**Papers on Disposability, Decay, and Depletion**

**Hosted by Grace Halden and Alice Burks**  
  
*A one-day event to be held in the Keynes Library at Birkbeck School of Arts on September 21st 2017 from 9am until 5pm.*  
  
Confirmed keynote speakers:  
  
Professor Esther Leslie (Birkbeck, University of London)  
Dr Leo Mellor (University of Cambridge)  
Dr Rachele Dini (University of Roehampton)  
  
Conference overview:

This interdisciplinary event will make visible the untold story of waste by exploring its representations, both material and metaphorical, within contemporary culture. Through an investigation of waste’s presence (or lack thereof) within modern life, this conference will disrupt the entrenched value judgements surrounding objects, places and people otherwise deemed redundant. By exploring how we create, classify and treat waste material this discussion will simultaneously review and challenge the ethics of human waste(-ing); the marginalisation of populations rendered disposable within a globalised socio-economic framework. Calling on related discourses from the arts, social sciences, medical humanities and beyond, this symposium will bring together a diverse mix of academics, artists and industry experts to share insights on a (waste) matter that impacts and implicates us all.

**Conference objectives:**

* To identify and interrogate representations of waste in its material, symbolic and human forms within contemporary culture.
* To encourage and establish sustained dialogue between these various representations.
* To begin an ongoing body of work which bridges these depictions of waste with associated contemporary anxieties.
* To bring together a diverse set of interdisciplinary speakers in order to enliven studies of waste while widening participation and increasing access to this topic.

**Particular timeliness / significance of the theme:**

We live in a time where disposable populations frequent the news, with anti-refugee, anti-immigration and anti-globalisation sentiments increasingly visible across Europe and America. Zygmunt Bauman defines these groups as ‘human waste’ – redundant communities who are the casualties of a globalised world that discards them. Bauman posits that the ongoing production of ‘human waste’:

‘is an inescapable side-effect of *order-building* (each order casts some parts of the extant population as ‘out of place’, ‘unfit’ or ‘undesirable’) and of *economic progress* (that cannot proceed without degrading and devaluing the previously effective modes of ‘making a living’ and therefore cannot but deprive their practitioners of their livelihood)’.

Simultaneously, waste material and environmental pollution are often aligned with such groups through land use decisions which harm vulnerable populations. Recent high-profile examples would be the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was planned to cut through the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota and compromise crucial water supplies. Fear of pollution from the pipeline was exacerbated by a Colonial Pipeline Leak in Alabama which spilled 350,000 gallons of gasoline into the surrounding area. The water crisis in Flint, Michigan which also unfolded this year similarly indicated the extent to which low-income populations bore the brunt of pollution which was the result of local government cost-saving.

Preoccupations with waste material are therefore valuably aligned with the resulting impact on or classification of associated populations. When read together, these may provide new insights on the way in which society figures both objects and communities as disposable.

**Possible submission topics include (but are not limited to) the following:**

* Literatures of waste (e.g. fiction about waste, recycling, printing)
* Pollution and toxicity (e.g. physical / metaphorical, environmental, social)
* Junk, dirt and rubbish (e.g. the abject, hygiene, creation of)
* Decomposition and decay (e.g. illness, corpses, physical ‘wasting’)
* The temporality of waste (e.g. ‘wasting time’, aging and depletion)
* The geography of waste (e.g. LULUs, derelict spaces, wastelands)
* Human waste / Wasted humans (e.g. bodily matter, biopolitics of disposability)
* Petrocultures and industrial waste (e.g. extraction, environmental damage of)
* Economies of waste (e.g. commodification, the cost of waste, disposal industries).

Following the conference, there will be the opportunity to submit papers for a Special Collection in the Open Library of Humanities (8000 words, peer reviewed) and Alluvium Journal (2000 words, non-peer reviewed).

**Schedule**:

9am – Arrivals, teas & coffees

9.15am – Welcomes & Introductions

9.30am – Keynote: Professor Esther Leslie

10.15am – Panel 1: Bodily Matters: Human Waste and Wasting Humans

* Leah Eades: 'Following the Foetus: Pregnancy loss, foetal remains, and cross-cultural management and disposal practices'
* Nicky Gardiner: 'Grotesque Corpses: New materialisms and the agency of bodily waste'
* Ikuho Amano: 'Feces at Work: Coprology in Japanese literary discourse'

11.30am – Coffee Break

11.45am – Panel 2: Managing Waste: Labour, Storage and Materiality

* Christine Okoth: 'Recycling People: Waste Intimacy, Undocumented Labour and Contemporary Transatlantic Migration'
* Layla Hendow: 'Cemeteries, landfills and storing waste in twentieth century America Literature'
* Diarmuid Hester: 'Doctorow's Hoarding: "Homer and Langley" and the stuff of fiction'

1.00pm – Lunch

2.00pm – Keynote: Dr Rachele Dini

2.45pm – Panel 3: Not a Load of Garbage: Making Art From Rubbish

* Ben Gillespie: 'Reduce, Re-use, Mina Loy'
* Lindsay Polly Crisp: 'Fragment / Part / Whole: Matter and mediality in Michael Landy's Break Down'
* Carina Brand: 'A Materialist Re-Reading of Abject Art: Non-reproduction, abject labour and aesthetics'

4.00pm – Coffee Break

4.15pm – Keynote: Dr Leo Mellor

5.00pm – Drinks & Close