of how redesigners' design concepts and their materials co-evolve through continuous collaboration between people and things. These methodological considerations draw on theoretical insights from new materialism, which suggests that humans and materials are engaged in reciprocal relationships (Barad, 2003; Barad, 2011; Haraway, 2008; Ingold, 2011; Latour, 2005; Tsing, 2015). This theoretical stance informed the research design and the analytical focus on the unfolding of socio-material entanglements in the studio space and how rejected Rubbish was brought into being in creative design processes.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, I discuss the relevant parts of Rubbish Theory, including basic notions of object positions and object transfers, alongside less recognized relevant features such as the domains of production and consumption. Then, using ethnographic material from fieldwork with the redesigners, I discuss four main ways in which their work raises questions about aspects of Rubbish Theory, partly related to the movement of things between categories and partly related to the conceptualisation of the exteriority of the ordering system that the theory focuses on. Concluding the chapter, it is argued that the work of the redesigners suggests that society's increasing shift towards material circulation encourages us to revise some of the principles of value positions and pathways of things presented in Rubbish Theory. However, Thompson's conceptualisation of Rubbish as a repository of dormant potentiality remains critical given the increasing need for shielding waste from attempts to find immediate utility as the CE model advances.

Rubbish Theory and beyond

The central message of Rubbish Theory is that humans make, organise and maintain social worlds through imposing value and order on things. The ordering of things in distinct categories according to value, along with the control of possible movement between these categories, constitutes a dynamic system expressing and engendering power, status, and class distinctions. "Things" are subject to human social ordering, but even if most of the cases discussed by Thompson constitute physical objects (typically commodities, art works, houses and cars), this category also embraces "ideas, historical facts, and systems of knowledge" (2017: 66). Thompson is committed to a social constructivist approach focusing on "the social malleability of objects—the idea that objects have the qualities that they have as the result of a social process of endowment" (2017: 64). The things themselves are passive objects and instruments in this world-making and their intrinsic physical properties have limited impact on the values socially associated with the things (2017: 26).

Positions and transitions in the system of value

Despite this focus on social ordering of and by people, Rubbish Theory primarily outlines a theory of thing-positions and thing-movements in an ordering system. According to this, there are two categories of valued things: the status of Transient is given to the large body of things in society, decreasing in value over time and having a temporary existence (most everyday commodities), while the status of Durable is conferred on the more restrictive grouping of things that have stable or increasing value coupled with a permanent existence (typically antiques, art and heritage objects). Since the two categories don't explain social change (people with the symbolic power of classifying things won't devalue things they themselves are associated with), Rubbish is introduced as a third category of worthless stuff (waste in its many forms). In contrast to the other two categories, which are actively controlled as part of maintaining and reinforcing social orderings, Rubbish is a socially unregulated and culturally

covert category of unnoticed and ignored things lingering on in a state of "limbo" (Thompson, 2017: 24-27). Interestingly, at one point Thompson mentions that a "growing concern with ecology, pollution, and conservation inevitably makes rubbish overt" (2017: 125). However, he does not develop this further.

Thompson sees Rubbish as a socially highly valuable category even if it comprises worthless things. Since value is fluid and changing, it varies up (Durable things) and down (Transient things) within the categories, but, more importantly, it can make things transition between categories. The theoretically possible paths of movement are from Transient to Rubbish (used commodities at the end of life) and Rubbish to Durable (works of art retrieved from a pile of waste). The covert and ambiguous category of Rubbish is thus what makes transfers of things between categories possible and opens a path for Transient things to become Durable by way of momentary dormancy in the Rubbish category. This is possible since Rubbish is not to be understood as a category of irrevocably extinct things, but a category of neglected things, emptied of value. This path between categories thus not only alters the status of things but makes social mobility possible. By "discovering" value in Rubbish and making these revaluations stick and stabilise as Durable objects, social groups can ascend in the social hierarchy (2017: 27).

The theoretical impossibility of other forms of movement is equally important for understanding Rubbish Theory. As mentioned, there are no direct transfers between Transient and Durable, and Rubbish cannot ascend into Transient status, while Durable cannot descend into Rubbish. The thing-centrism of the model makes it sound as if these latter transfers were somehow metaphysically impossible, but what Thompson suggests is that these transfers do not make social sense. Why would people with power downgrade their own possessions, and how could common people make their divergent value claims stick? Logically, things might transition across the Durable-Transient divide, but since those are exceptions, they have no effect on the system, or, conversely, if they happened to a significant

degree the system would collapse (2017: 116). What does affect the system, on the other hand, are movements to and from the Rubbish category (from Transient and to Durable), which is why this category has a subversive potential, possibly undermining hierarchies of value, things and people.

Beyond the system of value

Before looking more closely at the empirical case study, a few words are in place regarding a specific dimension of Rubbish Theory, namely how Thompson conceptualises the outside, or exteriority of the ordering system of "goods in circulation" that are his main focus (2017: 120). As pointed out by Kevin Hetherington, a key conceptual innovation of Rubbish Theory is the "recursivity" of Rubbish (2004). Rather than seeing waste as final and irrevocable, Thompson makes Rubbish a covert category of dormant things with value potential. Rubbish has been emptied of value and is socially ignored, but lingering on in the social landscape it can be reawakened and reinfused with new value (ascending into the Durable category). Hetherington argues that disposal happens in two stages: the first burial is the initial throwing away of things we find useless and worthless, while the second burial takes place when these are finally erased or annihilated (2004). Thompson's Rubbish category overlaps with the stage of first burial where value is zero, but waste continues to exist. When addressing the question of a stage of further deterioration beyond Rubbish, and beyond the system of value positions, he refers to the domain of "consumption" in which things reach the end and are irretrievably destroyed (2017: 121-125), akin to Hetherington's second burial (2004). Consumption, in other words, constitutes the final destination of things in Thompson's theory.

At the opposite end of the process, Thompson also outlines the beginnings of the things that flow through the ordering system. This is the domain of "production", where new commodities are manufactured and introduced into the dynamic category system of Rubbish Theory by their enrolment in the Transient category

(Thompson, 2017: 125). Having established that the system of value that Rubbish Theory charts is enclosed by a domain of production and domain of consumption, Thompson goes on to briefly outline the links between the three interior value positions and the exteriority. He asserts that all types of transfers are possible except for Durable to consumption (the obliteration of treasures) (2017: 121-122). Transient things and Rubbish might be erased (consumed) and things can be produced to directly be ascribed the status of any of the three positions, although new commodities that either directly ascend to the Durable status (exceptional art works), or are immediately eliminated (by-products) constitute exceptions. The typical path of consumer society is, rather, that commodities produced to enter the Transient category eventually end up as Rubbish and consumed (2017: 125). Backtracking pathways from consumption to the system of value, or from there to the domain of production, are not addressed.

The exterior elements of Rubbish Theory are particularly relevant to this chapter. This is because this is where the redesigners' work, and the CE model in general, complicate the picture.

Working with Rubbish

Rubbish: from ignored rejects to appreciated resources

The starting point for any redesign work is the sourcing of stuff to work with. Salvaging rejected, unwanted and unused old things, the redesigners spent a large share of their time and effort on searching for appropriate objects and materials. On one occasion one of the redesigners suggested that we would "go shopping". She picked up a salvaged shopping cart and we went out in the neighbourhood, a rather run down former industrial area of the city in the process of being tidied up and gentrified – ideal for finding abandoned "funky stuff". At other times, companies or organisations would let the redesigners know that they had things to donate. Once, a local microbrewery called and asked if we could help clear their dusty and jam-packed attic. We filled up a trailer with "useful" stuff that went into the redesigners' storage. In this way, the redesigners

continuously looked for and collected things and materials that had been abandoned or somebody wanted to discard. People would call in offering items they wanted to get rid of, or there were rumours of stuff being cleared away somewhere. Skips, renovations sites and demolishing projects were regularly checked for useful stuff. Sourcing activities seemed to be serendipitous, rather than systematic, and the foraging of material resources seemed to exceed the output of finished designs. Occasionally, the redesigners, in turn, got rid of surplus stuff by ordering a dumpster, returning some of the Rubbish they had gathered, to covert dormancy and possible destruction at the nearest recycling or incineration plant.

In sourcing, salvaging and storing rejected and abandoned stuff, the redesigners can be said to recognise and appreciate Rubbish. On one occasion, the resdesigners hauled an old acoustic piano into the studio. This bulky wonder of craft and material complexity brought to light the ambiguity of the temporality of valuation. Many of us commented on the enduring value of the skilful craft and fine materials that had gone into making the piano. At the same time, we were painfully aware of its near total lack of value in present society – its former status as a symbol of taste and distinction in wealthy homes having been replaced by a sense of material heaviness and unwieldiness. Its craft, design and historical value was obvious, but at this point in time this could simply not be reconciled with its social and economic Rubbish status.

In everyday life, such value conflicts, between immediate utility and future possibility, are rarely visible. The present lack of value, or even sense of negative value of Rubbish tends to be too dominating to reveal any future potentiality. For the redesigners, in contrast, the assessment of such value conflicts constituted an integral part of their work. Significantly, the systematic recognition and valorisation inherent to the redesigners' work contradicts the definition of Rubbish as covert and worthless, but it resonates with the third crucial aspect of Rubbish – its dormant potentiality (2017: 27). As Thompson argues, it is only by giving Rubbish the power of latent durability that the system of

valuation can be dynamic and changing. Rubbish can be "discovered" and given new value which constitute the first steps towards establishing it as a Durable, as in the example of the Stevengraph (Thompson, 2017: 30-48). Jokingly, the redesigners talked about their collection of used things as treasures and often spoke affectionately about them and their histories. Recontextualisation seemed to play an important role in this process. Simply by selecting odd things lying around and bringing them to the studio affected their status, and "accessioning" them into the collection, by placing them on shelves and informally collecting their background stories, added to the process of value generation even further. The rise in value of the objects was evident in the reactions by visitors and customers coming to the studio, who usually enjoyed walking down the aisles, expressing excitement and delight over what they found in the collection, not unlike in a museum.

Interestingly, even though they raised the value of the finds through, for example, recontextualising them, redesigners still did not appear to present such objects as Durables. Rather they expressed a general desire to use and care for existing things and materials as long as possible. In other words, rather than embarking on the journey of launching new Durables, the redesigners focused on the resource potential in waste. It can be debated whether the redesigners move Rubbish to the status of Transient or Durable, but what concerns me at this point is how they put "pressure" on the category of Rubbish as they forage for value and usefulness. While there is plenty of Rubbish to fill many redesigners' storage rooms, the act of demonstrating an interest in that which is typically rejected shows how a general shift towards material circularity in society leads to disclosure and valuation of waste as a category of potentially useful resources.

A point to note is that such disclosure and appreciation of waste, despite being similar to the interest in waste central to CE initiatives, differ from the latter in some important respects. The CE model entails continuous assessment of waste for value and utility and prescribed actions to activate passive things in new production cycles (Kirchherr and Piscicelli, 2019). It aligns with Rubbish Theory—

and the redesigners—in recognising the potentiality of waste but diverges on how that potentiality is temporally linked to society. For the redesigners, and CE proponents in general, idle waste is ascribed negative value in the present, both in terms of how it indirectly contributes to further exploitation of finite natural resources and the possible toxicity endangering health and the environment (Lacy et al., 2021). Associating waste with negative value, CE initiatives often enact a moral economy of addressing what is understood to be the problem of waste and tidying up households, communities and industries to maximise utility here and now (Esmoris, 2023; Gregson et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2006; Herrmann, 2006).

From a Rubbish Theory perspective, however, such urgency of dealing with waste as a problem forecloses future revaluations. The power of Rubbish dormancy in Thompson's work is of a different order, pointing towards future possibilities when the trajectories of people and things might intersect in a different way, revealing new potentials and values.

Moving Rubbish into the domain of production

Continuing the analysis of the redesigners using Rubbish Theory, we see that the intention of redesigners is not necessarily to revalue socially rejected things and move them into either the Durable or the Transient category. Rather, the purpose of filling the studio with salvaged used things is to be prepared for coming design work. Despite the ambiguous value of the bulky old piano, for example, it was kept in the studio with all the other assembled stuff, waiting for an opportunity to be used in a project, much like a manufacturing company secures resources to ensure smooth production as orders are dropping in. Compared to conventional manufacturing, where supplies are often just purchased as needed, for actors in the second-hand and reuse market the supply end of production is often fraught with uncertainty (Appelgren, 2022). For the redesigners, sourcing and keeping a well-stocked storage meant securing a richness in resources for addressing future design challenges.

From the perspective of Rubbish Theory, sourcing and then storing Rubbish might best be understood as moving it outside the dynamic system of value, beyond the established value categories, into what Thompson terms "the domain of production" (2017: 122). This domain is not further theorised by Thompson in terms of value attributions, but in a linear economy this is typically where natural resources become new commodities. In the Rubbish Theory framework, it is located outside the circulation of goods in society and precedes the introduction of new commodities into the Transient category. Since the redesigners don't rely on externally extracted natural resources in making new interior designs, they can be seen as moving existing things, of little or no value, into the domain of production to secure resources.

This kind of "backtracking" in the system, going from a later stage in the linear process from production to consumption, is not discussed by Thompson. His focus is rather on how things move unidirectionally from production to consumption and erasure (2017: 122) with the notable exception of Durable things, which tend to stabilise in that status (2017: 121). In this framework, things move from production into one of the three value categories, Transient, Durable or Rubbish, but can't retreat to the domain of production. Retreating does not make sense in a linear consumer society as long as neither the influx of virgin natural resources nor the accumulation of waste is restricted in any way.

However, similar forms of backtracking seem to be at the heart of most CE activities, aiming to convert waste into resources. This is especially true for recycling schemes in which waste is collected, sorted and processed to become materials for new productions (Alexander and Reno, 2012). Employing Thompson's analytical framework, decoupling social valuation from physical properties (2017: 26), it can be argued that disassembling and sorting things to be shredded, grounded and melted in fact constitutes the final step, where Rubbish is moved into the domain of consumption and ceases to exist. Recycling waste to reclaim material value sacrifices the thing and pushes it outside the circulation of goods, as it reclaims the material elements. These material elements are then circled back into the domain of production as resources for making new commodities.

Value is still a central concern in such movements of materials, even though the thing has dissolved. This means that the redesigners and other CE activities not only attribute value to Rubbish, but they also claim that value as things and materials are moved into the domains of consumption and production. Hence, on the circular market, used clothing bales, bulk wood chippings and recycled raw aluminium are all traded as commodities (Alexander and Reno, 2012; Gregson, 2023).

The redesigners normally don't shred, ground and melt, and their main concern is not material value. The main point here has been to illustrate how the redesigners, and CE initiatives in general, not only explore Rubbish for value, but how that is part of a process that takes existing things outside of the Rubbish Theory framework as they are circled back into new production. In this process things are often reduced to materials, but value remains an integral part of these movements.

Moving Rubbish into the Transient position and keeping things there

However, the redesigners keep complicating the picture. A case in point is when they asked everyone in the studio to be on the lookout for used plywood sheets. They had recently met a carpenter making spectacular designs with a wood laser cutter and had ideas for a piece of wall art for a café in the city. True to their business, they refused to consider new plywood that could be easily obtained from a nearby DIY store. The following day someone had spotted a stack of used plywood outside a housing renovation site on their way to work. After some negotiation with the site manager, the plywood sheets were transported to the carpenter to be laser cut in the shape of an artistically designed big tree and later mounted to cover the café wall from floor to ceiling. It can be argued that the thing (sheet of plywood) maintained its integrity but was still adopted purely as building material for making a wall artwork, hence making the Rubbish to production transfer without being "consumed" (turned into wood chips in a processing plant).

Even in the case of the plywood, the redesigners didn't simply treat

the sheets as materials. They paid attention to them as existing things, situated them in various social contexts, talking about them and their history to different audiences. Far from being resource-like in the manner of a pile of wood chips or plywood sheets stacked on a shelf of the DIY store, these particular plywood sheets were endowed with a socio-material trajectory leading to the artwork on the café wall which was recognised and cared for. The hunt for plywood, the find of one of the studio participants, the negotiation with the site manager as well as details of the renovation place in the central town were all narrated, as was the story about the carpenter with his laser cutter and creative designs. This dense narrative trail followed the sheets as they journeyed through social contexts at the renovation site, the studio, the carpenter's workshop, and finally the cafe. In the end, the plywood sheets were as much social processes of meaning, value and interaction as they were wood and material (cf. Appelgren, 2020), and as such they were socially charged things rather than pure material to produce new commodities.

This kind of socio-material becoming of things played a major role in the everyday design work of the redesigners. It was, in fact, the core aspect of what they did, and distinguished them from conventional interior designers. In the plywood case, this becoming-process was mainly narrated as threads of social significance woven around the thing, not directly associated with specific material properties. More often, the unfolding of particular trajectories was materially ingrained in the thing, carefully attended to and cultivated in the making of the designs. When designing a junk steel and scrap wood bench for a local elementary school, days were spent on selecting, treating and evaluating wood planks, noting shapes, textures and hues as well as marks and scratches to create rich layers of socio-material histories embodied in it. Indeed, being close to the things and knowing their histories were an important aspect of the unfolding of the design work and how things became materials for new interior designs (cf. Appelgren, 2019; 2020). This would suggest that often, redesigners turn existing things into new things, or transfer Rubbish into the Transient category, without first moving it outside the circulation of goods.

The possibility of objects moving from Rubbish to Transience directly, as the redesigners do, is considered unusual in Rubbish Theory. In a paragraph revealing the definitional underpinning of Rubbish Theory, Thompson asserts that "[t]he transfer of rubbish to transience would involve a change from zero to a positive quantity which inevitably entails an increase (the criterion for membership of the durable category), and in consequence would exclude the item from the transient category" (2017: 115). Logically, there can't be any movement from Rubbish to Transient since the only location where an increase in value can happen is in the Durable category. However, Thompson acknowledges that in practice, "[t]he transfer of rubbish to transience occurs in the limiting case which exists in the context of the totter, the rag-and-bone man, the Gypsy and the scrap-dealer [sic]", but points out that this type of transfer "does not seriously threaten the boundary maintenance" (2017: 115).

Given that "scrap-dealing", in the form of recycling, is becoming an essential part of the global economy (Alexander and Reno, 2012; Gregson, 2023; Meskers et al., 2024), I wish to probe Thompson's dismissal of "scrap-dealing" as an odd, and largely irrelevant case by discussing aspects of the redesigners' work. I will start by refocusing on the status of things the redesigners salvage. Even though it makes sense to begin in the Rubbish category when exploring redesign from a Rubbish Theory perspective, as mentioned above, in a substantial number of cases, existing things of some value – in other words, not Rubbish – were enrolled in the design projects. Existing office chairs were re-dressed in old t-shirts with prints, a rocking chair was taken apart to make ceiling lamp fittings, anonymous square desktops were redesigned, using a saw machine and paint, into playfully shaped coffee tables. Most things circulating through the studio were neither Rubbish nor Durable. Rather, they appear to come as Transient and leave as Transient, with the redesigners intervening to increase value, but not really moving things between value categories. Thompson addresses this apparent anomaly of value increase within the Transient category, by noting that a second-hand dealer "operates by manipulating the value and expected lifespan of

an item: by depressing them in one transaction and elevating them in the subsequent transaction" (2017: 115). Describing the aim of this practice as "delay[ing] the transfer of an item from the transient to the rubbish category" (2017: 115), he anticipates a key principle of the CE concept to extend the lifespan of existing things as much as possible (Brimacombe, 2019). In my own work with second-hand dealers, this phenomenon was readily acknowledged when they spoke of a "golden age" of second-hand, before the current popularity, when the gap between what they paid for used things and the selling price was wide. Now, they lamented, it is much harder to exploit that gap since the market has matured and used things tend to have been through several consumption cycles already (Appelgren, 2022). Thompson thus has a point when he asserts that second-hand dealers only temporarily postpone the inevitable end of Transient things. However, while the second-hand dealer might polish the surface and fasten that loose screw to make decaying stuff last longer, the redesigners laboured more extensively and systematically to raise value and usefulness.

In a somewhat unusual arrangement, the redesigners had been asked by an interior designer to deliver some furniture parts for an upmarket apartment she was decorating in industrial style. Among other things the interior designer had laid her eyes on one of the studio's worn wooden worktops that she wanted to have converted into a bar top for the apartment. It had accumulated clearly visible marks and signs of use over the years, but some of them were desirable while others were not, and the job consisted in cultivating these features along with the general patina of the wood top to achieve an aesthetically pleasant result. The wood top had thick dots and thin splashes of paint, patches of stain, grease and oil, silicone stains along with saw and hammer marks as well as plain unidentified dirt. The redesigners set out to "keep the ugly and the dirty", but also maintained that thick dots of paint, grease spots and silicon marks were too ugly. The thin stains of paint were "keepers" as were the saw marks and some darker hues of unidentified dirt signalling "worn and old". The solution was to carefully and with a light hand sand down undesired

features either so that they disappeared or, more often, to a point that they became less visible but attractive features blending in with the general patina. This would, the redesigners said, "keep life" in the wooden top and cultivate its signs of "life and usage". Throughout the work, the redesigners narrated parts of its history, for example how it had passed through a number of businesses including an equipment rental company and a migrant's cultural association in neighbouring premises before ending up in the studio where it had served as a worktop for a few years, accumulating a visible patina. The story contained a surprising number of details about people, activities, relationships and usages, which justified the singularity of this particular worktop and inspired the careful cultivation of the material signs of ageing and how that was converted into aesthetic value.

If the "scrap-dealer" symbolises the conversion of Rubbish to Transient in Thompson's writing, the second-hand dealer personifies the temporary extension of the life of Transient goods. Neither plays any significant role in Rubbish Theory. The redesigners come closer to the second-hand dealer's position, but go beyond it by upcycling, repurposing and redesigning. Not only do they contribute to keeping things in use for longer, but they also integrate them into greater interior design concepts and often quite substantially raise their value. Maybe we can talk about a state of "re-transience": Transient things of some value are socio-materially reconfigured and gain value as new commodities. They remain in the Transient category with falling value over time, but injected with new life and socio-material energy, they are re-positioned at the top of this downsliding category, only to slowly lose value again until they perhaps are reclaimed once more. The redesigners labelled their practice *rehabilitation* of things, which resonates with the concept of re-transience. They extended the anthropocentric notions of life, health and good life to material things, and insisted on giving worn and faded existing things, often prematurely rejected, "a second chance" by restoring them to their full life potential (Appelgren, 2019).

Things becoming materials, becoming things

We have now noted three ways that the redesigners' work challenged some of the principles of Rubbish Theory. In the final section, we turn to a fourth dimension of their work, which calls attention to the way that objects are conceptualised within Rubbish Theory. Returning to the ethnographic cases above, such as the worktop, its signs of wear carefully cultivated when it was converted into a bar top, and the piano, which was dismantled to be used in art works, we can ask the question *what* it is that the redesigners move between categories when they engage in their work. In his book, Thompson typically follows bounded stable objects such as commodities, art works and cars as they shift positions in the value system. Even things considered Rubbish, like the Stevengraph he traces as it makes a remarkable ascendance to the Durable status (2017: 30-48), are bounded and stable, maintaining their full integrity throughout the revaluation process. Things remain materially intact, while value changes.

The redesigners, in contrast, engage in things in a less absolute way. The objective is generally not to charge existing things with new value, as typically the second-hand dealer does, but rather, to explore their affordances for new interior designs. To do this implies various degrees of material intervention. In some cases, the type and level of intervention was low (redressing a chair in a t-shirt), in other cases it went further (sanding a worktop) sometimes even to the point of irreversibility (taking apart a piano). However, it never went as far as reducing things to their pure material value. Where, on the scale, the redesigners landed was negotiated in each case, depending on how they read the affordances in particular contexts. The same type of intervention could in one situation be disapproved of as "brutal" destruction, and in another be endorsed as the joy of "slaughtering" – both acknowledging that values were lost in the process, but with diverging results.

A study focusing on the disassembling of shipwrecks to produce furniture argues that a "gestalt shift" occurs as these ships are no longer seen in object form, but as configurations of material (Gregson et

al., 2010: 853). The redesigners perform a similar shift in gaze toward material affordances, but they do not abandon the object form of the salvaged stuff they are working with. Their view can rather be said to be characterised by a "split vision", where the boundary between thing and material is ambiguous. The piano, the worktop and the office chair are things in their own right, but they also become materials for making something. As things, they have integrity, boundedness and a trajectory of becoming. As materials, they are useful resources for making particular reuse interior designs. This should not be seen as a binary engagement in the material world, in either things or materials as mutually exclusive categories. The studio storage was full of socio-materially charged stuff dwelling in the ambiguous state of *things-as-materials* as they were considered, tried and enrolled in the making of new design projects (see Lidström, 2023 for a discussion on garments as materials). The redesigners' primary concern was *what* the salvaged things had become through their past usage – the integrated thingness also making up their properties as materials, and what made them useful and suitable for making new designs. Relating to things-as-materials involved salvaging and caring for not only the material properties, but also for the historical, social, commemorative and narrative qualities.

The point here is that dynamism extends beyond the social attribution of value, which is Thompson's focus, to involve the things themselves and their socio-material constitution as they are transforming and being transformed over time and in various social contexts, the studio being one such context. Elsewhere I have discussed this unfolding of the social-material constitution of reused and second-hand things using the organic metaphor "growing" (Appelgren and Bohlin, 2015). As seen above, the way that things "grow" have implications for how the redesigners can attribute value to things that they find, but also for how they develop practices and techniques for actively "growing" things by regarding them as things-as-materials. Being attentive to the socio-material transformations that a thing undergoes as it unfolds, offer opportunities for new valuations, both

in terms of the integrity of the thing, and as properties for becoming resource materials for the making of new things. Whereas Thompson is first and foremost concerned with the work of categorising and re-categorising bounded stable objects in specific value positions and along established value pathways, here we see a broader focus on things, as simultaneously materially and socially constituted. Working with things-as-materials, the redesigners open new facets of feasible value shifts within and between categories of value.

Concluding discussion

This chapter has explored the design work of redesigners using the conceptual framework of Rubbish Theory. Key features of Rubbish Theory, such as the fluid and dynamic understanding of value and its importance for the ordering of things in society, the way social and cultural factors shape perceptions of waste and the idea that Rubbish is a temporary state between value positions, are all productive in understanding how the redesigners create value by reclaiming, repurposing and redesigning existing things of limited value in new reuse interior designs.

However, ethnographic findings also seem to challenge some of the theoretical assumptions of the Rubbish Theory framework. The chapter highlights four aspects in which the redesigners' work suggest that Rubbish Theory can be reconsidered. First, while confirming the centrality of the Rubbish category for creating dynamical value attributions, the redesigners actively forage and explore Rubbish for value in ways that contradict Thompson's description of it as having zero value and being beyond conscious attention. Second, after salvaging existing things, the redesigners move some of them, as materials for new projects, into the domain of production. This transfer goes against the principles of the Rubbish category, which stipulates that Rubbish is either just obliterated or, in rare cases, transferred to the Durable category. Third, in the bulk of the redesigners' activities they upcycle things of some value, originating somewhere in the borderland of the Transient and Rubbish

categories, to a higher position within the Transient category as new commodities. This also contradicts the characteristics of Transient objects, which ideally should be declining in value until finally reaching the status of Rubbish, from where it could shift position to the Durable category, but never higher up within the category of Transients. Fourth, the way the redesigners employ a split vision and engage in things-as-materials allows them to generate value when making new interior design through building on and enhancing growing socio-material properties of unfolding things. Such value generation goes beyond the social attribution of value to bounded and stable things that Rubbish Theory is based upon.

In his book, Thompson recognizes actual value transfers contradicting the theoretical framework of Rubbish Theory, but states that they have limited significance for the general organisation of people, things and values in society. However, he also suggests that major societal changes, arising for example from the gravity of ecological concerns, can have implications for how the principles of value dynamics operate. Rather than being the idiosyncratic case, contradicting some of the principles of Rubbish Theory with little further effect, I suggest that the redesigners are a concrete manifestation of such a change – the broader transformation of social and economic life towards material circularity. In the context of a globally advancing CE model, the redesigners' case throws light on how Rubbish Theory was formulated in a particular epoch, conditioned in particular by the principles of linear economy. The current shift towards material utility and efficiency, and the pressure from CE agendas to close loops of production and consumption generate pathways and conduits of material flows of scale, following other trajectories. This challenges us to rethink the dynamics of value, how socio-material properties relate to value attribution and the possible transfers of things in and beyond the established conceptual scheme of value categories in Rubbish Theory.

But the redesigners' careful attention to the rich layers of socio-material significance of existing things also highlights the value

of Rubbish as a category of dormant potentiality, precisely as Thompson argues. The heightened awareness of waste in the circular society currently takes the form of activating waste by converting it into resources and optimising immediate utility in the present. A consequence is that waste is often reduced to its material value, obliterating social, cultural, historic, aesthetic and commemorative qualities – qualities that could constitute the base of emerging values if carefully attended to in the right time and context. Returning to Thompson's rhetorical question about where we would be without Rubbish—things descending into disuse and disregard—an answer is that we would be in a more impoverished state, robbed of the creative possibilities of unanticipated emerging values and serendipitous future riches.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the volume editor, Benedict Singleton, for constructive criticism and suggestions throughout the writing process, Anna Bohlin for reading drafts and giving thoughtful and productive comments and Maris Gillette for valuable advice on an early draft. I also gratefully acknowledge the Swedish Research Council for funding the research project "Staying (with) Things: Alternatives to Circular Living and Consuming" (grant number: 2019-02551).

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From Residue to Rubbish: the reclassification of industrial discards in Swedish biofuels

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Introduction

How is value assigned to discards in the biofuel industry? This chapter draws on Michael Thompson's Rubbish Theory (1979/2017) to explore how Palm Fatty Acid Distillate (PFAD) and Crude Tall Oil[1] (CTO)—two nearly identical fatty acids—are categorised and valued differently within the Swedish biofuel sector. Despite their similar physical properties, PFAD, a byproduct of palm oil processing, and CTO, a byproduct of the pulp and paper industry, follow divergent classificatory paths. Both these substances are referred to as 'discards' in this chapter; they are removed during the production of the primary product, yet their classification and valuation can shift significantly depending on how they are later categorised and utilised within different regulatory and economic contexts. As Transport & Environment, an NGO advocating for zero-emission transport systems, provocatively suggest in their report, *Biofuels: from unsustainable crops to dubious waste?*, the transformation of materials like PFAD and CTO into biofuels raises critical questions about how value is created, sustained, or undermined in the push for sustainability (Suzan, 2023).

In 2016, both PFAD and CTO were classified as residues within Swedish biofuel regulations. However, as the use of PFAD grew, environmental organisations raised concerns, highlighting its ties to deforestation, high carbon emissions, and human rights abuses linked

1 Tall oil is an English-language rendering of *tallolja* (literally "pine oil"), which confusingly differs from the essential oil normally referred to in English as "pine oil".

to palm oil production. This sparked a public debate over whether PFAD should remain classified as a 'residue' or be reclassified as a 'co-product'—a distinction that would either allow it to stay in the realm of sustainable biofuel production or associate it with the negative environmental impacts of palm oil. After a two-year regulatory process, PFAD was reclassified as a co-product and excluded from sustainable biofuel standards due to its high carbon emission risks. PFAD was effectively "rubbished."

Using Rubbish Theory, this chapter examines how materials like PFAD and CTO are categorised and move between Rubbish, Transient, and Durable categories. In Thompson's framework, Rubbish refers to objects that have lost their value and are disregarded by society, yet may persist in the background, waiting to be revalued. Transient objects, on the other hand, are those with declining value over time—items that are useful in the short term but are not intended to last. Lastly, Durable objects gain value over time and are often perceived as timeless or valuable in the long run, such as works of art or cultural artefacts. These categories are not fixed, and objects can move between them based on social, economic, or regulatory factors. Both PFAD and CTO have, at different points, existed as Rubbish—overlooked discards with little value. Over time, however, they became important Transient products, used in various industries such as oleochemical products, cosmetics, and animal feed. Eventually, they entered the biofuel industry, where they gained additional value, particularly as low-carbon alternatives to fossil fuels.

The chapter demonstrates that discards in the biofuel policy context can achieve higher status when classified as residues or waste. Under European biofuel policies, substances classified in these categories have become highly desirable, challenging traditional views of discards as valueless. Biofuels produced from these materials are praised for their minimal impact on land resources and effective waste management, addressing concerns about raw materials that could lead to land conversion and carbon emissions (IEA, 2022; IRENA, 2016). Regulatory frameworks reinforce this desirability by exempting these

materials from stringent sustainability scrutiny and assigning them minimal carbon values, based on their classification as waste or residue rather than primary or co-products. As a result, they paradoxically attain high-status, with near-zero carbon values yet significant economic worth, despite the fact that their classification as residues or waste may obscure the true environmental and social costs of their production (Suzan, 2024). This raises critical questions about whether these so-called "sustainable" biofuels genuinely deliver the promised ecological benefits or whether their value is artificially inflated by regulatory loopholes.

When Swedish environmentalists scrutinised PFAD, they argued that it has high carbon values, akin to palm oil and fossil fuels. This sparked a regulatory reclassification process that ultimately led Sweden to remove PFAD from the privileged residue category. Its shift from a low-carbon residue to a high-carbon co-product resulted in its devaluation—it was cast out from the sustainable biofuel economy, becoming Rubbish in the Thompson sense: a material of no value within this system, precisely because it holds value in other economies, such as oleochemical and animal feed industries. This shift highlights how classification systems act as valuation tools, altering the sustainability profile of materials within the biofuel sector. This concept is explored in detail in my article "Good Riddance" (forthcoming), where I argue that a subtractive logic—'ridding' materials like PFAD from the residue category—helps maintain a favourable economic image of biofuels. In contrast, CTO remained classified as a residue, allowing it to retain its position within Sweden's biofuel industry without undergoing the same revaluation process that would affect its role in carbon accounting. The categorisation of PFAD vis-à-vis CTO highlights how regulatory frameworks can redefine what is considered valuable or wasteful, showing the complex ways in which values can be created and destroyed.

Such value transformations do not fit easily into Thompson's original framework, but his concept of different "games" is useful for understanding this process (2017: 91). The concept refers to how

different actors have distinct value systems and objectives guiding their judgments and actions. Although these perspectives may seem contradictory, they can co-exist within overlapping frameworks, much like Thompson's example of a tenant and landlady disagreeing over the value of a painting (below). In the case of PFAD and CTO, different actors—regulators, producers, politicians, and environmentalists—are playing different games. Environmentalists framed PFAD as environmentally harmful, invoking claims of pollution and purity to argue that it should be excluded from the sustainable biofuel economy. Meanwhile, conservative politicians and PFAD producers emphasised its economic utility and its classification as a low-carbon residue. These actors, though playing different games, had overlapping interests that required negotiation. The regulatory system had to mediate these conflicting games, eventually siding with the environmentalists by reclassifying PFAD as a co-product and effectively rubbishing it from the biofuel economy. On the other hand, CTO, shielded by domestic industry interests, retained its status as a residue and was not subjected to the same scrutiny. The game around CTO's classification was shaped by national economic priorities rather than environmental purity, illustrating how different games can coexist and overlap, even while leading to divergent outcomes. Additionally, as seen in the broader international trade context, palm oil-producing countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, were playing their own game of economic survival, accusing the EU's classification processes of neocolonialism and green protectionism. This added a global dimension to the sorting process, revealing how domestic decisions have far-reaching geopolitical and socio-economic implications.

The next section introduces Rubbish Theory, along with the concepts of different games and purity and pollution, to explore the fluid processes of value creation and destruction within the biofuel industry. Following this theoretical discussion, the methodology is outlined, providing an overview of the approaches used to investigate these dynamics. The chapter then shifts focus to the EU Renewable Energy Directive and its role in creating residues with

low-carbon value but high economic worth. After that, it analyses the classification processes of PFAD and CTO in Sweden. Through this analysis, the chapter demonstrates how classification systems, shaped by sustainability narratives, regulatory frameworks, and competing political and economic interests, determine whether industrial discards are integrated into or excluded from the biofuel economy. By applying and extending Rubbish Theory, the chapter reveals how these processes of sorting and reclassification reshape the value of materials, illustrating the porous boundaries between Rubbish, Transient, and Durable categories.

Rubbish Theory

Thompson's Rubbish Theory revolves around how society categorises objects into two overt groups: the Transient and the Durable, and a covert one: Rubbish. These categories are socially constructed, meaning that people impose these distinctions on objects. Objects in the Transient category lose value over time and are perceived to have finite lifespans, while Durable objects gain value and are seen as having potentially infinite lifespans (Thompson 2017: 25). However, these two categories alone do not fully explain the movement of objects between value states. Rubbish serves as a crucial transitional category. The key idea is that if only the Transient and Durable categories existed, an object could not move from one to the other due to their opposite characteristics: Transient objects lose value over time, while Durable objects gain value. Therefore, the third category—Rubbish—plays a crucial role. When objects become Rubbish, they are discarded and lose their perceived value but could potentially gain value again. Thus, Rubbish is not necessarily the end state; it remains in limbo, often overlooked until it can be rediscovered, revalued, and moved into the Durable category. This process of being revalued after being discarded enables the movement between Transient and Durable objects, allowing for a redefinition of value based on changing social, economic, or cultural factors.

Thompson (2017: 123) highlights that in industrial contexts, Rubbish

is often a byproduct of production processes—no one intentionally produces it, but it arises inevitably in the refining processes. Thompson's original Rubbish Theory largely did not account for the possibility of Rubbish moving back into the Transient category, but in fact materials that were once considered Rubbish are often transformed into Transient commodities, gaining temporary value and market utility. Like PFAD and CTO, byproducts are repurposed for various markets as consumable objects. This challenges Thompson's original framework, where Rubbish was not seen as capable of transitioning back into Transient. In the Afterword to the updated (2017) edition of Rubbish Theory, co-authored with M. Bruce Beck, the transfer from Rubbish to consumption is described as quite common, as discarded materials can be repurposed or consumed through processes such as waste-to-energy incineration or recycling. In these cases, Rubbish is consumed as part of society's effort to manage excess material and byproducts, extending the usefulness of otherwise discarded goods. This concept of Rubbish to consumption applies to a wide range of societal processes, from everyday waste disposal to the repurposing of byproducts in industrial settings. It suggests that Rubbish is not static; it can be integrated into new systems of consumption, reflecting how society manages waste and transforms it into something with economic or social value. Even when something is designated as discard, it still has the potential to play a productive role in industrial and environmental systems.

The 2017 update of Rubbish Theory also expands the theoretical framework to address contemporary environmental concerns, particularly those related to climate change and the Anthropocene. Material flows like carbon dioxide have become central to these discussions, with regulatory systems increasingly determining the value of materials based on their environmental impact. The updated theory highlights how substances traditionally considered waste can be reclassified as valuable based on their role in reducing carbon emissions or contributing to sustainability goals. While the Afterword introduces these environmental dimensions, it does not fully integrate

them into the core framework of possible value transitions outlined in the original theory. The update expands the scope but stops short of directly applying these transitions to new environmental contexts, such as the reclassification of industrial waste or residues. Discard studies and books like Martin O'Brien's The Rubbish Society (2008) prompt a closer look at how discard functions in contemporary societies, highlighting that the boundaries between categories are often more fluid than Thompson originally conceived. Other discard scholars argue that Thompson's model underestimates the dynamic nature of Rubbish, particularly in contexts of second-hand sorting and demolition (Greeson et al., 2020). These scholars suggest that Rubbish is not a static category but can shift in response to socio-economic pressures, as is evident in the revaluation of byproducts in the biofuel industry.

In Rubbish Theory (2017: 91-101), the concept of "different games" highlights how individuals or groups can have entirely distinct value systems guiding their actions, often coexisting within the same social framework. These games reflect how people make judgments based on their perspectives, which may be contradictory but can still overlap and accommodate one another in practice. Thompson illustrates this through the example of a tenant and his landlady. The tenant finds a particular painting hideous, while the landlady considers it lovely. Although their aesthetic judgments are mutually contradictory, they coexist in different games: the landlady dusts and admires the painting, while the tenant avoids looking at it, even though he doesn't destroy it to maintain harmony in their relationship. The broader game played here is their mutual accommodation—though their value judgments differ, they must coexist within a shared social space. Eventually, when the landlady dies and the painting is sold at auction for a low price, the market "decides" the game, aligning with the tenant's view. This example shows how different games, despite their contradictions, often overlap, creating a dynamic interplay of values. The rules of one game, such as economic value in the marketplace, can override those of another, such as personal aesthetic judgment, highlighting how power structures shape the outcome of value disputes.

Rubbish Theory is especially helpful when examining how the EU's biofuel policy and Swedish classification systems influence a material's value because it reveals how different actors, playing different games, shape the fate of materials based on conflicting but coexisting value systems. This chapter now turns to describe the method of data collection and analysis, and then continues to the paradox of discard's value within the context of European biofuel regulations, followed by an analysis of the Swedish case. It examines how different actors perceive and influence the classification of PFAD and CTO, and how different games and valuation tools and metrics are used to create and destroy discard's value.

Studying Biofuel Classification

This study employs a case study approach, focusing on the Swedish classification of PFAD and CTO between 2016 and 2019. Sweden offers a unique lens to explore the interaction between sustainability discourse, environmental concerns, national biofuel policies, EU regulations, and long-standing industrial legacies. The country is known for its progressive environmental policies, aiming to become one of the first fossil-free nations, which makes its approach to biofuel regulation particularly interesting. Sweden's biofuel policies are deeply intertwined with EU regulations, creating a complex regulatory landscape that reflects broader European sustainability ambitions while balancing national interests. Furthermore, Sweden's long-standing industrial legacies, particularly in forestry and paper production, play a crucial role. CTO, a byproduct of this industry, is a key biofuel feedstock, and its inclusion in the biofuel economy represents the country's ability to repurpose industrial residues for environmental gain. This contrasts with more controversial imports like PFAD, which are linked to environmental degradation in palm oil-producing regions, highlighting a tension between domestic industrial protectionism and global environmental ethics. These unique factors—Sweden's environmental leadership, regulatory alignment with EU policies, and its balancing act between national

industrial legacies and global biofuel sustainability debates—make it a distinctive case for studying how value is assigned to discards in the biofuel sector. This section outlines the methodological approach and analytical framework used to investigate these dynamics.

The research methodology combines qualitative approaches, using both primary and secondary data sources. A comprehensive analysis of policy documents, regulations, and reports from Swedish regulatory bodies and the European Union, such as the EU Renewable Energy Directive, was undertaken to understand the formal classification of PFAD and CTO. Additionally, the study includes an analysis of environmental campaigns, media reports, and statements from industry actors, environmental organisations, and policymakers between 2016 and 2019. These sources provide insight into how these materials were publicly framed as either sustainable or harmful, residues or co-products, in the biofuel debate. By examining how different groups articulate their positions, this analysis uncovers the complex interplay between sustainability perceptions, ideological values, and national interests that inform the classification of PFAD and CTO.

The concepts of purity and pollution, famously explored by scholars such as Mary Douglas (2003[1966]) and others, offer an additional lens to explain how industrial discards are sorted in biofuel policy debates. According to Brendon Swedlow (2007), claims of pollution and purity can play a crucial role in influencing scientific credibility but also environmental policy and industry practices. In Swedlow's view, these claims act as boundary-setting tools that define what is considered acceptable or harmful within a particular context. These boundary-setting tools align with Rubbish Theory, as claims of purity and pollution influence how materials are sorted between the categories of Transient, Durable, and Rubbish. By framing certain substances or activities as pure or polluting, actors can influence regulatory decisions, scientific debates, and even public perception. For instance, in environmental policy, what is labelled as "pollution" often demands regulatory intervention, while what is seen as "pure" may be promoted as sustainable or beneficial. These classifications, however, are not

always objective; they are shaped by cultural, political, and economic factors. Scientific communities, industries, and policymakers engage in boundary work, using claims of purity and pollution to advocate for specific outcomes that align with their interests. An illustrative example comes from Thompson and Beck (2017: 248), who describe how a fertilising product, once classified as an "impure" byproduct, was re-designated by a UK Agency as no longer a waste or impurity, allowing it to be used in the irrigation of golf courses. This shift in classification—from (potentially hazardous) waste to resource—was made possible through regulatory redefinition. Such decisions reflect the power of claims about purity and pollution to influence whether certain materials are seen as valuable or disposable, or whether they should be regulated or utilised. The forthcoming analysis aims to unpack how claims of pollution and purity influence perceptions and regulatory treatments of PFAD and CTO, thereby shaping the broader landscape of sustainable biofuel production. In doing so, the analysis will also address the mathematician Ian Stewart's four sorting questions that Thompson outlines in Rubbish Theory (2017: 6): who effects the reclassification of materials?; who tries to prevent it?; who stands to gain?; and who loses out? These questions will guide the investigation of how different actors—environmentalists, regulators, industries, and international stakeholders—navigate competing interests and values in the classification and reclassification of industrial discards.

The Paradox of Discards: Low-Carbon Value, High Economic Worth

Rubbish Theory is used here to analyse how materials traditionally considered discards can undergo significant revaluation due to regulatory, political, and economic contexts—particularly within the EU's biofuel policy framework. Using materials called byproducts, residues or waste has been viewed not only as a pragmatic solution to waste management but also as a response to ecological and social issues tied to crop-based biofuels, such as land-use conflicts and the food versus fuel debate (Humalisto, 2014). This shift demonstrates

how contemporary sustainability frameworks can assign new economic value to residues, temporarily elevating them to high-status Transient objects within the industrial cycle.

The European Union's Renewable Energy Directives (RED and REDII) establish specific rules that differentiate between biofuels derived from crops and those from residues and waste. By defining where carbon accounting begins for processing residues—at the point of collection or processing rather than from the initial production stages—the EU effectively claims that certain materials, like PFAD and other industrial residues, have a "purer" carbon footprint. This claim of purity plays a critical role in allowing these materials to bypass the more stringent carbon accounting rules that apply to crop-based biofuels, positioning them as environmentally beneficial. Such claims are crucial in shaping the environmental and market perception of these materials. For instance, palm oil byproducts, which are associated with deforestation and high ILUC (Indirect Land-Use Change) risks, can be reclassified as pure due to policy exemptions. This framing protects residues from being subject to ILUC considerations, enabling their integration into the biofuel sector without full scrutiny of their upstream environmental impacts.

Thompson's theory posits that Rubbish is not inherently worthless but often resides in a state of disregard until a change in context or perception revalues it. In this case, the EU's regulatory framework redefines residues as vital components of a sustainable biofuel economy. This shift happens through claims of purity, particularly the low carbon footprint attributed to these materials, despite their origins in environmentally harmful industries like palm oil. The regulatory exemptions and categorisations of residues in EU biofuel policy illustrate a form of boundary work, as described by Swedlow (2017). By framing residues as environmentally pure, policymakers draw boundaries between what is considered acceptable and sustainable and what is environmentally harmful. These boundaries allow certain materials to avoid the scrutiny applied to crop-based biofuels, positioning residues as low-carbon despite their problematic origins.

This boundary-setting process affects not only environmental policy but also industrial practices and scientific credibility surrounding biofuel production. Through this reclassification, residues like PFAD transition from being part of the problematic palm oil supply chain to becoming essential components of Europe's green energy transition. The regulatory system privileges these materials, enabling them to escape the negative associations tied to palm oil while contributing to renewable energy targets, as seen in the "double market" created by Annex IX of REDII.

While Thompson's original Rubbish Theory focused on the movement of materials from Transient to Durable through Rubbish, the dynamics of biofuel regulations complicate this framework. In the biofuel sector, residues and waste become desirable categories because they are assigned near-zero carbon values. Materials classified as residues or waste benefit from relaxed carbon accounting rules, allowing them to be treated as low-carbon feedstocks despite their origins in environmentally harmful industries. Although technically regarded as discards, these materials carry high economic value due to regulatory exemptions and their essential role in meeting sustainability targets. As with other biofuels, when these materials are combusted, their carbon emissions are counted as zero under carbon accounting rules, further enhancing their appeal within renewable energy frameworks. This creates a paradox where materials that might traditionally be viewed as Rubbish—waste with little to no inherent value—are strategically reclassified as valuable within the biofuel market. In carbon terms, these materials are treated as Rubbish, with near-zero impact or value; yet in market terms, they are high-status Transient objects, consumed quickly within the biofuel production cycle but with significant economic worth.

From the perspective of different games, Thompson's concept can help clarify how seemingly contradictory value systems coexist and how materials like residues and waste navigate different value frameworks in the biofuel sector. In the context of biofuel regulations, we can see different games being played by regulators, industries,

and environmentalists, each with their own rules and objectives for classifying materials. In one game, regulators treat residues and waste as desirable because classifying them in this way allows them to count as low-carbon feedstocks under carbon accounting rules. These materials are framed as having near-zero carbon values, even though their origins in industrial processes (e.g., palm oil or paper pulp) complicate their sustainability credentials. This regulatory framework prioritises carbon neutrality, so these materials become strategically advantageous due to their role in meeting renewable energy targets. The debate on PFAD's categorisation was contemporaneous with EU efforts to refine the definition of residues under the RED II directive, which describes a residue as "a substance that is not the end product(s) that a production process directly seeks to produce; it is not a primary aim of the production process and the process has not been deliberately modified to produce it" (RED II, 2(43)). By adding the phrase "not been deliberately modified to produce it", this definition was designed to prevent the opportunistic reclassification of economically valuable byproducts as residues, thus avoiding rigorous environmental oversight. However, individual member states retain the discretion to further refine and apply this definition, impacting how materials are classified nationally.

The picture is different in other games. Thus, industries and market actors focus on the economic value of these materials. For them, the classification of residues and waste as low-carbon feedstocks opens profitable avenues, positioning materials that might otherwise be viewed as waste into commodities of high economic value. Despite their classification as discards, they are treated as valuable within a market context. On the other hand, environmentalists play a different game, one focused on sustainability and the long-term ecological impact of these materials. In this game, the regulatory leniency that allows residues to be classified as low carbon is seen as problematic.

These games reveal how the classification of biofuel residues is not just a matter of technical regulation but a negotiation of value systems. In one framework, materials are seen as beneficial, while in another,

they are viewed as problematic. Thompson's concept of different games explains how actors can play by different rules but still co-exist within the same broader system. The paradox that Rubbish becomes a highly valued category in the biofuel sector reflects these overlapping yet distinct value systems. The debate surrounding residues in Sweden is deeply intertwined with the paradox created by the European Union regulations. Understanding this regulatory backdrop is critical for comprehending the intricate discussions surrounding PFAD and CTO in Sweden.

PFAD: From Residue to Pollutant—Contesting Purity in Sweden's Biofuel Debate

In 2016, Sweden experienced a significant shift in its biofuel landscape with the rise of PFAD as a key component of its biofuel mix. Historically dependent on ethanol, Sweden had transitioned towards using hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), which is largely produced from so-called discards, or residues and wastes. As HVO increasingly dominated the market, the inclusion of PFAD, sourced primarily from Indonesia and Malaysia, became prominent (Energimyndigheten, 2017). PFAD is generated when the fat in oil palm fruits degrades, often due to bruising during harvest and transport (GAR, 2020). At room temperature, it is a light brown semi-solid, which becomes liquid when heated. PFAD is toxic and excluded from the food industry but is utilised in the production of biofuels, candles, soaps, and other oleochemical products, as well as in animal feed. It typically trades at 80–90% of palm oil's price, reflecting its high economic value and utility as a substitute for palm oil and other oils (Cho et al., 2013; ICF, 2015). It is generally called a byproduct, and terms such as residue, waste, co-product, product are interchangeably used, in debates and in formal classification across different systems. While "byproduct" is often used generically, the technical classification of a material—whether as a residue, waste, co-product, or product—plays a crucial role in determining its value within the biofuel sector as the previous section demonstrated. At this time (2016), PFAD was classified as

a residue in Sweden, which exempted it from strict sustainability scrutiny, making it attractive to biofuel producers. Another aspect was that the exact content of discards used in biofuel production was not transparent in Sweden. They were reported as an undifferentiated group of residues and waste, effectively functioning as a covert category within biofuel production. Their covert nature lay in the fact that these materials were used without distinction, avoiding scrutiny.

However, as the share of PFAD grew in 2016, environmental organisations detected its use in Sweden's biofuel mix and exposed its ties to palm oil production. They launched a campaign against its use, arguing that materials like PFAD should not be treated as "pure" low-carbon resources because their production is linked to harmful practices like rainforest destruction, forest fires, and they pose a high risk for carbon emissions due to ILUC (Sveriges Natur 2016a; 2016b). Green Motorists (*Gröna Bilister*), an advocacy group for sustainable transportation, and Greenpeace challenged the classification of PFAD as a benign residue, citing its negative environmental impacts and lack of stringent traceability (Greenpeace, 2017; Gröna Bilister, 2017; Sveriges Natur, 2017). The issue of PFAD's classification became a public affair, prominently featured in online publications and attracting diverse opinions from environmental groups, politicians, and fuel companies. As Sweden tightened biofuel reporting criteria, the raw materials' origins, primarily from Indonesia and Malaysia, became clear, highlighting the links to the controversial palm oil production. For critics, PFAD represented pollution or impure objects that undermine sustainability efforts. The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation spearheaded efforts to 'sanitise' the biofuel industry from palm oil products, reflecting broader concerns over environmental and social issues associated with palm oil production (Sveriges Natur, 2016b). The Green Motorists estimated that Sweden utilised 15–20% of all globally produced PFAD, denouncing the national biofuel strategy as being 'doped with PFAD' (Gröna Bilister, 2018).

These campaigns effectively highlighted PFAD's direct ties to palm oil production, catalysing debates over its classification.

Proponents argued that PFAD, being a byproduct, did not directly drive palm oil demand or contribute to deforestation. Conversely, critics maintained that PFAD shared both production processes and environmental impacts with palm oil, advocating for its reclassification as a co-product to subject it to stricter environmental scrutiny (Sveriges Natur, 2016b; Sveriges Natur, 2017; Greenpeace, 2017; WWF-Sweden, 2020). The discussion intensified as environmental campaigns connected broader palm oil-related issues, such as habitat destruction, human rights abuses, and hazardous chemical use in cultivation, positioning PFAD and palm oil as equally harmful. This led to a public outcry where environmental groups used media campaigns, petrol station stickers, and investigative journalism to expose the issues. Notably, a survey by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation revealed significant retailer resistance to selling PFAD-based biofuels, indicating a shift in public and corporate perceptions towards more sustainable practices (Sveriges Natur, 2016b; Dagens Nyheter, October 31, 2020; Gröna Bilister, 2020). Amidst these controversies, the Green Motorists campaigned under the slogan "Fossil freedom at any cost?" to emphasise the risks associated with PFAD's availability and its role in fulfilling Sweden's carbon emission reduction obligations set to begin on July 1, 2018 (Gröna Bilister, 2017). They argued for reclassifying PFAD to ensure it no longer qualified as a residue, thereby not receiving preferential treatment. As a co-product, PFAD would need to account for its entire carbon footprint, including emissions from the plantation and any associated land use changes. This shift was expected to increase carbon values significantly and diminish its attractiveness in the market (Bioenergitidningen 2018).

This extensive public and political engagement transformed the perception of PFAD from a benign residue into a symbol of unsustainable practices, challenging its place within the "clean" category of biofuel residues. Sweden's largest fuel company and the industrial platform "Fossil-free Sweden" also supported the reclassification, viewing PFAD as a cheap and unsustainable option

that could tarnish the renewable sector's reputation if not addressed (Bioenergitidningen, 2016; Riksdagen, 2019).

Debating PFAD in the Political Sphere

The contest over PFAD's classification spilled into Swedish politics, delineating clear ideological lines between parties on how to approach this contentious biofuel component. In the parliamentary debate on November 8, 2017 (Riksdagen, 2017), the then-ruling coalition, comprising the Social Democrats and the Green Party, with support from the Left Party, championed the reclassification of PFAD, driven by environmental groups' advocacy. They argued that PFAD should not be allowed to masquerade as a sustainable residue, emphasising the need to preserve the integrity of Sweden's biofuel market and ensure transparency in fuel origins. The Green Party highlighted the environmental risks associated with PFAD, linking it with palm oil and framing it as an unsustainable product with severe ecological and social impacts. This push was also framed as protecting Swedish green industries and attracting investments in biofuel resources sourced from within Sweden.

Through the lens of different games, we can see that the ruling coalition was playing the "environmental game." For them, this game was driven by concerns over purity, with PFAD framed as an impure, polluting substance due to its association with palm oil production and deforestation. Environmentalists and the Green Party sought to purify the biofuel market by removing PFAD from the mix, ensuring that only truly sustainable, "pure" inputs were allowed. The aim here was long-term environmental sustainability, even if it meant stricter regulations and potential short-term economic consequences. On the other side, the Conservative opposition, including the Moderates and Centre Party, played a different game, which can be understood as the "economic pragmatism game." Their game prioritised economic stability and caution, warning that reclassifying PFAD too hastily could harm Sweden's biofuel sector by increasing reliance on palm oil or fossil fuels—outcomes they saw as regressive. A Moderate Party member

criticised the government's approach, arguing that banning PFAD without considering the broader systemic implications could lead to worse alternatives. This stance reflected a preference for maintaining economic stability and avoiding unnecessary regulatory burdens.

The debate over PFAD's classification illustrates the different games being played by these political actors, with distinct value systems guiding their judgments. The Social Democrats and Green Party, backed by environmentalists, prioritised environmental integrity and purity in the biofuel market. The opposition parties, while acknowledging environmental concerns, were more concerned with maintaining economic stability and avoiding market disruptions. Their value systems co-existed but clashed, much like Thompson's example of the tenant and landlady, who both value a painting differently but must accommodate each other's views to maintain their relationship. The regulatory process had to mediate between these different games. Initially, the opposition delayed the reclassification for a year, arguing that rushing the change would negatively impact the biofuel sector. Despite this, the reclassification process to exclude PFAD from the biofuel mix was ultimately set in motion. In Rubbish Theory terms, this began PFAD's transition from a Transient object with temporary value in the biofuel sector to Rubbish. The opposition's delay reflects the broader dynamic of sorting and reclassification in which actors with vested interests try to resist or slow the process of "rubbishing" materials.

Reclassifying PFAD: Excluding it from the Sustainable Category

Once the political decision to reclassify PFAD was made, the question arose of how to execute and justify the transfer. A classification system should not allow cherry-picking but requires firm rules to determine which materials are sorted and where. Despite the political consensus, PFAD still fit the new EU definition of a residue. This presented a challenge: how could a material that was increasingly seen as unsustainable be formally excluded from the residue category? After several rounds of stakeholder consultations, Sweden decided to introduce an economic criterion for residue classification, setting a

threshold at less than 40% of the market value of the main product over the previous two years (Energimyndigheten, 2019). From the perspective of Rubbish Theory, the introduction of an economic criterion for residue classification reflects an attempt to formalise the process of revaluing PFAD and shifting it from a Transient, valuable category to Rubbish. This reclassification, driven by sustainability concerns, illustrates how social and regulatory systems create boundaries that determine whether an object is valuable or disposable.

The introduction of the 40% market value threshold, which prevented PFAD from being classified as a residue, was an arbitrary yet effective boundary-setting tool. By ensuring that only pure, low-value discards could qualify as residues, this threshold created a new boundary for materials that could be accepted into Sweden's biofuel market. PFAD, due to its high market value approaching that of palm oil, could no longer be classified as a residue. Instead, it became *polluted* by its economic utility—an ironic twist where its high value in one market led to its exclusion in another, casting it into the category of undesirable Rubbish within the sustainable biofuel economy. This blurred the game being played even further, as the introduction of economic criteria was used to cast out a material that was, in essence, excluded on sustainability grounds. The use of economic thresholds to enforce an environmental decision added a new layer of complexity to the reclassification process, highlighting the fluidity of categorisation in biofuel regulations. Furthermore, this threshold introduced an inherent instability, allowing materials to move in and out of categories depending on fluctuations in market prices, opening the door for continuous revaluation and reclassification.

The new criterion effectively excluded PFAD from the residue category as of July 1, 2019. Producers tried to align PFAD with sustainability standards quickly, but this move was pre-empted when Sweden classified PFAD and other palm discards alongside palm oil as high indirect land use change (ILUC) risks, positioning them as materials to be eliminated due to their significant carbon footprints. In 2018, nearly half of the HVO was made from PFAD,

and by 2022, PFAD and palm oil together represented three per cent (Energimyndigheten, 2019; 2023). From a Rubbish Theory perspective, this reclassification highlights the fluidity of value and how materials can swiftly transition from valued residues to Rubbish based on shifting regulatory frameworks. By invoking ILUC risks, Sweden reinforced PFAD's status as environmental "dirt," effectively excluding it from the clean biofuel economy. This exclusion underscores the way classification systems act as tools of power, shaping not only economic but also environmental hierarchies.

Sustaining CTO: Protecting Domestic Interests Through Selective Classification

The push to exclude PFAD was also framed to protect Swedish green industries and attract investments in biofuel resources sourced from within Sweden. In contrast to PFAD, CTO, shielded by domestic industry interests, retained its status as a residue and was not subjected to the same level of scrutiny. This distinction between PFAD and CTO can be viewed as part of the broader "game" of environmental regulation, where different actors—regulators, industries, and environmentalists—play by divergent rules based on their interests and value systems. Regulators, for instance, played a game that sought to sustain domestic biofuel production while avoiding market disruption, thus privileging CTO, which was deeply embedded in Sweden's pulp and paper industries, over more controversial imports like PFAD.

According to one rationale, CTO was to remain classified as a residue in Sweden due to its listing in the EU directive. However, other substances like palm oil mill effluent and empty palm fruit bunches, though also listed, were excluded from the residue category (Energimyndigheten, 2019). This selective enforcement highlights a key element of Thompson's notion of different games—while regulations appear to be neutral and objective, they can be bent or applied selectively to favour certain economic interests over others. The game of keeping the polluting and competitive "out" becomes evident when examining how regulatory frameworks manage not

only physical substances but also cultural and economic values, distinguishing between what is considered clean and contaminated.

The preservation of CTO as a residue reflects the strategic decision-making by regulators and policymakers, aligning with their broader goals of sustaining economically valuable domestic industries. This "game" of classification shields CTO from the same scrutiny as PFAD, illustrating how the "purity" of a material is not just a matter of environmental risk but is also shaped by economic and industrial priorities. By protecting CTO from reclassification, regulators ensured that it would continue to be viewed as a sustainable and low-carbon residue, thus preserving its economic value in Sweden's biofuel market.

This strategic choice reflects the active agency of regulators and policymakers who, by preserving CTO's status as a residue, ensure it remains part of a long-term, economically valuable system without undergoing the same revaluation process that would affect its role in carbon accounting. In the regulatory game, CTO was kept "pure," despite being subject to many of the same concerns that surrounded PFAD, a material now classified as "polluted." The decision to hold PFAD up for scrutiny but not to subject CTO to the same revaluation underscores the broader dynamics of power and regulation that Thompson discusses in Rubbish Theory, where value forms reinforce systems of power and hierarchy. Here, the selective exclusion of PFAD and the protection of CTO demonstrates how value is created and destroyed based on a material's perceived alignment with national and industrial interests.

Discussion: Sorting Actors and the Games of Purity and Pollution

In Rubbish Theory terms, the reclassification of PFAD and CTO in Sweden highlights the fluidity of material value. Despite their similar physical properties, PFAD was reclassified as Rubbish, excluded from the residue category due to its association with palm oil and high carbon risks, while CTO remained a Transient product, valued within the biofuel industry. This divergence illustrates how regulatory frameworks and environmental narratives can swiftly alter the value of

materials, with one object being cast out and the other preserved for its economic utility. The agency of sorting industrial byproducts can also be understood through the lens of Rubbish Theory as different games of purity and pollution played by various actors. In Thompson's framework, different groups influence the sorting of materials between Transient, Durable, and Rubbish categories. These actions are often guided by distinct value systems—each playing a different game. These games frequently overlap or come into conflict, as seen in Sweden's biofuel policy between 2016 and 2019. Below, I tease out the four sorting questions that Thompson, drawing on Stewart, outlines in Rubbish Theory (2017: 6): who effects the reclassification?; who profits from it? who tries to prevent it?; and who loses out? By revisiting these four questions, the discussion reveals how classification processes are not merely technical or environmental decisions, but deeply political acts shaped by overlapping games of purity, pollution, profit, and exclusion.

Who effects the transfer? The actors initiating the reclassification of PFAD from a residue to a co-product were Swedish environmental advocates, policymakers, and regulators. These actors played a game centred on claims of purity and pollution. Environmental groups like Greenpeace and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation framed PFAD as polluted by its associations with deforestation, carbon emissions, and human rights abuses in palm oil-producing countries. Their goal was to protect the purity of Sweden's biofuel sector, pushing for a cleaner, more transparent classification system that would exclude PFAD from the residue category and thus from the sustainable biofuel framework. Regulators, while responding to environmental concerns, were also engaging in the game of geopolitical and economic positioning. By aligning Sweden's biofuel policies with environmental sustainability narratives, they sought to bolster Sweden's international reputation as a green leader while protecting domestic industries. This broader regulatory game extended into the EU's Renewable Energy Directive, where residues were framed as low-carbon, clean materials. PFAD's reclassification was part of this purity game—expelling an impure material from the biofuel mix to ensure Sweden's green credentials.

Who profits from it? The game of profit is clearly seen in how Sweden's domestic industries benefited from the reclassification process. The reclassification of PFAD, as explored in my article "Good Riddance", demonstrates a subtractive logic that works to "rid" the biofuel sector of materials with questionable sustainability profiles. By reclassifying PFAD as a co-product, Sweden's biofuel industry was able to maintain its favourable reputation while disassociating from the negative environmental impacts tied to palm oil production. This reclassification is not merely a technical process but one that helps sustain the "good economy" image of biofuels. By preserving CTO as a residue, Swedish pulp and paper industries could continue using this material without the additional scrutiny applied to PFAD. This reflects a broader regulatory tendency towards "residual governance" (Hecht 2023), where residues often escape rigorous oversight due to their classification. In this case, economic and geopolitical interests took precedence over environmental concerns, ensuring that Swedish industries could profit from CTO's continued classification as a low-carbon, clean residue. The preservation of CTO's status allowed these industries to position themselves as sustainable while keeping foreign competitors, like PFAD producers, out of the market. For the domestic industries that aligned themselves with Swedish biofuel regulations, CTO became a clean product—despite its industrial origins—while PFAD was cast out as polluting. This distinction enabled Sweden to maintain a competitive advantage, protecting its biofuel sector from the economic pressures of competing with imports, particularly from palm oil-producing countries.

Who tries to prevent it? Resistance to the reclassification of PFAD came from both Swedish and international actors. Within Sweden, some industrial players and fuel companies argued that PFAD, despite its environmental associations with palm oil, should remain classified as a residue. These actors were playing a game that prioritised economic utility over environmental purity, framing PFAD as an economically necessary feedstock for the biofuel industry. Finland, as a major producer of PFAD-based biofuels, even lodged complaints with the European Commission, causing delays in the reclassification

process (Sveriges Natur 2018). Opposition also emerged from countries like Indonesia and Malaysia. Although their protests were primarily about the reclassification of palm oil as unsustainable, these same criticisms could easily be applied to PFAD, given its close association with palm oil. Indonesia and Malaysia argued that the EU's regulatory moves were not genuinely about protecting the environment but about excluding Asian exports and protecting European resources, like rapeseed oil and CTO (Magassy 2021; Abdul Ghani 2019). Despite aligning their sustainability standards with the EU's criteria, they saw themselves blocked by new rules, such as the ILUC factor and residue classification, which appeared to be designed to keep European industries competitive. Although the criticism initially focused on palm oil, the reclassification of PFAD in Sweden likely sparked similar feelings of economic discrimination, as it was framed by critics as polluted and excluded from the biofuel market. This boundary-setting process reveals how claims of purity and pollution are wielded to justify exclusionary practices that favour European industries while marginalising producers from the Global South.

Who loses out? The biggest losers in this reclassification were the palm oil-producing countries, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, whose industries relied on exporting PFAD and other palm oil byproducts. These countries played a different game—one of trade and survival—arguing that bans on palm oil and PFAD would harm economically precarious communities, including smallholder oil palm producers and workers. From their perspective, this exclusion highlighted the uneven distribution of benefits and burdens in the global biofuel trade, where countries in the Global South faced penalties, while European industries were protected. Environmentalists viewed PFAD's reclassification as a win for sustainability, but for palm oil producers, this decision represented a form of economic marginalisation, with terms like crop apartheid and green colonialism invoked to criticise the EU's actions (Magassy 2021; Abdul Ghani 2019). As losers-out, these actors were left without a meaningful voice in the decision-making process, bearing the brunt of regulatory changes that

disproportionately favoured European industries at the expense of Southeast Asian producers.

Conclusion

This chapter has applied and extended Michael Thompson's Rubbish Theory to analyse the dynamic processes of classification and reclassification within the Swedish biofuel industry. Through a detailed examination of Palm Fatty Acid Distillate (PFAD) and Crude Tall Oil (CTO), the chapter has demonstrated how industrial discards can move between categories like Rubbish, Transient, and Durable depending on regulatory frameworks, sustainability narratives, and political-economic interests.

PFAD, once classified as a low-carbon residue, was ultimately reclassified as a high-carbon co-product, excluded from the sustainable biofuel economy due to its association with palm oil production and environmental harm. In Rubbish Theory terms, PFAD became Rubbish. Meanwhile, CTO, benefiting from its domestic industrial ties, retained its status as a residue, reinforcing its value within the biofuel sector. These divergent paths illustrate the power of classification systems in shaping the economic and environmental futures of materials.

By applying the concepts of different games, purity, and pollution, the chapter has revealed how different actors—regulators, environmentalists, politicians, and industries—play conflicting yet overlapping games in determining what counts as clean or impure, valuable or valueless. The Swedish reclassification of PFAD demonstrates that these processes are not simply technical but are deeply embedded in broader struggles over sustainability, trade, and national interests.

In extending Rubbish Theory, this chapter has shown that value is not static but constantly negotiated through a complex interplay of regulatory decisions, environmental concerns, and market dynamics. The case of PFAD and CTO highlights that what is regarded as waste, residue, or resource is not inherent to the material itself but is

shaped by the socio-political and economic systems in which it exists. This analysis not only reaffirms the relevance of Rubbish Theory in contemporary environmental governance but also suggests that classification systems play a crucial role in the ongoing creation and destruction of value in industrial discards.

Acknowledgement

This research has been supported by Formas (2019-02023).

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Green grows the city! Backstage with the Swedish Sustainable Development Durable

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Introduction

In many ways, urban development has become the modern project to solve everything. The city is supposed to enable comfortable lives, generate growth, and is the key to achieving sustainability. In Sweden, the expansion of urban territory, and/or densification of many settlements has created the possibility for Swedish municipalities to generate growth by attracting more taxpayers and larger companies to establish their businesses within municipal territory. However, the densification of urban environments has also been claimed as a requirement for urban sustainability[1]. The argument is that the density and proximity of services, households and workplaces mean effective energy and heating consumption, short transportation distances, effective land use, and so on. Thus, urban planning in Sweden often articulates a win-win vision – growth *and* sustainability. Indeed, most Swedish cities and elsewhere actively compete for the title of "the Greenest City" to attract investment and wealthy citizens (Garcia-Lamarca et al., 2022; Saldert, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, enacting such a win-win is seldom a smooth process and in practice there may be conflicting aims, particularly when it comes to the value of growth and the value of green spaces. Simply put, dense urban areas often mean little or no green space. At the same time, including nature in the city is important both when it comes to biodiversity and when it comes to human health and wellbeing

1 Something sometimes considered to be an oxymoron (Rees, 1997).

(Garcia-Lamarca et al., 2022). When local governments engage in planning for sustainable urban development, there is thus a need to find a balance between nature and green areas and density. To this end, the interdisciplinary subject of sustainable science has put considerable effort into devising ever more complex theories and models to understand and enact sustainable development. In this chapter, we take another approach, utilising Rubbish Theory.

Rubbish Theory's focus upon the valuations of objects within different ordering systems makes it a good tool for exploring what occurs when arguably paradoxical concepts like sustainable development are operationalised. In this chapter, we explore how different aspects of sustainability are pitted against one another within urban planning. We do this by analysing how sustainable development is "done" through urban planning and construction in Gothenburg, Sweden. We analyse the development of Jubilee Park (*Jubileumsparken*), during discussions about the redevelopment of the previously industrial Frihamnen area of the city. Jubilee Park was envisaged as a centrepiece of the sustainable development of Frihamnen, involving the creation of a completely new green space. The social and political processes that such a project entail make it a good case for investigating how sustainable development is enacted. In our analysis, we enhance Rubbish Theory by applying the sociological concept of stage management. Our primary research aim is thus to contribute to the development of Rubbish Theory as an analytical tool.

In applying Rubbish Theory, we take the interpretative stance that *Sustainable Development* can be understood as a Durable (below), which public officials seek to enact and maintain through their actions. We thus describe and discuss the political processes of negotiation between different actors that go into the process of deciding what a Durable is and what may be required to preserve it. This highlights how maintaining Durables like Sustainable Development requires an internal valuation process. In this case, this valuation takes place backstage, while the façade of the Durable is retained. It thus draws attention to something only briefly touched

upon in the original book on Rubbish Theory (Thompson, 2017) – Durables, whilst idealised as eternal often require considerable work and this work is an inherently political process. We thus develop Rubbish Theory by zooming in on the maintenance activities that largely intangible objects like Sustainable Development require, both social and material.

The chapter is organised as follows: in the next section, the theoretical lenses are briefly elaborated alongside our reasons for describing Sustainable Development as a Durable. We also explain the concepts of front and backstage that we utilise in this chapter. We then describe the case in question, providing a historical description of the development of Jubilee Park. This material draws primarily upon information collected by one of us (Saldert) and policy documents such as city plans. For further details on methodology please see Saldert (2022).

Going backstage with Rubbish Theory

While not wishing to retread too much ground already covered in this volume, it is useful to restate the basic idea behind Rubbish Theory. Rubbish Theory is about valuation. It argues that humans classify objects (broadly defined) as part of enacting particular social contexts. So far, so simple, but the theory goes further in arguing that these valuations can be placed in three categories, Transient, Durable and Rubbish, which have different characteristics. Transient objects lose value as time goes by, eventually becoming worthless and moving into the Rubbish category. Durable objects, by contrast, are understood as retaining value or even gaining value as time goes by. Durable objects are often considered functionally eternal within the system (even though such a thing is physically impossible given physicists' theories on the eventual end of the universe). Rubbish objects are of a slightly different nature to the others; they are without value and are moved out of sight as much as possible – to the "correct" place (see Gillette, this volume). They thus form part of the residual, that is those parts of the universe external to the model envisaged by the ordering system.

However, Rubbish also has a role as a source of potential Durables as different actors' activities constantly alter what is termed the "class society" with Rubbish Theory.

In Thompson's work on Rubbish Theory, the primary focus is upon this latter aspect of the movement of objects. There are numerous examples of how different objects have been rescued from the Rubbish category to emerge as a new Durable, and it is through this process that the power struggle to order society is revealed. Thompson also describes the ways that Durables can be removed from circulation (such as being placed in museums) or destroyed (which often provokes considerable reaction) (2017: 112-4). In these accounts, one thing is made clear: keeping Durables functionally eternal requires considerable work – great works of art are painstakingly maintained in conditions designed to ensure their preservation. However, what goes into this work is not really elaborated upon by Thompson who describes those performing it thus: "These conservationists, hidden away in the basements of our museums and galleries, are the conceptual equivalents of those lonely jackaroos on Australian sheep stations whose entire working life is spent repairing the fences that keep the sheep in and the rabbits out" (2017: 114). The image conjured up is of an anonymous, largely robotic group maintaining the ordering system defined elsewhere.

To us, this seems strange. After all, it may be far from clear what the best way to preserve a Durable object is. For example, in Israel, there is considerable conflict about what aspects of historical sites in use for millennia should be preserved and presented to the public (Abu El-Haj, 2001). Even where the nature of an object, such as a famous painting, appears to present a clear "correct form" it is easy to imagine disagreements emerging about how best to preserve the object. This all begs the question of what role those tasked with maintaining the ordering system[2] have in actively deciding what a Durable object is.

To do this, we need a theoretical language to look behind official ordering narratives. In this chapter, we utilise the dramaturgical

2 Thompson calls them "cognitive fence-repairers" (2017:115).

language developed by sociologist Erving Goffman (1956). Originally, this approach explored how an individual's behaviour varies depending on whether they are in a public or private context. Thus, an individual's performance of self will differ in public (or in a larger group) or in private (or with close family and friends). The theory refers to the fact that in public we enact a role that is expected by our audience/the group that sees our behaviour, while in private we can behave according to our own preferences and perhaps even perform taboo actions (such as picking one's nose). The simple insight that people behave differently "frontstage" (i.e. in public) in comparison to "backstage" has been influential within social science. Thus, scholars have highlighted how the expert authority of science and scientists is maintained by frontstage work, which often conceals the internal divisions and conflict backstage within the scientific community (Hilgartner, 2000). Similarly, other scholars have contrasted the front and backstage behaviour of members of political parties (Ringel, 2019) and among public officials (Poulsen, 2022). Common to these accounts is the idea that frontstage behaviour builds upon and conceals the complexity and conflict that exists backstage.

In this chapter, we interpret Sustainable Development as a Durable object. This may seem strange – how can a concept be an object within the rubbish cycle? However, this is something that has always been part of Rubbish Theory – "Ideas, since they must always be generated and communicated in a social context, are also constrained so as to become, to a somewhat variable extent, thing-like. I will now use the word 'object' to refer, not just to physical objects (including people), but to ideas as well." (Thompson, 2017: 88). Likewise, in making this interpretation, we draw upon the insightful work of anthropologist Kay Milton. Milton has argued that contemporary Western society holds certain values as sacred (i.e. Durable objects in our formulation). She identifies "nature" (conceptually separate from humanity) as one of these but also identifies "development" or "progress" as others (Milton, 1999). In this chapter, we take this one stage further, arguing that through the Sustainable Development concept, these two sacred objects have become fused into a Durable.

One might argue that Sustainable Development advocates' stated desire to "transition" society suggests that it is better classified as a Transient object, which will fade away as society improves. However, to our eyes, this feels incorrect. Sustainable Development in many conceptualisations (e.g., the famous "doughnut economics model" [Raworth, 2012]) is a destination for society as well as a call for action. What is usually envisaged is a form of society that can proceed in perpetuity (Brightman and Lewis, 2017). Within Thompson's framework, Durable objects are idealised as eternal. Likewise, Sustainable Development is largely priceless – it is the ultimate thing all should strive for. As such, Sustainable Development largely matches Thompson's definition of a Durable object (2017: 47).

However, while Sustainable Development appears to be a Durable that even opposing actors agree on, it remains a multifaceted and contradictory concept integrating seemingly incompatible goals (Jacobs, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2010). Indeed, numerous scholars have addressed sustainability from diverse perspectives (ecological modernisation, deep ecology, and so on (Hugé et al., 2013). While this is an ongoing battle, the United Nations and governments all over the world have, however, agreed on Sustainable Development as a universal goal. Much contemporary discussion of Sustainable Development describes it as a concept supported by three "pillars" (economic, social and environmental). The idea is that each of these dimensions of sustainability is necessary and supportive. They thus need to be integrated into all sustainability work "to build a humane, equitable, and caring global society for present and future generations" (Boström, 2012: 3). However, making this happen has proved challenging. There have thus been political battles over which pillars (such as social, economic and ecological) are most important in any given situation.

Implementing Sustainable Development often falls to local governments. Frontstage, we see different actors competing over the definition of Sustainable Development, simultaneously as local governments, especially cities, trumpet fealty to the concept, regardless

of any controversy. This is what the public sees, and what scholars describe as a paradox, a wicked problem, and complex (Franco-Torres et al., 2020; Kowalski, 2013; Peterson, 2009). It is certainly the case in Gothenburg, where Sustainable Development is a core feature of planning discourse. Thus, the city plan clearly states: "Sustainable development is the point of departure… The overarching and obvious goal for Gothenburg is sustainable development" (Göteborgs stad, 2022). This same document then identifies various goals, drawing on national and international indicators of sustainability.

However, the actual doing of Sustainable Development mostly takes place backstage, often by public officials. By and large, this is a group that is conceived as predominantly concerned with operationalisation rather than agenda-setting. In Sweden, where our case is found, there has been a long tradition of idealising apolitical public officials, who enact the democratic will of the people through the tasks set by politicians (cf. Singleton and Magnusdottir, 2025). This is, however, a simplification, as much literature on bureaucracy and public administration in Sweden and elsewhere highlights (e.g., Applbaum, 1992; Hysing and Olsson, 2018; Mahoney and Thelen, 2009; Svara, 2001). We thus add to this more nuanced take on public official agency by exploring how Sustainable Development is "done" backstage. In Rubbish Theory terms, we are interested in what happens after a Durable has been publicly identified and needs to be maintained, particularly what happens when it is unclear what the best way to go about this is. As such, the guiding aim of this chapter is to illustrate *how backstage work often plays an important role in enacting the systems of value that Rubbish Theory describes*.

Case study

In this section, we present the chapter's empirical material. We first introduce Gothenburg and its urban development plans, zooming in on Frihamnen. We then describe the case of Jubilee Park, highlighting how urban planning and development entail backstage processes of negotiation about what is to maintain Durable objects.

Frontstage: Jubilee Park – from brownfield to verdant city idyll

Gothenburg is the second largest city in Sweden comprising a population of 587,549 in 2021 (Göteborgs stad, N.d.). The municipal body (*kommun*) responsible for Gothenburg is known as Gothenburg City (*Göteborgs stad*). In 2022, Gothenburg City published a comprehensive city plan (*översiktsplan*) stating the intention to grow considerably, aiming for 250,000 more inhabitants and 100,000 more jobs. At the same time, green infrastructure is required to ensure this development takes place in a sustainable manner (Göteborgs stad, 2022). This development is steered by the vision of becoming an example of how a sustainable city should be. This has ecological, economic and social dimensions. These are most obvious in the city plan's setting of environmental goals, targets for "sustainable growth" (above) and programme for an "equal" [i.e. just] city (Göteborgs stad, 2022).

As part of Gothenburg's planned densification, the municipality decided to redevelop brownfield areas along the river (previously used for harbour activities). One such area is Frihamnen. Frihamnen's immediate history begins in the 1890s when it was originally developed to provide a tax-free import facility for shipping companies (*frihamnen* means "the free port" in Swedish) (Fritz, 1996). During this part of its industrial history, Frihamnen was considered valuable (and essential) to both Gothenburg and Sweden. The area provided jobs to the citizens of Gothenburg and was an important cog in the Swedish import/export machine driving the industrial development of Sweden (Fritz, 1996; Christensen et al., 2021). This is reflected in the names attached to the area to this day. For example, the Banana Pier (*Bananpiren*) gained its name as the original entry point for bananas that were then distributed around Sweden.

As the wheel of time has turned, Sweden has largely deindustrialised. While the port of Gothenburg is still the largest in Sweden, its activities have been moved out of the city centre, further down the estuary (Mossfeldt, 2020: 9). As such, Frihamnen declined in value and became something of an "empty space" in the middle of the city. While some activities, such as a ferry line to Scotland, continued

into the early 2000s, the municipality began to increasingly see development potential in the area, enabling the city to grow and enact the vision of Sustainable Development.

From these developments, the municipal government in 2012 presented a vision for the central areas of the city, including Frihamnen, proclaiming how the development of brownfield areas will create a new sustainable city centre – *Rivercity Gothenburg* (Göteborgs stad, 2012). This development entertains the idea of green growth. Frihamnen was highlighted as an essential part of this development to fulfil all dimensions of sustainability and address a certain number of challenges. The challenges presented at this time showed the need for the city to attract wealthy citizens and companies to stimulate the economic development of the municipality; the need to transition to a sustainable city to adapt to and mitigate climate change and ensure biodiversity and public health (Göteborgs stad, 2012: 23). Finally, it also highlighted a need to counteract segregation and social injustice in the city (Göteborgs stad, 2012: 12). The three challenges very neatly represent the three pillars of sustainability.

As part of this vision for Gothenburg, plans were made to redevelop Frihamnen in multiple ways. These plans discuss the provision of affordable housing, local transport and a busy (24-hour) city life incorporating restaurants and shops. The new neighbourhood was envisaged as an extension of the current city centre, providing 15,000 workplaces and 9,000 apartments. It was to be an inclusive neighbourhood, with 50 per cent of the area allocated as public space (meaning public streets, squares and parks accessible to all citizens). Also included within the vision is the development of the city's green infrastructure, which is framed as both a distinctive feature of Gothenburg but also as a key part of ensuring the city's future sustainability:

> We will build on the Gothenburg tradition of creating parks and use greenery as a means of raising the attractiveness of the city. RiverCity Gothenburg will contribute to the city's reputation as a lush green city beside the water with welcoming green spaces

> in attractive locations. New green spaces or features should be planned in such a way that it increases accessibility and attracts people down to the waterside. Several large parks and a large number of small green spaces are required for rest and recreation in the future dense inner city. Our urban paths and streets will be viewed as an integral part of the city's green space network. Places that are attractive for development could be left untouched to the benefit of the green areas that contribute to our quality of life and increase biological diversity. The vegetation in the area should contribute to creating a healthy urban environment with stabilised temperatures, wind protection, good air quality and low noise levels. As the temperatures rises [sic] due to climate impact, greenery in the urban spaces will become increasingly important to create a comfortable local climate. The greenery will highlight how the city is dependent on natural resources, thus creating an understanding of the importance of greater environmental adaptation. It will also contribute to creating a good residential environment with, for example, green courtyards, roofs and walls (Göteborgs stad, 2012: 23)

The Rivercity Gothenburg vision (Göteborgs stad, 2012) outlines how greening the city can ensure all three pillars of sustainability. Specifically, prominent in the planning for Frihamnen was the provision of 10 hectares of city park – to be called the Jubilee Park (as its creation was supposed to coincide with the 400-year anniversary celebrations of the founding of the city of Gothenburg). Jubilee Park is referred to several times in the vision document and represents a centrepiece initiative for achieving Sustainable Development.

From the outset, the Jubilee Park was described as accruing value to Frihamnen. Forming part of a "green corridor" for Frihamnen, the value of the park was asserted as contributing much-needed greenery to a sustainable city centre, improving quality of life and biodiversity (Göteborgs stad, 2012). However, historically Frihamnen has never been blessed by an abundance of vegetation, being dominated by tarmac and concrete. Thus, the planned ten-hectare park needed to be created from scratch and presented unique opportunities and challenges. One early workshop report describes it as it should "widen

and challenge the definition of what a park can be" (Älvstranden Utveckling och Göteborgs stadsbyggnadskontor, 2015). In the first draft of the detailed plan for the area, the stated motivation for the park refers to both ecological, economic and social sustainability by referring to its capacity to attract people and provide rich plant and animal life.

> …in the capacity of a city park, Jubilee Park should be 'sufficiently large and attractive to accommodate and attract people and withstand use.' The park should also have a 'distinctive character' with a 'rich plant and animal life,' and it should be designed to achieve a 'variation between different city parks.' (Göteborgs stad, 2015: 42-43)

The public presentation of the future development of Gothenburg in general, and the new city park in particular, promises a reality that combines both social and economic development through the promotion of green infrastructure to ensure biodiversity and a healthy climate, and by framing the park as contributing to the attractiveness of the area. As such, having agreed to this vision frontstage, the governing political parties forwarded these decisions backstage to relevant bureaucrats and other public officials.

Going backstage: what actually is Sustainable Development?

Expediting these plans for Frihamnen fell to a range of public officials representing different departments of the local government (Gothenburg City) as well as the municipal development company, Älvstranden Utveckling, which was formally the land- and property owner in the area and bore financial responsibility for the development. Several municipal departments[3] were important to the development of Jubilee Park. These include the City Planning Authority (*Stadsbyggnadskontoret*), which has the authority to prepare comprehensive and detailed plans, which demarcate zones of the

3 After data collection was completed, the local government re-organised public administration, changing department names and structure.

city for development and the Parks and Landscapes Administration (*Park- och Naturförvaltningen*), responsible for green infrastructure and managing parks. In addition, the City District Administration (*Stadsdelsnämnden*) contributed information about, for example, the local community living in the surrounding areas, but were not actively involved in the planning and development of the park.

Looking at these actors' backstage activities reveals several conflicting objectives. Enacting the Sustainable Development Durable in Frihamnen required public officials to be creative in weighing up the different dimensions of sustainability. In operationalising this plan, officials from the departments listed above participated in the planning project and were involved in making claims about the role of Jubilee Park in Frihamnen. However, it should be noted that specific objectives were not always the preserve of a particular municipal department. Thus, some officials from Älvstranden Utveckling might have different objectives from their departmental colleagues. They would thus periodically engage in internal competition and/or make common cause with representatives of external departments. Throughout Jubilee Park's development, much discussion within and between departments centred on its contribution to the economic and social sustainability of Frihamnen. Through this process, as the narrative below illustrates, the pillars of sustainability were weighed against each other, with the environmental pillar largely fading from discussion.

As already noted, in the early planning process for Frihamnen, creating a city park was presented as crucial to addressing sustainability challenges and contributing to the municipality's economic development. However, in 2017, planning was abruptly stopped. This was because the different objectives and qualities previously described as complementary now appeared to be in competition. As one respondent put it:

> I would say that during the workshop period, everything worked okay, but it is when things come to a head that it becomes uncomfortable because that is when conflicting interests emerge… I guess that is when the discussions start. (Official at Älvstranden Utveckling, 2018)

It seemed that materially enacting the planned mixed-use city which combined residential and office buildings, schools and playgrounds, a tramline and green space was impossible without the project running a budgetary deficit. More precisely, the ambitions of the City Planning Authority were now being opposed by the public development company, Älvstranden Utveckling, based on concerns of the cost of it all. One official from the City District Administration, who was also involved in the planning of Frihamnen, described how the events behind the scenes evolved during the preparation of the Detailed Plan.

> … we described Jubilee Park as the heart, and there's a lot of warmth in it. But then you're faced with this elephant in the room related to the exploitation and the gross floor area that doesn't seem to add up. During the consultation phase of the detailed plan, it seemed to align, but later, the Building Committee wanted to increase exploitation by about 20%. I'm not sure why, but I assume it's due to economic reasons. (Official at City District Administration, 2020)

While the City District was not a main actor in the planning (they were only included to give information about the social aspects in the area), their officials witnessed the competition between the different sustainability aspects brought up in the adopted vision. In particular, they were exposed to discussions around the amount of green area to be included in the plan and how much exploitation was needed to make a profit from the land. An official from Älvstranden Utveckling highlighted why profitability became a planning concern:

> It is expensive to exploit Frihamnen, there must be high exploitation at the same time it must meet all the requirements we have [for example regulations on access to childcare and schools in proximity of your home and a certain size for school yards which needs to be calculated into the plan]. How many businesses and how many homes should there be? But it's hard when only ÄU sees this. (Official at Älvstranden Utveckling, 2018)

In essence, representatives of Älvstranden Utveckling were worried that the rising development costs would be detrimental to the economic growth of Frihamnen. In these discussions, the Jubilee Park became an object of heated debate. Competing voices would variously frame Jubilee Park as adding to or damaging the value of Frihamnen. Uncertainty had entered the picture about the extent that Jubilee Park complemented the Sustainable Development of Gothenburg. In Rubbish Theory terms, while the Durable to be maintained remained the same, conflict emerged over what action was needed to enact it.

As these arguments proceeded, conflicting actors discussed Jubilee Park's contribution to different aspects of sustainability. Whereas in the public documents the park's environmental contribution was considered one of its primary values, discussion backstage focused on its contribution to Sustainable Development's economic and social dimensions. So, while at this stage policy documents continued to highlight the need for and value of "green infrastructure" to "nature", much of the discussion came to focus on the development value of Jubilee Park in social and economic terms. One of the process leaders of the development of the park described how the environmental dimension was perhaps the least crucial part when planning for the park:

> If I were to say that something has taken up more space in terms of sustainability dimensions, it would likely be the question of social sustainability, but perhaps also the question of economic sustainability. In other words, how does one drive the development of a place for many, for all, with economic incentives, considering its impact on the surrounding construction site values? After all, everything costs something somewhere, and how does one find the economics and arguments for engaging with citizens openly, allocating project-led hours, and creating prototypes? (Process leader Jubilee Park, Älvstranden Utveckling, 2020)

These discussions were a consequence of the practical effect of developing a central, 10-hectare area as a public space rather than as

any number of alternatives. For example, the location meant that there was considerable scope for raising money by developing some or the whole area for housing or business. Repeatedly, it was highlighted that the Jubilee Park, as a non-revenue-generating space, represented a cost to the city. One of the consultant architects questioned the planning project, with its vision of social and ecological sustainability, because of its financial consequences:

> Can one believe in a project where you're building for all social groups, especially when you're situated on the city's most expensive plot? Is it realistic? Who foots the bill? It might also be about wanting this green, attractive city—a sustainability goal—with ample recreational areas and parks. However, this can conflict with an exploitation economy, which requires achieving certain building values. No one questions those goals when it comes to sustainability, but handling these conflicts of interest smartly is crucial. (Consulting Architect, 2019)

The cost of placing a non-revenue-generating space in one of the city's most expensive plots became a factor in discussions over the extent that Jubilee Park contributed to Gothenburg's Sustainable Development. Would the benefits of the park outweigh the costs or would the expense render Gothenburg economically unsustainable? Alternatively, as a central plot of "waste" land, it would be expected to generate high financial revenues, if it were sold to commercial companies.

Advocates for the full 10-hectare park found themselves struggling to justify it financially, while the park was understood to provide ecological value, this was hard to quantify in monetary terms. Thus, it appeared that in the ongoing competition of values, the ecological pillar was losing out to the economic and social pillars of sustainability. The elements of the Sustainable Development Durable were being ranked and ecological concerns were being deprioritised. Jubilee Park's environmental contribution to Sustainable Development was considered largely a given regardless of the eventual form it took. Seemingly more essential to successful Sustainable Development was

whether Jubilee Park pulled its weight in social and economic terms.

However, creating green spaces in urban environments does not solely result in monetary loss. Advocates of Jubilee Park continued to argue that it contributes to the economic value of the whole of Frihamnen. As such, discussions of the park did not suggest abandoning the idea completely but circled around its size and position and what effect this had for economic sustainability. This was described by a consultant working within the project during the interruption of the plan:

> When we looked at Frihamnen as a blank canvas, Jubilee Park's placement might be questionable—right in the heart of Frihamnen, where parks also straddle the boundaries between neighbourhoods or occupy challenging terrain. Here, they've taken the prime land, creating an urban island in the middle... Perhaps one could consider adjusting its size, allowing certain parts to extend onto the piers, but the question wasn't thoroughly discussed. (Consultant in the project, 2019)

In discussing the dimensions of Jubilee Park, the pillars of Sustainable Development were thus being weighed against one another. Reducing the size of the park was argued to increase Frihamnen's contribution to Gothenburg's economic development. It also created the possibility of building further housing, easing several social problems. However, in turn, those advocating a larger park stressed that a smaller park would fundamentally change the area's character. A smaller park would risk becoming an exclusive green area for future residents and employees in Frihamnen, excluding the rest of the citizens in Gothenburg. One official working with the park argued:

> ... the Jubilee Park should become a meeting place for all, it is something that has been a guiding star in the work... it should be a destination for the entire city and not just for residents in the immediate area. So, the difference between a residential park and a city park. That the resources invested in the project should benefit the entire city… And that it contributes to a slightly richer

> everyday life and an active, free leisure time for more people in town, and that in this way it evens out differences. (Coordinator Jubilee Park, Parks and Landscapes Administration, 2020)

Defenders of a larger park thus argued that a smaller park, based on Frihamnen's central position and current market dynamics, meant that one could expect most future residents to be predominantly wealthy. Reframing Jubilee Park as primarily for local residents (by reducing its size) was thus suggested as going against Gothenburg's ambitions to counteract segregation and social injustice. Something literature on green gentrification also has shown in other cases (cf. Yazar et al., 2020). Defenders of a larger Jubilee Park were effectively stressing that more space was required if it was to fulfil the *social* ambitions of Sustainable Development. Thus, social sustainability increasingly came to the fore in discussions.

In doing this, public officials emphasised the need to make the park valuable for residents from all over the city. In that way, they argued that investing more resources in Jubilee Park would provide value for the wider city beyond the local population. They therefore redrew the scale of the discussion, framing Jubilee Park as a city-wide concern. Thus, according to officials at the City Planning Authority, as a city park, Jubilee Park will attract people to the area, creating movement and raising consumption in the planned neighbourhood shops. Through this argument, the officials motivated the existence of the park by highlighting the economic value for the area, and the greater city.

However, economic concerns were not totally hegemonic. Those arguing for the larger Jubilee Park also referred to its contribution to social sustainability. Social sustainability has long been criticised for its vagueness (cf. Boström, 2012) and in Frihamnen's development, public officials came to define social sustainability through their actions (Saldert, 2024). As the Frihamnen area was formally uninhabited at the onset of planning (due to its brownfield status), public officials instigated various strategies to populate Frihamnen with citizens to introduce the population to the area and test how it could be used. To do this, they made use of so-called Place-Making methods. The

purpose of the methods is to involve citizens in planning processes for the social life of the area before construction begins. This is often done by staging temporary activities to attract people to a place, and in that way get people to start liking and relating to it (Ramli and Ujang, 2020). As such, to attract citizens to Jubilee Park, public officials constructed a temporary sauna, skating ramp, pool and sandy beach. In doing this, public officials focused increasingly on the types of people who were visiting the park.

Discussions around social sustainability thus came to be increasingly focused on diversity, which then became something to measure. Diversity was also something the vision for the area presented as an important aspect of making it socially sustainable (Göteborgs stad, 2012: 15). Thus, in assessing the forms that Jubilee Park could take, actions that increased measurable diversity came to be seen as desirable. One of the officials working with the Jubilee Park said the following:

> After all, we have worked a lot based on the principle of thinking not many but thinking diversity, to try to bring in as "diverse" as possible instead of thinking that we should bring in as many as possible, and thinking that it may come later. We started with the so-called weaker groups. Since no one lives in Frihamnen and there are hardly any businesses there, so it was a matter of adopting people there. (Process leader Jubilee Park, Älvstranden Utveckling, 2020)

Through the planning and the place-making activities in the temporary park, public officials used the social sustainability aspects of the municipal vision to demonstrate the value of Jubilee Park. By showing that there were citizens from different social groups and different parts of the city using the park, the public officials sought to demonstrate that the park was attractive to a large group of users. The large group of users would then also contribute to the ambition of creating a lively city centre.

To prove that they were attracting citizens from different neighbourhoods and diverse social groups, the practitioners used

calculative practices, for example, by counting the number of visitors.

> What we have done in the Jubilee Park that has helped us a lot is that we have counted the number of participants. So participants in planned activities and participants, or visitors, bathers. And we have put quite a lot of resources into that... but also the fact that people come back is an answer in itself. And that figure is then also a summation of the work... And damn important that the temporary is not reduced to something that happened before you start building, but that you use it as a tool because that's when it can have impact and power. (Coordinator Jubilee Park, Parks and Landscapes Administration, 2020)

Public officials' strategies thus spoke to both social and economic dimensions of Sustainable Development.

At the end of all this activity, a municipal decision was made to include the park at its originally planned size and location. This decision comprises a frontstage document, that once again reiterates the importance of all three pillars of sustainability (Göteborgs stad, 2020: 2). However, interviews with public officials paint a different picture. Throughout this process, we find it striking that the effect of a smaller or larger park on Frihamnen's environmental sustainability was not discussed. After all, one might expect that a smaller park would affect the enactment of the ecologically diverse, green city outlined in vision documents (Göteborgs stad, 2012). Indeed, respondents actually asserted that Jubilee Park's role in environmental sustainability was an insufficient argument for a greater park area. Instead, showing the social and (by extension) the possible economic value of a large, diverse group of visitors also ensures the presence of Nature in Frihamnen. It is a subtle point, but we would argue that Jubilee Park's environmental contribution has become a positive yet minor addition to the main value of the park, which is to contribute to social and economic sustainability. Throughout the planning process, the size and form of Jubilee Park seem to be irrelevant to achieving environmental sustainability. Voices discussing the social and

economic value were most prominent. We interpret this as illustrating that the environmental pillar of sustainability was accorded lesser value as the planning process proceeded.

To summarise (and to bring the discussion back to Rubbish Theory), the debate on the size of Jubilee Park focuses largely on competition between the economic and social pillars of sustainability. Despite frontstage proclamation of the need to integrate the three pillars of sustainability, backstage discussion hinged on economic and social development. Public officials thus used a range of calculative practices to demonstrate the value of a larger park backstage. Integral to these practices were assumptions about what economic and social contributions are, with the latter increasingly defined as diversity. In this, the effects of the size or position of the park would have on biodiversity were not used as motivation. The point is a larger Jubilee Park prevailed because it was deemed to contribute more to Frihamnen's economic and social development than a smaller park. In such circumstances, the contributions the park made to environmental sustainability were just a bonus.

From a Rubbish Theory perspective, this highlights that the frontstage Durable of Sustainable Development has morphed into something else backstage. The Sustainable Development Durable is perhaps more accurately called "Socio-Economic Development" (and looks remarkably similar to "Development" as described by Milton [1999], mentioned above). Taking this further, we can say that when it comes to utilising Rubbish (Frihamnen wasteland) as materials for a new Durable (Sustainable Development) a backstage struggle ensued, where the three pillars of sustainability were ranked. Everyone agrees that they are all important, but when push comes to shove, social and economic sustainability are *more* important and thus worth maintaining than environmental sustainability in Gothenburg. Left unresolved is the ranking of the economic and social pillars of sustainability. In the case of Jubilee Park, they were interpreted as largely complementary. It will be interesting to see if this persists in future or whether one or the other will come to be seen as dominant.

Much of the literature on Sustainable Development has highlighted that economic interests tend to trump social and environmental values in urban planning (Boström, 2012; Brightman and Lewis, 2017; Campbell, 2016; Rashidfarokhi et al., 2018). It will be interesting to see if this is also the case as Frihamnen continues to be developed. However, it does suggest that environmental concerns may risk being deprioritised as Gothenburg develops. This is certainly a concern that has been echoed in other accounts of Swedish municipal planning (cf. Singleton, 2024: 409).

From this interpretation, we are then able to locate the public officials involved with Frihamnen within Rubbish Theory's schema. Frontstage, definitions of Sustainable Development appear to envisage a levelled relationship between each of sustainability's pillars. However, backstage public officials find themselves defining and ranking each pillar. This highlights a point from Rubbish Theory, the nature of a Durable is never completely fixed; they emerge through their enactment and maintenance.

Concluding discussion

Throughout the foregoing narrative, a range of different actors were involved in making claims about the role of Jubilee Park in Frihamnen. Many of these were public officials who found themselves having to balance the different dimensions of sustainability against one another. In Frihamnen, public officials had to effectively define the Sustainable Development Durable through actions to build Jubilee Park – the symbolic shining star of sustainability at the heart of the project. In doing this, they effectively ended up prioritising the economic and social pillars of Sustainable Development. Thus, while frontstage Sustainable Development appeared to be already defined, backstage different public officials competed to define it. The story of Jubilee Park is thus of how Sustainable Development emerged as a Durable. Like many Durable objects, Sustainable Development in Gothenburg is something that perversely is functionally eternal (sustainability should be forever) but something that also involves

considerable work. This work, as our narrative of Jubilee Park makes clear, often happens backstage and sometimes involves managing disagreement over how best to proceed. In such circumstances, public officials find themselves actively altering the ordering system itself. In the case of Jubilee Park, public officials defined Sustainable Development as primarily relating to the social and economic pillars of sustainability. Public officials constructed a hierarchy between sustainability's pillars. This contrasts with the frontstage discourse, which accords all three pillars equal weight.

A Rubbish Theory observation extends from this, if backstage action is part of Rubbish Theory, then this needs to be integrated into the analysis. A considerable part of Rubbish Theory describes how the selection of Durable objects is a social and political process. The case described here highlights a further dimension, *maintaining* Durables is also social and political and involves people constructing orderings of valuation *within* orderings. Thus, understanding the orderings of valuation in practice requires an awareness of this extra dimension of social life. This thus presents a challenge to Rubbish Theory, how does one present this complexity without undermining the simplicity and utility of the model? While there are no doubt various solutions that could be employed, in this chapter we have represented this complexity by utilising the dramaturgical lens of front and backstage, allowing us to see both the official ordering of objects and the maintenance upon which it depends. Our hope is that this creativity inspires future efforts to operationalise Rubbish Theory.

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Rubbish Theory and the problem of China

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Introduction

In *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (2017), anthropologist Michael Thompson provides a structural model of how value works, how world views relate to social orders, and how social reproduction and social change occur. Such a task is only for the bold. Many social thinkers have theorised value, social reproduction, and social change; were we to start naming them, our list could easily comprise the contents of an introductory textbook to social theory: Ruth Benedict, Mary Douglas, Emile Durkheim, Garrett Hardin, Karl Marx, Robert Merton, Adam Smith, Max Weber, Theodore Veblen, and so on. Strikingly, neither Michael Thompson's name nor his model Rubbish Theory appear in such textbooks (e.g., Elliott and Lemert, 2022; Murphy, 2021). The contributors to this volume seek to remedy this omission.

In being neglected, Thompson and Rubbish Theory are, paradoxically, in good company. Thompson grounds his theory in Durkheim's insights about the relationship between world view and the social order. Yet while today Durkheim's work is foundational to social theory, it was poorly received at the time it was written (Douglas, 1986: 9–19). As Mary Douglas has discussed, brilliant theoretical breakthroughs have repeatedly fallen on deaf ears in the course of history, only to be rediscovered, with or without acknowledgement, at a later date (ibid.: 45-53, 69-90). Douglas attributes this phenomenon to the power of institutions to guide thought. Most of us "save cognitive energy" by going along with whatever the dominant world view is, ignoring "reasoned argument" to the contrary (Douglas, 1986: 3, 55, 72, etc.). However, ideas and other "objects" confined to the rubbish bin

have a latent potential to "leap into prominence" (Thompson, 2017:41). It is this "seemingly impossible transfer" from Rubbish to highly valued Durable that Thompson focuses on in *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*.

In the following pages, I scrutinise Rubbish Theory using "the problem of China". This turn of phrase refers to Edwin Ardener's "Belief and the problem of women" (Ardener, 1972 [1968]). In this text, Ardener critiqued anthropologists for ignoring "the problem of women", that is to say, for creating ethnographic models of society that were based on men's representations of the social order and omitting women's models (ibid.). He regarded this problem as both "technical" and "analytic". Technical, in that it was the result of ethnographers talking primarily with men, and analytic, in that men produced the bounded models of society to which anthropologists were attracted, yet which excluded the understandings of half the population. Ardener's contention that public models of the social order were male, and that women had other, "muted" models, was an apt description of Chinese society, with its dominant "male" lineage system (Freedman, 2021 [1958]) and the "nameless" model of kinship held by women, dubbed the "uterine family" by Margery Wolf (Wolf, 1972). When Ardener wrote this piece, ethnographic representations of Chinese society were dominated by male models.

Rubbish Theory has a similar technical and analytic problem, in my view. The technical problem is that Thompson neglects China, a behemoth country where about 20% of the world's population, more than 1.4 billion people, live. While I make this critique somewhat tongue-in-cheek—I do not in fact require all anthropologists to draw examples from Chinese society—it is striking that Thompson, in this wide-ranging and eclectic monograph, does not employ any examples from China. Is this because, as I demonstrate below, China does not in fact adhere to Thompson's claim that "The human life-span and the time taken for an item to pass from the transient, through the rubbish, to the durable category are of the same order" (2017: 42)?

Similar to Ardener's work, I argue that the technical problem of

Rubbish Theory makes visible its analytic problem. Put differently, elements of the model that Thompson presents in his 2017 book are underdeveloped, and examples from China help us recognise and conceptualise what is missing. Once this work is done, I expect that examples from other ethnographic contexts will also illustrate the lacunae identified in this chapter. In particular, just as scholars have extended Ardener's notion of "muted models" beyond gender and applied it to the social models held by other non-dominant groups in various societies, e.g., those based on race, ethnicity, class, occupation, religion, and so on, I believe that my elaboration of Rubbish Theory, particularly the structural subdivision of the category Rubbish that I present below, will find productive application elsewhere.

In the following pages, I identify and discuss the aspects of Rubbish Theory in Thompson's monograph (2017) that require development. I first present the basics of Rubbish Theory. Then I turn to the elements that should be addressed. I follow with a section where I exemplify my points with cases from my research on Chinese industry and industrial heritage. I conclude by returning to the topic with which I opened the chapter: why Michael Thompson and Rubbish Theory have been excluded from introductory textbooks on social theory, and how it has become possible for his book to move from Rubbish to Durable.

Rubbish Theory

In *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, Thompson departs from the premise that maintenance of the social order requires "some measure of agreement as to what is of value" (2017: 20). Value categories and classification systems correspond to and support social orders, e.g., class hierarchies, caste systems, and egalitarian enclaves. Thompson, "swimming against the anthropological tide" of contextual specificity (Thompson, 2017: 15), posits that a single dynamic structural model underlies all category systems. Changes in how "objects" are categorised effect changes in the social order. Drawing on diverse examples from mid-20th century England, cosmopolitan art worlds, higher education, and a Papua New Guinea pig cycle, Thompson

models how social change and social reproduction come about in any given situation. He exerts himself to account for complexity and identify all possible dimensions of change (and stability).

In Rubbish Theory, material things, ideas, and people are all "objects" subject to categorization. All category systems in turn can be reduced to a common underlying structure of "three linked cisterns and two taps" (Thompson, 2017: 7), three core categories and two permissible movements. Durables, Transients, and Rubbish are the three categories. Durables and Transients are "overt cultural categories" (Thompson, 2017: 4, 24). Durables gain value, although they can have so much value that they become "priceless" and are unable to continue to gain (Thompson, 2017: 120-128). Transients begin with value but lose it over time. While the process of losing value need not be linear—a Transient can be worked on to raise its value temporarily (e.g., Thompson, 2017: 36)—in the long run Transients decline in value to the point of becoming Rubbish. Rubbish, the third category in Thompson's model, lacks value. It is a "covert" or "Residual" category (Thompson, 2017: 4, 20, 27, etc.). Objects in the Rubbish category are unacknowledged or unwanted "things or areas which we conspire not to see" (Thompson, 2017: 98). This "invisibility" makes Rubbish a vast reservoir of potential Durables. Rubbish can make an "all-or-nothing" movement to the Durable category (Thompson, 2017: 41). When it does, social change is effected, either "evolutionary" or "revolutionary" (Thompson, 2017: 13, 166, etc.).

Rubbish Theory: the analytic problem

Before turning to the aspects of Rubbish Theory as presented in Thompson's 2017 book that I find analytically underdeveloped, I have two points to make. First, I find Rubbish Theory productive. To give an example, Benedict Singleton and I have used RT to understand how contemporary environmental and conservation scientists seek to include local environmental knowledge in biodiversity conservation while simultaneously limiting local knowledge holders' participation in conservation science, decision-making, and practice (Singleton and

Gillette, 2023). Second, Thompson continued working with Rubbish Theory after publication of his 1979 monograph. The 2017 reprint includes a new introduction and a new afterword, the latter written with M. Bruce Beck, and Thompson has also published other texts in which he deploys RT (e.g., Thompson, 2003; 2024). My critique is based on the 2017 reprint, and Thompson may have addressed my points in other publications. However, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* is the main reference for Rubbish Theory among scholars engaging with the theory (e.g., Fisher and Smiley, 2016; Meadow, 2011; Singleton, 2021; Singleton et al., 2021). I argue this justifies giving the book extra attention.

Thompson gives numerous examples of Rubbish in *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, often but not always in conjunction with tales of the Rubbish to Durable transfer (2017). Among the many Rubbish objects he discusses are snot, sweat, phlegm, Stevengraphs (Victorian woven silk pictures), rat-infested Georgian terraced slum houses in North London, Gypsies [sic], academic disciplines, and the toilet in Duchamp's *Fountain*. This list brings me to my first point, which concerns the structural features of the category Thompson calls Rubbish. I argue that this list contains structurally different types of Rubbish. Some of the objects on this list are marked and others are unmarked. This structural distinction matters when Rubbish moves.

Thompson is fully aware that his category Rubbish includes both marked and unmarked objects. As he puts it (2017: 98),

> In relation to rubbish we can distinguish two forms of blindness: there are those things or areas which we cannot see (though those with an entirely different 'game' may be able to see them), and there are those things or areas which we conspire not to see. When these latter intrude, and we cannot help but see them, we banish them from view (or, alternatively, neutralize their visibility) by assigning them to a unique cross-cutting cultural category which may be labelled 'rubbish'.

Things which we cannot see are unmarked Rubbish. These objects are unacknowledged. If we take as examples snot and anthropology (the latter serving as a specification of an academic discipline), anthropology falls into the unmarked category in most societies (except among anthropologists and the occasional university student). From here on out I call this structural subcategory of Rubbish "Residuals". By contrast, snot, as well as all other things which we can see but banish or strive to neutralise by labelling Rubbish are marked Rubbish. These objects are actively unwanted. They are not invisible, they are managed, often by removing them from sight. Going forward I call this structural subcategory of Rubbish "Despicables".

No object, everywhere and for all time, is Despicable, although I suspect that snot comes close. As Thompson explains, the physical properties of an object set some maximal parameters for objects by "rejecting those qualities that happen to be physically impossible" (2017: 26), but beyond this, an object's physical properties determine neither its category status nor its movements. This feature (or nonfeature) of objects does not affect the structural difference between Residuals and Despicables as subcategories of Rubbish. However, when Rubbish objects make the "seemingly impossible transfer" to Durable within any given category system, the distinction between Residual and Despicable matters. The movement of Residuals and Despicables effect different changes.

This takes me to my second point, which concerns the outcomes of Rubbish to Durable transfers on the social order. To make this point we must first consider the differences between the categories Rubbish (Residuals plus Despicables) and Durable. Rubbish is an infinite category. Durables are finite. With regard to Rubbish, the number of objects that can be Residuals or Despicables is limited only by the structural need for at least some objects to have value. For some objects to be unseen or purposely banished from view, at least a few objects must be seen. This point is completely in line with Rubbish Theory, even though Thompson does not express it exactly in this way. The category Durable, however, is subject to

social control, as Thompson repeatedly argues (e.g., 2017: 6-8, 26-27, 59-64, etc.). Durables cannot expand to infinity in a class or caste society. The result would be the collapse of hierarchy. Only in a completely egalitarian (or level) society is an infinite Durable category theoretically possible. At this point the distinction between Durables, Transients, and Rubbish is lost, as all objects are valuable (or valueless). We can think of examples of more egalitarian societies, such as for example China between 1949 and the early 1980s, a kibbutz, or a commune, but a fully egalitarian society in which all objects are Durable has never been described in the social science literature. Thompson names the "ferociously individualistic societies… in the New Guinea highlands" as a case where the members of society do not appear to agree about what is of value, but these, as he observes, cannot stabilise themselves as an egalitarian order (2017: 9). Durables, then, the objects marked as valuable that increase in value (unless they are so valuable as to be "priceless"), are finite in most human societies.

Most of the examples of Rubbish to Durable transfers that Thompson provides in his book enact what he calls "evolutionary" change, an "internal rearrangement" of the social order that does not yield a dramatic transformation (ibid.: 166). I argue that this occurs for two reasons: a) the Rubbish in question are Residuals (not Despicables), and b) the finite category Durable expands, and the objects already in the category remain valuable. When Stevengraphs join the ranks of collectibles (chapter two), or rat-infested Georgian terraced houses in North London become "our glorious heritage" (chapter three), the Durable category is enlarged (new objects are added). This requires socially acknowledging new "experts" and the creation of a new subfield of knowledge, but such social changes are evolutionary. Class society continues in a slightly different form. Hierarchies are modified but not radically altered.

Thompson investigates fewer cases of "revolutionary" social change in his monograph. One detailed case is revolutionary only within academia (2017: 160-168). In higher education, curricula are based on disciplines or on interdisciplinary subjects. Any given university

at any given moment has either a "collection" curriculum based on "pure" disciplines, in which the disciplines are Durable, or an "integrated" curriculum based on interdisciplinary fields, in which interdisciplinarity is Durable, but never both simultaneously. When the collection curriculum is Durable the integrated curriculum is Rubbish, and vice versa. Periodically, collection-based academic Parthenons are displaced by edifices "amorphous in plan, flexible, linked by glazed bridges and pedestrian walk-ways" in which the integrated, interdisciplinary curriculum is taught (Thompson, 2017: 164). This entails actively disavowing the collection curriculum – making the collection curriculum a Despicable, not a Residual. Put differently, the collection curriculum is ejected from the Durable category and marked Rubbish when the integrated curriculum enters it. This effects a revolutionary social change in the academy. Departments are disbanded and new ones formed (my own home department, the School of Global Studies at the University of Gothenburg, is a perfect example). Discipline-based degrees are replaced by interdisciplinary ones. New research teams join forces. Publications appear in new interdisciplinary journals. New professorships are created. These changes are not permanent; as Thompson discusses in chapter eight, the opposite transfer also takes place, in which the integrated curriculum is disavowed and the disciplines placed on pedestals. My point is merely that oscillations between the collection and integrated curricula exemplify revolutionary (if cyclical) social changes in academia based on Durable-Despicable-Durable transfers. Thompson turns to catastrophe theory to explain such revolutionary change (Thompson, 2017: 169 and following), but I find this unnecessary.

I argue that whether Rubbish-to-Durable transfers enact evolutionary or revolutionary social change relates to: 1) what happens with the finite Durable category (does it expand or is an object-formerly-known-as-Durable ejected and marked as Despicable Rubbish), and 2) what kind of Rubbish, Residual or Despicable, becomes Durable. In any given case of Rubbish becoming Durable

the answers to these two questions should indicate whether we find evolutionary or revolutionary social change. Put differently, the structural features of Rubbish and the movement at the boundaries of the Durable category determine whether the concomitant social change is a minor modification of the existing social order or a radical transformation. Thompson turns to catastrophe theory for an explanation, but I contend that the structural features of an elaborated Rubbish Theory model are adequate to address this question.

A third area where Rubbish Theory could be elaborated concerns another type of Rubbish to Durable transfer. Despite the comprehensiveness of *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, Thompson omitted a possible movement from his book: the intentionally covert Rubbish to Durable transfer. Sometimes an individual or group secretly elevates a Residual to the Durable category. This movement, which cannot be done with a Despicable, reinforces the social order, and in fact takes place in order to exploit the social order. I freely admit that this is a minor critique.

My final point is about another minor sin of omission, here related to how Thompson depicts the origins of Rubbish-to-Durable transfers. Repeatedly throughout the book, Thompson states that this movement begins a "creative" or "eccentric" individual who "suddenly in a blinding flash" sees an item "not as rubbish but as a durable" (2017: 42). This person's epiphany is accepted by someone else, and then someone else, until "everyone eventually agrees" and Rubbish becomes Durable (ibid.). Stevengraphs' elevation from Rubbish to Durable began with Miss Mary Dunham (ibid.: 43), a "Knocker-Through" transformed a slum house into an immaculately painted restoration with cast iron balconies, a brass dolphin knocker, and a painstakingly repaired leaded fanlight (ibid.: 57-61), Marcel Duchamp turned a mass-produced toilet into a work of art (ibid.: 126-127), a "creative innovator" decided to research a topic outside the "ring fence" of his or her discipline (ibid.: 167), and others follow suit. Much of the time, Thompson writes, the aspiring "creative, upwardly mobile" individual is not able to "do it my way", or at least, s/he

cannot persuade others to accept her eccentric evaluation and, if she is trying to convert a Despicable to Durable, she may well end up in the loony bin (ibid.: 6, 42). All this is plausible, but does not cover every social situation, as the problem of China makes clear.

Exemplifying with cases from China

My research on industry and industrial heritage in China enables me to provide examples of these underdeveloped aspects of Rubbish Theory. I begin with a case of a Residual to Durable transfer in which the Durable category expanded, followed by a Despicable to Durable transfer in which a Durable was forcibly removed from Durable status. Next comes an intentionally covert Residual to Durable transfer, and finally a case where an actor other than the creative and eccentric individuals Thompson discusses in his book makes the Rubbish to Durable transfer.

These examples from Chinese industry and industrial heritage emerge from two related research projects. The first investigated ceramics production in Jingdezhen, a city formerly known as, and by some still called, China's porcelain capital (Gillette, 2016). The second focused on a massive but short-lived initiative to create national mine parks in the People's Republic of China (Gillette and Boyd, 2024; 2025).

Jingdezhen is a small (by Chinese standards) city known for producing most of the highly-prized blue and white porcelain found in museums and private collections around the world. Since the year 1004 (during the Song dynasty), this city has had a comprehensive ceramic industry, including all the stages from mining porcelain stone and kaolin to applying final surface decorations. Sales have been mostly to brokers, as Jingdezhen was and remains somewhat remote. In later years the porcelain industry has declined, and the city bills itself as an art and heritage destination. My research in Jingdezhen included participant-observation field work, study of archival and historical documents, examination of material culture, and ethnographic filmmaking (*Broken Pots Broken Dreams*, 2009; Duhem et al., 2019; Gillette, 2010; 2016; 2017a; 2017b; 2022). As I

have argued elsewhere (Gillette, 2016), Jingdezhen's centuries-long industrial success depended on state support from the imperial and then the Chinese Communist Party governments. Its mid-1990s industrial failure was a result of the central government's decision to withdraw sponsorship. From Jingdezhen I draw two examples. The first is a Despicable to Durable transfer which was accompanied by revolutionary change. The second is an intentionally secret Residual to Durable transfer.

The other two cases come from my research on the creation of China's national mine parks. This massive and costly heritage initiative was run by the central government. Between 2005 and 2021, the Ministry of Land Resources repurposed 88 formerly state-owned coal, oil shale, and mineral mines as industrial heritage (Gillette and Boyd, 2024; 2025; Wang et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2020). Many were abandoned in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when China's central government tightened credit to the planned track of the economy, causing an enormous wave of industrial bankruptcies (Frazier, 2006; Gillette, 2016: 103–123). Others, particularly coal mines, survived this decision only to close when the price of coal dropped in the 2010s and the government downsized the coal industry (Audin, 2020; China Daily, 2019). The central government ended the national mine park initiative in 2021 with its decision to create the "world's largest" national park system (Zhao, 2022). The parks' existence as designated national mine parks ended with this administrative change. I conducted research on China's national mine parks between 2017 and 2024, using Chinese-language scholarly publications, MA theses, official media, and digital ethnography on a popular Chinese tourism platform (Gillette, 2017a; Gillette and Boyd, 2024; 2025). A research assistant in China visited two mine parks in 2023 and provided field notes and photographs. From the mine park heritage initiative I draw two examples. One is a Residual to Durable transfer. This movement, which was not entirely smooth and had not, at the time of writing, been accepted by all Chinese citizens, resulted in evolutionary social change. The second example concerns an actor other than an upwardly mobile creative who initiated Rubbish to Durable transfers.

A Residual to Durable transfer: China's national mine parks

China's massive "mine rehabilitation" program (Zhao et al., 2020), in which abandoned mines became what Thompson calls "our glorious heritage", exemplifies a Residual to Durable transfer. The social change effected by this transfer was evolutionary, an internal rearrangement of a hierarchical system. A new object joined the ranks of Durables. The category "our glorious heritage" expanded. A new form of knowledge, which for simplicity's sake we can call "mining heritage", was added to the roster of knowledges within the museum profession. New social actors appeared, such as the mine park tour guides who told visitors "what it was like" to work in the pits (Gillette and Boyd, 2024). None of these changes were radical. Mining heritage became a new arena for profit-seeking within China's capitalist economy. The Chinese Communist Party retained power.

Thompson's description of Rubbish as "those things or areas which we cannot see (though those with an entirely different 'game' may be able to see them)" (2017: 98) perfectly encapsulates what happened when mines became heritage objects. Mines, whether operative or abandoned, were Residuals in the "game" (domain) of Chinese heritage. In the "game" of resource extraction, the mines were transients on the way to becoming Rubbish or had already become Rubbish. The mines' position in the "game" of resource extraction, or in other "games", related for example to environmental health or landscape aesthetics, has no bearing on their position as Residuals in the heritage domain. As heritage, mines were unseen, unacknowledged, non-existent. The Chinese state (hint: spoiler alert) initiated the process of shifting shuttered mines from their original domain, that of resource extraction, to a new "game", that of heritage. A key step in this process took place in 2006, when the State Administration of Cultural Heritage defined "tangible and intangible industrial remains" as heritage (Lu et al., 2020).

As noted above, examples of structurally similar Residual to Durable transfers in Thompson's monograph, in which the Durable category expanded to include formerly unacknowledged objects, include

North London Georgian terraced houses, Duchamp's *Fountain*, and Stevengraphs (Thompson, 2017). In each of these cases, an object that had transient status in one domain—housing in the housing domain, toilets in the water closet/human sanitation domain, and woven industrial novelties in the Victorian collectibles domain—and was unseen and unacknowledged in another game, e.g., architectural heritage, art, and Victoriana, moved into this second, new to the object moving, value arena. When the object became accepted as Durable, the category of Durables expanded. Socially, the resultant change was an internal rearrangement of a hierarchical system. Not even Duchamp's *Fountain* produced revolutionary change. High art did not become Rubbish or "something you piss on" (Hicks, 2004: 196). The elite art system continued with relatively insignificant modifications.

A Despicable to Durable transfer: Jingdezhen's ceramic workers

In 1949, when the People's Liberation Army entered Jingdezhen, 19 year-old Feng Shangsong was a porcelain thrower working in the city's ceramic manufacturing industry (Gillette, 2016: 43–45). As he told me several times, Feng had been working full time since the age of ten. He was poor and hungry, performing a dirty job that was so badly remunerated he could not afford shoes. The arrival of the People's Liberation Army changed his life and the lives of his fellow ceramic workers. As he marvelled, "To the [Chinese Communist] Party, we poor people, those of us who were the children of poor people, we were just as good as anyone else" (Gillette, 2016: 55; to hear Feng recount this story, see *Broken Pots Broken Dreams*, 2009). Feng's story, and the events affecting Jingdezhen's ceramic industry workers in the 1950s, exemplify a Despicable to Durable transfer.

Support for the argument that Jingdezhen's ceramic workers were Rubbish can be found in the fact that they are virtually absent from the records of literate elites on whose testimony we rely for understanding Chinese society in the late imperial period (Gillette, 2016: 12). Jingdezhen's precious porcelain wares were often described, as were the manufacturing stages through which these objects were

produced, but not the ceramics workers whose labour produced these wares. On the rare occasions that members of the scholar-gentry class mentioned ceramics workers, they were described as "soiling their fingers with clay" and living in poverty (Gillette, 2016: 14). This, combined with the memories of Feng and other ceramists who recalled Jingdezhen's "liberation" in 1949, suggests that ceramics workers were not unacknowledged Residuals, but Despicables whom educated elites managed to banish from sight.

After the Communist Party's victory, poor industrial workers like Feng catapulted to a new status. They became the heroes of the revolution, the Durables of the new social order. Feng himself became a party member and then a government official. Accompanying this Despicable to Durable transfer were revolutionary social changes and considerable violence (Gillette, 2016: 46-49). After taking Jingdezhen, the Party moved quickly to put supplies of china stone under government control, striking a blow to the four powerful land-owning families who monopolised mining. On October 29th, 1949, a mere six months after the army entered Jingdezhen, party members organised Jingdezhen's first public "struggle session" in which locals took to the stage to criticise powerful local families and bosses for exploiting them. Industry owners and managers were prohibited from beating workers shortly thereafter. In 1950, government officials began confiscating land, potteries, and kilns from local property owners. Executions followed in 1951: "counter-revolutionaries", "non-cooperating capitalists", "evil officials and bosses" and other "feudal exploiters" were publicly shot. Put differently, the Party's decision to transfer ceramics workers from Despicable to Durable required ejecting previously Durable "objects"—landowners, capitalists, and government officials—from the Durable category.

Mao Zedong famously said that a revolution is not a dinner party. The government of the New China could not simply "pull up a chair" for poor workers and add them to the existing guest list, those who previously occupied Durable high value statuses. Nor did the Chinese Communist Party have any desire to do this: radical

change, not evolution, was always the goal. The old Durables had to be expelled, with violence where necessary, and new Durables put in place. As Chen Duxiu, founder of the Chinese Communist Party, put it, "In order to advocate Mr Democracy, we are obliged to oppose Confucianism, the codes of rituals, chastity of women, traditional ethics, and old-fashioned politics; in order to advocate Mr Science, we have to oppose traditional arts and traditional religion" (quoted in Chow, 1960: 59).

When I first met Feng Shangsong in 2005, the Durable status of industrial workers in the New China was already over. In Jingdezhen, it took three years for all the state-owned and collective factories and mines to close after the government's decision to privatise (*Broken Pots Broken Dreams*, 2009; Gillette, 2016: 91–97). Residents remembered the bankruptcies as shocking and sudden. Ceramics industry workers had believed that they had guaranteed employment for life, an ample post-retirement pension, health care, and other benefits. They were wrong. Jingdezhen had "gone in a circle", as a potter in his 60s told me. In his view there was little difference between Jingdezhen in the mid-2000s and Jingdezhen prior to 1949. A Despicable-cum-Durable had fallen to Despicable again – and Jingdezhen, like the rest of China, had undergone another round of revolutionary social changes.

An intentionally secret Residual to Durable transfer

We stay in Jingdezhen for my next case, focusing on the Jingdezhen of the 2000s. When the state and collective ceramic industries collapsed, many Jingdezhen residents had to find new ways of supporting themselves. Large numbers entered private ceramics manufacturing (Gillette, 2016: 95–111). Some worked as hired employees for the owners of small porcelain workshops, almost exclusively on short-term contracts, as few of these small business owners had the means or desire to support a permanent staff. Others became ceramics free-lancers, selling their skills to the highest bidder and moving from workshop to workshop. More entrepreneurial locals founded their own small private workshops, where they made porcelain alone or

with one or two employees. These small business owners almost exclusively produced art porcelain.

Most of the ceramics entrepreneurs whom I met regarded the art that they produced as worthless, although there were of course exceptions. As many locals told me, people living in Jingdezhen were surrounded by porcelain, so they thought it was Rubbish. A ceramicist who succeeded in selling a ware for a high price called this act making a killing, or to translate the local expression literally, "slaughtering the pig" (Gillette, 2010). A high-priced sale meant that a crafty ceramics entrepreneur had pulled a fast one on a gullible buyer (the pig). This was cause for celebration, and pork was the favourite meat for a party.

Reproductions of historic wares were the dominant type of art sold on the streets of Jingdezhen during the 2000s (Gillette, 2016: 84–109; 2010). Mostly locals produced replicas of late-imperial wares. The quality of these antique reproductions ranged from shoddy to magnificent. An open secret was that some of the ceramics entrepreneurs who produced high-end antique reproductions also produced counterfeits (Gillette, 2010, 2016: 108–109). This brings me to the missing transfer in Thompson's book: intentionally secret movements of Rubbish to Durable. Not a few ceramists in Jingdezhen participated in such covert transfers. A couple even asked me if I wanted to join their efforts. They thought my foreign contacts and past work with Chinese ceramics in a Philadelphia art museum could yield lucrative results.

A fake porcelain antique, in the absence of discovery, is Rubbish successfully disguised as Durable. The purpose of producing counterfeits is to make a lot of money from an object that otherwise has relatively little value. The social order does not change when a potter succeeds in this transaction. The activity of producing and selling counterfeit art depends in fact upon the continuation of the existing hierarchical social order that finds Chenghua period Ming dynasty porcelain bowls from Jingdezhen to be very valuable and fakes to be worthless (Duhem et al., 2019). Should the fake be discovered, this putative Durable becomes Despicable. Private

owners discard them and museums hide them in storage racks. Those involved in the scam are punished, if they can be caught. In the People's Republic of China, art counterfeiters are usually punished with fines and prison sentences.

An alternative actor who transfers Rubbish to Durable

For my final example I return to China's national mine park initiative. In the preceding pages I presented this as an example of a Residual to Durable transfer. Here I call attention to the fact that the actor who initiated this transfer was not, *pace* Rubbish Theory, an eccentric, a creative innovator, an upwardly mobile Knocker Through, or a rogue academic looking at the wasteland beyond the ring fence, but the Chinese state. Unlike the Ron-and-Cliffs whom Thompson discusses in chapter three, governments "have access to durability" (Thompson, 2017: 62–63). Often governments are expected to safeguard Durables, for example in national museums, nature reserves, and marine protected areas, but also through such institutions as central banks, federal reserves, and courts. Governments regularly assume the role of "high priest", upholding the existing category system and social order (ibid.: 6). However, governments can and do act to modify classification systems and the social order, as seen in the national mine park initiative.

The Chinese government conducted this brief experiment in the hope that turning defunct and failing mines into national parks would yield economic development. Industrial heritage tourism was to be "the new fuel" for addressing economic problems in deindustrialised areas (Ren, 2017). This was by no means an obvious choice. In most of China's deindustrialised cities, local inhabitants regarded shuttered industries as eyesores and "belittled" industrial labour and culture (Yang, 2017). However, central government officials were aware that several European countries had successfully transformed industrial detritus to heritage (Wang et al., 2020). The Ruhr area of Germany, where the regional government reinvented shuttered coal and steel industries as a tourism attraction (Berger et al., 2017), was particularly inspiring.

As Rubbish Theory predicts, the transfer of abandoned state-owned mines from Rubbish to Durable entailed "difficulty, opposition, and confusion" (Thompson, 2017: 42), even though the key actor "knocking through" was the Chinese state. A study evaluating 14 national mine parks finds that most of the former mining communities have experienced significant outmigration and social decline (Zhao et al., 2020). The economic beneficiaries of heritage redevelopment are not the former mine workers. Only some of the mine parks have succeeded as tourism destinations, while others fail to attract visitors (Zhao et al., 2020; Gillette and Boyd, 2024). A significant minority of visitors to the sites are disappointed and dissatisfied (Gillette and Boyd, 2025). At least some of these "disgruntled tourists" publish negative reviews on a popular Chinese travel platform. Here they complain about the "garbage scenery" ("it's just a hole") and call the parks "a rotten attraction" that is "not worth the money". Many warn other tourists not to visit.

Conclusion

Large swathes of the Chinese population have witnessed multiple Transient-Rubbish-Durable-Rubbish-Durable movements in their lifetime. This is the case for adults living in China who are over the age of 50, which is roughly 257,000,000 people (see Bicker, 2024). To take an example, when formerly Durable state-owned mines took an ideological nosedive during the late 1990s and early 2000s, and industrial working class "Masters" were reclassified as "Losers" (Li, 2015), the changes to the social order were enormous (*Broken Pots Broken Dreams*, 2009; Coase and Wang, 2012; Gillette, 2000; 2016). The mines' subsequent recent leap, from Residual to Durable in the heritage game, enacted relatively minor social modifications. In addition, Chinese society provides cases of intentionally secret Rubbish to Durable transfers, as well as alternative actors, such as the government, who effect the "seeming impossible" Rubbish to Durable transfers that are at the heart of Rubbish Theory. These cases lead me to argue that scholars interested in Rubbish Theory should be mindful of "the problem of China".

Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value (Thompson, 2017) is an ambitious book. Thompson aspires to be comprehensive in his theorising, and he is quite successful. That having been said, some aspects of Rubbish Theory are underdeveloped. Of the critiques I have voiced, more significant are the structural aspects of Rubbish, which should be subdivided into Residuals and Despicables, and the sort of changes that occur within the Durable category when Rubbish becomes Durable. The latter is related to the former: elevating a Despicable to Rubbish entails ejecting a Durable, whereas advocating that a Residual is Durable merely expands the Durable category. Rubbish Theory works better if it addresses these points. My other critiques are by contrast cases that Thompson did not address but which Rubbish Theory encompasses.

I conclude this study by returning to the topic with which I began, the absence of Rubbish Theory and Michael Thompson from textbooks on social theory. Thompson first published his Rubbish Theory book in 1979. As he explains in his introduction to the 2017 reprint, his sudden burst of insight did not inspire others to adopt his eccentric evaluations. Rubbish Theory instead followed another trajectory. A Transient when published, the monograph almost immediately became the subject of a conspiracy of blindness and was suppressed as a Despicable. More recently, Thompson argues, the book "has made the second transition: from rubbish to durable" (2017: 16). Recent peer-reviewed journal articles (Fisher and Smiley, 2016; Singleton, 2017; Singleton and Gillette, 2023), and the publication of this edited volume, suggest he is correct. I might even go so far as to suggest that the Durable which has been displaced is neo-classical economic theory, although that is a topic I must leave for another paper.

According to *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, Rubbish Theory's most recent journey results from the accumulation of eccentric evaluations. For me, this explanation raises the question of when eccentric evaluations accumulate and when they do not. Mary Douglas asks a similar question in *How Institutions Think*, namely why beliefs emerge to be held in common or "how a system

of knowledge gets off the ground" (1986: 45). She discusses several scholarly breakthroughs that were ignored when they were first proposed, only to be rediscovered much later: the Condorcet paradox, the identification of syphilis, Durkheim's and Fleck's arguments about the social regulation of cognition. Douglas' explanation is that "An answer is only seen to be the right one if it sustains the institutional thinking that is already in the minds of individuals as they try to decide" (Douglas, 1986: 4). Generally we "let the founding analogies of the surrounding society take over" rather than wrestling with "difficult problems" (Douglas, 1986: 55). A new "climate of ideas, political and philosophical" emerges only when the dominant classification system has been adequately modified (Douglas, 1986: 79).

Edwin Ardener argues that within any given society we will find more than one model of the social order (Ardener, 1972). One group's model dominates, but others exist. Douglas and Thompson, as scholars who have worked with Cultural Theory, agree with this assessment (Douglas, 1978; Thompson, 2003). Plural rationalities exist in any society, and this plurality is four-fold (see Thompson, 2017: 6–10 for a succinct statement). The encounter between these plural rationalities has the potential to be enormously productive (e.g., Verweij and Thompson, 2006). Put in the language of Rubbish Theory, "head on collisions" between the holders of different category systems are moments when one "game" meets another (Thompson, 2017: 60, 98). While often the result is the "cognitive energy saving" that Douglas describes (1986), Residuals can, and sometimes do, become visible through these meetings. When these Residuals become Durables we move the "ring fence" (Thompson, 2017:167) of our thought world and modify the social order. A hypothesis for further investigation is whether the movement of Residuals to Durables in some sense paves the way for transferring a Despicable to the Durable category. Reno, in his introduction to the 2017 reprint of *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, suggests this is the case: he argues that with the emergence of discard studies and scholarship on environmental justice, Rubbish Theory has taken on a different status (2017). Such possibilities can only be evaluated through further research.

Acknowledgements

The author presented an earlier version of this work at the Mary Douglas seminar at University College London in 2024. She thanks the organisers and participants for their thoughtful engagement, in particular Michael Thompson who kindly served as discussant. She would also like to thank Charles Barthold, Eric Boyd, Rebecca Kanthor, Lin Huangshi, and Marie Widengård for supporting the development of this chapter. Finally, a special acknowledgement to Benedict Singleton for his editorial work and many invigorating discussions of Rubbish Theory.

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A bluffer's guide to Rubbish Theory

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Part One

Heritage: What is it and where does it come from?

In an article about the 2024 Venice Biennale in the UK newspaper *The Guardian* Adrian Searle, its arts correspondent, devotes a fair amount of space to an ambitious project staged in a palazzo on the Grand Canal: a palazzo whose residents have included the Queen of Cyprus and the Pope (not at the same time, I hasten to add).

> Christoph Büchel [a conceptual artist known for his provocative contemporary installations] has performed a wretched takeover of the Prada Foundation, a work called Pawnshop. Squalid toilets sit in corners. Rooms are filled with abandoned casino gaming tables. Stalls selling guns and bombs, diamonds, paintings and all the detritus of modern life are piled high. All the traders and moneymen and dodgy entrepreneurs, the diamond sellers, the art dealers, the soiled clothing racketeers and the bitcoin moguls have lit up and gone, leaving only the wandering art lovers to the filthy, artfully distressed rooms, wondering what they are looking at and why. (Searle, 2024)

And Searle is evidently as mystified as they are. However, had he been able to dip into the little volume of essays the Prada Foundation had commissioned to accompany the exhibition, all would have been revealed.[1]

Though it may appear somewhat dilapidated, the venue (which, as well as being the headquarters of the Prada Foundation, houses

1 This Part One is a much modified version of my chapter for that little volume (see Thompson, 2024).

the archives of the Venice Biennale, now in its fortieth year) is in fact poised, once all that "detritus of modern life" has been cleared away, for a meticulous and inevitably quite costly restoration. Yes, all may be filth now, but not for long. It is about to be transformed into heritage and this, as one of the essays explains, is where Rubbish Theory comes in.

To understand heritage we need to look at that which it most certainly is not: Rubbish. The Rubbish Theory argument, very briefly, is that possessable objects can fall into one or other of two cultural categories: the Transient (in which items steadily decline in value and have finite expected lifespans) and the Durable (in which items steadily increase in value and have infinite expected lifespans). Most objects, we find, start off in the Transient category and are only later transferred to Durability. This then raises the question of how this transfer is possible, given the mutual incompatibility of the criteria that define the two categories. The answer is that the direct transfer is not possible, but that there is a third, and covert, category—Rubbish—and that it is this that provides the crucial pathway (Figure 1).

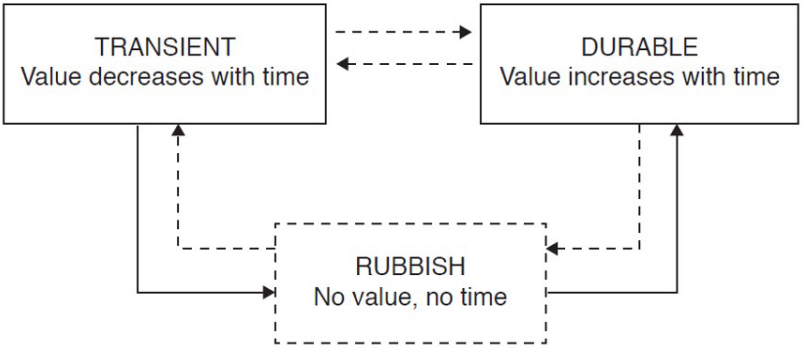

Figure 1: Cultural categories of objects and the possible transfers (the solid arrows) between them.

A Transient object, decreasing in value with time and use, eventually sinks into Rubbish, a timeless and valueless limbo. In an ideal world it would then disappear in a small cloud of dust, but often this does not happen and it lingers on, unnoticed and unloved, until perhaps one

day it is discovered by some creative and upwardly mobile individual and successfully transferred to the Durable category. This is how something second-hand becomes an antique and how, as has happened with many a run-down inner-city district, a rat-infested slum becomes part of Our Glorious Heritage.

So that is where heritage comes from. Far from being something that is inherent in the buildings and objects themselves, it is the product of a social and cultural process: "the creation and destruction of value", as the sub-title of the book Rubbish Theory puts it (Thompson, 2017). And, for all its simplicity, the theory continues to shed light: most recently, on the rise (particularly in the United States) of the "decluttering movement", whose acolytes aim to help people to rid themselves of all the now worthless stuff they have accumulated. But what, you might protest, could possibly be wrong with that? To answer that question we will need to delve into our theory's origins.

Rubbish Theory (surprisingly perhaps) began life in the world of art, not academia, thanks to my involvement in the early conceptual art movement: Art and Language. Its members, being intent on emphasizing the art concept, were radically critical of the then-current dominance of the art object; so critical, in fact, that we found ourselves in the forefront of the protests across British art schools that led to some of them (notably Guildford and Hornsey) being closed down, with the more activist in our ranks finding themselves on employment blacklists (all because, initially, of their request that students be able to move freely between the then very separate realms of painting and sculpture): a spectacular instance of what is now called "gate keeping" (or "boundary work").

The group's output, unsurprisingly, was not easily taken possession of, with much of it coming in the form of "language as art", which was then exhibited in our somewhat pretentious journal: *Art-Language*. More than four decades later, in 2016, I was surprised and delighted to come across an exhibition at the Tate Britain Gallery: "Conceptual Art in Britain 1964-1979". And even more surprised and delighted to find one of my Art-language articles, complete with its Rubbish Theory

diagrams, on display *as an artwork*. The theory, I realised, had gone through its own transformations: from Transient to Rubbish and then from Rubbish to Durability. When I got home, I rummaged in an old filing cabinet and, in a folder marked "Hull Art Notes" (Hull College of Art being where several of us had fetched up), discovered two issues of the once worthless Art-Language.[2] All of which suggests that it is not a good idea to place too much faith in the declutterers; you may be throwing away the next Mona Lisa.

The cultural observer, Peter York, has also taken this jaundiced view of it all, albeit a little more prosaically:

> A growing group of us, though, really like lots of things and want to hang onto them, or at least give them to people we know: recycling for real. We think high-profile simplicity is the supermarket spirituality of the rich. Some of us think our upcycled furniture and car boot finds talk to each other when put together. And they give us something to talk about, observations on the history of taste – how did those plates end up in a charity shop? (which means, of course, that you have to have found them yourself). (York 2022)

So there you have it: plates talking to each other. That's heritage.

But can it really be that simple? Is it all just a matter of discourse, with the inherent properties of the buildings and objects (including the art objects) playing no role whatsoever? "All that glisters is not gold", wrote William Shakespeare, but that does not mean that gold itself is neither here nor there. Indeed, as Michael Palin has observed (it was in relation to the grim bunkers and subterranean palaces bequeathed to Albania by its oppressive and paranoid communist regime) "You can't polish a turd." In other words, it seems safe to say that gold is *not* neither here nor there. Rather, heritage is under-determined by the inherent properties of the stuff it is comprised of.

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2 The history of the Art and Language movement is summarised in an obituary of one of its key figures Mel Ramsden (Darwent, 2024).

Not everything is equally likely to make it through Rubbish and into Durability.[3] Prada's palazzo, I would venture, is pretty much a dead cert, but the prospect for those Albanian bunkers and palaces is far less rosy.

Part Two

Hoarding and Decluttering[4]

Long ago, in the years when I was developing Rubbish Theory (Thompson, 1969; 2017), I found myself teaching a course—it was in "urban sociology"—to students of architecture in what is now Portsmouth University. At the end of the course, by way of an examination, I asked them to write a short essay, giving them a choice of six or seven titles. One title I always included (and which always proved more popular than any of the others) was "Compare Mole's house in *The Wind in the Willows* with Le Corbusier's machine for living" (Le Corbusier being the leading figure in the Modern Movement that came to dominate architecture in the post-war decades). The difference between these two dwellings, I will argue, as well as shedding some further light on the decluttering movement, helps us to understand just how crucial Rubbish is in our dealings with one another and with all the stuff that sustains those dealings.

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3 But is Michael Palin's assertion entirely correct? After all, perhaps the most famous exhibit in York's Viking Museum is the LBT: The Lloyd's Bank Turd (it having been unearthed during archaeological excavations beneath the structure) and dinosaur poo is now quite frequently sold at Sotheby's. However, the LBT is desiccated and the dinosaur poo is fossilized, both of which processes render these turds polishable. The ones Michael Palin is talking about being moist and smelly, still suffer from what commodity traders call "inherent vice" (it is not easy to invest in things that "go off"—like kippers and milk—even when, unlike those unpolishable turds, they do have some value). And in the opposite direction, as it were, we sometimes see great effort, expense and technological ingenuity being committed to preventing the decay of certain objects—the Vasa Warship in Sweden, for instance, and the Mary Rose in Britain—that do suffer from inherent vice, once they have been raised from the sea-bed. The members of the Art and Language group, in going to great lengths to make their artworks unpossessable, were in a sense caught up in these inherent vice difficulties, ending up in a situation where the art market had found ways of making these art works possessable. The artists were thus left "crying all the way to the bank", as is recounted in a recent obituary of one of the group's key members. (Darwent, 2024)

4 This Part Two is largely based on Thompson (2023c).

The Essential Tension

When Mole (the hero of Kenneth Grahame's much loved story about the animals of the riverbank) returns to his subterranean home, he is so overcome by the emotion of it all that his friend, Rat, has to gently take command of the situation.[5]

> The Rat, looking round him, saw that they were in a sort of forecourt. A garden seat stood on one side of the door, and on the other, a roller … On the walls hung wire baskets with ferns in them, alternating with brackets carrying plaster statuary – Garibaldi and the Infant Samuel, and Queen Victoria, and other heroes of modern Italy. Down one side of the forecourt ran a skittle-alley, with benches along it and little wooden tables marked with rings that hinted at beer mugs. In the middle was a small round pond containing goldfish and surrounded by a cockleshell border. Out of the centre of the pond rose a fanciful erection clothed in more cockleshells and topped by a large silvered glass ball that reflected everything all wrong and had a very pleasing effect. (Grahame, 1908)

This picturesque, not to say kitsch, scene would not have appealed to Le Corbusier. "Decoration," he insisted "is a sensorial elementary order … suited to simple races, peasants and savages" (Le Corbusier, 1947). Nor, given he saw the cafés of Paris as "the fungus that eats up the pavement" would he have been enthused by Mole's neither fully private nor fully public forecourt; indeed, he would have fingered Mole as what planners call "a non-conforming user". Then, had he traversed it and stepped inside Mole's house, he would have had much more to find fault: the *ad hoc* way the beer cellar had been excavated off a passageway and the bunks carved out of the parlour

5 I first presented this argument in 1986, at a conference—The Design of the Future—that was organised by Lucius Burckhardt and took place in the now-legendary Balhaus in Berlin's Kreuzberg district (Thompson, 1987). It was subsequently set out, in English, and expanded so as to take in *Cultural Theory* (Thompson et al, 1990), in a volume that came out of a 2001 conference—Thinking Utopia—held by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Essen and the Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum in Hagen (Thompson, 2005).

wall. Then there were the pictures which, though they met with Rat's approval ("Wherever did you pick up those prints? Make the place look so homelike they do") would have fallen far short of the exacting standards set by the machine for living: "Just a few pictures, and good ones." Nor is this cleavage due simply to the presence or absence of surface decoration and self-help.

Mole's dwelling is not so much designed as evolved and still evolving: a social and material *process* rather than a finite and concrete *specification*: "Mole, his bosom heaving with emotion, related … how this was planned and how that was thought out, and how this was got through a windfall from an aunt, and that was a wonderful find and a bargain, and this other thing was bought out of laborious savings and a certain amount of going without" (Grahame, 1908).

The machine for living, by contrast, arrives complete in every prescriptive detail. Far from the occupant modifying it, the idea is that it should modify its occupant: "a well-mapped out scheme, constructed on a mass production basis, can give a feeling of calm, order, and neatness, and inevitably imposes discipline on the inhabitants" (Le Corbusier, 1947). No chance here for bosoms heaving with emotion. Indeed, all traces of femininity are to be eliminated: "Men—intelligent, cold, and calm—are needed to build the house and lay out the town" (Le Corbusier, 1947). Poor old Mole! There is simply no place in this grand design for the future for his "old coach full of tuberculosis": Corb's verdict on the pre-modern house.

My students all picked up on this contrast between Mole's idiosyncratic abode and Corb's glorious vision of where things have got to go, and in revealing ways, some of which I had not anticipated. Though I had not asked them to come down in favour of one or the other, they felt this was something that, as aspiring architects, they had to do. Their eagerness to make the transition from layman to professional evidently required them to emit a clear signal that they were moving in the right direction. In the early years, when the Modern Movement was still in full flood, there was really no problem: strike out strongly for Le Corbusier. Later on, however, with the advent of community architecture, of neo-vernacularism, of public

participation, of the autonomous house, of Prince Charles' "monstrous carbuncles" and of post-modernism (exuberantly championed by Charles Jenks), perhaps it was Mole they should be plumping for. And, in the transitional period, I found myself reading wondrously convoluted essays as my students found themselves driven to distraction by the refusal of their teachers to tell them which direction was the right one, with one of their number concluding that "though Mole's house appears very attractive from a purely human point of view, I feel that, as an architect, I must side with Corbusier." So here, between Mole and Corb, is the essential tension. Corb is bent on remaking the whole world by grand and conscious design; Mole, in his short-sighted way, just tinkers with his immediate surroundings to create "a very pleasing effect".

Since Corb's immaculate global prescription and Mole's unruly local *bricolage* are directly and irreducibly opposed to one another, you might expect to see one of them emerge as the clear winner, but the curious thing is that you do not. Neither side, we must conclude, is ever entirely successful in imposing its vision of the future. The future, rather, is some "resultant" of the contradictory forces that each brings to bear, as best it can, on its physical surroundings. In other words, to think of this struggle between contending visions of the future in terms of winning and losing—imposing and capitulating—is as nonsensical as saying that the lions of Serengeti have won when they've eaten the last wildebeest in the park.

No, like predators and grazing animals in the natural environment, Corbs and Moles go on, and on, and on, existing in the built environment. Nor do they just coexist in that environment; they constitute a *dynamical system*. Even as the single grand design is being realised, the Moles are busy beneath it, rearranging it into a million individually pleasing effects. My argument will be that our built environment is nothing more nor less than the by-product of this dynamical system. It certainly has a design, but it certainly does not have a designer – an insight that, I believe, has some far-reaching implications.

However, before we can move on to these "far-reaching implications", we will need to ask the crucial question: is this essential two-fold

scheme—the hoarding Mole versus the decluttering Corb—sufficient? The answer, as we will see, is that it is not; the plurality needs to be bumped up from two to four (or, rather "four-plus-one"). And it is this—the increasing of the institutional plurality beyond the familiar dualisms (markets and hierarchies, *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft*, status and contract and so on) that have long held sway in social science—that brings rubbish theory into a single coherent and dynamic whole with *the Theory of Plural Rationality* that has been pioneered by Mary Douglas (1970; 1996) and her successors (e.g. Douglas and Ney, 1998; Rayner and Malone, 1998; Thompson et al, 1990; Verweij et al 2011).[6] In other words, expect some upsettings of orthodox applecarts.

In framing this chapter in terms of architecture and art I realise I am exposing myself to a major objection: "All very interesting, but is it anthropology?" The head of the anthropology department at University College London was strongly of the opinion it was not, and he did everything he could to prevent me from pursuing my doctorate. Indeed, it was only thanks to a loophole in the regulations, and an explosive showdown between him and my supervisor, Mary Douglas, that I, and my thesis topic, were not thrown out. My fieldwork as a carpenter in a small building firm that was merrily transforming rat-infested slums into glorious heritage—a process now called "gentrification"—was evidently not what anthropologists were expected to do, and this was rendered even worse by my site being just a mile or so up the road rather than thousands of miles away on some Pacific island. Nor was that the end of it. The centrality of dynamical systems—that ecological parallel between Corbs and Moles, on the one hand, and lions and wildebeest, on the other—was suspiciously "scientific", as too was the then novel mathematics—catastrophe theory—that I had had to equip myself with. Unsurprisingly, I soon found myself working in an institute for applied systems analysis, and that is where I have remained: still an anthropologist, but a funny looking one.

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6 It is also called *cultural theory*. Indeed, it has sailed, and continues to sail, under a host of names, none of which is entirely satisfactory and some of which are simply too much of a mouthful. Plural Rationality, thanks to its brevity and its carrying of little confusing baggage, is probably the best of the bunch.

So if the rest of this chapter appears a bit odd—jumping from architecture to art to engineering, for instance, and from households to cities to global scale material flows—that is the reason. Looking on the bright side, it does massively expand the territory and usefulness of anthropology in today's world. Perhaps the prime example of that has been in relation to climate change, with its profoundly altered material flows: carbon dioxide, water, energy and so on. Not that that expansion has been enthusiastically embraced by the profession. Indeed Steve Rayner famously chided his fellow anthropologists (it was in RAIN, the newsletter of the Royal Anthropological Institute) for "fiddling while the world warms" (see Douglas et al, 2003; Rayner and Malone, 1998; Verweij et al, 2006; 2022). So, for a moment, I will step back in order to anchor this Rubbish Theory argument to something more readily recognisable as anthropology.

Flows of Ancestors: Flows of Possessable Objects[7]

The Tiv—an anthropologically renowned people in West Africa—are organised in terms of a vast family tree: a *segmentary lineage system*.[8] Descent is traced through the male line and their distribution in

7 This section—Flows of Ancestors, Flows of Possible Objects—draws, in part, on a rather ambitious paper (too ambitious some may feel) that pushes the Rubbish Theory argument pretty well all the way to a ToE (Theory of Everything, Thompson, 2003a). That such a pushing is possible is, I think, interesting and challenging, but it is not really needed for the purposes of this book. However, that said the ToE-like nature of the theory has been touched on in Benedict Singleton's introductory chapter, where he draws our attention to the idea of a "rubbish triangle" that subsumes class and caste (more properly, the "fundamental dimensions: status and power") within a single dynamical framing. And this simple "hydrological model" – three "cisterns" (Transient, Rubbish and Durable) and two "taps" (fought over by the Crashers-through, the High Priests and so on) – has now been complemented by other dynamic representations, along with an assembling of other fourfold schemes that have been proposed (largely by theorists of organisation, Thompson, 2008). One of these is the "four function paradigm" that was developed, back in the 1950s and 60s, by Parsons, Bales and Shils. And that was a ToE: a ToE that, alas, has not stood the test of time. Rubbish Theory claims to have rescued this Parsonian endeavour by showing that its four functions, far from being functional for the totality—the entire social system—are each functional for just one way of organising, and dysfunctional for the other three. The overall system, *contra* Parsons, Bales and Shils who assumed equilibrium, is sustained by the disequilibrium of its contending parts.

8 The Tiv are explained in more detail (and with supporting references to their ethnographers) in Thompson 1979; 2017.

space—Tivland, as it is called—maps onto this genealogical scheme. The result is that segments—those descended from, say, two brothers X generations back—will always be next to one another on the ground. This means that, if there is a dispute between two Tiv, each can mobilise his or her segment—first generation, second generation and so on—until they reach the point where they have mobilised the segments that are descended from two brothers. So they have no need of leaders (chiefs, headmen, etc); indeed, leaders would mess up this mobilisation process: they are what is called an *acephalous society* (a "tribe without rulers").[9] But surely, it will be objected, a genealogical scheme that encompasses four million people will soon become hopelessly unwieldy. On top of that, the requirement that it makes sense of all the Tiv—not just in time but in space as well—will surely render it unworkable after just a few generations.

Well, neither of these debilitating consequences has arrived. Though new generations are being added all the time, the genealogy has remained at just 16 or so generations, and today's Tiv, despite all the territorial and demographic upheavals they have undergone, still manage to live next to their closest kin, and their segments still remain numerically balanced. This means that some compression must be happening: some generations, somewhere, must be being lost from the family tree as new ones are being added. And some of those ancestors who have not been lost must be being rearranged, otherwise the spatial distribution of the Tiv would drift out of line with their temporal distribution. Both of these essential adjustments require amnesia. Some ancestors have to be forgotten entirely and some relationships have to become sufficiently blurred, thereby enabling people to become convinced that two brothers, say, are really father and son.

Such compression and rearrangement, however, are simply not possible at the two extremes of the genealogy. Tiv himself and his sons and their sons are fixed in myth (and in the regional divisions of Tivland) and, at the other extreme, people *know* who their fathers,

9 The most famous of which are the Nuer of southern Sudan, who were first described by Evans-Pritchard (1940). Their lineage system functions in much the same as Tiv's, but has only 11 or so generations.

grandfathers and great-grandfathers are or were ("Every man", they say, "has three fathers"). This means that *duration* reaches back three or so generations from the present, while *eternity* reaches forward three or so generations from Tiv himself: the father of them all. So the forgetting—the black hole of oblivion—must be somewhere in between: somewhere in the eight or so middle generations. Only in that range are compression and rearrangement possible and, even then, only through the exercise of impressive political skills. As their ethnographers have long stressed: "politics among the Tiv is conducted in the idiom of kinship".

So identity—being a Tiv and staying a Tiv—would simply not be possible without this amnesia. That amnesia, moreover, requires this threefold structuring: eternity (to keep the founding fathers anchored just 16 generations back), duration (to allow for not being able to pull the wool over people's eyes about their immediate ancestors) and oblivion (to enable the compression and rearrangement that will keep the whole segmentary lineage show on the road).

Not that the Tiv's is the only way of doing this. The Sherpas of Nepal, for instance, go to considerable lengths not to mention the names of the dead, and this means that the "curtain of amnesia" is brought forward much closer to the present, thereby making it impossible for them to anchor rights to land and other property in the weight of history (Thompson, 1982). Sometimes, as with the introduction of state-imposed records of births, deaths and marriages in eighteenth century Austria, the curtain is pushed back, resulting in a reduction of the compression and rearrangement the population had previously enjoyed. But, though the boundary lines may shift, there will always be *some* structuring. In other words, duration (our common-sense understanding of time) has always to be framed by something—some combination of eternity and oblivion—that is not itself duration.[10]

10 This section draws on an early version of the first half of the 2003a paper that appeared in Lab: Jahrbuch (2001-2002) Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln (eds Thomas Hensel, Hans Ulrich Reck and Siegfried Zielinski. Köln: Walter König). It has recently been republished (Thompson 2022). I am indebted to Siegfried Zielinski for pointing out to me that Rubbish Theory is saying something interesting about time.

And, if that is the general rule, then it is unlikely that we "moderns" are exempt (as is suggested, in relation to quantum mechanics and super-string theory, in Thompson, 2022).

However, though kinship and genealogy are by no means irrelevant in modern societies, it is the social life of things—paintings, furniture, houses and, indeed, everything that comes under the rubrics of "material culture" and "natural resources"—that is most revealing of the time/space structure by which we struggle to maintain and transform our lives with one another.

"That's a nice car you have there" someone may say to us, and we reply modestly "Yes but it's second-hand, you know". But we could not give that modest reply if someone said "That's a nice Rembrandt you have there", nor could we give it if the car in question was a "vintage" car: a Bugatti, say. The explanation, of course, and as we have seen, is provided by that Rubbish Theory diagram (Figure 1). Most objects—the Bugatti, for instance—start off in the Transient category and are only later, if at all, transferred, via Rubbish, to Durability.[11] In other words, there is a structure here that exactly matches the structure that enables the Tiv and their segmentary lineage system to keep on going. Durability ("A thing of beauty is a joy forever") equates to eternity, Transience ("Here today, gone tomorrow") is measured out in duration, and Rubbish ("Out of sight, out of mind") matches oblivion. But, though these transfers relate to the social life of things, they are also intricately connected to the social life of people: creativity and upward mobility going with the transition from Rubbish to Durability and, in the other direction, social marginality and fatalistic resignation going with the decline from Transience into Rubbish. Those who ride the downward flow, therefore, are not at all the same as those who ride the upward

11 The vast majority, of course, never make the transfer; they are thrown away, scrapped, recycled or whatever around the time their value has declined more or less to zero. Bugatti-owners face a different problem, thanks to their *penchant* for racing their increasingly valuable vehicles. They have resolved this slide towards extinction by admitting Ferrari-owners to their exclusive club: a Tiv-like rearrangement that is justified by the argument that Ferraris are the Bugattis "de nos jours".

one. And it is by these sorts of transfers, together with these sorts of changes of riders, that our class-based societies are able to continually realign status and power, and thereby perpetuate themselves.

So these transfers—from Transient through Rubbish to Durable—do not happen of their own accord (any more than the Tiv's compressions and rearrangements happen of their own accord). Rather, these transfers require the interactions of the requisite variety of what Durkheim (1893) called *social beings*.

- There are the "Crashers Through": those creative and upwardly mobile characters who effect the transfers to Durability.
- There are the "High Priests" (like those literary critics who strive to define what shall be admitted to "the canon": keeping the sauce bottle labels separate from the Shakespeare sonnets) who try to prevent these transfers.
- There are the "Levellers"—revolutionaries who by flooding the Durable category ("debauching the currency", as Lenin put it) are able to diminish both status and power—who are intent on getting more and more of what they are after: equality (see Reno, 2017).
- And there are the "Losers Out" (those, like ourselves when we see in an antique shop window something we recently threw away) who, despite all their efforts, keep finding themselves at the bottom of the pile.

These four, a little more formally set out, are the upholders of the four distinct *forms of social solidarity* (or *ways of organising*) that are at the heart of the theory of plural rationality: *individualism*, *hierarchy*, *egalitarianism* and *fatalism*, respectively. Corb, referring back to our architecture students and their essays, is clearly an upholder of hierarchy (and an avid declutterer) but Moles, we can now see, come in three different species, each hoarding in its distinctive way. However, and this is the point Peter York is making, they will likely not see that

as hoarding. Hoarding, rather, is what the hierarchical declutterers see them as doing. In other words, the declutterers are treating all these "non-conforming" households as an undifferentiated blob. So, as Peter York is suggesting, I need to show how this is not the case.

The Four-Plus-One Household Consumption Styles

A study of 220 British households (Dake and Thompson, 1999) confirms that those basic consumption units fall into the four-plus-one styles that are predicted by the theory of plural rationality. This is in contrast to rational choice theory (which sees them as all the same: rational utility maximisers) and to post-modernism (which sees them as incomparably different): a plague on both your houses, you might say (Verweij et al, 2006). It further shows that each style is quite thick on the ground and that they all work their way through into markedly different "purchasing preferences": shopping baskets with systematically different contents. Moreover, since manufacturers soon learn not to produce things that people do not want (or cannot be persuaded to want), these purchasing preferences quickly work their way through into markedly different material flows within the economy (and the ecosystem) as a whole. And changes in these purchasing preferences quickly work their way through into changes in these material flows.

In other words, what is coming into a household will vary with its consumption style, and so too will what is subsequently retained and discarded. So the material flows—their contents, not just their volumes—will vary according to a household's style, and so too will the definition of what counts as clutter. Moreover, these styles (as with Mole and Corb, but with the plurality bumped up from two to four-plus-one) constitute a dynamical system (as is evident from their continued, but far from balanced, co-existence). And that dynamical system, as we will see, is then reproduced, fractile-wise, as we move to the city that contains those households, and then to the planet that contains those cities.

- *Individualistic* householders are fashion-conscious, like to look successful, prefer a tidy garden and don't join clubs (in the manner of Groucho Marx, who would not join any club that would have him as a member). They do not go in for vegetarianism, biodegradable products, or informality, nor do they allot specific chores within the household or go out of their way to avoid "fascist vegetables" and the like: the products as we coyly put it (we were doing this research for the Anglo-Dutch multinational Unilever), of "oppressive institutions". (This was in the 1990s, around the time when many people were boycotting produce from apartheid South Africa and similar "odious regimes"; the particularities of these styles will of course vary over time—these ones are already displaying a sort of period charm—but we can expect the principles that underlie these particularities to remain the same).
- *Hierarchical* householders are status-sensitive: different wines at their dinner parties for the ladies and the gentlemen, for instance, with one household going so far as to buy Huntley and Palmer biscuits for its human members and DOB (Dealer Own Brand) for the dog. They use traditional ingredients, have their own places at table, are sticklers for punctuality, and wash their clothes on "wash-day" having first sorted them out according to colour and fabric. They do not boycott certain products, nor do they find that work often runs late, nor do they go in for takeaway meals They are not prepared to put up with old furniture (apart from antiques), nor are they comfortable with a house that is untidy.
- *Egalitarian* households are about as opposed to both individualistic and hierarchical ones as it is possible for them to get. Communality, together with unprocessed foods and biodegradable products (which, moreover,

should be made by institutions that are not oppressive) is what they look for: an informal, joining, vegetarian sort of life, in a pleasantly scruffy house filled with furniture that is not new (indeed, often recycled) and surrounded by a garden that (whilst often productive) is far from tidy. Unlike their individualistic and hierarchical counterparts, they are not "brand-loyal", nor are they fashion-conscious, nor do they wash their clothes on the same day each week, or sort them out into separate piles before they put them into the washing machine (such households, in consequence, are quite easily spotted: the "Pinky-Greys", as they are now dubbed within Unilever).

- *Fatalistic* householders make few long-term plans, find it difficult to save money, and are much addicted to takeaway meals. They do not have regular routines, or allotted household tasks, or their own places at table. Indeed, their takeaway meals are likely to be eaten off their knees, in front of that quintessentially fatalistic piece of technology: the television (Putnam, 1995; Schmutzer, 1994). The keeping of KFC plates that is mentioned by Peter York would typify this style.
- *Autonomous* householders (the "plus-one"), unsurprisingly given the way they strive to distance themselves from all four of the consumptive positions that the other households dig themselves into, are less easily pinned down. This is because their style—conviviality without coercion—includes elements from all of the others and yet manages to remain detached. They embrace novelty as does the individualistic householder, but do not seek to emulate him/her (that is, the competitive component is missing); there is something timeless, rather than the hierarchical traditional, about the unchanging elements in their consumption (the Dalai Lama's famous letter, as he was

> fleeing the Chinese invasion of Tibet, was addressed to "*tsampa*-eaters everywhere", *tsampa* being the parched barley staple of the region). And, though they are certainly in favour of naturalness (the celebrated Tibetan hermit Milarepa ended up living on boiled nettles) they manage to avoid the sort of moral righteousness that comes so easily to their egalitarian counterparts. Hermits may be holy, but they're not holier-than-thou. This style, moreover (and perhaps surprisingly, given its Buddhist affinities), is, like the other four, quite common in contemporary Britain.[12]

In other words, and *contra* neoclassical economics' *non-satiety requirement*, not everyone is a rational utility maximiser. Indeed the requirement holds only for the individualist actor. The others are gathered around quite different moral positions (see Thompson, 2010).

Finally, the Far-Reaching Implications

There is a sort of orthodoxy nowadays which sees the material flows that we are generating as excessive and environmentally *unsustainable*.[13] Carbon dioxide from fossil fuels, sand and gravel for construction work, mangoes being flown into Europe from Honduras, domestic waste demanding more and more landfill sites, pig slurry (rich in nitrogen and phosphorous) causing algae blooms in the North Sea … on and on. Greed, thoughtlessness, a capitalist system out of

12 These five styles are further elaborated, in contrast to the rational choice view that underpins neoclassical economics, in Thompson (2010). The "plus-one"—autonomy—is often ignored by cultural theorists. Indeed, Mary Douglas herself, having recognised the hermit's existence, elected to take him "off the social map". In fact the social map, once drawn correctly, does have a location for this somewhat socially withdrawn solidarity at its very centre (as is explained in Thompson, 1982; 2008; Thompson et al, 1990).

13 This and the next two sections draw on a number of sources: *Rubbish Theory* itself, of course, but also a chapter (in German) in the proceedings from a conference—Aspects of Rubbish: From the Stone Age to the Yellow Sack—at the Landesmuseum für Natur und Mensch, Oldenburg, Germany (Thompson, 2003b). Both these were subsequently drawn on in a paper for the UK Government's Foresight Future of Cities Project (Thompson and Beck, 2014).

control, the triumph of competition over cooperation, the inequitable relationship between the nations of the North and those of the South, and anthropomorphism—our domination of nature when what is needed is a self-effacing recognition that we are but one component within an intricately connected and inherently fragile ecosystem—are prominent among the reasons that are advanced for the material flows—the stuff that we are pushing around (and being pushed around by)—being the way they are.

The umbrella concept for those who study such material flows is *societal metabolism* – the way in which societies organise their exchange of matter and energy with their natural environment (for example, Ayres and Simonis, 1994; Beck et al, 2013; Brunner and Rechberger, 2003; Fischer-Kowalski and Haberl, 1993; 1998; Schmidt-Bleek, 1994). Since they are subject to conservation principles—neither matter nor energy being created or destroyed—these exchanges are typically expressed in terms of stocks and flows. And the aim is to build up a detailed picture of just what is going where as a result of our social involvement with our physical world. Sometimes the depletion of natural resources is the focus (for example, Meadows et al, 1972); more recently the filling-up of available "sinks" (oceans, landfills … the atmosphere) has come to the fore (for example, Meadows et al, 1992). Taken together, these approaches to (or overshootings of) nature's limits have now been framed in terms of a gross imbalance between that portion of the earth's "primary product" that is appropriated by us humans and what is left over for the rest of creation (e.g. Vitousek et al, 1986; Wright, 1999). And this framing has now been further generalised in terms of a number of "planetary boundaries": dangerous climate change, loss of biodiversity, gross distortions of the nitrogen and phosphorous cycles, and so on (e.g. Lynas, 2011; Raworth, 2017; Rockström et al 2009).

This orthodox framing of the problem, clearly, is being done from a moral position—indeed, the whole discourse takes the form of a sermon about our profligacy and what it is doing to our relationships with one another and with nature—and those who adopt that moral

position, equally clearly, will be having some effect on the material flows. But, and this is the key to those far-reaching implications, there are *other* moral positions and *other* ways of framing the problem (see, for instance, the critique of the planetary boundaries framing by Nordhaus et al, 2012). And it is this plurality of moral positions, and their modes of interaction, that are actually determining the material flows (those flows being, as it were, the resultant of the diverse forces that are being exerted by those who are gathered at each of the moral positions). This means that, if you are interested in the material flows, and in finding ways of altering those material flows, you will get nowhere until you have a map of those moral positions (Beck et al, 2013).

Mapping the Moral Positions

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the provision of housing in London was almost totally in the hands of the planners: far-sighted experts who were convinced that, for the common good, the development of the built environment should be brought under control and firmly steered in the desired direction. One of their main concerns, therefore, was the renewal of the war-torn and worn-out fabric of the inner city. One of their number, Harold P. Clunn, put it like this:

> "London … is marching on to a destiny which will make it the grandest city in the whole world … London must be allowed to grow upwards and the straggling villas and small houses of Highbury, Barnsbury, Stoke Newington, Hackney, Maida Vale and St John's Wood must give way to new blocks of flats" (Clunn, undated: 26-27).

In material terms, Clunn—a declutterer if ever there was one—is talking about a good half of London's fabric: all that part, beyond the old cities of London and Westminster, that was built by the Georgians and the Victorians. It is roughly the equivalent, in Vienna, of demolishing and re-building everything between the Ringstrasse and the Gürtel. In New York, it would not be far short of the whole of Manhattan, together with outlying places such as Brooklyn Heights.

Much of this vast swathe of London did indeed give way to new blocks of flats and, if the planners had had it all their own way, and if enough money had been made available to them, their algorithms for determining just when a section of the built environment had become "optimally demolishable" (their terminology) would have ensured that every urban acre underwent its "comprehensive redevelopment" (again their terminology). Fortunately, a creative and motley alliance of owner-occupiers and grassroots activists (the Victorian Society, for instance, and the association that sprang up to fight the demolition of Islington's Packington Square) who saw these 18th and 19th century houses as sadly neglected heritage not rat-infested slums (the official perception, as voiced by the then housing minister, Richard Crossman), were able, through their myriad and often uncoordinated efforts, to derail the planners' singular and unrelenting vision of the New Jerusalem.[14] It was this anarchic and innovative bunch—all Moles, of course, but of more than one species—who, in effect, privatised the despised communal burden, *re-valued* it (just one of those "straggling villas and small houses" could now set you back several millions of pounds) and put it into the healthy and highly liveable state in which we now see it. This re-valuing of the built environment is something that now continues apace in almost every European and North American city (and even in less occidental places, such as Kathmandu), but it would never have happened if control had remained in the hands of the planners.

If today's material flows are indeed unsustainable just think what they would be like if the planners had had their way! And, since it is those "anarchic and innovative privatisers"—the villains of the piece in the conventional orthodoxy about the unsustainability of our material flows—who we have to thank for averting that horrendous future, we should pause to examine how they did it. *They* were the actors who invented the re-valuing of the built environment. *They* were the ones who put a stop to the total physical renewal of the city every 50 years

14 *The Sack of Bath – And After* (Fergusson and Mowl, 1989) chronicles what was perhaps the most spectacular instance of this sort of derailment.

or so. It was *their* undermining of the planners' "vision of the future" that resulted in all the "social learning" that we are the beneficiaries of today. In other words, if they have managed to move things so *far* in the material flow-lessening direction that is seen as so desirable by those who espouse the conventional orthodoxy, then we should seek to build on those achievements if we wish to go even further: all the way to the point where we are living in cities that are "walking on air" (Beck, 2011; 2014). This realisation has some important consequences.

- Those parts of London's inner suburbs that were comprehensively redeveloped resulted in massive material flows. The bricks and mortar from those optimally demolished buildings were all carted away to be dumped in landfills or used as hardcore, and all the timber—flooring, joists, staircases, rafters, doors, etc.—was burnt on-site. Many of the replacements—high-rise systems-built tower blocks, in particular—have proved disastrous, structurally, socially or both, and have had to be demolished long before their planned 60-year life has elapsed (indeed, one of them—Ronan Point, in the Borough of Newham—demolished itself, less than a year into its allotted span).
- These colossal flows dwindle to a trickle in the case of those parts that have been re-valued. The bricks, the mortar, the timber, the slates and the cast-iron balconies are still in place; they have not flowed anywhere. Of course, there has been work, and there will have to be much more if those houses are to stay in existence forever, which is the present intention.
- But the flows that are generated by the careful and continuous repair of a renewable resource (which is what this swathe of London has now become) are altogether different from those that are generated by comprehensive redevelopment. Now, when a part of a building *is*

demolished, every brick is saved, even half-bricks (which form what look like "headers" in the modern cavity wall construction method, in which the outer brick skin is tied, using alloy links, to an inner blockwork skin). Even more so with fireplaces, handrails, cast-iron fitments, door furniture and so on, all of which are profitably recycled by way of small local businesses that specialise in what is called *architectural salvage*.

- The building work itself is much more skilled, and it is labour-intensive (not material intensive and machine-intensive, as is comprehensive re-development). It is also much more local and small-scale: good builders being passed on, by word-of-mouth, from house to house, often without even a change of street.
- Along with the growth of architectural salvage, there has been an astonishing re-birth of skills that had virtually disappeared by the 1960s: ornamental plastering, bespoke kitchen-making, traditional joinery, scagliola, stained glass, the laying of tessellated floors … on and on. There is nothing that originally went into these houses that is not now being produced or done.
- And, to help people actually do it all, there is now a whole communication industry—from museum curators and academics to glossy magazines (like *Period Living and Traditional Homes*), coffee-table books and television programmes—all merrily coining it in and spreading the word.
- Nor would it be right to see all this as "retro" or neo-Luddite. New technologies—timber-treatments, damp-proofing, forced ventilation, "Velux" roof windows, the afore-mentioned cavity wall construction methods, and so on—are key ingredients in this process that has been set in train by re-valuation. This inner swathe of London, moreover, probably contains the highest proportion of

"home-workers" anywhere in Britain (especially now that the re-valuing of former warehouses and factories has provided all those "work-live" units). Indeed, these homes/workplaces fairly hum with the latest information technology. For instance, the 18th century silk-weavers' houses in Spitalfields (the until recently run-down district immediately adjoining the City of London) have become the electronic cottages of the 21st century, providing an impressive response to one of the great challenges of the new millennium: *designing for selective slowness*. Until recently, getting anything to go faster was automatically better, but, with the transition to the "post-industrial city", this is no longer the case, and these houses and their inhabitants now combine very high-speed and high-volume technologies of information with impressively slowed-down material flows (the "slow food movement", for instance, and a very low level of car-ownership). Far from having "turned their backs on the future" or "pulled the plug on progress" (which has been the prevailing perception; see Katz 1996) these dwellings-cum-inhabitants *are* the future.

So the good news is that we used to be committed to physically turning over our built environment every 50 or so years and now we are not. And it is the market and egalitarian actors—the owner-occupier moles and the grassroots activist ones—that we have to thank for that, not the hierarchical actors. Re-valuation, we should note, is altogether different from re-cycling. In re-cycling, the building itself disappears and its physical components are then re-used in the construction of a new building (or, more likely, buildings). Re-valuation, however, is something that happens in our heads, and the building itself stays in place. The only change, to begin with, is in our attitude to the building. But, once we see it as sadly neglected Glorious Heritage, rather than awful rat-infested slum, our behaviour towards it changes and that (as

we have just seen) leads to all sorts of changes in the material flows associated with the city of which it is part.

So, we now have the map of moral positions: the hierarchical institutions (Mr Clunn and his ilk) with their "New Jerusalem", the egalitarian institutions (the proponents of that limits respecting orthodoxy) with their insistence that we need "a whole new relationship with nature", and the individualist institutions (the market-oriented owner-occupiers) with their noses atwitch at the prospect of re-valuation. Individualistic actors, being in (Mary Douglas's felicitous term) "pragmatic materialists", might seem to be the odd ones out here, but there *is* a moral position around which those who believe in a life of bidding and bargaining are gathered. This is the Adam Smithian argument that the pursuit of self-interest pays off only when it adds to the welfare of the totality: "the hidden hand". With this map, (to which the fatalist institutions will be added in the next section) we can now resist the almost overwhelming urge to pronounce just one of these positions right and the others wrong.

Plurality and Clumsiness

About half a century after the de-railing of Mr Clunn's clutter-free vision of the future, Arsenal Football Club decided they really would have to do something about their Highbury stadium. It only held 30,000 spectators and they needed double that. Also, the pitch was slightly under-sized and this detracted from their status as one of the premier clubs in the world. Thus, it was that Arsenal (I will call it the *market—i.e. individualist—actor*) sidled up to Islington Borough Council (I'll call it the *hierarchical actor*) with the suggestion that the council give the go-ahead—"outline planning permission"—for Arsenal to acquire, and demolish, the two streets of houses immediately adjacent to its stadium, thereby enabling it to expand its capacity to 60,000, along with a full-sized pitch.

Most of social science (especially in relation to public policy and urban governance) assumes that that is it: if it isn't the market it's the hierarchy, and *vice versa* (as, for instance, with financial sector firms

and financial regulators, or Margaret Thatcher's attempt to create an "enterprise culture" by laying into the unions, the professions and other bastions of privilege and restrictive practices).[15] But it is not. Within less than twenty-four hours of Arsenal's approach to Islington Council becoming public knowledge, a third actor emerged: the Highbury Community Association. Its members were implacably opposed to the solution Arsenal was proposing: the *only* solution, Arsenal insisted, playing what it thought was its trump card, if the club was to remain in the borough.

So, this third actor—I'll call it the *egalitarian actor* (its arguments being largely couched in terms of the unfair treatment of residents, small local businesses, the unemployed and so on)—really put the cat among the pigeons. An enormous controversy blew up, a petition with thousands of signatures was delivered to Islington Town Hall, and there was a vigorous television debate (chaired by the former government minister, Ann Widdecombe). It soon became clear, trump card or not, that there was no way Arsenal was going to get permission to expand on its Highbury site. Various alternatives were then proposed—one of which was to relocate to a vast regeneration project, just a couple of miles away, around King's Cross and St Pancras stations—but none proved to be feasible. So it began to look as though Arsenal had indeed been right and that the club, to the dismay of both the council and its loyal supporters, would indeed have to move right out of the borough: all the way out to near the M25 orbital motorway.

But then two commercial property surveyors, who also happened to be fanatical Arsenal supporters, got out their maps. To everyone's surprise (including theirs) they found a triangular piece of rather low-rent and under-used land, bounded on two sides by busy railway lines, that would comfortably take a 60,000-seat stadium. Even more amazingly, as well as being already owned by the council, it was less than half-a-mile away from the old stadium and its hallowed (but

15 Margaret Thatcher's "crusade" was analysed, almost while it was underway, in a volume explicitly focused on "Themes in the Work of Mary Douglas" (Hargreaves Heap and Ross 1992).

under-sized) turf. Cutting a long story short, in August 2006—just four years later, on-time and on-budget—Arsenal moved into its new stadium: onto this near-ideal site, the very existence of which had remained entirely unnoticed until the three-cornered battle—the market actor, the hierarchical actor and the egalitarian actor—had been joined.

So, this is a nice example of what is now called (with tongue in cheek) a *clumsy solution*: a solution that, in contrast to the familiar *elegant solutions*, emerges only in those situations where each of these three kinds of actor is (a) able to make itself heard (*accessibility*) and (b) then responsive to, rather than dismissive of, the others (*responsiveness*). Things, we can now see, started off over-elegant (just Arsenal and Islington Council); they only became clumsified when the third actor—the Highbury Community Association—managed to force its way in.

Moreover, in a clumsy solution—and this is the counter-intuitive bit—each actor ends up with more of what it wants (and less of what it doesn't want) than it would have got if it had somehow managed to achieve "hegemony" and impose its distinctive (and elegant) solution.

- *Arsenal* (the market actor) has got its state-of-the-art stadium (and a handsome price for its old stadium, which has now been re-developed, mostly for housing).
- *Islington Council* (the hierarchical actor) has kept the club in the borough (and extracted a colossal "planning gain": thousands of new houses, a futuristic waste-transfer and re-cycling centre, some badly needed public open space and so on).
- *The Highbury Community Association* (the egalitarian actor) has saved the streets and houses around the old stadium and forced the council to ensure that those businesses displaced by the new stadium were re-located within the borough, and without any loss of jobs. Of course, they are still critical, especially over the failure

to build a new tube station within the stadium (the Piccadilly Line passes directly beneath it) but they do have the satisfaction of knowing that the new stadium is the greenest in the world. (For a more detailed account see Thompson, 2008, chap. 1).

- Even the disregarded *fatalist actors*—the "cannon fodder" supporters who find their way on foot, stopping off at their favoured pubs and chip shops—have done quite well. Reaching the new stadium is still feasible, whilst they could never have made it to an out-of-the-borough venue.

So my argument, in a nutshell, is that we need to ensure that every decision—every essay at coping with change—mimics what happened with Arsenal's new stadium. In that case, of course, the clumsy solution came about by *accident*: the rude intrusion of the initially excluded egalitarian actor turning out to be so constructive. The challenge is to get it to happen, every time, by *design*.

But why, it might be objected, if it is as easy as this, do we not see clumsy solutions all over the place? The answer is that the two necessary conditions—accessibility and responsiveness—are not easily achieved. Indeed, the four precepts of policy analysis—(a) insist on a single agreed definition of the problem, (b) clearly distinguish between facts and values, (c) set up a "single metric" (pounds, lives saved, etc.) so as to be able to compare and evaluate options, and (d) optimise around the best option—together ensure the silencing of all but one actor. So, if we want to find our way to clumsy solutions, we will have to insert the words "do not" in each of those precepts. And that, outrageous though it may appear, is what I am proposing.[16]

So those "far-reaching implications" boil down to something very different from the way the design process is usually handled. How, rather than struggling to decide which elegant solution is the right one and then rejecting the rest, do we somehow or other draw on the

16 For a more reasoned justification for this proposal, with an explanation for why it is now being seen as less outrageous, see the concluding chapter of Verweij and Thompson (2009).

experience and wisdom that is inherent in them all? In other words, we are back with those architecture students and their essays: back with the all-too-common situation in which just one voice—in their case, of course, it was the hierarchical and decluttering Corb voice urging architects to "rid their minds of all dead concepts"—drowning out the others: those of the poor old Moles.

Bring On the Clutter

The design of clumsy solutions, unsurprisingly, turns out to be most easily achieved in situations where a long-dominant elegant solution, for some reason or other, has hit the buffers. For architecture's Modern Movement, for instance, this happened, literally with a bang, when, in the US, Pruitt Eigo—a prize-winning housing project in St Louis that had become uninhabitable—was blown up. In the UK, something similar happened when one quarter of the system-built tower-block, Ronan Point, demolished itself (unfortunately, unlike Pruitt Eigo, with some loss of life). Almost overnight, architects found themselves knee-deep in dead concepts (post-modernism—as defined by architect Charles Jenks rather than Derrida, Lyotard et al—prominent among them) that had miraculously sprung back to life.

Usually, however, clumsy solutions need some coaxing, and there are now many case studies of how this has been done. I can mention the ones in the books *Clumsy Solutions for a Complex World* (Verweij and Thompson 2009) and in *Aid, Technology and Development: the Lessons from Nepal* (Gyawali et al, 2017). But perhaps the prime example is the participatory process by which the landslide risks faced by the Italian town of Nocere Inferiore, thanks to its proximity to Mount Vesuvius, were successfully mitigated (Scolobig et al, 2015). All these, of course, involve engineers or architects (or both) and what soon becomes evident is that these professions always operate on a *contested terrain*. Though their practitioners may refuse to recognize it, there are different, and contending, *schools of architectural and engineering thought*. In the UK, for instance, "starchitects" like Norman Foster and Richard Rogers are very much of the individualist school; Richard

MacCormack a leading light in the egalitarian school. And many of their hierarchical school counterparts, having suffered the indignity of seeing some of their buildings demolished within their lifetime, have found themselves shifted across into the fatalist school.[17]

So this—clumsy solutions, contested terrains and contending schools of engineering thought (and of actuarial thought, changing the city requires investment)—is where Rubbish Theory has now got us to: Rubbish Mark 2, you might say.[18]

17 Most famously, perhaps, Owen Luder's brutalist multi-storey car-park in Gateshead that features in the film "Get Carter".

18 This is a somewhat novel and challenging enterprise. The gist of which is set out in Thompson and Beck (2014), Thompson, Beck and Gyawali (2019), Beck, Gyawali and Thompson (2019) and Thompson (2017).

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Acknowledgements

This book is the joyous product of friendships I have forged over many years – in one case dating all the way back to New Year's Eve 2006! As such, it has proved a real labour of love, and I would like to thank first all the contributors for their enthusiasm and engagement throughout this book's gestation process. It has been a real pleasure to bring together so many people from different parts of my academic life. I hope we can continue to mine many of the productive research seams we identify here and continue to meet up for years to come. Here's mud in your eye!

During the production of this book, various texts were presented in 2023 at two seminars at the Department of Sociology, University of Gothenburg and at the 2024 Mary Douglas seminar at University College London. I am grateful to all the participants for their interest and input.

I would like to thank the editorial and production team at MayFly Books, particularly Charles Barthold, for his encouragement and assistance over the past two years.

Benedict Singleton,

Karlstad, January 2026

All That Glitters Is Not Garbage presents a range of cases unified by the application of Rubbish Theory to explore the social processes through which objects come to be valued, preserved and discarded. Chapters discuss the production of art, the disposition of the possessions of the deceased and efforts to institute a Circular Economy. Other chapters address issues and topics beyond the solid objects that many in the Global North associate with Rubbish, from Chinese mining parks to Indigenous community tourism, from the history of Faroese wool to the legal personhood of nature and more. This book highlights how ordering processes around objects link to social organisation and conflict. Playful, creative and critical, it highlights the Rubbish Theory's value as a provocative, insightful tool for thinking about numerous social scientific topics.

"The symbolic distinction between what is valued and non-valued constitutes a powerful social, political, and historical force. ... *All That Glitters Is Not Garbage* brings with it a positive message that there is always hope for the discarded."

Magnus Boström, Örebro University

"This volume embodies a refreshingly open and curious approach to understanding the infrastructures—and inertias and inconstancies—of power and cultural, economic and social capital. It offers both roadmaps for the beginner and critical interventions on social hierarchy and conflict. ... Both playful in spirit and quite serious on questions of comparative value and power, it reminds us, humbly but powerfully, that people not only can, but will, change the ordering systems that now dominate us with such apparent irreversibility."

Laurie Kain Hart, University of California, Los Angeles

"I am fascinated by the depth of quality research and critical thought invested by authors in their analysis of Rubbish Theory. Readers from diverse disciplines, especially students of consumerism, sociology, climate change and sustainability scholarship in general, will find the book most relevant. I highly recommend it."

Ikechukwu Umejesi, University of Fort Hare

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ISBN 978-1-906948-82-5
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9 781906 948825