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# The values of indeterminacy

Catherine Alexander and Andrew Sanchez

## 1: Indeterminacy and classification

This book explores the relationship between indeterminacy and classification, particularly the kind of classificatory order that is central to the modern bureaucratic state. At the heart of classification is the question of value and waste. What we propose here is indeterminacy as a third term that challenges this binary, describing that which defies classification. As Bowker and Star point out, in their path-breaking book *Sorting Things Out*, ‘each category valorizes some point of view and silences another’ (1999: 5). While the production of value and waste through classification has been well rehearsed (Star and Lampland 2009), here we are analysing how value-making categories also produce waste that resists classification. It is these indeterminacies, the silenced points of view, which interest us here. Thinking of waste in relation to classification systems, inevitably brings us to Mary Douglas’ classic formulation in *Purity and Danger* that dirt is matter out of place (1966: 36).<sup>1</sup> However, as Campkin notes (2013: 3), there is some inconsistency in this neat binary definition of dirt, and her analysis of waste as anomalous and disruptive of the structured way through which worlds are understood. ‘Reflection on dirt,’ Douglas wrote, ‘involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness’ (1966: 6).

Bowker and Star have two further points that are relevant for us here. They remind us that classification is a profoundly moral *process*, making some places, materials, actions and people visible, while others are ‘left wild, or in darkness, or even unmapped’ (1999: 32); and that visibility may bring disadvantage as much as advantage (ibid: 44). To this we add Star and Lampland’s comment that categories are necessarily part of a larger scheme of meaning and value which frame how knowledge is represented through classification (2009: 21): classification thus implies a totality or whole of which it is part. Whether these totalities are value systems, states or society, they are also partly effects of the imagination (Graeber 2013).

By training our gaze on that very relation between form and formlessness that Douglas suggests, we offer a series of interventions that problematize a binary reading of waste and value and in so doing complicate such approaches to classificatory systems. We suggest that waste and value are both aspects of Douglas' 'form' whereas formlessness or indeterminacy is a third modality occupying a space between waste and value.<sup>2</sup> Indeterminacy can also encompass these conditions, or act as an imaginary state that provides the precondition for certain value-creating interventions, or indeed operate within categories where fuzzy gradients of compliance are obscured by binary determination. Thus we highlight that classification, as a way of apprehending reality, is itself essentially indeterminate.

We show, for example, how accounting techniques can invoke, or imagine waste and value as co-constitutive, but not as opposites; how people, places, infrastructure and materials may be in limbo, suspended spaces and times that escape ideas of either waste or value; how instances of the 'anomalous' can elide different instances of category confusion with markedly different consequences; how waste as excess of meaning can threaten to explode meaning-making categories from within and how a superabundance of legislative categories and guidance can create gaps where (for example) one legal regime does not quite mesh with the next. Indeterminacy may thus act as a third term, or challenge binary category making from within. It is also one way in which some wastes are characterized or certain conditions of exclusion experienced.

We take forward Bowker and Star's observation that visibility (and we would add invisibility) may bring either benefit or loss to challenge analytical normativities that tend to see indeterminacy as either positive or negative. Indeed both may be different facets of the same experience. For example, in resisting gender codification people may find themselves economically harmed, invisible as a citizen and therefore unable to claim welfare rights.

Just as bureaucratic classifications and standards appear to be abstract but are relational in their effect, so too are infrastructure's effects unevenly distributed (Star and Lampland 2009: 13; Star and Ruhleder 1996: 113). Again, introducing indeterminacy as a third term can highlight the co-constitution of advantage and disadvantage: if houses are perceived to be derelict by city officials, their inhabitants are less likely to be immediate victims of gentrification. Such housing is simultaneously rubbish and prized – to different constituencies. Recognition, whether or not explicitly referred to as such, therefore emerges as a theme throughout this volume, although the perspective twists and turns: who classifies someone or something as excessive or unknowable is a question of power. In many instances, indeterminacy *is* lack of recognition on someone's part, not always on everyone's part. And that is the crux of the ethnographic puzzle.

We further offer an analysis of how people who feel themselves cast out, or mourn the loss of previous status, may long for reincorporation to alternative or earlier totalities and, in contrast, consider how the fragment challenges any notion of a past or potential whole, or indeed any sense of classification or motion towards another state at all. Attention paid to the fragment signals one more engagement with indeterminacy, classification and totalising systems, which is an emphasis on contingency as opposed to prior or predetermined futures, a contingency which includes going nowhere at all.

As some of these examples might suggest, this book is largely staged through wastes as matter and metaphor embracing people, places and materials that have been broadly classified as waste, displaced, been removed, or removed themselves from dominant systems of value. We also include two familiar waste sites (landfill and a sorting station) to highlight both that these places can be transformative for people and materials moving from discard to value, but also that indistinct remnants and wayward pollution defy containment and relation to other entities or putative wholes.

In so doing we flag up the complexity and multiplicity of relationships that waste can have with value. Depending on context and perspective, waste is (at least): the antithesis of value, that which enables value, irredeemably toxic or sterile, a resource by another

name, an unrecoverable residue, not yet productive, disgusting, forgotten, abandoned. A focus on the relationship between indeterminacy and classification also provides a means to engage with intellectual traditions that have respectively valorized, critiqued and rejected the teleological, determining project of modernity in which indeterminacy, for good or ill, plays a central role as the dark (or joyful) other. Waste matter often appears as indeterminacy, a form that can be terrifying because it suggests dissolution and indecipherability, something that is either unknowable or uncanny in its hints at previous forms. In some cases, but not all, in that very indeterminacy can lie the seeds of value transformation.

Indeterminacy therefore appears in the following modes: lack of recognition or incorporation in a given classification system; undetermined futures or directions, and a resistance to totalising systems.

But first, it is perhaps as well to get cognate terms out of the way before proceeding further. Here we therefore outline why our take on indeterminacy is different from, or where it may include but is not synonymous with uncertainty, ambiguity and liminality. In short, these terms are not just reducible to each other but have specific meanings and consequences.

Recent ideas on uncertainty fall roughly into four camps: the inability to read other people's intentions, the unknowability of the future, risk management as a response to those unknowns and, finally, the collapse or withdrawal of totalising modernist systems. Thus, as an example of the first group of approaches, Berthomé et al. (2012) approach uncertainty through linguistic anthropology and interactional sociology considering the social problem of being unable to understand the meaning of other people's intentions (see also Rumsey and Robbins' special issue on the opacity of other people's minds, 2008). While not using these approaches, we share their assumption that uncertain conditions are common, not incidental, experiences (Berthomé et al 2012: 130). In the second group, engagements with doubt, from Hecht's (2003) panoramic discussion of the sceptical tradition onwards, can be allied to uncertainty as broad questions of how we

know and, more specifically, how to gauge and act on unknown futures (Pelkmans 2013a, 2013b; Carey and Pedersen 2017). This latter group of questions are at the heart of analyses of late capitalism since both its mechanisms and consequences are uncertainty.

Thus, in the third set of approaches, are analyses of how actors in financial capitalism achieve profits through negotiating risk as a means of managing uncertainty (Appadurai 2011; Miyazaki 2013; Ortiz 2014; Riles 2013; Tuckett 2011; Zaloom 2004). But one flipside of the profit to be gained from the calculability of risk, and the readiness to adapt a workforce to demand, is the erosion of labor security. This precarity is experienced through a variety of forms, which rehearse Marx's insight that capitalist profit requires a reserve army of insecurely or unemployed people. While precarity in itself is an uncertain and not an indeterminate condition it can lead to a crumbling of previously clear identities in terms of class and gender. Further, where the worth of different kinds of work (e.g. manual labor or waste picking) is not formally recognized, this can engender a sense that distinct identities, status and human value are being eroded. Samimian-Darash and Rabinow's edited book, *Modes of Uncertainty* (2015) centres on ethnographies of attempts to know the unknown and thus identify danger and mitigate risk. Their emphasis is not on uncertainty as something 'out there' but how it is deployed as a concept: a new form of governmentality via the management of risk.

The fourth topos of engagement with uncertainty is how people negotiate the political and epistemological insecurities accompanying collapses of ideology and empire. Many of these chronicle the dereliction of lives in former state socialist regimes (e.g. Yurchak 2005; Alexander 2009; Rofel 1999; Verdery and Burawoy 1999) as well as those who embrace new economic opportunities. The complex phenomenon of everyday nostalgias for socialism (e.g. Stenning 2005) finds unexpected echoes in some post-socialist state nationalist projects. As Ozyurek (2006) reminds us in her study of Turkey, nostalgia for the modern state in the wake of anxieties accompanying neoliberalism, is not confined to the former eastern bloc. In part, these anxieties may be ascribed to a loss of a sense of clear direction and of one's place in the world as part of a larger whole, even if in retrospect the wholes turned out to be rather fragmented. As discussed in Section 3 below,

the collapse of old and the emergence of new regimes can generate not only people who no longer fit, but the newly redundant material remains of earlier hopes and quite different regimes (Navaro Yashin 2009; Yarrow, 2017).

Uncertainty therefore chimes with our discussion of indeterminacy but only insofar as it reflects conditions of dissolution, or category loss produced by economic and political exclusion; the material infrastructure of previous times which has yet to find its place; and, finally, a sense that future pathways are rarely as determined as grand narratives suggest but emerge as a dialogue between people's attempts to plan and shape futures and contingent events beyond their control.

'Ambiguity' is frequently used as though it were just another term for indeterminacy. Thus ambiguity refers to the precise meaning of something being unclear or obscure; this might be seen as the recognition failure of indeterminate conditions. However, the potential confusions that arise from ambiguity are because there is a multiplicity of possible meanings at any one given time. These multiple readings may be contradictory (Widger and Russell, in press), creatively play off each other, or depend on context.<sup>3</sup> In other words, ambiguity is about a superfluity of possibilities, each one a legitimate reading of a meaningful category. By contrast, the condition of indeterminacy suggests the lack of such categories. There are instances, however, when the terms merge. For example, Derrida was specifically concerned with indeterminacy-as-ambiguity, multiple meaning, as in the *pharmakon* that is *at once* poison and medicine (Rinella, 2010); that is, the *pharmakon* is not either/or but both and hence essentially indeterminate (Derrida, 1981: pp. 63-171) and, precisely because it holds both these meanings at once, also speaks to the idea of the 'scapegoat' (ibid).<sup>4</sup> These ideas remain salient in our chapters that consider the expulsion or social rejection of people.

Finally, while liminality may seem to mean the same as indeterminacy at times, a clear distinction between the terms is useful. In the anthropological tradition, following van Gennep (1909) and his 'recuperation' by Victor Turner (1967), liminality is not only a condition between two fixed states but, crucially, also has the characteristics of

transformation and transition. These are not qualities that fit our definition of indeterminacy as something that remains between or has an undetermined future. But recently, the term has been widely adopted elsewhere in the humanities and social sciences, particularly political science, to refer to a general condition of being betwixt and between which can be the locus of emergent political orders (e.g. Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra 2015; Thomassen 2014). From literary studies, Szakolczai (2016) adds the oxymoronic notion of ‘permanent liminality’. These more capacious understandings of the term partly chime with our discussions, but also attenuate the charge of the original narrower anthropological use.

These are our working definitions for the book, but are far from the last word on how these terms are understood either in everyday speech or in different disciplines. Namwali Serpell, for instance, reminds us that in literary and scientific theory these terms have become freighted with particular meanings: the New Criticism has appropriated ambiguity; indeterminacy is the driving force of Derridean deconstruction, while uncertainty reflects scientific theories roughly contemporaneous with James Joyce (2006: 308 fn 41).

There are three more parts to this Introduction. The following section provides a grounding for our chapters via a brief genealogy of how indeterminacy has been theorized in philosophy and social theory vis-à-vis questions of order, recognition and progress which partly hinge on whether or not the infinite variety of the world can or should be caught in categories. From this, we move in the next section to the growth of invisible, unregistered, stateless people in the contemporary world alongside tightening systems of classification and control and the material by-products of intensified political and economic production/wasting processes: uncontainable contamination. Here we also consider four areas where social scientists have engaged recently with indeterminacy: statelessness, economic precarity, ethics and creativity.<sup>5</sup> Theorisations of the former two areas typically decry indeterminacy while the latter celebrate it. In the final section, we identify our principal contributions to understanding the multiple registers of indeterminacy via our ethnographic chapters.

## 2. A brief genealogy of order, indeterminacy and waste in the modern age

Our main focus in this section is the interplay between ideas and practices of order and progress in the modern age on the one hand, and indeterminacy on the other. As we work through this genealogy, we highlight how ideas of indeterminacy, wastes, excess and ordering narratives have been woven together at different times in different ways, then how and where these ideas resonate with our volume. We begin with a sense of indeterminacy as something to move away from, towards enlightenment, order and progress before turning to Benjamin's engagements with modernity *as* waste which illustrate how waste and indeterminacy have often been cast as modernity's other. This section ends with Foucault and Bataille's celebratory take on indeterminacy as transgression, and Adorno, whose negative dialectics and denial of the possibility of apprehending reality have been inspirations in locating lives in all their diversity and meaning making outside, in parallel or in response to, centrally-determined, teleological grand projects.

We therefore start with Hegel for whom indeterminacy (*Unbestimmtheit*) and recognition (*Anerkennung*) are fundamental preconditions to the development of individuals' agency as social beings. Drawing on Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is important here for two reasons. First, it starts with the condition of indeterminacy as the unknown point from which logical thought moves towards determinacy. The successive moves towards first a determinate but abstract being and then an actualized self emerges through the recognition by another subject of our own subjecthood: full dynamic being, in other words, is essentially relational. In this frame, we need recognition, and the relation that so implies, in other words, to become agents.

Hegel initially emphasized intersubjective encounters within social groups as linking mutual dependence to questions of recognition, solidarity and esteem (Pippin 2000: 156) allowing (to use a different lexicon) the prosecution of life projects by a social agent.

Later, in the *Philosophy of Right*, this shifted to an emphasis on the objective spirit of world history, eliding intersubjectivity, and creating a new idea of the ethical life and community where adequate recognition is achieved within an institutional system of rights (Williams 1997: 59-69): the three spheres of family, civil society and the state. For Hegel, indeterminacy, alongside emptiness (or ‘loneliness’, as Axel Honneth translates *Einsamkeit*), is a pathology, experienced as an unhappy self-consciousness and indeed, Honneth suggests, is characteristic of the age (2016). While our take on indeterminacy differs from the Hegelian pre-thought void, the question of who recognizes, or refuses recognition of whom and what, is a central theme of this book, allied to the moral project of classifying.

Second, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* outlines the dialectical process by which history (knowledge) moves to the absolute via the two-step between abstraction and concrete appearance which gives rise to a renewed idea and so on towards an absolute totality where idea/category and reality are fused into one. Hegel’s teleological vision of history is shared by many modern political projects. Thus, capitalism, socialism, and colonialism are all teleologically-determined, grounded on Enlightenment concerns with development and Progress, via science and technology, towards a goal of better, happier lives (see Negri 2004; Guyer 2007 for a discussion of capitalism’s temporality).<sup>6</sup> Thus, as Adams et al. observe, modernist temporalities are anticipatory ones ‘in which the future sets the conditions of possibility for action in the present’ and is able to ‘arrive already formed in the present’ (2009: 248-49).

Drawing on Hegel’s method, Marx offers a dialectical framework to address questions of change and structure, also rooted in a modernist temporality of progress and finalization (Berman 2010; Huyssen 1984; Lunn 1984). At its bluntest, the final resolution of the dialectic is reified as an absolute whole, and Marxist dialectical method is reduced to a prescriptive and predictive typology (Althusser 1970; Cornforth 1961) as it most notoriously appeared in Marxist-Leninism.<sup>7</sup> More subtle Marxist work emphasizes the contingency of historical process and class formation (Chandvarakar 1994; Thompson 1978, 1991).

There have been critiques aplenty of this narrative of Progress. What interests us here is how the ideas of surplus, ruins, excess, and wastes in many forms, but particularly the indeterminate and unrecognizable, are woven through these narratives and their critiques. Thus Marx's materialist interpretation of Hegel's dialectical method located historical movement in the material conflicts inherent in each socio-economic formation. The final stage, communism, theoretically contained no exploitative relations and was thus the end point of historical development; the social/material equivalent of Hegel's merging of idea and reality. The emergence of capitalism, as a mode of production, lay in the confluence of factors that enabled the production and appropriation of surplus for profit. Surplus labor can be interpreted in two ways, both essential for capitalism. The first is the labor which is surplus to the laborer's livelihood needs and which creates profit for the capitalist. The second, is the reserve army of unemployed people hovering in the wings to meet the swings of market demand. Such people are surplus to immediate requirements, outside yet connected to formal systems of value production; simultaneously potentially valuable and wasted.

Surplus is therefore integral to the capitalist process, creating and maintaining profit, and wasting human lives. But excess, as something overflowing, which cannot be accommodated, can be threatening (Alexander this vol) and must therefore be expended (wasted), to follow Bataille's reasoning (1991)<sup>8</sup> if it is not to become harmful. Excess also appears as the detritus of the capitalist modern age. In such a spirit, Benjamin excavated modernity through the trail of waste and ephemera it left behind, his own monumental *Arcades* project, unfinished, a half-built/ruin of fragments symbolizing as well as accounting for the failed promise of modernity (2002). And yet, modernity's underlying framework of progress still seems to have a tight grip on dominant imaginaries of capitalism and socialism.

In some post-Soviet contexts, for example, revolutionary logic seemed merely to transpose 'communism' with 'the market' as the goal, retaining faith in determinate historical rules (Alexander 2009). Elsewhere, in the 1990s, international lending agencies

as well as local governments, spoke of ‘transition’, the implication being that they knew precisely where they were heading: free market capitalism (Gaidar 1999; Lipton, Sachs et al 1992: 213; Sachs 1994). In the academy, the emphasis on transition moved rapidly, following Stark (1991) to languages of transformation and ‘path dependency’, where particular pasts, rather than futures, influenced continual change.

But the modernist project of development, underscored by the same belief in Progress and framed by market integration since the U.S.’s Marshall Plan in 1948, marches on for all the steady criticism it has received over the last few decades from Gunder Frank’s insight that ‘development’ was having the reverse effect (1966), and Escobar’s reiteration in 1995 that development was wasting the very places it was supposed to make anew. There have been calls for post-development (Dasgupta 1985), alternatives to development (Friedman 1992) and to move after post development (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000). But still, as Gardner and Lewis (2015) describe, the appeal of Progress continues with, ironically, a return to belief in technological interventions. Indeed, Sachs (1992: 1) described Development itself as an indeterminate ruin of modernity, still with us, but pointing to a discredited future. To paraphrase Benjamin, modernity can be characterized by the wasted lands, excess materials and people it expels to keep the project on the road. For the anthropological endeavour, to think critically about normative frameworks of progress, entails a willingness to engage with ruination (Dawdy 2010), and the modern forms of life created by processes of systemic expulsion and desolation (Massey and Denton 1993; Wacquant 2010).

Waste, Scanlan suggests, is modernity’s other side (2005). We narrow this down here to indeterminate excess produced by the order of Progress. Indeed the shadows of formal rational Progress appear via a scabrous version of indeterminacy as the menacing, wasted cast-offs of Progress itself where the curiously contagious quality of wastes (Druckner 2005) leads waste workers to become as much symbolically as materially defiled by their contact with waste materials and places, the latter typically located on edges and borders just to add to their capacity for symbolic disruption. More famously, Marx’s excoriation of the lumpenproletariat merges those who live on waste with redundancy (or

‘uselessness’ in Scanlan’s phrase, 2005) in a revolutionary progressive order, and with the quality of waste itself: ‘the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers in old society’ (Marx 1967: 92); the dangerous class ‘living off the garbage of society’ (ibid).

Such language not only reappears in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, but makes explicit the contempt and fear generated by those who are not readily classifiable: the rotting (between life and death), ruined and indiscernible mass:

‘the decayed roués ... the ruined... offshoots of the bourgeoisie ... ragpickers... in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French call *la bohème*... ... This Bonaparte, who constitutes himself *chief of the lumpenproletariat*, who here alone rediscovers in mass form the interests which he ... pursues, who recognizes in this scum, offal, refuse of all classes the only class upon which he can base himself unconditionally.’ (Marx 1975: 148).

This, Žižek observes, is the ultimate statement of the ‘logic of the Party of Order’ (2012: 20), where ‘the excremental ... non-representable excess of society’ (ibid: 21) becomes the only medium of universal representation. Western modernity, if we follow Scanlan, tends to blank out ‘that which doesn’t fit’ (2005: 80); ambiguity and confusion, he suggests, prevent meaning and lend themselves to the language of garbage (ibid: 56).

Adorno’s devastating critiques of modernity give us a way out of this binary of rigidly ordered meaning or unmeaning via an explanation and a method: First, with Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002), he locates the primal human fear of the unknown as the driver for attempts to dominate the world through technologies of knowing (cf. Feyerabend 1975, 2001). In such a society, unfree through fear, the other is exploited or expelled. This other, in our lexicon, is thus unknowable, unrecognizable—and rendered indeterminate. The second element we adapt from Adorno is from his *Negative Dialectics* (1973). His take drew on Hegel’s method but was a non-dogmatic philosophical

materialism, as opposed to Hegel's idealism (Jarvis 1998). Thus, for Adorno, unlike Hegel, the attempt to conjoin idea and object is negatively valued. Where unity seems to appear this is only by suppressing difference and diversity (Adorno 1973: 142-61). It is only by articulating such contradictions, and the misidentification of object and thought, that a 'fragile transformative horizon' of hope appears where objects and people can flourish in their particularity.<sup>9</sup> We too are attempting this dialectic between theory and ethnography, outlining in the final section of this introduction how we draw on negative dialectics to frame our approach to indeterminacy.

Other critiques of modernity emphasize the repressive domination of ordering practices by celebrating transgression.<sup>10</sup> As Viney suggests, accounts of people, places and things that do not fit dominant orders are typically binary, casting matter out of place as negative (2014), the *process* of ejection, however, is positive (for those doing it): reaffirming system and structure (Douglas 1966). There is however another body of work that also counterposes waste-as-excess against rational order, but celebrates and glorifies disorder as a deconstruction of the humanist, unified modern subject. Such accounts typically draw on pre- or early modern and ethnographic accounts of alterity to challenge modernist accounts. Thus Stallybrass and White's historical work (1986), Bakhtin's on the excess of the grotesque body and carnival (2009), and Foucault's work on transgression, infinite variety and Dionysian excess (e.g. 1977, 1984), serve to destabilize singular subjects, aligning with Bataille's invitation to consider open-ended forms of knowledge and economic exchange rooted in the productive consumption of excess (1985, 1988). This doubleness of excess in the modern world, its threat and potential is what interests us here.

The next section outlines instances of just that modernist drive to domination, order and expulsion that many of the theorists above describe—but we end by juxtaposing this not only with celebrations of open-endedness and excess, but reminders of more complex accounts of how promises of modernist order have been experienced and lamented.

### **3. Contemporary Excesses.**

Crisis hardens social categories, spewing people out who no longer fit. The implications of being outside the law are crucial to how political indeterminacy is experienced. The term ‘outlaw’ is derived from Old Norse for wolf (Nyers 2006), implying a lack of distinction between human and non-human that can cruelly shape what it means to be outside the juridical community. Indeed, Hannah Arendt opens *The Origins of Totalitarianism* with ‘homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth’ caused by the chaos of war and reinforced nation-state borders (1950: vii). In this section we consider the growth of political and economic indeterminacy as the volume of displaced people and precarious labor grows. Alongside such immediate violence (Sassen 2015), we consider the concomitant slow violence (Nixon 2011) of wasting materials and lands through ordering regimes, and how this has been theorized before turning to a different branch of engagement with indeterminacy: the realm of creative, hopeful imagination.

Thus over the last few decades, wars, and the redrawing of nation-state boundaries and ethnic and citizenship categories, have stranded people in temporary zones and camps that have calcified into permanence. The UNHCR estimates there are over 59.5 million forcibly-displaced people worldwide, of whom approximately two thirds are internally displaced and therefore unprotected by International Law (UNHCR 2014).<sup>11</sup> In the same year, UNHCR estimated there were 10 million stateless individuals (ibid). A crisis of recognition draws attention once again to the challenge of alterity: how to unite without forcing assimilation (Povinelli 2002), how, to return to the previous section, to recognize difference and common humanity. In such contexts, indeterminacy has typically been theorized as an undesirable condition, imposed by state authority, where resistance is the positive counter move to regain or remake political subjectivities.

Agier documents a further ‘disquieting ambiguity’ of refugee camps: humanitarian interventions that appear to be linked disturbingly to penal technologies of containment, and are an exercise in ‘managing the undesirables’ (2010). He suggests a growing and carefully maintained division between ‘a clean, healthy and visible world ... [and] the

world's residual "remnants", dark, diseased and invisible' (2011: 4). Following Agamben (1998), Agier describes states of permanent precariousness where a rhetoric of constant emergency means that refugee camps 'exclude past and future' in an exceptional but enduring present (2010: 79). De Genova (2002) and Willen (2007) similarly focus on the production of migrants' illegal statuses and spaces—and their attempts to resist ambiguity. Recently, a series of interventions have highlighted resistance, reclamation and the forging of new political subjectivities in these atemporal, aspatial spaces (Gabiam,2016; Turner 2012) even when simple existence can be taken as resistance (Schiocchet 2013: 67). Peteet notes for example, in Palestinian refugee camps, how young men re-ascribe meaning to beatings as rites of passage that constitute forms of masculinity' (2005).

Agamben shows that those who are excluded from society live exposed and threatened lives (1998: 29). Such impositions of structural indeterminacy go beyond ascriptions of criminality and move towards the negation of humanity—as in the evacuation of meaning (Eriksen and Thorleifsson this vol.) of the common use of tropes for unwanted migrants as indiscernible, uncountable masses (Alexander this vol). The number of unregistered people who fall between the cracks is growing as states militarize borders, tighten population classifications and control measures for 'homeland security', and restrict welfare to those with the right kind of identification documents. In 2014, the World Health Organisation estimated that, as a consequence of such measures, two thirds of deaths and nearly half the number of births globally are unrecorded (WHO 2014).

Alongside the indeterminate status of the world's 'outlaws' and refugees, late capitalism has intensified conditions of precarity in the working lives of people in ostensibly stable political environments. Marx highlighted the reserve army of unemployed that kept 19<sup>th</sup>-century capitalism ticking. But now, cheaper labor can easily be found elsewhere in the world. Mechanization often replaces the need for bodies at all. Weakening labor legislation, the growth of unpaid internships, 'zero hour' contracts, and corrupt or emasculated trade unions all contribute to contemporary economic precarity. Even when work is available, it may be poorly paid, unreliable, part-time, and insufficient for a

livelihood. Such flexible labor has been enabled by financial deregulation and the easy global movement of capital (Harvey 1987). The essential character of formal employment has been transformed, not only rendering previous working-class identities indeterminate but, as Diedrich suggests for unemployed former Welsh miners, ‘steadily dissolving what the individual had believed to be the stable core of his ... identity’ (2004: 117). The ethnographic emphasis here has been on how precariously employed persons experience their labor, often as extreme vulnerability (Allison 2012; Genda 2005; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hann and Parry 2018; Millar 2014; Mole 2010; Munck 2013; Sanchez 2016; Standing 2011).

Indeterminacy has become the dominant condition of insecure work in many industries as ‘permanent impermanence’ normalizes ostensibly temporary contracts within regular structures of production. Employment conditions and forms are thus seemingly predictable and fixed through time, yet are underpinned by profound insecurity, collapsing previously clear distinctions between regular and casual work (Sanchez 2018: 235).

In such a context of increasing political and economic indeterminacy, McFann suggests a chilling typology of how humans-as-waste (see Mbembe 2011; Yates 2011) have been produced, typically as a product of ordering regimes such as colonialism, modernity and capitalism (McFann n.d.) which both depend on *and* produce surplus or unwanted, excess people, lands and materials. McFann’s typology describes the symbolic deployment of the concept of waste (following Douglas’ 1966 structuralist account and Kristeva’s 1984 notion of the abject); the biopolitical (such as Foucault’s accounts of state ordering) and the politico-economic, informed by a Marxist critique of capitalism that demands a surplus labor population and wastes human bodies (Gidwani 2013; Gidwani and Reddy 2011; Yates 2011). To this we add Bauman’s construction of late modernity as fluid or liquid which seems to counter the rigidity of an ordering regime and yet rehearses the move of expelling unwanted bodies as just so many wasted lives (2013).

Precarity and ambiguity can also generate strategies for living beyond, or in spite of, the state, as Knudsen and Frederiksen and their contributors (2015) trace through their notion of the 'grey zone', where the informal, ephemeral and ambiguous have become ordinary. Improvisation can intersect with forms of exclusion and regimes of governance based upon legibility. The temporalities of indeterminate encounters with the state require attentiveness. It is not only in refugee camps, among asylum seekers and on the margins of the state (Das and Poole 2004; Auyero, 2012) that suspension and waiting are ways of being and expressions of power hierarchies.<sup>12</sup> Gupta reminds us of the chronic suspension of many giant infrastructure projects (2015), Choy and Zee of the chemical and other pollution suspended in the atmosphere that allows/damages life (2015). Samuel Beckett, of course, identified waiting as the human condition (1956).

Just as ordering regimes waste and devalue people, so too are landscapes marked with such regimes' failures, byproducts, and cast offs that give the lie to any notion of future-oriented improvement. The often unfulfilled promise of modernity's grand projects, become inscribed upon the landscape as half-built infrastructure and ruins, which point to forgotten futures (Gordillo 2014; Gupta 2015; Stoler 2013; Hussain 2013; Ringel this vol) and shape lives transfixed in a present, waiting either for the past or the future to return, as Geissler (2010) so movingly shows through a discussion of the people who continue to live and work in an abandoned colonial field station in Kenya. Both this and Yarrow's (2017) account of Ghana's incomplete Volta Dam project, suggest a different relationship to modernity's march than that suggested by the preceding pages. The failed promises of modernity can be mourned by people who live among the ruins.

Policies devised by such modernist states are typically linked to a specific mode of acting on the world to produce outcomes that are aimed at closure and containment (Hinchcliffe 2001). In the essentially limitless context of the environment and climate such aims are inherently flawed, since certitude can be misplaced and potentially damaging (see Wynne 1992, 1997; Alexander in press). 'Dealing with' the wastes of military and industrial extraction, consumption and production is often only hopeful postponement, appealing to an imagined future state, when science will have caught up with its earlier incarnation

and be better able to resolve the endless stream of by-products and hybrid entities that have qualified 'nature'. Buried shrapnel or lurking landmines can also be a source of profound indeterminacy (Henig 2012; Kim 2014), unmapping previously known landscapes. Compared with the relative localization of such military waste, chemical (like nuclear) contamination is 'amorphous and invisible' (Broto 2015: 94), exacerbated by the inability to determine the temporal and spatial reach of leaks (Topçu 2008). Pollution and contamination are thus characterized by formlessness, excessiveness, and wayward movement (Strathern 1991: 61; Tsing 2015: 28), which resist neat narratives of containment or restoration. Such accounts of remediation, however, are confronted head on by a queer ethics of hybridity, personified by the figure of Nuclia Waste, a drag queen act who exuberantly foregrounds the excess and permeability of the entire environment and herself to nuclear contamination (Kupar 2012). Guy Schaffer further reminds us that queer theory is concerned with 'uneven remainders, things that don't fit neatly into categories' (n.d.), that 'trash' unites wastes and camp alike and that camp itself is 'a mode of aestheticism devoted to excess, to failure, to ironic detachment' (ibid), a refusal, we might say, to be integrated. Such practices align indeterminacy, unruly wastes and queer theory, recasting indeterminacy as a mode of potentiality, resistance, escape, creativity, and improvisation (see Morgensen 2016; Gonzalez-Polledo this vol).

In just such a light, recent scholarship in the social sciences, arts and humanities has characterized indeterminacy as a necessary space for creativity, and cultural improvisation (Hallam and Ingold 2007). Becker describes artworks as fundamentally indeterminate, only existing within each moment of re-creation (2006). Feminist and Queer theories also invite us to consider mobility rather than stasis, processes of becoming rather than fixed categories, and the generative power of ambiguity. They also ask us to think how metaphors and performances of indeterminacy can be mobilized to resist social classification and control. Or indeed, how ritualized gender transgression, as in Bateson's (1936) account of transvestism during Naven rituals among the Iatmul of Papua New Guinea, can establish / reaffirm hierarchical, gender binary relationships, thus highlighting again the complex relationship between indeterminacy and classificatory systems. Herdt's work on the imaginative possibilities of the 'third gender' suggests

another reading of Naven transvestism whereby such performances indicate the “abandonment of absolute contrast” (Herdt 1994: 41, cf. Halberstam 1999).

Gibson-Graham’s feminist approach to political economy, echo these moves in their criticism of what they call the over-determination of spaces, a capitalocentric, analytical tunnel vision that fails to see spaces of opportunity and alternative imaginaries (2006). Debates on imagination’s preconditions again insist on the apparent freedom offered by indeterminacy (Rapport 2015; Sneath et al. 2009). And just as imagination projects forward, so radical indeterminacy has also been described as a requirement for hope (Miyazaki, 2005 following Bloch, 1995) and the crucial *conditio sine qua non* for an ethical stance of openness. Roughly speaking then we are faced with analytical approaches to indeterminacy that counsel only either hope or despair.

We end this section with Ringel (2014) and Jansen (2016) who both highlight an emerging strand of ethnographic writing that privileges the social significance of indeterminacy. Critically engaging with Miyazaki and Ernst Bloch’s analyses of hope, Jansen notes that recent anthropological attention to indeterminacy has allowed ethnographers to embrace global capitalism’s apparent ‘loss of direction’ and to create new methodologies that consider the significance of exclusion and the emic inability to predict change through time (Miyazaki 2010: 250; cf., Bloch 1986 [1959]; Ringel 2012). However, both Ringel and Jansen observe that many anthropological engagements with this topic deploy a Deleuzian analytic that overly fetishizes processes of ‘emergence and becoming’ (e.g. Anderson 2007; Biehl and Locke 2010; Pedersen 2012). Such ethnography can too easily settle for ‘uncovering and valorising sparks of indeterminacy’ instead of interrogating how they are formed and where they lead. Like Jansen and Ringel, what concerns us are the social effects produced by these sparks which we trace by emphasising ethnographic rather than analytical normativities. In the final section we describe what our ethnographies of indeterminacy reveal.

#### **4. Conclusion: Ethnographies of indeterminacy, waste and value**

We approach indeterminacy and its relationships with the material and metaphors of waste and value through two closely-related steps, both of which draw on Hegel's idea of recognition and Adorno's negative dialectics.

Our first step is to explore indeterminacy largely as an issue of classification and failed/mis-recognition of that which cannot be easily incorporated into classificatory systems. We do this by interrogating the mechanisms of power and resistance at play in classification and indeterminacy, how people negotiate mundane knowns and unknowns, confront foreshortened futures; how the state reads its citizens and is in turn read—or dissolves into illegibility that is resistant to encounter. And while indeterminacy can foreclose engagement with a person or institution that cannot be discerned, or can create a space for personal rule and corruption (Reeves, 2015), there are instances where people may embrace ambiguity via a multiplicity of meaning, refuse categories, and find other ways of counting outside dominant classificatory modes (Alexander and Kesküla this volume). One implication of rejecting a category foisted upon one, is that the system or imagined totality that gives that category meaning is also implicitly rejected. Thus, the unhappiness of both the expatriate Russians in Kesküla's chapter, and the repatriate Kazakhs in Alexander's is caught up in their repudiation not only of how they are treated, but also of the system, or the new totality, in which they find themselves. They are denied full citizenship rights but some at least, in turn, deny the state (cf. Simpson, 2014). While the power difference scarcely needs to be spelled out in such reciprocal refusal, there are suggestions that the state also needs, in part, these recalcitrant people. The integrity of the modern nation-state and the modern human subject is challenged by, and yet requires open-endedness, mobility.

This might suggest a structuralist approach to categorization and its antinomies, returning to Douglas' classic definition of dirt as matter out of place (1966). The power of her observation is that a bewildering array of 'wastes', and the visceral revulsion that may accompany them, are culturally determined. However, thinking with a third term 'indeterminacy', which may be negatively or positively valued, or neither (suspension),

or both, complicates this approach and reveals (as in Eriksen and Thorleifsson's contribution) that quite different instances are merged and lost in the category of 'the anomaly'. Equally, emphasising those or that which is expelled, may reveal contestation over who and what represents order. Finally, instances where an element may fit with the dominant order, but excessively so, or simultaneously possess wanted and unwanted characteristics, can threaten to shatter categories from within (Alexander this vol.).

Our second step is the familiar anthropological argument that indeterminacy, as a mode of apprehension and being, can complicate modernity's grand teleology. We focus on areas where movement, change and transformation are not always predictable or follow more modest ambitions than state-driven narratives of an ultimate social or organizational whole to which progress is being made. But there are also instances where people neither resist nor counter teleological visions, even after the collapse of animating state regimes. Rather they may hope for the return of such projects, grieve their passing, act as though they still exist or simply transpose the logic to a new context. Three related insights from negative dialectics follow.

The first is that state (or indeed international agency development) projects are typically based on a teleological vision of time; after all 'to project' implies just such an engagement with the future. But change may be unpredictable, rarely proceeding according to a predetermined telos. This echoes interventions from Science and Technology Studies (e.g. Bijker 1995; Bijker et al. 2012 and Latour 1996) which trace the contingency of successful technological developments, inventions, and the happy (but not inevitable) coalescence of enabling factors in the successes or failures that later come to seem predestined (see Ringel this vol for a comparable account in the case of urban infrastructure). Some ideas succeed, others fail to be taken up.

By focusing on lives outside formal scaffolds of developmental progress, we describe instances where people have been expelled from or denied full participation in mainstream societies, have embraced formlessness and open-endedness, or settled for getting by, muddling through, and attending to the job at hand. We also include those

who align themselves with previous grand narratives and lost visions. It is perhaps worth noting that increasingly, contemporary institutions expect employees to have their own life/career projects carefully articulated with the greater whole; those who do not subscribe to, or find themselves tangential to the latest institutional or state developmental mission or vision, are increasingly ripe for being ‘managed out’ or cast as wasted (cf. Bauman).

But ethnographic attention allows us to see that a Baumanesque classification of outcasts as wasted lives is to fail to see gradation and difference, where tactics of imagination and reclamation may come into play, where value may be recovered both from rejected materials and by people whose labor is excessive for a profitable enterprise. Simply to call these wasted lives is to recapitulate analytically the expulsion into indistinction that modernity has inflicted on them. Rather, we suggest, that while regimes of modernity expel lives, materials and places as excessive—the tension and often ambiguities of these indeterminate states can allow meaning and value to be remade, suspended or lost. If capitalism itself is predicated on imagined futures, in other words (Beckert 2016), then so, in theory, can people reimagine their own futures.

The next insight derived from negative dialectics is that progression to another state (whether a future condition, revaluation or reincorporation) is not to be assumed. This is most easily seen in the complex relationships between waste and value that are imagined, practiced, experienced and theorized. Thus waste can be matter out of place, its expulsion a restorative act of ordering. We know enough now to recognize that one person’s or system’s waste, might be valuable in another instance (Reno, 2009). But one implication of the emphasis on structural / contextual understandings of waste (changing a waste object’s context can mean it is suddenly valuable) is that it appears as though wastes invariably contain the seed of value if they can only be re-placed or converted, and indeed that all valued objects and people in turn contain the potential to be wasted. The relationship between waste and value is more complex and varied than that implied by the ‘matter out of place’ maxim. One is not necessarily the simple inversion of the other. This is where indeterminacy provides a useful third term. Wastes can be indeterminate

(value never) in the sense of a forgotten or postponed limbo, unattached in terms of property rights. Or indeterminacy can simply be a state where either, neither or both negative waste and positive value can be discerned or imagined.

Examples of such an imbrication of waste and value, or rather, the precondition of an act or representation of wasting to release value are found in Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015) and Peña Valderrama's work on carbon sink accounting (2016). In the former, intensive industrial logging renders the land unable to support life except for one kind of fungus that thrives in such territory—and turns out to be a prized delicacy. Hope appears among capitalism's ruins.

Peña Valderrama illustrates another kind of intertwining of waste and value via a carbon sink project in Madagascar which gathered weight and funding thanks to fallow land being constructed by project officials as both unrecoverable and potentially recoverable waste. An imagined future scenario of degradation from slash-and-burn cultivation is pictured as being 'avoided' or 'offset' through the project's reforestation activities. This accounting legerdemain created the fallows as essentially indeterminate, creating one kind of value via carbon credits. But this is not a hopeful story: the farmers who were literally cast out from their lands are effectively wasted. The politics of such accounting techniques are that different parties enjoy the benefits and suffer the losses.

Wastes are not simply transformed into value in these acts. Rather, the condition of indeterminacy can be seen as a mode between, or as encompassing, waste and value. In some cases, it is a threatening, negative force, sometimes translated into wastelands and waste people, sometimes a necessary imaginary to allow the economic, rehabilitative value of an alternative route to be realized, but also exists as a mode of limbo or suspension that may never be resolved, re-fused or incorporated. This in-betweenness operates temporally as well as spatially.

Engaging with emic ideas of worth, uncovers contested ideas of what constitutes waste and value in a given ethnographic moment. Crucially, the moment of apparent transition

from waste to value may remain unresolved, indeterminate. This is the moment that interests us. We include in this idea, as one example, lands that have been irrevocably polluted and stripped into sterility by industrial mining or the toxic chemical by-products of value production.<sup>13</sup> Abandonment or containment are typical responses, the latter sometimes in the hope of a future technology appearing that is able to undo toxicity. Again, people may articulate a sense of being left behind by rapid and extreme social change, for whom there is less a sense of ‘progress towards’, than daily routines of getting by, a modest intentionality. Again, we sound a note of caution about taking such lives as intrinsically those of either resistance or oppression. Some ethnographic studies suggest marginalized people may disregard any time but the present, subverting the rather Protestant notion of the present as a site of suffering to be overcome through careful planning. In this model, marginalized people resist by performatively stating that the true domain of suffering is the future, mitigated by the impulsive act of living for the ‘now’ (Day et al 1999: 2). Fatalism does not always lead to present impetuosity, or a positive emic take on it.

The final inspiration we take from negative dialectics is that apparent ‘fragments’ are not necessarily part of, nor destined to be incorporated into a whole. Many of our contributions explore tensions between imagined totalities (e.g. nation-states) and mundane experiences. Our chapters speak to an unpredictable world, partly apprehensible, where the multiple ordering regimes of modernity rely on the constant production and expulsion of putative excess. Many of the essays in this collection suggest a means of representing and of being in the world as fragments, non-unitary subjects and things, with incomplete perspectives and understandings (Candea 2010; Strathern 1991). In what follows we outline our chapters’ main contributions to understanding indeterminacy ethnographically.

The first three chapters explore open-endedness in quite different contexts, each of which reveals tensions, or surprises, between ways of knowing and managing (landfill containment, defining people, urban planning) and material or human refusals to conform to such determinate visions. Thus suspended fragments in a North American landfill

generate unpredictable contamination (Reno); British trans artists' embrace of mutability in life and work inhibits access to rights through formal recognition (Gonzalez-Polledo); German post-industrial infrastructure is successively planned, redundant and repurposed (Ringel). The following three chapters examine demographic politics from complementary angles, how: internal and external others (Roma and Travellers) are marked as indeterminate waste in Norway (Eriksen and Thorleifsson); Russian miners who were 'left behind' after the end of the Soviet Union in Estonia and Kazakhstan now find themselves unvalued (Kesküla); and, repatriate Kazakhs in Kazakhstan are simultaneously welcomed and rejected as excessive to the country's enterprise (Alexander). As many of these chapters uncover, one form of indeterminacy, whether imposed or embraced, often creates others. Our final chapter explores this explicitly through people classed as surplus labor in the Philippines, who now work as waste pickers (Schober). Despite the range of contexts, certain common themes appear, as the following sketches out.

The will to control through fixity, numbering, containment and classifications, is typically manifested through the modern state, which expels, or forcibly assimilates, or 'digests' in Eriksen and Thorleifsson's striking metaphor (see also O'Brien 2003), those who do not fit. But as Eriksen and Thorleifsson show for the Roma in Norway and Schober for waste pickers, one means of doing this is by imagining indeterminate wastes that migrate across domains linking wayward pollution, chaotic material wastes, and unclean people which together threaten the literal and metaphorical health of the body politic. Shifting perspective shows different responses.

Schober shows how waste pickers contest classifications of 'surplus' or 'wasted' labor by remaking their lives, re-determining the discards of others into valuable resource, locating ever finer intervals in the value chain, where most see only indecipherable waste. In this way, they demand formal recognition of their lives and labor. Moreover, she highlights the failure of terms such as precarity and wagelessness to capture the nuances of people living through, off and alongside processes of capitalism. The trans artists described by Gonzalez-Polledo experience the politics of recognition and indeterminacy

quite differently. Seeking in their lives and art practice alike to escape formal determinacy, they find access to rights and resources denied and may strategically move in and out of accepting 'labels' and medico-legal models in order to subsist. Thus the politics of recognition and redistribution merge in the tension between wanting recognition but not codification. Ringel's description of the unanticipated ruins of industrial infrastructure which actively inhibits future municipal development is neatly offset by a group of residents in a rundown region who value their houses' dilapidation as a means of resisting gentrification. Ringel's point, as urban infrastructure is rendered superfluous then repurposed, is that, with each new direction, indeterminacy only appears as a retrospective point of surprise.

Both Kesküla and Alexander's ethnographies illustrate people mourning the classificatory frameworks offered by former modernist states for the social, moral and monetary value they once conferred. In the former account, Russian miners find they are no longer a distinct category of prized worker but lumped together with other unvalued manual workers, even though the product of the miners' labor, energy, is vital for the national enterprise. Their sense of dislocation is partly expressed through constant comparison with other workers, ethnic groups, lands and times. They fit with none of them.

Reno's focus on the fragment reminds us that most analytical approaches fail to account for the part that belongs to no whole nor has a trajectory other than material decay. Not all wastes are ripe for conversion to value. Such present-oriented moments reappear in Ringel's account. The landfill serves as both metaphor and case study of the indeterminacies that emerge from techniques of control. Attempts to manage unruly wastes through containment are always incomplete as leachate and gas escape. Essentially indeterminate, biogas can only be partly trapped and converted to value. For an emergent politics of indeterminate wastes, the question is not whether they can be known or not, but if they can be known *enough* to act upon: a matter of *degree* instead of binary determination.

Thus we explore what happens when binary categories or ideas as containers of meaning clash with complex lives and materials that overflow such attempts to hold them fast. Repatriate Kazakhs, for example, seem to show an *excess* of qualities that demarcate ‘Kazakhness’, potentially diminishing other Kazakhs by comparison. Further, they seem to conflate distinct times, embodying the past in the present, and remind unwilling neighbours that population and labor force numbers also refer to human beings. Numbers and categories, Alexander suggests, are essentially indeterminate proxies for reality. As both Reno and Alexander show, excessive regulation can create gaps between laws that, like anomalies, are often profoundly ambiguous.

Individuals that fall between or outside categories, or find their specificity denied in generic classifications, may strive for formal recognition and attendant rights, or celebrate being outside formal schema, or move between these modes. Anomalous figures may be rejected by dominant societies (as with Roma in Norway), or brutally made the same (as with Travellers in Norway), may lack the relations that make them a social person, but may also be symbolically potent (the miner) or, as an entrepreneur, may seize the value lurking in indeterminate spaces and times.

The figure of the entrepreneur, who appears in many of the following chapters, incarnates the need for attention to ethnographic normativities. Often an anomalous figure<sup>14</sup> herself, the entrepreneur can be cast as the heroic agent of innovation and capitalist value creation precisely by exploiting indeterminacy qua ignorance.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, she can be morally derided for mere speculation, or reconfiguration, failing to produce any genuine added value, or indeed brokering across spheres that should legally and morally remain distinct, as in the case of rent seeking.

One last observation, before we move to our chapters. Arguably ethnography is fundamentally concerned with the mundane spaces where social rules are encountered, negotiated, modified, resisted, reincorporated, appropriated and so on. Cannell’s ethnography of power and negotiation in a Philippine community makes this explicit (1999), but this is also the indeterminate space of ethnography itself more broadly.

Further, 'suspension', Choy and Zee suggest, 'tethers to the ethnographer's method, a procedure that works to render staid common sense into an opening of possible worlds: ethnography constitutes a work of suspension, of assumptions and disbelief, one that not only describes worlds but holds them in such a way as to allow them to settle into different arrangements, possibilities.' (2015: 212). Indeterminacy is at the core of ethnographic engagement.

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### **Bio**

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### **Bio**

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas was, of course, discussing dirt not waste and the two are not always synonymous: wastes can be amorphous, unrecognizable and hence unclassifiable—or they can be the very stuff of classificatory order, as anyone who sorts recyclates for collection knows. However, there is by now a considerable literature where the equation between waste and dirt is made in a way that stays true to her overall argument (as Joshua Reno helpfully pointed out, pers. comm.)

<sup>2</sup> Thompson (2017) presented an analogous critique of Douglas' thesis by challenging the waste/value binary with a third term 'rubbish', an indeterminate but still, in his framework, a socially-constructed category.

<sup>3</sup> Ambiguity is of course a mainstay in literary studies from Empson's classic study onwards. Note too in part homage, Namwali Serpell's *Seven Modes of Uncertainty* (2016) which suggests that uncertainty is an essentially ethical stance, allowing freedom.

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<sup>4</sup> Thus for example, a society that rids itself of a perceived social poison, unwanted people is, in that act, providing the antidote or medicine to that ill.

<sup>5</sup> There are others, of course. For example, Green's (2005) account of the Balkans which describes external discourses that insist 'the region is fluidity and indeterminacy personified, right on the surface, a completely explicit fog, as it were' (2005: 12), challenging modernist accounts of statist drives to clarity, but which are also partly reproduced locally, and Green suggests, partly constitute lived experience. Both Green's book and Candea's (2010) on Corsican identity, which also works through external and internal insistence on indeterminacy and partiality, are themselves presented as provisional, open ended and fragmentary.

<sup>6</sup> Thus despite the fact that capitalism and state socialism have been ideologically portrayed as opposite, Buck-Morss emphasized how in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century these two forms of organisation were profoundly entwined, sharing 18<sup>th</sup>-century philosophical roots and a passionate belief in the emancipatory potential of industrial production for creating mass utopia (2000). Earlier, Keith Hart flagged the ideological projection of difference between capitalism and socialism during the Cold War while they had never been closer in practice (1992).

<sup>7</sup> Note also Sanchez and Struempell 2014 for a different setting of prescriptive Marxist thought.

<sup>8</sup> Although Bataille uses both 'surplus' and 'excess' in *The Accursed Share* (1991) there is a sense that it is the latter, as superabundance, which forces expenditure, or wasting-as-luxury (or sacrifice and war). Excess is the accursed share.

<sup>9</sup> See Taylor's 1992 account of contemporary political demands for recognition on the grounds that recognition and identity are fundamentally linked.

<sup>10</sup> Or highlight alternative classificatory systems and discursive formations historically (Foucault, 1994) and through ethnographic comparison.

<sup>11</sup> Article 1 of *The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* defines a refugee as someone who has fled his or her country "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social

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group or political opinion” and sets out the legal obligations of governments towards such people.

<sup>12</sup> Wittgenstein’s famous paradox for rule-following encapsulates some of the experiences explored in our chapters of attempts to engage with the state and its representatives: “This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here” (1953: 206). I am grateful to Diana Vonnak for this observation.

<sup>13</sup> Thus one might see Harvey’s concept of capitalism’s spatial fix (1981) as having a second movement. If the first is to acquire more space, more territory to fuel the constant expansion inherent to capitalism, then the irrecoverable wasting of land from unsustainable resource extraction also drives the ‘need’ to acquire more resource-rich land (see also Gidwani, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> This is taken further in Tsing’s analysis of the potent imaginary of ‘the entrepreneur’ in supply chain capitalism where sweatshop workers may hopefully imagine themselves as potentially rich entrepreneurs (2013: 159) and, in recruiting family members, further blur the fuzzy line between self- and superexploitation (2013: 167, fn 28).

<sup>15</sup> This of course as Joshua Reno points out (pers. comm) is the fetishized ideal type of neoliberal ideology whereas (see Birch, 2015), arguably, the monopoly capitalist who undergirds global capitalism is concerned with determinacy, predictability and limiting risk where possible.