Terrain Vague

Interstices at the Edge of the Pale

Edited by Manuela Mariani and Patrick Barron

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First edition published 2014
by Routledge

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Terrain vague: interstices at the edge of the pale/[edited by] Manuela Mariani, Patrick Barron.—First edition.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Terrain vague. I. Mariani, Manuela, editor of compilation. II. Barron, Patrick, 1968– editor of compilation.
NA9050.T47 2013
711'.4–dc23 2013006667

ISBN13: 978–0–415–82767–6 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978–0–415–82768–3 (pbk)
ISBN13: 978–0–203–52217–2 (ebk)

Typeset in Univers
by Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon, UK

Contents

Figures

Chapter 11

Garbage Arcadia

Digging for Choruses in Fresh Kills

Jennifer Scappettone

Fresh Kills: a landscape yielded from half a century of "mounding," or the dumping of up to 29,000 tons of trash per day, for decades the largest of its kind in the world. Such massiveness abstracted from its contents isn't articulate, and a monument to consumption, on land still off limits, has to exist in time, in transit. This is how a writer came by fits and starts to salvage garbage by threading the dregs of post-consumer language for a chorus: 150 million tons of trash, as sheer lumpen mass, balks eloquence.

Is it possible to mobilize the disgust provoked by encounter with what has been cast off, to transform a wasteland from an abject repository of undifferentiated filth into an archive?[1] Can one render its contents, negated and amalgamated as ambiguous matter, coherent only in being excluded from the *polis* as stuff and as discourse, legible to the senses? Iconography falls short of what's required to apprehend this monument bulging from the margins of New York City, notoriously "visible from space" and yet invisible to most of the city's inhabitants: Fresh Kills Landfill, now capped and amounting to 2,315 acres of hillscape risen from a disquieted estuary along the western seams of Staten Island. We are prone to identify monuments by their awe-inspiring measurements: The Washington Monument stands 550 feet, $5^{1}/_{8}$ inches of marble high; the flagpole of the 100-ton Iwo Jima memorial is 60 feet high, and its bronze carbine and M-1 rifle are 12 and 16 feet long; Christo's Abu Dhabi Mastaba is to be wrought of 410,000 oil barrels, at a cost of US$340 million; and so forth. But that Fresh Kills Landfill encompasses 2,315 acres (roughly the size of Lower Manhattan; almost three times the size of Central Park) transmits no sense of what it's like to stand amid one of the world's most

11.1
Performer Rebecca Davis Wanders Among Grasses and Invasive Phragmites on the North Mound of Fresh Kills Landfill During Fieldwork for *PARK* on September 12, 2011. (Photo by Jennifer Scappettone)

populous urban agglomerations surrounded by nothing but the reticence of hillgrasses and sublimity of sky, disrupted only by the occasional crook of a methane pump.

In the brief lifespan of the landfill across the postwar booms and busts of 1948–2002, over half a century of conspicuous consumption, four immense mounds of garbage, rising 125–210 feet high—and containing 150 million volatile tons of solid waste—emerged amid tidal creeks and coastal marshes once inhabited by Lenape fishermen. The moundscape's alarming rise from a long-rural zone whose human presence dates back to 12,000 BCE, from a low-lying island whose giant tulip trees and ocean views were admired by Henry Thoreau, where Charles Olmsted started an experimental farm, must be read in symbiotic relation to the enthusiasm for demolition that characterizes the modern American metropolis, so that, as a 1929 journalist for *The New Yorker* observed, "one does not have to wait if one wants archaeology."[2] In the same fateful year, marketing consultant Christine Frederick wrote:

> It is the ambition of almost every American to practice progressive obsolescence as a ladder by which to climb to greater human satisfactions through the purchase of more of the fascinating and thrilling range of goods and services being offered today.[3]

However, it was not until the postwar moment that this performative enlistment of Americans in a program of planned obsolescence would be practiced on a massive scale, in what Heather Rogers identifies as the "invention" of garbage: With mass production come mass consumption, in which less is actually "consumed," encouraged by disposable merchandise and the manufactured inefficiency of salvage, and a new need for sanitation.[4] The clay ponds of Fresh Kills, first dug for brickmaking in the nineteenth century, were initially slated as a temporary dump by Robert Moses in 1947, part of a "Sanitation, Reclamation, Recreation" plan that would turn Staten Island's salt marshes into real estate. Dumping began directly on the clay, the meadows were leveled, and the dump stayed open; over time, and as the environmental regulations of the 1970s and 1980s encouraged the consolidation of landfills, Fresh Kills became the favored (and, by 1991, the only) dumping ground for the household waste of New York City—until Mayor Rudolph Giuliani finally conceded to political pressure from residents of Staten Island in 1999, agreeing to export the city's trash to South Carolina instead. The facility stopped accepting municipal waste in 2001, only to reopen months later in a controversial effort to handle the material fallout of 9/11: 1.2 million tons of material from the World Trade Center was sifted down to ¼-inch masses and screened before indiscernible remains were laid to rest in an area of clean soil on the West Mound.

Currently inert to the naked eye, this reticent memorial of excess and neglect is on the verge of a 30-year transformation into a green public park, upon the initiative of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and in accordance with a visionary draft master plan released in 2006 by James Corner Field Operations that led Staten Island Borough President James Molinaro to assert,

> Staten Islanders can finally exhale and vacate from within all those remaining pent-up fears—large and small, real and imagined, from the personal to the community-based—that for two generations both defined and stigmatized Staten Island to the nation and the world as someplace you did not want to be in or even near.[5]

But reclamation does not come without ambivalence, skepticism, and even anger on the part of residents who can recall the stench that pervaded the nearby shopping mall and the sky until recently black with gulls. As the landfill undergoes capping in preparation for the site's remediation as Freshkills Park —the words "Fresh" and "Kills," a Dutch term for "creek," being fused in the interest of softening the morbid name—the subdocumentary methods of collaborators on a multiphase performance project called *PARK* have sought to express the volatility of the processes that are being tamped down in the interest of moving on.

* * *

11.2
Performers Abby Block and Tessa Chandler Placing Threaded Trash-Texts on the Surface of the North Mound at Fresh Kills. (Photo by Marina Zamalin)

There are a couple of facts about landscape that make it interesting for a poet, or perhaps one fact and one truism. For one thing, it is devoid of language—apparently. Second, it is full of structure. The structure of these hills, which resemble a sudden upwelling of Northern California on the Atlantic seaboard, provides a thick, dark, and even militaristic poetic in being deeply strategic, anything but immediately lyrical: Sophisticated engineering wrests stability of what is inherently unstable, as in Rome's Monte Testaccio, a 550,000-cubic-meter hill composed entirely of shards from oil amphorae and pottery that arrived in the ancient imperial capital as tribute from the colonies, which the pragmatic Romans, suited to manufacturing landscapes from nullity and vice versa, methodically shattered and stacked. The need to avoid plateaus, to track garbage from different boroughs, and, from the late 1980s forward, when Fresh Kills was forced into environmental compliance by multiple state charges, to prevent landfill by-products from migrating into the surrounding earth, water, and air made for an increasingly sculpted and monitored topography. Regulations obliged the eventual installation of a complex of wells, pumps, terraces, trenches, and swales for the capturing of landfill gas, a product of anaerobic decomposition that can cause explosions, and of the million or more gallons of leachate, an ammonia-rich excretion generated when rainwater picks up decaying garbage, that were, for decades, being dumped into New York Harbor every day. The gas now makes its way through a network of wells, to be either burned off or "purified," its methane extracted for sale to National Grid to fuel homes,

at least until it is no longer profitable to do so. (When that happens, it will be released passively, at legal levels, through the goose-necked pipes punctuating the mounds.) The troublesome leachate juice is now collected in trenches surrounding each mound and piped to a treatment plant, where it is siphoned off from solids, aerated, exposed to bacteria of a certain age that feed on ammonia, exposed to chemicals that pull out metals, and filtered through sand before being released into the Arthur Kill as effluent; the leachate solids are shipped as "cakes" to a landfill in Pennsylvania. These functions will be under surveillance for 30 years, according to the law, as the trash settles inch by inch. Meanwhile, the waste mounds are capped like layer cakes, following an elaborate formula of barriers between rubbish and public: soil, gas vent and drainage layers, impermeable plastic liners, synthetic barrier protection materials, and, finally, planting soil. Ironically, the barriers that stave off the pollution of neighboring earth in landfills have also tended to preserve garbage, preventing it from biodegrading: When a University of Arizona team of researchers, led by archaeologist William Rathje, called The Garbage Project, dug up refuse around the country, it found decades-old fractions of legible newspaper, discarded steaks, and hot dogs still preserved.[6] So, in coming across a distressed but still recognizable Barbie leg during a spring ramble across the mound, one visualizes not only slime, but cells of legible commodities crammed below. On the other hand, the barrier to development on these thousands of acres makes the alienated Fresh Kills terrain a unique habitat for non-human species of Mannahatta—red-tailed hawks, great egrets, muskrats, ospreys, ring-necked pheasants, deer, killdeer, snapping turtles, invasive phragmites, and various meadow grasses and wetland habitats that could restore sacrificed and sorely needed functions such as flood control—to gather and thrive, in hillscapes laced by glimpses of industrial Jersey, the Manhattan skyline, and the Verrazano bridge. These conditions forge a fruitfully estranging hybrid of organic and inorganic phenomena, nature and engineering, and legible and illegible cultures in the process of an intriguing transition: from wasteland to garbage arcadia. In the tender phases of remediation, the compacted trash hills of this still-unplowable terrain—the bulk of which is officially an active construction site, still under the auspices of the Department of Sanitation—call out for "loosening."[7] Unleashing the "heap of broken images" below that balks articulation into the furrows of verse (*balk* originally denoting, in Middle English, "land left unplowed") exposes the shifting, metamorphic foundations of the new pastoral.[8]

Although Fresh Kills presents itself as dry, sterile, bureaucratic infrastructure, it's surrounded by juicy, clashing rumors and gossip. Gossip reintroduces the messy details of private life—disease, corruption, fallibility—into the disinfected infrastructure of public life; it sutures public and private back together after they have been cleaved away from one another by the decorum of official discourse. Gossip as talk reminds us not only that upstanding politicians and golf stars have desires and depravities, but also that

infrastructure has lurid blind spots and leaks. The result can only resound ethically, where the personal meets the social. While gossip is an obsolete term for godparent, or spiritual sponsor (literally, *God-kin*), it has come to index unregulated, unsponsored knowledge, as if hailing from a limbo between gods and men—knowledge that's faulty, that takes the risk of being horribly wrong, even as it risks being horribly right about unwanted truths. In this way it's like poetry, for the fault lines of poetry are also the fault lines of possible knowledges: Like doubt, they are inventive, damaging, erotic.

Rumor seeps out of the infrastructure of managed landscape. When regulations arrive decades late, and impact reports prove inconclusive, it is gossip that helps us divine that the infrastructure of tragedy turns out to be one and the same as the infrastructure of abundance, in both material and aesthetic senses: It suggests that the infrastructure of cancerous by-products may trail the infrastructure of planned obsolescence. These painfully complementary relationships are reflected in art, for the roots of Greek tragedy as a genre lie in fertility rituals. The word *chorus*, which comes from the root for enclosure, *hortus*—garden, garth—refers to the bounded threshing floor where seed would be beaten out of the harvest, as the threshing platform, or *orchestra*, was the only possible dance floor in a landscape that was all curve, convexity, and concavity. Dancing, the seduction of fertility, becomes formalized in the place where fertility is violently extracted. The poetic feet of the chorus in Greek theater evolve a contrapuntal relation to those of the looser puppets of the gods onstage, like the gossip, expressing darkling secrets and anxieties that the actors cannot. Over time, the chorus comes to articulate an increasingly obsolete viewpoint: sympathy with the suffering actors of a tragic diegesis. If Greek tragedy grew out of the fertility rituals taking place on the level platform for dance wrested by the threshing floor, in the bulging mounds of Fresh Kills, tragedy has paved the way for the new fertility: that of a postlapsarian Eden in search of a chorus line.

* * *

My analysis of the bald Fresh Kills panorama is contaminated: not only by an ear for rumor, but by ancestral memory, by an ingrained thrill of hunting in the city for salvageable junk. I hail from generations of ragpickers: My great-grandfather moved to Lower Manhattan from the foothills of Vesuvius, following the devastation of his crops at the turn of the twentieth century, and acquired a pushcart for the sale of used items, joining the "swarms of Italians who hung about the dumps" that Jacob Riis described in *How the other half lives*: laborers paid to sort through rags, tin cans, bones, and other waste, thereby reproducing "conditions of destitution and disorder which, set in the frame-work of Mediterranean exuberance, are the delight of the artist, but in a matter-of-fact American community become its danger and reproach."[9] "The wretched refuse of your teeming shore" described in Emma Lazarus's 1883 sonnet "The New Colossus," and engraved into the Statue pedestal just across the harbor,

included those non-picturesque figures hungry enough to parse it for value. The pushcart peddling thrived and led to the opening of a salvage shop downtown, co-managed by my grandfather, who learned to read and to speak English; and the tradition persisted as my parents supplemented my father's endangered underling-on-Wall-Street salary by selling antiques and other seemingly random collectibles at flea markets on Sundays. My father would expertly scan driveways and open garages on weekend mornings for identifiable cast-off toys and figurines, wound and ticking things, and tchotchkes of value, while my mother dug for costume jewelry and other rhinestones-in-the-rough. By some strike of fortune, our house faced twin sites I always associated with garbage as a kid, though their waste was never forthcoming to the naked eye, but emerging as rumor, and anonymously inhaled and imbibed: a postindustrial complex overseen by a black water tower branded CERRO WIRE, overtaken by the Department of Highway, and an imperfectly fenced-off landfill that accepted the Cerro complex's industrial waste (as I learned decades later) next to my elementary school just down the hill, around the corner from the house of a friend who died of leukemia the year I left for college, and closed for capping (along with the school itself) the following year. It wasn't until I worked on the excavation of two ancient garbage dumps in the agora of Morgantina, Sicily, and discovered a bust of Persephone discarded from a nearby sanctuary, that I discovered a methodology and inspiration for digging into this history of landfill;

11.3
Audience Participants Atop the North Mound at Fresh Kills Landfill During a Performance of *PARK*, Choreographed and Directed by Kathy Westwater, on November 5, 2011. (Photo by Marina Zamalin)

it wasn't until I began to research the cancer cluster that struck our community and learned the term "Superfund" that I had the drive to confront it.

I was in the midst of composing the quarreling strains in this "toxic autobiography"[10] as a poetic archaeology of the landfill called *Exit 43* when I met choreographer Kathy Westwater at the Djerassi Resident Artists Program; she was developing a work about the destruction and creation of natural and seminatural worlds called *PARK*, and our mutual interests in the uncanniness of Fresh Kills, and in the relationship between landscape, language, and the body, began to converge in conversation and an exchange of practices. For the past four years, together with architect Seung Jae Lee and a series of performers, we have collaborated in the studio, in the field, and across networks on these questions. Our gropings into the muteness of Fresh Kills have been conducted in the spirit of the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, founder of Maintenance Art and resident artist at New York City's Department of Sanitation since 1977, and of Robin Nagle, founder of Discard Studies, author of the forthcoming *Picking Up*, and anthropologist-in-residence at the Department of Sanitation since 2006—while tracking farther-flung projects of literal reclamation, such as Favio Chavez's "Recycled Orchestra," composed of instruments made out of oil cans, cooking implements, utensils, and other salvaged trash in the landfill slum of Cateura, Paraguay.[11] Through a series of collaborative residencies at Freshkills Park that granted us unique access to mounds still off-limits to the

11.4
Hilary Chapman, Lorene Bouboushian, and Audience Ascend the Landfill Mound. (Photo by Marina Zamalin)

public, and through the stewardship of various arts organizations, we have explored what it's like to veer from authorized pathways in the restricted-to-be park, gathering views and refuse with unsteady footing; we have spoken on-site and off with Staten Island workers and residents, with other artists, and with the public about their perceptions of the site, while investigating possibilities in the studio for routing processes embedded in the mounds back to civic consciousness through space, the body, and voice. Along the way, engineers and urban planners have taught us about the methane recapturing process that makes gooseneck columns on the hills hiss, spiraling sludge swales, and "the bugs" designed at City College to eat Fresh Kills toxins. Staten Islanders have related facts less toothsome: the stink still conjurable to memory and cancer cases and the lawsuits by families of 9/11 victims and not wanting to take *their* kids to the dump for a picnic. The infrastructure of our responses mingles utopian aspirations for remediation with the indigestible, the residual. Mapping the reciprocity between the liminal landscape and the city, and investigating behaviors of consumption stemming from both panic and affection, we have sought to move from disgust to responsibility.

We have worked to create scores that interrogate the pathways of desire, waste, and biological retribution in this *terrain vague* and beyond through movement, textscapes, and design. We have strained to articulate the fact that Fresh Kills is the no-longer-stinking underbelly of Manhattan, just as Coney Island (whose parachute jump is visible from the mounds) is its fantasy-double;[12] and that the facility's closure merely pushes the problem out of view, as the same trash is now foisted on less prosperous regions, so as to outsource the transfiguration of New York into a space of leisure—Fresh Kills being a mere metonym for a far more immense trash crisis that poisons the populations of the global South and that ultimately has no place to land. (As I write, mounds of stinking garbage line the streets of my great-grandfather's kin in Naples, while plans for creation of a landfill adjacent to Hadrian's Villa in Rome are hotly debated.) That Fresh Kills faces the absent Twin Towers, monuments to global finance capitalism and scars of its ruin, and that the site received the aftermath of 9/11 for apparent lack of any other harbor, swarmed in consciousness as the 10th-year anniversary of the tragedy passed, and Zuccotti Park was occupied across the waters as Liberty Square. Could language, dance, and design restore social substance to the abjected material underbelly of capital? Through our respective languages—movement, poetry, pathmaking, architecture—we have sought to imagine the harrowed landscape's translation from a site of trauma to a possible commons.

* * *

Like gossip, like rumor, poetry gives body to the fissures of infrastructure; its orchestrations force intimate and public matters, digestion and expression, to inhabit the same byways. Like gossip, like rumor, poetry is most seditious when

11.5
James Simmons, Hilary Chapman, and Kathy Westwater Collapsing the City-Block-Sized Word-Chorus. (Photo by Marina Zamalin)

it takes the risk of coursing where it's not wanted. It addresses incompletely virtual pleasures and traumas in a medium that's incompletely intimate, sounding the entanglement of a personal ethos with a collective one. Tapping this medium, with its unparalleled capacity to preserve ambivalence through caesuras and breaks, one might restore rumor to the mounds silenced in the name of reclamation, modernization, and gentrification—in New York as in Cairo's Moquattam Hill, where the Zabaleen community has provided highly efficient informal trash collection and salvage for seven or eight decades, now eclipsed by foreign contractors, and in Mexico City's Bordo Poniente landfill, whose closure reduced carbon dioxide emissions but triggered waves of illegal dumping. I drew inspiration from Vik Muniz's portraits of the *catadores* ("pickers") of Rio de Janeiro's 60-million-ton Jardim Gramacho landfill, rendered from recycled garbage the pickers salvaged from the site. Though Jardim ("Garden") Gramacho closed weeks in advance of the UN's 2012 Rio+20 megaconference on sustainable development, and was replaced by a sophisticated facility like the recent installation at Fresh Kills, which will generate hundreds of millions of dollars in methane sales and carbon credits, the Muniz portraits and accompanying documentary ensure that the *catadores'* endangered welfare cannot be elided.[13]

In strategizing the poetic component of *PARK*, I aimed to formulate a verbal and material archive of the indigestible contents of the mounds, amalgamating phases of research conducted online ("barged nine days South"),

field notes ("monarch quiver, unidentified fire"), oral testimonies ("sequential batch reactors," "mercaptans"), and histories from witnesses such as Ted Nabavi, a chemist and engineer with the Department of Sanitation, who described the serenity of the mounds as "zero atmosphere" and confessed, "Going up there after 9/11 I used to think I saw people." During the first on-site performance of *PARK* in June 2010, I collected live impressions according to constraints supplied to audience members on the bus out to the mounds: "TRASH MOUNTAIN KILLDEER/PLASTIC PERCOLATOR DRANO/IN SMELLING DISTANCE/TIM AND GOLF/DEAD FACE/PASSIVE/MY MATTER EFFLUENT/MY MOM HELPED." During our second residency at Fresh Kills in 2011, it emerged as essential to imagine knowledges buried further, too, to transmit the afterlife of rabid consumption habits being broken down under our feet. I scoured the language of advertising past through virtual magazine searches: "'oh! oh! oreo!' 'they're femineered!' 'happier with a hoover' / 'computer moves in' 'cut the wire' // 'fight' 'in-plant hazards' 'to turn her on . . .'." Yet oral testimony, virtual research, and projected ads still weren't literal enough to conjure the dilated, noxious materiality of Fresh Kills. The residency was unfolding as the Occupy movement spread across the harbor, on Wall Street and beyond; my collaborators were developing a series of mapping, trailbuilding, and wandering scores on the mound, exploring the freedom of pedestrian movement and individual improvisation on prohibited land, as well as the impossibility of "building" anything on the massive expanse. A score transpired as Seung Jae Lee, grappling with the obstruction to anchoring anything to the problematic surface of the mounds, invoked the code of Hansel and Gretel. Keeping in mind that trailbuilding is inherently about language—the roots of language being tied to preliterate interpretative practices such as divination or reading animal tracks—I responded by proposing a trail of linguistic remains that could be left behind in the grasses, yet followed and voiced by multiple passers-by, picked up, woven, or pulled taut in rows.[14] I imagined words from underground extracted as dysfunctional kites, or quarrelsome marionettes dragged by immense strings along the unsettled surface of the mounds: I proposed a score for weaving choruses out of waste.

I began reaping the language of my garbage; we all began hoarding garbage language, living with it, amused, revolted. This slow accrual of plastic, paper, and cardboard exposed the plural orders of squandering incorporated into the waste stream: not only the throwing away of raw material, of labor, of the energy required to transport commodities across great distances, but the waste of intellectual labor and aesthetic skill spent branding them, designing fonts, devising product jingles or names. I discovered that plastic bags were exceptionally polite, thanking us, reminding us how much they care, pleading us to return them, proclaiming themselves champions of nature; I was reminded of the exceptional quantity of "smart" products on the market; and, slowly, dissonant choral messages began to transpire, as in some bidirectional

osmosis between landscape and body: "Reckless/INJURY CASES/Ready Crust/ HarvesTime/retirement/and fleas/about/the dance." Out of such language, manufactured utterly within capitalist cycles of consumption, how was any insubordinate message to emerge? Branding had then to be irrupted by idioms other to it: nursery rhymes and lullabies inspired by the hills innocent of building, nonsense logics, technology news (the phantom of Steve Jobs uttering "Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh wow"), and the chants then filling the rerouted streets and newly public squares, printed in emergency colors. Teams of dancers armed with oversized needles threaded words on 500-foot-long kite strings, occupying whole afternoons in parks; the end results looked not as I'd imagined them, abject, but rather like the celebratory flags that one sees at festivals or marking off car dealerships. We tested the cobbling of choral vocalizations in the studio, their circulation from rumor to noise to song.

During the public culmination of a residency with iLAND (the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature, and Dance) in November 2011, the texts were held aloft as the giant city-block formation that Seung Jae Lee had proposed to imprint on the mound through the body and flexible string, a frame/twin resembling pageantry. Alien to anything a lyricist could have composed, and belted across the mounds by dancers parading with megaphones, limbs layered in denim, flannel, and wool in the bitter autumn chill, the chorus's strophe and antistrophe alternated between programming, reproach, absurdity, whimsy, and lament. Then, the rectangle of strung language folded in upon itself as performers rushed toward the center of the mound, tangling and formulating of a sudden a bewildering web, megaphones becoming dunce caps or faulty cornucopias—jingles whipping in the redoubtable unimpeded winds of Fresh Kills, increasingly challenging to read and sing, committed instead to strained memory. In the end, the seemingly interminable lines of wasted words hung finely knotted about the body of a single dancer, occupying hardly any space at all; and bodies settled once more into release from language, sequences of vertiginous solo dances accompanied by the knocking of wood and wail of Tamio Shiraishi's saxophone, purgefully cyclical.

* * *

A. C. Bradley, writing in 1904, located the expressive center of tragedy precisely in "the impression of waste" at the heart of its performance: the mystery of the world's devouring what is invaluable. "Tragedy . . . forces the mystery upon us, and it makes us realize so vividly the worth of that which is wasted that we cannot possibly seek comfort in the reflection that all is vanity."[15] The relationship of waste to the worth of ecstatic political discourse has yet to be formalized, however. Trash strikes and trash demonstrations have potent effect in prodding the best-planned cities into tumult, as laborers from Naples to Amsterdam to Bangalore have driven home: When reinjected into the city center, trash serves as an acrid reminder of the elements of the *oikos* cast off in the interests of

11.6
Rebecca Davis Entwined With Compressed Word-String Mass, Surrounded by Audience, on the Summit of the North Mound. (Photo by Marina Zamalin)

economy. In the weeks following the November performance, the subversive political discourse of the Occupy movement was being policed out of cities in the name of "sanitation," despite preemptive cooperative efforts on the part of protestors to organize their own "Department[s] of Sanitation" to clean the plazas: Filth in the occupations was ascribed to a lack of leadership, and 30 tons of debris were soon all that was left of the two-month undertakings of Occupy Los Angeles;[16] Mayor Ed Lee declared Occupy San Francisco a "public health nuisance" (as if garbage hadn't polluted the streets of the Tenderloin for years);[17] City Director Erma Hendrix referred explicitly to Occupy Little Rock as "garbage";[18] and sanitation, rather than terrorism, was given as the reason for Bloomberg's clearing of Liberty Plaza. In October 2011, five women from the Action Now group, aged 55 to 80, had been arrested in Chicago when they dumped garbage from a foreclosed house in a branch of the Bank of America—the waste's displacement underscoring the bond between the abstract value manipulated by finance and the fetid material remnants of its victims. These tetherings, both unconscious and strategic, underscore trash's equivalence to both the abjected matter and the discourse violently to be removed from earshot and view of the enlightened city—its equivalence even to the organized vocalization of unsponsored masses, masses regarded as too vaguely aggregated.[19]

The cast-off murmurs buried in the apparent serenity of Fresh Kills literalize the fundamental kinship between the manufacture and disposal of

values in the *polis* across the waters, and simultaneously suggest that the restoration of language and ecstatic mobility to forcefully evacuated repositories of social substance need not entail the sterilization of history.

Notes

1. In a now canonical afterword to her analysis of minor affects, Sianne Ngai suggests that the "centrifugal" feeling of disgust, "defined by its vehement exclusion of the intolerable," could be the most politically efficacious of emotions in a thoroughly differentiated and commodified society (Ngai, 2004, p. 344). For canonical studies of attitudes toward dirt and garbage, see Douglas (2005) and Scanlan (2005). On the wasteland concept, see Nabarro and Richards (1980).
2. From the November 13, 1929 issue of *The New Yorker* (as cited in Douglas, 1995, p. 17).
3. As cited in Rogers (2005, p. 113).
4. Rogers (2005, p. 31).
5. Field Operations, Hamilton, Rabinovitz, Alschuler, Inc., and New York Department of City Planning (2006).
6. For the complete account, see Rathje and Murphy (2001, p. 114).
7. Franck and Stevens (2006).
8. Eliot (1922). Verse's relationship to furrows by the turning plough is discussed in Agamben (1999).
9. Riis (1971, pp. 43–44).
10. Richard Newman identifies "toxic autobiography" as a genre in "Darker shades of green: Love canal, toxic autobiography, and American environmental writing" (Foote & Mazzolini, 2012, pp. 21–48).
11. Chavez's orchestra, "Los Reciclados," and the youth music program Sonidas de la Tierra are the subject of a forthcoming documentary directed by Alejandra Nash and Juliana Penaranda-Loftus called *Landfill harmonic*.
12. The concept of Coney Island as Manhattan's double is elaborated in Koolhaas (1994).
13. For the story behind these portraits, see the documentary film *Waste land* (Walker, Jardim, & Harley, 2011).
14. For the links between language and preliterate interpretation, see Ginzburg (1989, pp. 96–125).
15. Bradley (1992). For a recent exegesis of Bradley with applications to current sociopolitical crises, see Clark (2012).
16. "Occupy L.A.," 2011.
17. "Public Health and Occupy," 2011.
18. "Occupy Little Rock," 2012.
19. "Our idea of dirt is compounded of two things, care for hygiene and respect for conventions" (Douglas, 2005, p. 7).

References

Agamben, G. (1999). *The end of the poem: Studies in poetics* (D. Heller-Roazen, Trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bradley, A. C. (1992). *Shakespearean tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (3rd ed.). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Clark, T. J. (2012). For a left with no future. *New Left Review, 74*, 53–75.

Douglas, Ann. (1995). *Terrible honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Douglas, M. (2005). *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Routledge.

Eliot, T. S. (1922). *The waste land.* New York: Boni & Liveright.

Field Operations, Hamilton, Rabinovitz, Alschuler, Inc., & New York Department of City Planning. (2006). *Fresh Kills Park: Lifescape, Staten Island, New York, Draft Master Plan, March 2006.* New York: New York City Department of City Planning.

Foote, S., & Mazzolini, E. (Eds.) (2012). *Histories of the dustheap: Waste, material cultures, social justice.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Franck, K., & Stevens, Q. (2006). *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life.* New York: Routledge.

Ginzburg, C. (1989). *Clues, myths, and the historical method.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Koolhaas, R. (1994). *Delirious New York: A retroactive manifesto for Manhattan.* New York: Monacelli Press.

Nabarro, R., & Richards, D. (1980). *Wasteland: A Thames Television report.* London: Thames Television.

Ngai, S. (2004). *Ugly feelings.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Occupy L.A.: 30 tons of debris left behind at City Hall tent city. (2011, November 11). *Los Angeles Times.*

Occupy Little Rock: We are not garbage. (2012, February 28). *Fox News.*

Public Health and Occupy. (2011, November 29). *San Francisco Bay Guardian.*

Rathje, W., & Murphy, C. (2001). *Rubbish!: The archaeology of garbage.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Riis, J. (1971). *How the other half lives: Studies among the tenements of New York, with 100 photographs from the Riis Collection.* New York: Dover.

Rogers, H. (2005). *Gone tomorrow: the hidden life of garbage.* New York: New Press.

Scanlan, J. (2005). *On garbage.* London: Reaktion Books.

Walker, L., Jardim, J., & Harley, K. (Writers). (2011). *Waste Land.* Arthouse Films: New Video.