

**Sarah Hill**  
**Garbage: Wastes in Culture and History**  
Western Michigan University, 1997

Can “garbage” in one instance be a resource in another? If so how can we understand what safeguards human health when definitions of wastes and resources vary from society to society and across time? This course explores these questions by examining the social production of garbage: how and why things become designated as wastes and what is then done with them. Readings will address the phenomenology and political economy of wastes as well as the nitty-gritty of garbage disposal in a variety of settings.

**January 29 – Week 1. Introduction**

**February 5 – Week 2. Orientation: Thinking dialectically/relationally**

Douglas, Mary. 1966.

Purity and Danger: *An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Harvey, David. 1993.

“The nature of the environment: The dialectics of environmental change” in *The socialist register*, pp. 1-51.

**February 12 – Week 3. Wastes in nature – ecology/biology/Death and waste**

Lewontin, Richard C. 1982.

“Organism and environment” in *Learning development and culture: Essays in evolutionary epistemology*. H.C. Plotkin, ed. Chichester and New York: John Wiley and Sons. Pp. 150-170.

Martin, Emily. 1991

“The egg and the sperm: How science constructed a romance based on stereotypical male-female roles.” *Signs*. (16) 485-501.

Robertson, Andrew. 1995.

“From asps to allegations: Biological warfare in history.” *Military medicine*. 160(8):369-373.

Searle-Chatterjee, Mary. 1979.

“The polluted identity of work: A study of the Benares sweepers” in *Social anthropology of work*. Sandra Wallman, ed. London: Academic Press.

Strathern, Marilyn.

Reproducing the future: *Essays on anthropology, kinship and new production technologies*. London: Routledge. Chapter 6 (118-138).

**February 19 – Week 4. Apocalyptic Trash**

MOVIE: *Mad Max*

## **February 26 – Week 5. The environment at its critics**

Bullard, Robert, ed. 1993.

*Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the grassroots*. Boston: South End Press. Chap. 1 and any other chapter of your choosing.

Hayles, Katherine. 1995.

“Searching for common ground” in *Reinventing nature? Responses to postmodern deconstruction*. Soule, Michael and Gary Lease, eds. Washington, D.C.: Island Press. Pp. 47-63.

Ingold, Tim. 1992.

“Culture and the perception of the environment” in *Bush base: Forest, farm, culture, environment and development*. Croll, E. and D. Parker, eds. London: Routledge. Pp. 39-56.

Michael, Anthony. 1993.

*Planetary overload: Global environmental change and the health of the human species*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Intro and Chap. 1. 1-53.

Worster, Donald. 1995.

“Nature and the disorder of history.” In *Reinventing nature? Responses to postmodern deconstruction*. Soule, Michael and Gary Lease, eds. Washington, D.C.: Island Press pp. 65-85.

## **March 5 – Week 6. What smells?**

Corbin, Alain. 1992.

*The foul and the fragrant: Odor and French social imagination*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

## **March 12 – Week 7. What to do with wastes: the invention of “sewage”**

Reid, Donald. 1991.

*Paris sewers and sewer men: Realities and representations*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

----- SPRING BREAK -----

## **March 26 – Week 8. Wastes in China – the wonders of “night soil”**

King, Franklin H. 1908. (?).

*Farmers of forty centuries or permanent agriculture in China, Korea, and Japan*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Needham, Joseph. 190?

*Science and civilization in China. Vol. 6. Biology and Biological technology. Part II: Agriculture*. Pp. 289-298.

Tomes, Nancy. 1990.

“The private side of public health: Sanitary science, domestic hygiene and the germ theory, 1870-1990.” *Bulletin of the History of medicine*. 64:509-539.

## **April 2 – Week 9. Urban Problems: solid wastes**

Fee, Elizabeth and Steven H. Corey. 1994.

*Garbage! The history and politics of trash in New York City.* New York: The New York Public Library.

Melossi, Martin. 1981.

*Garbage in the cities: Refuse, reform and the environment, 1880-1980.* Chicago: The Dorsey Press.

## **April 9 – Week 11. Getting clean: the rise of “hygiene”**

Hoy, Suellen. 1995.

*Chasing dirt: The American pursuit of cleanliness.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Ross, Kristin. 1995.

*Fast cars, clean bodies: Decolonization and the reordering of French culture.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

## **April 16 – Week 12. Contemporary Garbage.**

*Appetizer:* Assorted newspaper clippings on file in the Reserve Room. Look under “newspapers” in the reserve catalogue for the course.

Guillermoprieto, Alma. 1995.

*The heart that bleeds: Latin America now.* New York: Vintage Selections.

Phillips, David et al. 1984.

“El proyecto basura: The archaeology of industrial transformation in Mexico” in *Household refuse analysis: Theory, method, and applications in social science.* Rathje, William and Cheryly Ritenbaugh, eds.

Rathje, William and Cullen Murphy. 1992.

*Rubbish! The archeology of garbage: What our garbage tells us about ourselves.* New York: Harper Perennial.

## **April 23 – Week 13. Brown fields: New wine in old bottles?**

Wagner, Travis. 1994.

*In our backyard: A guide to understanding pollution and its effects.* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Tarr, Joel. 1985.

“Historical perspectives on hazardous wastes in the U.S. in *Waste management and research.* 3:95-102.

Tarr, Joel. 1984.

“The search of the ultimate sink: Urban air, land, and water pollution in historical perspective.” In *Records of the Columbia Historical Society of Washington, D.C.* 15: 1-29.

FIELD TRIP WITH BROWN FIELDS COORDINATOR, CITY OF BALTIMORE.

**April 30 – Week 14. Risks and hazards.**

Douglas, Mary and Aaron Wildavsky. 1982.

*Risk and culture: An essay on the selection of technological and environmental dangers.* Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Slovik, Paul et al. 1991.

“Perceived risk, trust and the politics of nuclear waste.” *Science*. 254:1603-1607. December 13.

**Assignments/Grading**

*Class participation* (10%). You will be expected to participate in class in two ways: Each week you will turn in a one-page discussion of the reading. This discussion will address one of the three following issues: (1) How does the author conceptualize wastes? (2) What are the transformative processes discussed in the reading? (3) What social markers are used to distinguish social groups from wastes and/or each other?

*Presentation* (20 %). Each student (partnered with 2 or 3 other students) will be charged with delivering a presentation and leading the discussion at least once during the semester. You will be expected to coordinate with the other students presenting in order to convey a variety of issues and to avoid redundancy.

*Short Papers* (20%). You will write 2 short papers (4-6 pages long). One will be on your presentation and the second will be an expansion of one of the class discussions (one page – see above) of your own choosing. During the week in which you chose to do a short paper, obviously you will not also do a one – page discussion paper.

*Term Paper* (50%). 25-30 pages. Your final exercise will be a research paper that will incorporate the themes addressed in the class, additional bibliographic research and, if desired, field research. There are many possibilities for this assignment, which I will go over in class.

You will be expected to turn in a two page description of your term paper topic on Wed. March 26 (the week AFTER Spring Break).