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# Garbage and the Politics of Mixing, in Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen's *Trash! On Ragpicker Children and Recycling*

DANA C. MOUNT

Waste may be a human by-product, but it is also where much human labor begins. Garbage dumped curbside or in landfills signals the start of the working day for millions of people around the world. The critically acclaimed Brazilian film *Waste Land* was pathbreaking in the way it introduced Western audiences to a handful of people who work in the Jardim Gramacho landfill in Rio de Janeiro. Directed by Lucy Walker, the film features the artist Vik Muiz, who embarked on a highly involved project to create portraits for and of the people who labor as scavengers and sorters in one of the world's largest landfills. The film stands as a landmark in the gathering public interest in art made from and about garbage. The narrative arts in particular, namely film and literature, are adept at reinserting the human element into our discourse on oversized global problems such as the garbage crisis. A small but powerful example of such a narrative is the illustrated children's book entitled *Trash! On Ragpicker Children and Recycling*. *Trash!*—written by Gita Wolf, Anushka Ravishankar, and Orijit Sen (who also illustrates the text)—tells the story of child scavengers in the southern Indian city of Chennai. *Trash!* is an educational storybook on issues of waste and child labor that critically situates India within a global context in order to give its young readers the tools for thinking through the issue of

waste production and waste management. Whereas Western discourse on garbage often begins with the attempt to confront readers or viewers with the enormity of the trash problem, postcolonial writing on the same topic may explore the problem of not being able to disentangle oneself from the prevalence of waste. The story that *Trash!* tells is one in which the children move dangerously between the private and public spheres as they glean resalable waste products. As a rule, whether in a municipality with a solid-waste treatment plan or one without, the discarding of household garbage always involves movement from the personal sphere into the public sphere and in so doing crosses a threshold that is difficult to negotiate. I read this ability to transgress and transmutate through the lens of a politics of mixing that harkens back to the taboo of miscegenation. The paper explores where this mixing brings about violence—which may be slow on the planetary scale or very fast indeed as it affects the lives of individual scavengers. I am interested in the multiple scales of our garbage problem, from the enormity of New York’s now-defunct Fresh Kills Landfill (once visible from space) to the comparatively tiny narrative of Velu and Jaya portrayed in *Trash!*

In his analysis of this age of “liquid modernity,” Zygmunt Bauman has written that ours is “a civilization of excess, redundancy, waste, and waste disposal.”<sup>1</sup> Ours is a time of the proliferation of material waste and of waste as a category for the dismissed and expendable. Waste is a concept that transforms the thing it describes completely from something to nothing. As scavengers remind us, however, nothings can be recuperated. This potential for transformation makes waste a slippery label. Garbage, the everyday form of waste, makes a particularly interesting study of this slippage. Maurizia Boscagli rightly points out that “the fluidity and instability” of garbage is its chief characteristic.<sup>2</sup> In his book *Stuff Theory*, Boscagli writes that “stuff is always on the verge of becoming trash; composed of commodities destined to be trash, it is trash’s natural ally. Garbage is stuff in its most extreme form. The unruliness of stuff becomes trash’s revolting quality.”<sup>3</sup> This paper presents two theories of garbage and pollution and considers how they inform a postcolonial and ecocritical reading of the illustrated children’s book *Trash!* In the first, I will give an account of Michel Serres’s *Malfaisance* in which he offers a theory of pollution as appropriation. By invoking the notion that garbage can be used to lay claim, Serres provides us with a framework for understanding waste as material colonialism. Secondly, I will

consider an article by Dipesh Chakrabarty in which he focuses on the spatial meanings of waste through an examination of private and public space in India. Finally, through a critical reading of *Trash!*, I argue that garbage itself represents the threat of miscegenation; I argue that the desultory qualities of trash are strongly determined by its mixed state.

### Pollution as Appropriation and Garbage as Colonization

Michel Serres, in his *Malfeasance*, asks a question that is central to this age of consumption, creation, and disposability: “What do we *really* want when we dirty the world?”<sup>4</sup> His answer is, in a word, ownership. Ultimately, Serres makes a similar discovery as the late Farley Mowat does in his *Never Cry Wolf*—the thing that links us to our lands is nothing as organized as culture or politics but is instead this: piss. In his field study of declining caribou herds and wolf predation habits in the subarctic, Mowat sought to establish the boundaries of his camp with a perimeter of urine in the same way as the wolves mark theirs. A memorable scene from the film adaptation involves the Mowat character drinking copious amounts of black tea in order to create this invisible fence, while the wolves sit at a distance, curiously watching. The urinary claim on territory is exemplar of Serres’s findings:

Whoever spits in the soup keeps it; no one will touch the salad or the cheese polluted in this way. To make something its own, the body knows how to leave some personal stain . . . *appropriation takes place through dirt*. More precisely, what is properly one’s own is dirt.<sup>5</sup>

Serres draws heavily on concepts of the abject as defined by Julia Kristeva, especially in its symbolic use of the body, which recalls psychoanalytic theories about the stages of development. He writes, for example, that “sewers, garbage barges, factories, and loudspeakers can be thought of as orifices, pores, mouths, anuses.”<sup>6</sup> More specifically, he says that “bodily discharges, that is, urine, manure, or corpses as well as sperm, [are] used to appropriate places.”<sup>7</sup> Serres’s theory does not simply invoke the body, but it comes from the body.<sup>8</sup> Gay Hawkins argues, however, that “most of the waste we encounter is not bodily and nor is it experienced as abjecting. The detritus of urban life congealed in gutters or dumped on the street doesn’t destabilize the self. It just hangs

around largely ignored.”<sup>9</sup> What Serres is attempting to do, then, is to re-configure the cityscape into a bodyscape; he is employing metaphors of the body in order to invoke the abject in ways that render the “detritus of urban life” biological. But I would argue that one does not need to go to such lengths to understand public waste through the abject.

If a key feature of the abject is the uncanny, then garbage in the city streets need only have a familiar quality—it need not be directly *of us*. We are put off by garbage because the abject returns something to us that we are not prepared to receive—it involuntarily reconnects us with that from which we separated ourselves. And so it is that waste, the abject, must be removed through ritual disposal (garbage day or street sweeping, for example). A bag of garbage or sun-bleached trash in a park turns us off and yet reminds us of ourselves; it is the uncanny. And it is this faint familiarity, Serres seems to be arguing with his reference to orifices, that allows garbage to act as a token of the self for the purposes of claiming ownership.

Serres’s theory of pollution as appropriation raises the question that if, as he argues, we pollute in order to lay claim, then why do we simultaneously reject that which we’ve claimed? Take, for example, “Not in My Backyard” lobbying, which perfectly encapsulates our final attitude toward trash and waste after decades of social education. We are intellectually aware of the need for landfill sites to deal with our garbage, but we are not willing to accept them in our own neighborhoods. As a society, we are always trying to divest ourselves of, and disavow ourselves of, wastelands, landfill sites, and other abject environments (except, of course, where they are also highly profitable). We lay claim, but we avoid. The mark of “civilization” is our ability to create ever-greater distance between ourselves and our waste. The end result is the search for new territories to claim (and to reject as abject).

The mechanisms by which waste conquers are not limited to its materiality. Indeed, Serres makes a distinction between what he calls *hard* and *soft* pollution:

By the first I mean on the one hand solid residues, liquids, and gases, emitted throughout the atmosphere by big industrial companies or gigantic garbage dumps, the shameful signature of big cities. By the second, tsunamis of writing, signs, images, and logos flooding rural, civic, public and natural spaces as well as landscapes with their advertising.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, the brand of today can be thought of as the piss of yesterday. What we call cultural imperialism can therefore be understood as another form of garbage dumping. Serres's theory, which takes the elemental human instinct for territorial markings and elevates it to the social and to the hypercapitalist, gives us a framework for understanding the global trash trade as an example of ecoimperialism. He argues that it is through the international trade in waste (and I might add especially the dumping of toxic or nonbiodegradable and nonrecyclable waste) that the Western nations are expanding their territories by appropriating landfill sites elsewhere. In his own words, "When the rich countries discharge their industrial waste in the mangroves of poor countries, are they not also seizing and recolonizing them?"<sup>11</sup> The trade in waste is not simply an issue of whether or not we have space to accommodate our own waste; instead, Serres argues that the practice "emanates from our will to appropriate, our desire to conquer and expand the space of our properties."<sup>12</sup>

### Pollution and the Public and Private Divide

Although Serres may be right in suggesting that which we own we must pollute, polluting can also be about a process of disavowal—an attempt to divest ownership. For Dipesh Chakrabarty, this divestment can best be understood through the concept of the public and private. According to Chakrabarty's writings about garbage and place in India, we must understand garbage as an element of the *outside*. He argues that the conceptual divisions between private household space and public bazaar space are critical to the understanding of trash as a negative. He begins by arguing that "the language of modernity" demands "an order of aesthetics from which the ideals of public health and hygiene cannot be separated."<sup>13</sup> Cleanliness, then, is the language of modernity. Scholars of garbage agree that cleanliness has been central to the definition of modernity; and yet this "garbage problem" exists in its intensity precisely because a key feature of modernity has been the consumer culture that generates previously unknown quantities of refuse. Waste, of course, is a key concept in capitalism and, paired with the idea of surplus, has come to define and determine the function of the market, which structures so much else. It is thus ironic, but not surprising, that modernity emphasized the value of cleanliness at the same time that it

generated more waste than ever. The modern subject became defined by its ability to distance itself from that which it perpetually created in excess. Chakrabarty reminds us that this value system perpetuated racist notions of the other. He contrasts the Western preoccupation with cleanliness and hygiene with perceptions of India as dirty, crowded, dusty, and generally unwholesome.<sup>14</sup> He cites street policy implemented in India by Lord Wellesley in 1803 that sought to integrate aesthetics with health, arguing for improved sanitation, sewage, and garbage removal—but also for “order” and “regularity” in the houses and lanes. Against the “chaos” of the precolonial cityscape, he writes, “was opposed the immaculate ‘order’ of the European quarters.”<sup>15</sup>

An older understanding of dirt is that it is “matter out of place.”<sup>16</sup> Mary Douglas emphasizes the structural element of dirt when she writes, “Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.”<sup>17</sup> By exploring how dirt and garbage mark the boundary of the household, and the community, Chakrabarty’s analysis supports Douglas’s seminal findings. Like any system, the manner of purifying the home follows strong ideas about the gendered division of labor. Chakrabarty links women’s responsibility for putting matter into place to the notion that women must somehow ensure the well-being and success of those in their homes. The woman of the household, often married into a patriarchal household structure, is charged with maintaining the good health and fortune of the household:

Auspicious acts protect the habitat, the inside, from undue exposure to the malevolence of the outside. They are the cultural performance through which this everyday “inside” is both produced and enclosed. The everyday practice of classifying certain things as household rubbish marks the boundary of this enclosure.<sup>18</sup>

In this reading of place, women engage in ritual identification and removal of undesirable things—a sort of grooming of the household—in order to establish the home as a place marked by care. But why must the house, as an interior space, be protected? Because outside the house lies the commons and the bazaar, a place of the unknown. “Structurally speaking,” Chakrabarty writes, “the bazaar or the ‘outside’ is a place where one comes across and deals with strangers” who represent dan-

ger.<sup>19</sup> The outside “is exposed and therefore malevolent. It is not subject to a single set of (enclosing) rules and ritual defining a community. It is where miscegenation occurs.”<sup>20</sup> The bazaar, then, violates the rules of mixing; it is a place where ambiguity and risk are inherent. And that is precisely why it is also so exciting.

Chakrabarty’s musings on trash and the divide between the inside and outside raise a number of questions about those who toil in the informal recycling field. What is the public and the private for the children working in the rag-picking trade? What can Chakrabarty’s thoughts on miscegenation teach us about the child laborers themselves? How do those working in the rag-picking trade represent an anxiety about mixing: strangers with our intimate waste; children with our most base labor; children in the street? How, too, might these children represent the fixing of our own errors—the making logic out of the mess of garbage? These workers are making *sense* out of *mess*; they are translators or decoders. They are alchemists making something out of “nothing.” Instead of celebrating this alchemy, we resent their glimpse into our uncontainable selves, which they gleaned in this practice, because as modern subjects, we must uphold the fiction of our wholeness and cleanliness.

### Trash in *Trash!*

The book *Trash! On Ragpicker Children and Recycling* successfully links critiques of globalization, government, and commodity culture with a frank look at children’s poverty and homelessness. The aim of the book is to destigmatize the children who work in the informal recycling sector in India and to valorize the work they do through education. Today, in the global South, waste picking or scavenging is a robust economy, with millions of people participating in the informal collection, separation, and resale of discarded or used goods. This story is representative, then, of a common narrative (rural to urban migration, child labor, etc.), but it cannot hope to represent the myriad experiences of these millions of people. The narrative in *Trash!* tells the story of a boy named Velu as he arrives all by himself on a train from his small village to the city of Chennai. Velu barely has time to take in his impressive surroundings, when a young girl approaches him. Her name is Jaya, and she instantly sees Velu for what he is: a hungry runaway without the skills or connections to survive in the big city. Jaya takes him under

her wing, and he becomes an apprentice and initiate into the streetlife of a ragpicker. Velu and Jaya find some relief and respite from their day-to-day lives, in a night school run by a religious organization. It is through this connection that Velu and Jaya end up attending a workshop for ragpickers aimed at educating and empowering them. Over the course of the short text, readers watch as Velu, Jaya, and the other workshop participants arrive at the following question: if their work is so important (economically, environmentally), why is it so stigmatized and so poorly remunerated? In the words of one of the characters, “But, akka, if our work is so important, why don’t we get more money for it?”<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, the text summons child laborers to a place of collective consciousness as a means of creating change for the future. Denying the hope that adults can solve the children’s problems for them, the text conceives of intervention as arms-length support for an autonomous body (the children).

The images in *Trash!* are drawn by Orijit Sen, creator of one of India’s first graphic novels. His 1994 text *River of Stories* explores the human stories surrounding the Narmada River, site of a highly contentious big-dam project. With the highly publicized support of writer-activist Arundhati Roy, the Narmada Valley Dam project drew international attention and is arguably the most internationally well-known environmental issue in India (aside from the 1984 Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal). Sen’s work is exemplary of postcolonial environmental literature, as he tackles issues of environmental and social justice simultaneously through text and visual art. The images in *Trash!* are mixed-media, combining photography; black-and-white comic-style illustrations of the main characters; and vivid, saturated collages of drawing and images in the crowd scenes (see fig. 1). Popular film stars and movie posters are superimposed on colorfully drawn streetscapes (see fig. 2). The pastiche photos are blended with comic-style backgrounds in some frames, resulting in a hyperreal cartoon style. The children themselves are often drawn from the back or in profile (and always in black and white tinged with blue) so that their faces may live primarily in the minds of readers rather than strictly on the page. This adds to the sense that Velu and Jaya might represent so many children. The imagery focuses on setting, not character, and thus establishes the *mise-en-scène* of the Chennai streetscape. In this way, the child laborers are made part of that public space that Chakrabarty described as the place of strange, exciting, and violating encounters—a

place of inappropriate mixings. The image of a group of children sleeping on the curb with no adult present is an example of this type of unwholesome combining of juxtaposed elements (see fig. 3). Here in the streetscape of *Trash!*, we add a new layer to the concept of mixing: unsorted solid waste. The metaphor of miscegenation (a key tool of colonial rule as well as the maintenance of caste in India) has taken on material meaning as a threat in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: it is the mash-up of waste materials. At its best, this inappropriate form of mixing can be found in the negligence of residents who do not sort their trash; in its worse form, it is the creation of new synthesized materials for which mechanical separation (especially at the informal level of ragpickers) is impossible or hazardous.

Velu's entire informal education is geared toward learning how to sort. Jaya teaches him how to sort the valuable garbage from the worthless (monetarily speaking), and she also teaches him how to tell friends from foes. She is constantly admonishing Velu: "Start searching. Only useful things—paper, plastic"; "No use, Jaggu [the scrap dealer] never takes wet paper"; and finally "No, no, that's a juice packet. Useless." The relative meaning of "use" is explored when Velu tosses a used coconut shell into his sack, thinking it could have use value as firewood like it did in the village; Jaya scolds him: "Idiot! You don't know anything! That's useless."<sup>22</sup> As a teacher and a worker, Jaya is proud of her choice of trades. She is pleased that she is not beholden to an employer, the way she would be if she were a laundress, like the other women in her family. She argues that it is her sisters' work that is more demeaning: "I don't know how you wash other people's clothes and dirty vessels, day and night and say 'yes madam, no madam.'"<sup>23</sup> Jaya's sense of pride is an important element in assimilating Velu and also in delivering the positive, labor-friendly message of the text. Still, her young trainee is wary of this inflated view of their work. The way Velu sees things, and the view with which the Western reader is likely to sympathize, the job of a ragpicker may be independent, but it in no way represents free choice in its ideal sense. As he reflects, "Velu didn't really think [the job was so freeing]. The thought of spending another whole day around garbage bins made him feel sick. Nobody was forcing him to work, but if he hadn't worked yesterday, he wouldn't have had the money for the buns and tea."<sup>24</sup>

Added to the nauseous feeling that Velu gets around the stench of garbage is the constant harassment that the children face in their trade.

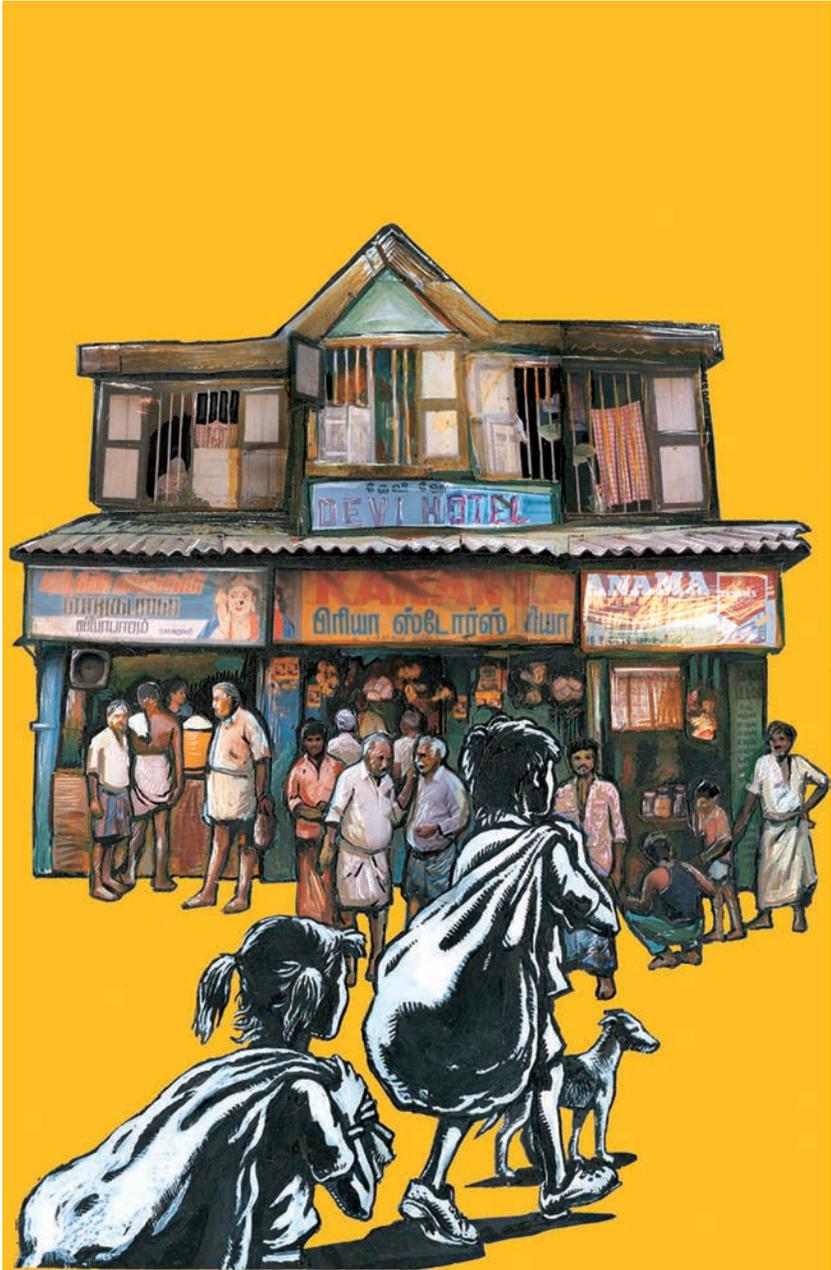


Fig. 1. Cover illustration of *Trash! On Ragpicker Children and Recycling*. Copyright Orijit Sen, reprinted here with permission.

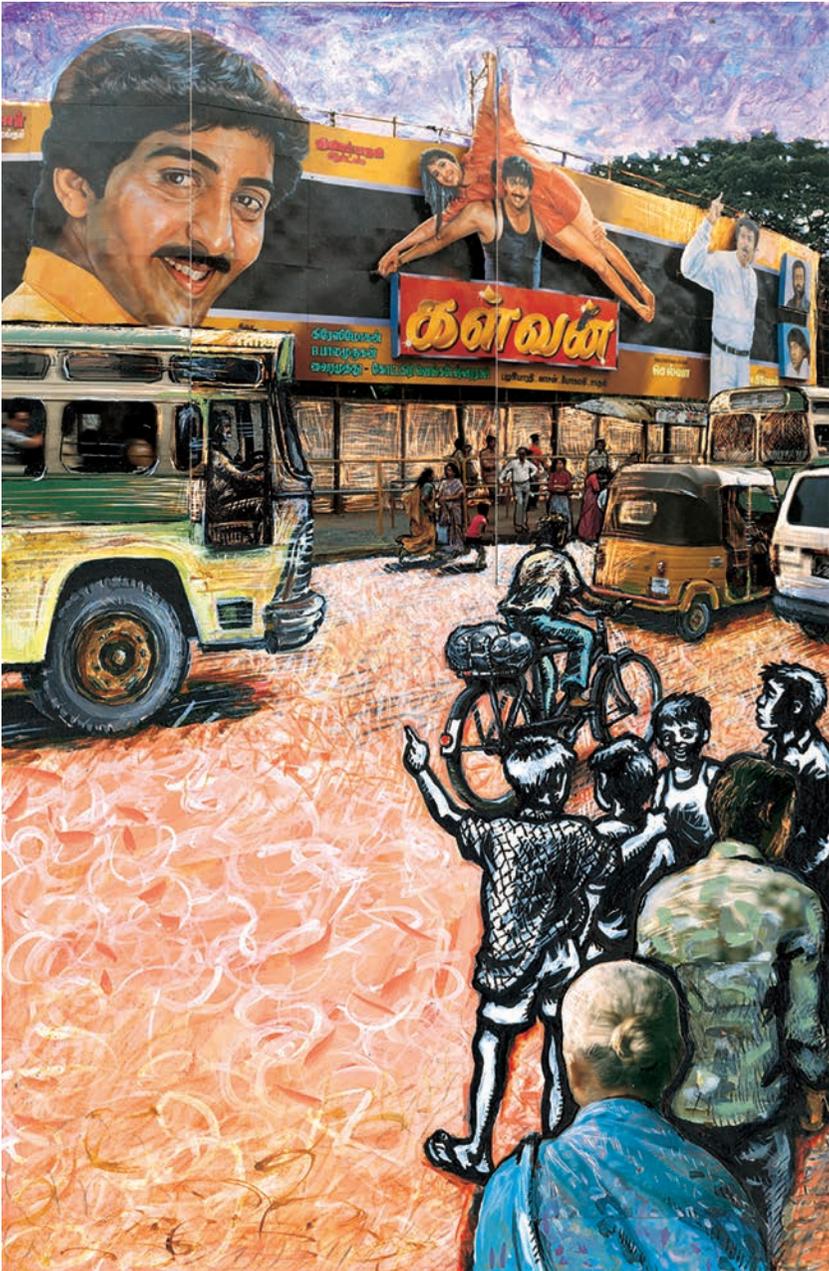


Fig. 2. Illustration of street children looking at movie posters in busy Chennai. Copyright Orijit Sen, reprinted here with permission.

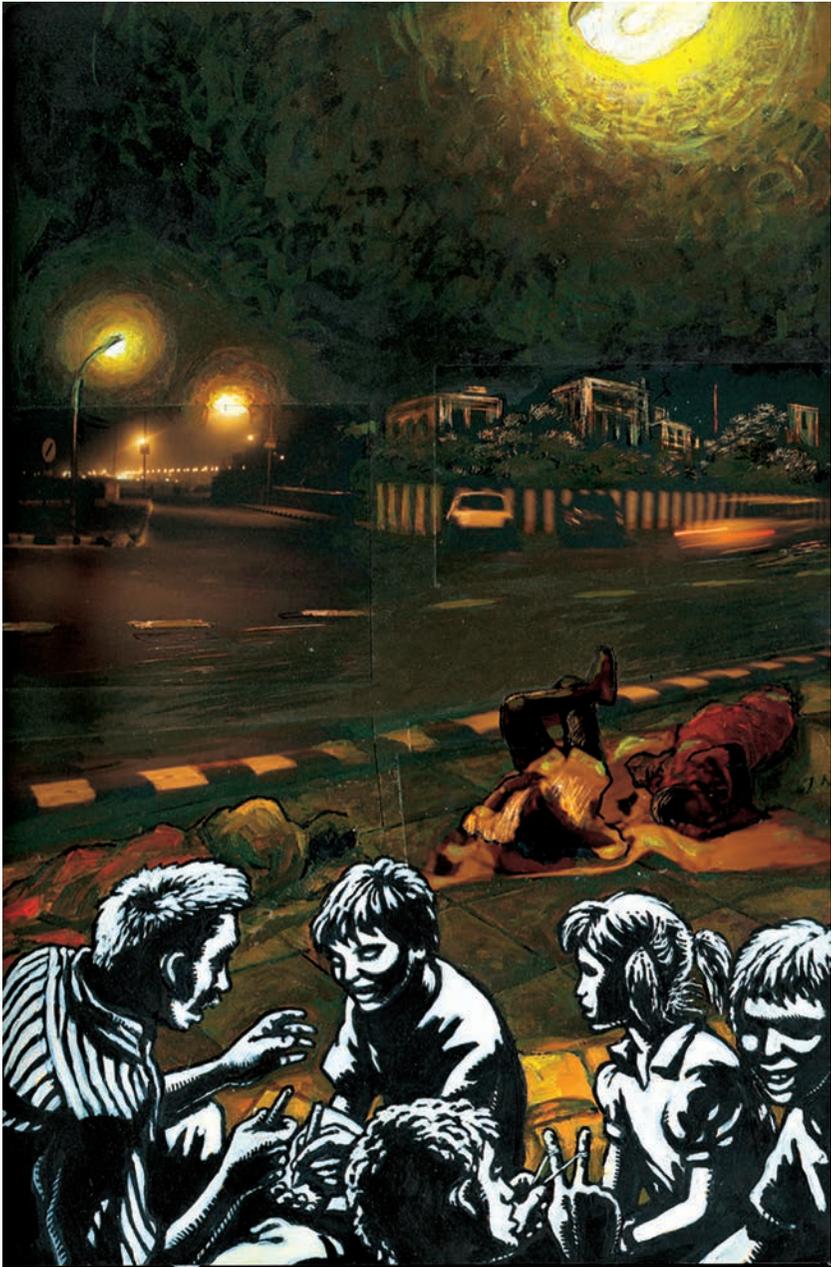


Fig. 3. Illustration of children gathering and sleeping rough on the streets of Chennai. Copyright Orijit Sen, reprinted here with permission.

They are chased away from the garbage, called names, and threatened by police. Often the children are treated with the same attitude that people would use against the garbage itself or the rodents that live among it. Insults lobbed against them often invoke this language: “Aiy! Get out of here! You filthy good-for-nothings. Making a mess of the place! Out, get out,” yells one shopkeeper as he swatted at the children with a stick. Jaya is hit in the leg and suffers a painful blow to her ego. Her quick-witted responses are brimming with false confidence, and they reveal her vulnerability as a young child. For although she spits in the direction of her attacker and yells, “Stupid dog! We’re cleaning his mess and he tries to act big!,” beneath this bravado she “looked sad and angry and stopped to rub her leg now and then.”<sup>25</sup>

When asked by their workshop leader why they sort the trash that they gather, one child ragpicker sassily responds that “we sort them because that dog [Jaggu] is too lazy.”<sup>26</sup> But it is clear that behind this defensive, self-aggrandizing rhetoric, the children do understand the economics, if not the ecologies, of their trade. For example, because she is fearful of being cheated by Jaggu, Jaya develops quick and keen math skills:

Twenty rupees? How? . . . White paper is four rupees a kilogram, that comes to six rupees, plus six rupees for the notebook paper. Newspaper is another six rupees. Masala [plastics] is ten rupees. And it’s not ten bottles, it’s fifteen. Each bottle costs fifty paisa. So that makes seven rupees fifty paisa. The iron is worth five rupees, and the plastic four rupees. The total is forty-four rupees fifty paisa. You can write it down and check if you like.<sup>27</sup>

Despite her excellent accounting, Jaya must settle for only thirty-four rupees from the scrap dealer. It isn’t until later at the workshops that she begins to see Jaggu not as the King of Garbage, as she once thought, but merely as a middleman who is also at the whims of those he sells to. This type of education is helpful for the children, as they begin to make sense of their role in a larger machine of scavenging, selling, and recycling and the various professionals who labor in these industries.

In later scenes, Jaya and Velu’s informal knowledge about the trash and recycling sectors is validated. At a workshop for street children, they are invited to gather trash from around the site; it is then dumped into the middle of the room, and the children are asked to sort it:

Suddenly [Velu] felt strange to be sitting in a big room, doing what he normally did by the side of the road in Triplicane.

“That was quick!” Viji akka [the adult supervisor] looked surprised. “You’re really experts at this.”

“What, Jaya? We sort much bigger piles everyday. This is nothing!” Velu leaned across and whispered. Still, he felt pleased to be called an “expert.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite the growing pride Velu feels when he imagines that without their labor there would be “heaps of trash covering houses and trees,” Velu refuses to see his sector through rose-colored glasses.<sup>29</sup> Velu “was confused. Brother said his work was important, but other people thought it was dirty. Then he realised what was bothering him. ‘*But it is dirty work*, Brother . . . There is always a terrible smell and glass pieces cut us. I don’t like it.’”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, *Trash!* depicts the children sorting through piles of rotted garbage spiked with glass, syringes, and other dangerous goods. The adults running the workshop say they are trying to educate the people of Chennai to sort the waste as they leave it outside and to remove or be careful with the sharp objects.

However, the child laborers, and the citizens of the city, have already been tainted by the idea that it is the children themselves (most of whom have no indoor homes to retreat to) who are already polluted; through their unwholesome proximity to the public space (they are saturated with it), they bear its reputation for filth and threat. By inhabiting the public sphere, and worse, by immersing themselves in the embarrassing waste that the private citizens must rid themselves of, the child ragpickers represent the worst of the public sphere and the shame of the private sphere.

Velu’s acknowledgment of the physical danger of garbage picking and the children’s internalization of their low worth leads us to think about what kind of violence is being perpetuated through waste. Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* asks us to think anew about the temporality and structure of environmental harm. He references garbage as a type of slow violence, citing its often “hidden” nature and the way it is benign on the surface yet toxic over time. *Trash!* reminds us, however, that there are multiple time frames within any issue. The garbage itself operates at the level of this slow violence, to be sure, as it compounds and releases its chemicals over generations. How-

ever, during the course of a ragpicker's day, and especially one who is a child whose total life experience is already less, the weight of the bags of waste, with their disturbing smells and their hidden dangers, are a form of immediate violence as well. What would the book look like if it tried to depict the drawn-out future of the life of this waste?

In their preface to the new edition, Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen reflect on the changes over the last ten years since they first published *Trash!*, stating that with regard to waste, public sanitation, and the environment, "We are in a far more alarming situation than we were a decade ago." The text, they write, is "witness to our continuing culpability, demonstrating just how deep and lasting the problem is." The reissuing of the book combined with its treatment of the gradual and acute violence of the garbage problem is an example of the capacity of art and literature to react to multiscalar environmental harm. Such a response, however, does not remedy what Nixon rightly calls the "representational bias" of slow violence in an age where the "violent threat" demands representation by a "spectacular, immediately sensational and hyper-visible image."<sup>31</sup> The thoughtfully worded preface is powerful for a readership intent on searching for clues about the lasting impacts of garbage and child labor, but it is not adequate fodder for the twenty-four-hour news cycle that dominates and defines environmental catastrophe today.

## Conclusion

In their interviews with child ragpickers, Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen report a list of demands that include respect for their work, access to suitable education, healthcare, time for play, and the improvement of quality of life in their home villages so that they would not have to leave for the city at all. Ultimately, the message of the text is that "garbage sorting should become a clean and proper job like being a bus conductor or a carpenter."<sup>32</sup> And perhaps this is the most important message: the abjectness of garbage lies not in its "out-of-placeness" but in its mixed state. Garbage, sorted to the *n*th degree as we do in many North American municipalities today, resembles something ordered and, hence, expected. In fact, since the advent of the green bin, which contains compostables, the well-tended household trash can has become more and more inert, as it contains mostly nonrecyclable packaging materials and

no organic materials at all.<sup>33</sup> Sorting our “garbage” really has gone a long way to producing the vision of the respectable profession that the authors of *Trash!* envision. Once it is organized in this manner—separated at the point of disposal—will it lose its potency as abject? What is the relationship between the abject and the organic? Perhaps our revulsion to garbage is connected to its capacity to grow or to decay. If so, then do inert recyclables appropriate in the same manner as the mysterious, hot bag of mixed trash? Culturally, will our fascination with garbage end if it no longer contains the frightening thrill of the unknown? And finally, will the knowability of garbage treated thus be enough to transform the stigma of the working children? By exploring environmental issues directly through the lens of exploited workers, *Trash!* refuses to separate the questions of environment and politics. Chakrabarty’s claim that our pollution of the earth will ultimately have a species effect on humans is correct; but in the meantime there is Jaya and Velu, who are doing the work of the future (by way of an old tradition).<sup>34</sup> They are victims of old patterns of thinking in which the outside is a bad place apart and in which we are caught up in relationships of pollution and ownership with places and things, which ultimately creates tensions between appropriation and revulsion. These dual stigmas contribute to the association of garbage pickers with garbage; these inside-outside objects mark those who sift through them.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dana C. Mount** is an assistant professor at Cape Breton University in Nova Scotia, Canada, where she teaches in the areas of world, indigenous, and environmental literatures. Her current research is on the cultural work of garbage and waste. She has been published in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, *Postcolonial Text*, and *ARIEL*.

#### NOTES

1. Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 97.

2. Maurizia Boscagli, *Stuff Theory: Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 228.

3. Boscagli, *Stuff Theory*, 228.

4. Michel Serres, *Malféasance: Appropriation through Pollution?*, trans. Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 3.

5. Serres, *Malféasance*, 3.

6. Serres, *Malfeasance*, 38.
7. Serres, *Malfeasance*, 34.
8. Serres's analysis of pollution and private property, however, disturbingly gets played out through sexual politics as he muses on how heterosexual penetrative sex is a form of ownership of women through a polluting of their bodies through ejaculation. An ecofeminist response to Serres's text would be fruitful.
9. Gay Hawkins, qtd. in Serres, *Malfeasance*, 3.
10. Serres, *Malfeasance*, 41
11. Serres, *Malfeasance*, 48
12. Serres, *Malfeasance*, 42
13. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Of Garbage: Modernity and the Citizen's Gaze," *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, nos. 10–11 (March 7–14, 1992): 541–47, 541.
14. Many have written on the conceptual weight of dirt in the colonial project and its links to racism, including Ann Laura Stoler and Anne McClintock.
15. Chakrabarty, "Of Garbage," 541.
16. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002), 44.
17. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 44.
18. Chakrabarty, "Of Garbage," 542.
19. Chakrabarty, "Of Garbage," 543.
20. Chakrabarty, "Of Garbage," 543.
21. Gita Wolf, Anushka Ravishankar, and Orijit Sen, *Trash! On Ragpicker Children and Recycling* (Chennai, India: Tara Books, 2011), 81.
22. Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen, *Trash!*, 20.
23. Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen, *Trash!*, 35.
24. Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen, *Trash!*, 35.
25. Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen, *Trash!*, 22.
26. Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen, *Trash!*, 80.
27. Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen, *Trash!*, 30.
28. Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen, *Trash!*, 80.
29. Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen, *Trash!*, 77.
30. Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen, *Trash!*, 83.
31. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 13.
32. Wolf, Ravishankar, and Sen, *Trash!*, 83.
33. And here, of course, I am speaking not in the chemical sense but rather in the sense of how we can perceive garbage, using only our simple senses. We are now too familiar with the significantly disruptive chemical and hormonal effects of what appear to be stable and harmless plastics to make any claim about the inertness of any object. However, there are few (if any) who feel revulsion at the sight of a bisphenol A water bottle, even if we know intellectually its potentially harmful effects. We are much more likely to balk at the sight of a soiled tissue, the feel of a wad of gum, or the stench of something "off"
34. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222.