



The Destiny of “Refuse” in a Impure Society

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Abstract

We want to be even too angelic: our city wants to get rid of odors, bad or good ones in every way possible...dirty is politics: politics is shame, but the degree of shame varies from culture to culture, from one historical moment to another. An objective condition however, is the existence of the need to dispose waste and this is why I believe it is a reality we need to accept and take advantage of, not to battle against and see as a shame and, therefore, need to “hide”. According to Godard, history today is contained in the history of cinema and the rest exists in the images we have. Our eyes are compelled to see through lenses of those that have already taken the picture, filmed, documented. In effect, I have no choice: form and direction are already embedded in the territory, and my task is only to reveal them, by building little by little the inner structure: the rhythm, the melody and harmony, the out of key places, subjected to my study. I find myself in the conditions of the founders when they had to domesticate an uninhabited place or a place inhabited before. A territory, for those who have just arrived is actually chaos, a land that has to be acknowledged for its power, and to work with it by looking for it or avoiding it, strengthening it or weakening it. Cities are scattered by buildings that do not belong to us, shored up by questionable, ambiguous, insignificant, indifferent architectures. Consider in this case the different incinerators, the fenced in places for waste disposal waiting to be treated to later reach other contexts, other dumps and consider all those spaces that interest the theme, object of this study. The environment is just not a figure. In it there are objective physical conditions and proportions of hygiene, climate, and of pollution. What do we feel in observing the magma of waste invading the earth sometimes in a respectful way, controlled, and sometimes completely free imposing without respect? The landscape continuously modifies to accommodate disposal and collection of waste but how aware are we that it's a reality that will always accompany our life and how much are we willing to accept it and see it as an opportunity to plan and not as a problem to battle? In particular, this article is part of a more integrated study on the subject of waste, which has now described through the eyes of artists who have looked for the material, the feeling... of their works in the waste.

Keywords: Waste; Landscape; Reuse

Introduction

« [...] Among the refuse of the word a new world is born: new laws are born where there is the lawless; a new honour system is born where there is dishonour. Power and nobility

are born in unlimited places, where you think the city ends, instead for thousand times over, there are bridges, labyrinths construction sites, and digs, behind storms of skyscrapers covering the entire horizon[...]» that's what Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote, in *La religione del mio tempo* (*The religion of*

my time), in 1961 (Pasolini P.P., 2015, pp. 115). In my opinion, today, beyond time and places, authoritative sentences and summary judgement [1-5].

« [...] Pasolini is, par excellence, the poet of refuse, or many even the last poet in Italy with any social commitment [...] ». The world he describes was and still is today a heap, magma indistinct of an infinite amount of material and physical waste contaminated by thousands of other types of waste: human, mental, moral, political... In this sense, Pasolini has represented an exemplary figure of blame and reproach towards everyone and no one, towards a mass society that in only two decades, from the fifties to the sixties in Italy, in particular they had swept each other away, their own history, which became only too quickly as post history, new prehistory and modern “barbarian”. Modern populations had, in effect, destroyed cities, towns, nature, landscapes, people, souls, memories, the sense of inviolable and sacred, tradition, art, reversing all this in the obese paroxysm of consumption and waste, in overflowing garbage disseminated everywhere. Yes! Garbage and degradation became now “places” and over this another reality swept over and proliferated. Pier Paolo Pasolini’s poetic production, in my opinion, represents the highest point of celebration, inspiration and description of rejection in every direction and in every sense. After all, Pasolini was guided by the obstinate intention to unmask indifference, apathy, the voluntary and perverse cover-ups of overflowing heaps of waste and rejects, defenceless victims of immoral forms, criminal ostracising policies, negation and rejection [6]. Therefore, a rejection of people, things and objects, pitiless and deliberately thrown out and poured randomly at the margins of existence, in dark inaccessible corners of infinite suburbs and outskirts of the world, in the new fields, therefore, the collection and concentration of the global planet, the new slums become waste dumps and illegal rubbish of humanity from which we are consciously or unconsciously surrounded and from which we keep ourselves at proper distance. It’s really a “dirty deal”: waste, together with “the illegality of existence” is scattered, forgotten, profaned, disseminated everywhere, representing this way a reality where you can’t even breathe, indecent and disquieting story of physical and moral degradation. On the other hand, there is an inefficient, removal compulsory machine under political and institutional powers that have become spokesmen in bad faith of a discontent and general discomfort with the interest of wanting to create concealment systems and police operations and cleaning only in appearance in line with a philosophy of public decorum. The objective is always wanting to restore order, give back and guarantee at least superficially a coat of hygiene, of transparency and purity, after all a world which is apparently clean and re-cleaned obviously better, but actually it is a distorted, hypocritical strategy of control, rhetorical, fatal and total that doesn’t spare anyone. This determining, environmental pollution

and not only, and today it is practically a failure. We could however know, perceive, or simply stay in the dark and not know exactly what is happening. Consequently, I feel that today we can’t back up or assist indifferently to everything that is happening around. In my opinion, it is necessary to accomplish a fearless act of rejection for waste, a step ahead assuming an attitude of disobedience, insubordination and mutiny with regards to those that want us to be unaware, but also seeking an unprecedented “dignity” of the waste to face the hateful intention to close their eyes and deny the world hide from the world. Pasolini used to say: flowers: that’s what the heart wanted to offer you instead of waste, and thanks to the description of the Poet, and of others that have treated the topic of waste, unusual images have come to my mind, distinct glances, thoughts... which have helped me to investigate in an innovative way, a reality that is just as present as it is hidden. Waste, in effect, is in the foreground as well as the background, “independent” and at the same time connected to the city context. In addition, I would like to remember Michael Braungart in *Cradle to Cradle: A Call for a Revolution of Abundance* highlights how a different way of planning has to pass inevitably through a new way of viewing and perceiving our waste. Therefore the text presents itself like an unusual advertisement toward change of life which will determine an improvement of environmental conditions, supporting my thesis that says that change in the creation of innovative and interesting architectonic, environmental, urban projects of those areas, feared today, subject to recycling city dumps only if first we assume a different way of seeing and living with our waste [7].

Waste, the Destiny of All Goods

What does waste represent in each of our daily life? How do we perceive waste in our imagination and how do we elaborate it through the languages of our creativity? This storm that transforms the past into a heap of debris says Benjamin, is « [...] what we call progress [...] ».

Waste and unusual objects have often gotten the attention of novelists, poets, directors. We see that obsolete objects, waste, “take possession” of literary texts parallelly to their progressive settling in the real life partly starting from an “historical time” that coincides, roughly with the industrial revolutions. I remember, for example, the book *Una solitudine troppo rumorosa (A too noisy solitude)* by Bohumil Hrabal where the destiny of literature seems to have reached completions when the mountains of books, together with newspapers, magazines, packages and packaging of every type are thrown out and destroyed. A new world is coming forward, hygienist and rushed, impersonal and indifferent, monotonous and cruel that perceives books as simple scrap paper. Literature explores this topic by speaking of landfills, who works there, who lives there, for example, in the story

Racconti dalla Collina di rifiuti (Tale of a hill of waste) from the Turkish author Tekin Latife or even speaking about the daily relationship we have with our garbage which sometimes even becomes a ritual, like in *La poubelle agrée* by Italo Calvino. The author grasps perfectly the common feeling of repugnance, whether aware or not, and describes the world of waste as a sort of social tabù. Moreover, Calvino gives us an image of the world where we live one hundred times with the description of the invisible city of Leonia « [...] the city of Leonia makes itself every day [...] » (Calvino I., 2015, pp. 79). Sometimes literature gives us surreal stories of a rare delicacy as *Junk Girl*, taken from *the melancholy death of oyster boy* by Tim Burton. Even in the stories of Charles Dickens waste have an invasive aspect of the urban landscape? It is in literature that the rejected object, abandoned, second-hand, obsolete, useless, seems to have taken revenge over the functional, useful, intrinsically valuable object because it allows us to designate and allude to an aspect of the human condition that the world of goods and functional relationships tend to remove or erase the places of waste, live and work with them, the “spirit of dead things”, these are aspects that often touch each other, they overlap, they live together and often, as we have seen they are described in literature but, not only because even cinema regarding the theme of garbage seems to renew itself in continuation, as the last production of Pixar shows in an animated feature film, it tells the story of WALL-E, a robot alone on the Earth in an apocalyptic scenario, where he gather objects found in the garbage. Going back more than half a century ago, Vittorio De Sica in *Miracolo a Milano (Miracle in Milan)* (1915), at the end he shows an image of Duomo square crowded with garbage men where street people take their brooms away to fly away with them towards an imaginary world. Even Antonioni in the 1948 documentary *Nettezza urbana (Garbage men)* follows the life of garbage men in Rome. In an alteration of free and suggestive associations, the director tries to find again the relationship that ties the world with the urban environment [8-11].

Finally, I remember one of the six episodes *Che cosa sono le nuvole? (What are clouds?)* of the film *Capriccio all'italiana (Italian whim)*, directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1967, where the last scene takes place in a land-fill site where the “marionettes”, half-buried by the garbage, notice the skies for the first time and see light white clouds floating by. I think the director, through the overlapping of “world thrown out” and “world lived”, expresses the wish that life is the dream of a dream, that is, the representation of a representation.

There are many examples of films, both Italian and international. What is surprising is that the theme has influenced authors and continues to do so with different productions ranging from comic to grotesque, dramatic to fantasy.

Waste cannot be Erased

In the past we observed that waste was something to have become harmless and invisible or to take far away. In recent times, instead, the idea has been that minimizing waste results being the best solution: reducing consumerism, making things becomes permanent, keeping them with care. It is time to say, that waste cannot be erased and we have to begin to consider them as complimentary elements to every reality that surrounds us. The entire path, from the production and the reuse, up to the elimination, should, however, be subject to particular attention and considered as one only reality. We live in effect in a world where the idea of reuse should be taken on even from the same industries that produce, and the Global Peace Container is an example for this. This industry is aware of the difficulties of deterioration for a container not used and proposes reusing it as a housing unit and later be used for other more complicated matters [12-15].

In Jamaica, for example, the population used the container as a simple module and built its own living units and created a series of accommodation for family units equipped with facilities and even open spaces. Industrial scraps can be a realistic target in recycling processes, but collection costs and scrap reproduction are too high. We can observe that the packaging that make up the greater part of our daily garbage have a very short life span, very often they cannot be directly reused while it would be interesting to think of a secondary use, for example as construction material. Martin Pawley demonstrated how this could be possible when he invited the Heineken beer factory to produce a bottle that can be used as a construction element in poor house. Evidently all these innovative proposals concentrate on technical aspects, neglecting the emotional consequences. We want order, stability, boundaries. While scraps appear chaotic, varied, disorderly and it is mostly this sensation of uncontrollability that we most fear but at the same time seduce, attract, fascinate ourselves. However the art could help that needed change we should be moving towards, careful to recycling of goods and far from the philosophy of “use and throw out” which would bring us to a scenario of disquieting heaps of waste very soon!. Many artist, infect, have taken conscious positions with respect to this topic, concentrating their works on the beauty and on the necessity of decline. Even if garbage often repel us and is often a cause of sickness, they have a power of suggestion of a sort of unknown continuity. In effect many artists use scrap material for their own works. Actually, during the 20th century lots of different artistic movements were born and they confronted themselves with that feeling of decadence that seems to invade everything. For example Pop Art elevates the unimportant to a work of art, or Poor Art, in Italy, highlights the daily life or archetypes [7]. Therefore, contemporary artist have found in waste the very

material, the feeling of their works. I remember for example the German artist Ha Schult who, in the 70s, seemed to be obsessed by garbage and in particular he creates human shapes of trash. Since 1996 he has begun a trip of these Trash People stopping at top places such as: La Défense of Paris in 1996, the Great China Wall in 2001, in the Cathedral square of Cologne and finally in Piazza del Popolo in Rome. Then, always in theme of “refuse” there are many artists and architects who pay particular attention to urban unused, forgotten or simply not noticeable lands and come to create new implicated images, suggestive and aware as the works of Christo demonstrates [8]. They relate to the landscape, to the infrastructures, to the urban surroundings and to a rare space dilated by the oceans and the deserts and so they give us particular interpretations of the space. However, discarding should be just as important as producing and consuming. Collecting garbage and rubbish could, in effect be a process of learning instead of degradation, an opportunity to show ability or to acquire knowledge. Waste is full of information so much that even archaeologists base their research on them as Harvard Alfred Kidder demonstrates digging in the dump of Andover in Massachusetts or the “waste project” by Rathje and Hughes that examines samples of rubbish of Tucson every spring with the objective of verifying the level of consumption, eating habits, food waste and differences among different social groups. In fact, in numerous American cities exists the Garbage project that is the analysis of “fresh” garbage produced by a specific block of houses, will later become a stratigraphic research of some dumps and the study of the historical evolutions of the urban waste composition. Therefore we can notice an analogy between the systematic analysis of waste and archaeological research that after all, it is not so different from a dig of waste from another period. We could talk about a sort of treasure hung when we see that in the United States, where the short and simple national history makes it improbable to find historic finds, urban waste become the main protagonist of research, directed primarily to waste collection of famous people [16]. Evidently, waste is an immense deposit of valuable information and so I think about the police investigations that find, in effect, answers through analysis of waste. I remember, for example, the arrest of Joseph Bonanno, a Mafia boss, was based on proof found from the waste of his studio in a three year period. Therefore these aspects are sufficient to foresee that the study of waste will be cultivated in ever more systematic ways. The reason is simple: garbage is direct documentation of habits and behaviour of those who have produced it.

The future of Researchers

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An Astonished Glance

What attracts me, is that impulsive air, decadent and yet nostalgic of those abandoned objects. More than a pile of waste we can say a sum of state of mind, a type of a national story [25,26]. Land fill, faraway places from our “sight”, containers and testimony of our present. The discarded objects in some way becomes a protagonist because it evokes something that does not exist anymore. Often, contemporary artist have found in waste the very material, the feeling of their works. Therefore, art could help that needed change we should be moving towards, careful to recycling of goods and far from the philosophy of “use and throw out” which would bring us to a scenario of disquieting heaps of waste very soon [27-29].

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