

EXPLORING THE TRASH HEAP: WASTE IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE



COURSE SYLLABUS & POLICIES

Instructor: Jacob Goessling

Section Details: 76-204 | MW 10:30-11:50

Classroom: Porter Hall A19C

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Office Hours: MW 12-2 and by appointment

Please send an e-mail or talk to me after class if you want to meet.

I'd love to discuss the class at any time!

Description

We usually consider garbage as something we need to keep out of sight. We try to ignore it, ship it someplace else, and simply don't want to admit how much our lives rely on creating junk. But can we better understand ourselves if we pause to look at trash? The garbage we create overwhelms the world—and in some way, we all play a role in a system of waste that ruins environments, poisons communities, and defines how we inhabit our planet. In this course, we investigate the many forms that wastes may take. How much do our daily lives depend on plastics? What happens to our cellphones and computers they turn into "e-waste"? How do certain communities encounter wastes differently? And what role does waste have in establishing and maintaining social inequalities? In this class, we will explore these questions by reading journalism and fiction novels, watching films, and examining visual art and design projects that reveal our relationship to trash and our culture of waste.

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Required Texts

All texts are available at the campus bookstore or online. Any print edition is acceptable. If you want to use a digital edition, you will need to be able to consult that edition in class on a laptop, e-reader, or tablet (not your cellphone).

Brian Thill, *Waste (Object Lessons)*. 978-1628924367

Heather Rogers, *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage*. 978-1595581204

Ann Pancake, *Strange as this Weather Has Been*. 978-1593761660

Katherine Boo, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in Mumbai City*. 978-0812979329

Latife Tekin, *Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills*. 978-0714530116

Richard Powers, *Gain: A Novel*. 978-0374159962

Jeff VanderMeer, *Borne: A Novel*. 978-0374537654

Essays, short stories, additional excerpts, and other readings will be made available on Canvas. For some class periods, you will be assigned films that can be watched using Carnegie Mellon's subscription to the streaming service Kanopy.

Course Goals

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Identify the significance of waste as a material object and social process that plays a significant role in contemporary society
- Apply methods of cultural analysis, including historical, material, and close reading approaches, to a range of textual and visual forms
- Demonstrate an intertextual awareness of the politics of representation, cultural production and consumption, and aesthetic valuation
- Analyze the results of uneven social relations through lenses of race, class, gender and sexuality, and colonial status in both local and global contexts
- Formulate arguments that articulate and intervene in political, socioeconomic, and cultural problems

Assignments

20% Online Participation via Canvas

20% Midterm Short Essay

15% Group Project

35% Final Essay

10% In-Class Participation

Online Participation via Canvas

Starting Week 5, you will be asked to contribute to our conversations by using Canvas on a regular basis. These posts can include responses to our readings, reflections on our class discussion, and other types of informal writing that adds to our collective exploration of the issues in this class. You will also be asked to respond to your classmates' posts at times. For most weeks, you should expect to post between 300 words between Wednesday and Monday classes, and write 200 words in response to another classmate's post between Monday and Wednesday classes. I will provide further details about Canvas participation before week 5.

Each post will be individually graded according to the following rubric:

Well Done (8-10 points)	Proficient (4-7 points)	Needs Work (0-3 points)
Post shows a developed understanding of what we have read and sticks to the topic. Goes beyond the surface to connect it to what we have previously learned. Specific references are used.	Post shows some understanding of what we have read, but tends to go off topic a little. No concrete references are used.	Attempt is made, but it is difficult to tell from what you wrote whether you understand the reading, or post has nothing to do with the content of the reading.

Midterm Short Essay (4-6 pgs)

For this "close reading" assignment, you will write an argument about a specific theme, pattern, or problem in a single work of fiction, or in which you use one example of fiction as a lens for revealing something about another. No outside research will be expected for this essay. This assignment will be explained in a more detailed handout when it is assigned.

Group Project

Once we have discussed a range of ways that waste shapes our lives, you will work with a small group of your classmates to monitor a particular kind of waste that you produce in your daily life over the course of a week. You will be able to work together to form objectives, develop methods, and analyze your results. Prior to this assignment, we will survey similar projects that have been tried as a way to monitor waste, and you will be given ample class time to design your project together.

Final Essay (8-12 pgs)

For the final paper, you will write a focused, analytical paper in which you make an interpretive and/or historical argument about an issue from the class that draws upon scholarly research. The overall topic is up to you; however, you will want to be as specific as possible in your choice of topic and it must be motivated by a significant question raised by other critics. I am also willing to consider types of scholarship that you might be engaging with in your own discipline (within particular limits). This assignment will be explained in a more detailed handout when it is assigned.

In-Class Participation

In this class, we build the knowledge that we need for our reading and writing tasks over time and in discussion. You are expected to contribute to general class discussions and to contribute to small group discussions. Being prepared for this class includes paying close attention to the assignments for each class, doing the homework, and bringing relevant materials with you to class. Your participation grade will be decided based on your preparation for class, participation in class and group discussions, and various low stakes in-class writing activities.

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Participation in discussion will establish base-level participation grade based on the following:

	Well Done (7-10 points)	Proficient (4-6 points)	Needs Work (3-0 points)
Frequency of participation	Student initiates contributions at least once per class meeting.	Student initiates contribution only once a week.	Student does not initiate contribution and needs instructor to prompt input.
Quality of comments	Comments are insightful and constructive and balance between general impressions and specific, thoughtful text-based comments.	Comments are usually constructive, and are usually relevant to the discussion.	Comments are uninformative, lacking basis in the text. Heavy reliance on personal taste (e.g., "I love it", "I hate it", "It's bad" etc.).
Listening Skills	Student listens attentively when others present commentary, as indicated by responses that build on others' remarks.	Student is sometimes inattentive when others present commentary. Occasionally needs reminder to focus.	Does not pay attention while others speak. Makes distracting comments while others are speaking. Sleeps.

Grades

Daily and weekly assignments cannot be turned in late. If a major paper is turned in late, it will not be eligible for full credit. For every individual day after a major paper is late, including Tuesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, five points will be deducted from the total amount you are able to earn.

If you require an extension on an assignment, let me know in advance *at least two days before the due date* rather than the day it is due, and I will be much more likely to grant it. However, there will be no extensions on the final paper, nor can it be turned in late. Finally, incompletes will only be granted due to extreme circumstances.

Grades are earned on a 100 point scale:

A=100-90 B=89-80 C=79-70 D=69-60 R=59-0

Attendance

Since this is a small discussion class, attendance is mandatory. The reason this class has an attendance policy is so that we practice what we preach—that academic texts are built in collaboration with other readers and writers and not in isolation, and that academic authors are responsible to a community of knowledge makers. In this class and in our professional lives, we make knowledge that is valuable to a community through talk, interaction, and connection. I will periodically provide feedback on your level of participation in class.

Arrive on time. Lateness not only disrupts the class but also shows a good deal of disrespect for your peers and for your instructor. *For every two days you are late to class, you will be marked for one absence. If you are more than 15 minutes late to class, you will be marked absent for that day. Sleeping in class can result in being marked absent.*

You are allotted four absences in this class without penalty—after your fourth missed class, your grade in the class will begin to drop by a half-a-letter grade (or 5%) per absence. Treat this attendance policy like a "personal" or "sick day" policy you might find in a workplace. In

other words, these absences usually occur because of minor illnesses or schedule conflicts (e.g., a delayed flight after a holiday).

Using Sources Properly

In this course, we will talk about the differences between plagiarism and the misuse of sources. There is a difference, and so the consequences for each are not the same. We will discuss how to use sources appropriately, and if you have any questions, always feel free to ask me. Working with sources is a developmental skill, and how well we cite them depends on how well we read them. This issue of working with sources is different from blatant plagiarism. It's been my experience that those writers who plagiarize are those who feel overwhelmed by the assignment and, out of desperation, use someone else's work to stand in for their own.

If you get so frustrated with an assignment that you feel like your only option is to plagiarize, come see me. My role as a teacher is to help students, not punish them—use me as a resource to help you write, brainstorm or work out your essays. So pay attention to how we use sources in this class, and please don't plagiarize. Please also note that we do use the SafeAssign tool within Canvas, which is a tool that matches texts with others within its database and with texts found on the Internet. While SafeAssign can function as a plagiarism detection tool, we can also use it as a way to check our citation practices *and* to monitor to what extent we have made revisions between drafts.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is the deliberate and/or unacknowledged theft of another person's intellectual property, or, in simpler terms, attempting to pass another person's academic work off as your own either whole or in part. This includes failing to cite references in your work or not attributing ideas contained in your work to their original source[s]. Plagiarism usually occurs as a result of desperation and panic, often at the last minute. Rather than plagiarizing, contact me first—I am happy to help you navigate the rules for appropriate source use and attribution. In this course, plagiarism will be dealt with according to Carnegie Mellon's policies: you will be given an R for the assignment and the course and the case will be referred to the dean of student affairs. If you want to understand how to relate the concept of integrity to our community standards and how to understand university procedures for maintaining our community's standards, go to this url:

http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/dean/acad_int/index.html

Norms for Fair Use of Gendered Language

In this class, we take a "normative" view of language and standards. This view means that we use language to meet the expectations of a community of readers who share particular values about how we represent the world in our texts. In other words, we use standards in order to create particular effects for our readers. If we want to communicate professionalism, we use a style guide for our academic writing. If we want to communicate that we are writing with precision, we use conventions such as appropriate verb tenses. To that end, I encourage you to use gendered pronouns in this class to create particular effects, especially the effect of "gender balance" or fairness. The emerging convention for using gendered pronouns is that we should write in a style that includes both the feminine and masculine. The National Council of Teachers in English (NCTE) gives us these examples on their website

<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang>:

- Avoid exclusionary forms such as
 - If a student reads, he will succeed.

- Choose inclusionary alternatives
 - If a student reads, they will succeed.
 - Students who read will succeed.

Cell Phones, Laptops, and Other Related Technologies

My operating principle for using technology in class is that it should aid your learning. If you prefer to use digital copies of our texts, then I am open to you using digital readers. If technology is used to distract you or anybody else in the class (including me), then I will no longer allow the use of electronic devices.

Support for Academic and Professional Literacy Development

During the semester (and across your undergraduate years), you may find that you would like to pursue extra support for your writing. You can find support for your writing at the following places:

Consider visiting the emerging **Global Communication Center**, which will provide support for communication practices (including written, visual, and oral communication) across the disciplines. The Center is located on the first floor of the Hunt Library, and you can make in-person appointments at their website: <http://www.cmu.edu/gcc>

If you are a multilingual student, you may also seek support at the Intercultural Communication Center, which is located on the third floor of Warner Hall. You can learn more about them here: <http://www.cmu.edu/icc/>. You may also seek support with the GCC.

Styles of Learning and Disability

If you have a disability and have an accommodations letter from the Disability Resources office, I encourage you to discuss your accommodations and needs with me as early in the semester as possible. I will work with you to ensure that accommodations are provided as appropriate. If you suspect that you may have a disability and would benefit from accommodations but are not yet registered with the Office of Disability Resources, I encourage you to contact them at access@andrew.cmu.edu.

Incomplete Grades

University policy states the following about Incomplete grades:

“Carnegie Mellon students are expected to complete a course during the academic semester in which the course was taken. However, if the instructor agrees, a grade of ‘I’ (incomplete) may be given when a student, for reasons beyond his or her control, has been unable to complete the work of a course, but the work completed to date is of passing quality and the grade of incomplete provides no undue advantage to that student over other students.

In awarding an ‘I’ grade, an instructor must specify the requirements for completing the work and designate a default letter grade where no further work is submitted. Students must complete the required course work no later than the end of the following academic semester, or sooner if required by prior agreement. The instructor must record the permanent grade by the last day of the examination period of that following semester, or Enrollment Services will administratively assign the default grade.” (via <https://www.cmu.edu/policies/student-and-student-life/grading.html>)

A student requesting a grade of “I” in a Department of English course must meet the above conditions, including having completed a sufficient amount of course work (at least 50%,

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ideally 70%). The student should be completing the same work that everyone else in the course will complete. There must be a written contract, available from the instructor, that shows agreement about what work needs to be completed, the deadline by which the work should be submitted, and what the default grade will be should the work not be submitted by the deadline. Cases in which a graduating student requests an "I" grade must be discussed by the instructor and the department head.

Communications

You can reach me via e-mail (jgoessli@andrew.cmu.edu). Emailing about coursework is a type of formal communication, and how you present yourself through e-mail is a reflection of yourself as a student and scholar. Be sure to include a salutation and a full name. Please, do not send an e-mail to me written like a text message!

I try to stay on top of my e-mail, but to lay out some ground rules: I will roughly try to keep "normal business hours" between 10:00am and 6:00pm, but with our class being so late in the day this might not always be the case. I will try—but cannot always guarantee—that I will respond to all e-mails promptly so leave plenty of time for me to reply to important communication.

Take care of yourself!

Take care of yourself. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress.

All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. There are many helpful resources available on campus and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is often helpful.

If you or anyone you know experiences any academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings like anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) is here to help: call 412-268-2922 and visit their website at <http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/>.

Consider reaching out to a friend, faculty or family member you trust for help getting connected to the support that can help.

If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal or in danger of self-harm, call someone immediately, day or night:

Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS): 412-268-2922
Re:solve Crisis Network: 888-796-8226

If the situation is life threatening, call the Police:
On campus: CMU Police: 412-268-2323
Off campus: 911

If you have questions about this class or your coursework, please contact me at any point in the semester.

Syllabus is subject to changes with instructor notification

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Schedule

Date	Assignments	Notes
Week 1		
Monday, August 27	Syllabus	
Wednesday, August 29	No Class-Instructor at Conference	If you have any questions about the class, the syllabus, or have issues accessing the Week 2 readings, please send me an e-mail and I will answer as promptly as my schedule allows
Week 2		
How to Think about Waste		
Monday, September 3	No Class- Labor Day	
Wednesday, September 5	Read Brian Thill, <i>Waste</i> (entire book)	
Week 3		
History of the Waste Stream		
Monday, September 10	Read Heather Rogers, <i>Gone Tomorrow</i> , 1-77 Bring in one piece of trash (smaller than a shoebox) from the past several days that reveals to the class something interesting about yourself.	
Wednesday, September 12	View selections from Jacob Riis, <i>How the Other Half Lives</i> (linked on Canvas)	Focus: Signification and Material Culture Studies Methodology
Week 4		
Waste and the Body		
Monday, September 17	Read Ann Pancake, <i>Strange as this Weather Has Been</i> , 1-85	Take note of all the different forms of waste/trash that form the setting of this novel
Wednesday, September 19	Read Pancake, 86-152	Focus: Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice in Appalachia
Week 5		
Waste and the Body		
Monday, September 24	Read Pancake, 153-278	Focus: Slow Violence
Wednesday, September 26	Read Pancake, 279-357	Focus: Literature as Activism

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Week 6		
Monday, October 1	<p>Waste and Landscape</p> <p>Read Jennifer Peeples, "Toxic Sublime: Imaging Contaminated Landscapes" (PDF on Canvas)</p> <p>View J Henry Fair, TedXtalk and photography collections (linked on Canvas)</p>	
Wednesday, October 3	Read Erik Reece, "Reclaiming a Toxic Legacy Through Art and Oil" (PDF on Canvas)	
Week 7		
Monday, October 8	Read Latife Tekin, <i>Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills</i> , 1-100	
Wednesday, October 10	Read Tekin, 101-End	
Week 8		
Monday, October 15	Read Katherine Boo, <i>Behind the Beautiful Forevers</i> , ix-83	<i>No Canvas posts due this week due to Midterm</i>
Wednesday, October 17	Read Boo, 84-151	Midterm Due Friday, October 19
Week 9		
Monday, October 22	Read Boo, 152-End	
Wednesday, October 24	Watch <i>Waste Land</i> (available through CMU Library, Kanopy)	
Week 10		
Monday, October 29	<p>Watch Tanya Leal Soto, dir., <i>Plastic Paradise: The Great Pacific Garbage Patch</i></p> <p>Read selected poems from Rita Wong, <i>Undercurrent</i> (PDF on Canvas)</p>	
Wednesday, October 31	Group Projects: Presentation of results & discussion	
Week 11		
Monday,	Read Rogers 79-231	

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November 5		
Wednesday, November 7	Selected episodes of <i>Hoarders</i> and <i>American Pickers</i>	
Week 12	Waste Futures: Constructing Wastelands	
Monday, November 12	Watch Peter Galison and Robb Moss, dir., <i>Containment</i> Read Peter Galison, "The Future of Scenarios: State Science Fiction" (PDF on Canvas)	
Wednesday, November 14	Read China Mieville, "Covehithe" (PDF on Canvas)	
Week 13	Waste Futures: Salvaging Wastelands	
Monday, November 19	Read Jeff VanderMeer, <i>Borne</i> , 1-55 (Outside of class) Final Essay Conferences	
Wednesday, November 21	No Class; Thanksgiving Holiday	
Week 14	Waste Futures: Salvaging Wastelands	
Monday, November 26	Read VanderMeer, 56-193	
Wednesday, November 28	Read VanderMeer, 194-End	
Week 15	Project presentations	
Monday, December 3	Presentations	
Wednesday, December 5	Presentations	
Final Essays Due: Friday, December 14th at 11:59pm		