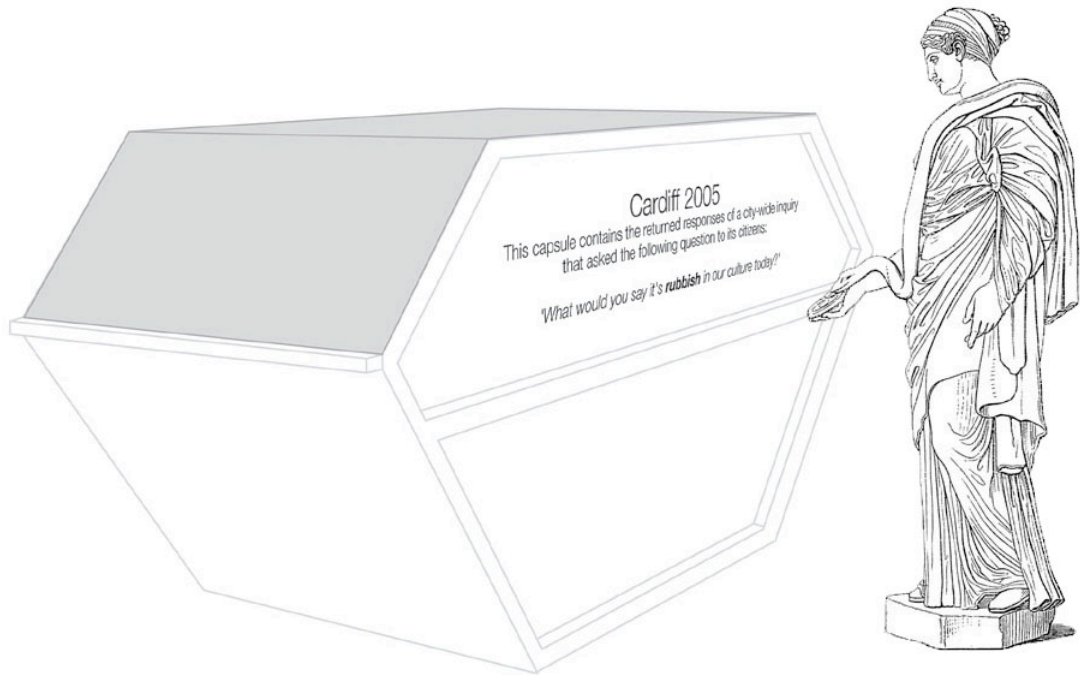


'The Future as a Virus in the Midst of our Waste?'

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Introduction

This paper is divided into two main parts: the first is an overview of some evidence of the centrality of the management of waste matter and hygienic practices in utopian projections of nineteenth century British urban planning. We will then turn our attention to two texts of the second half of the twentieth century in which the confrontation with waste in urban settings gives way to dystopian scenarios. I will then attempt to bring some of these concerns about the future, waste management, consumption and urban development into a specific contemporary context through the description of my own project, called LAMBY WAY TIME CAPSULE, in which the deliberate burial of a time capsule within the imminently closing landfill facilities at Lamby Way in Cardiff, will attempt to preserve some particular historical records in this most unlikely area of conservation. This capsule is also the *virus* referred to in the title. In this project the notion of waste is conceptualized as a harbinger of the future.

Main propositions:

A: To reappraise the importance of the relationship between modernity and waste through cultural historical evidence from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

B: Through such a reappraisal, to highlight the importance that such a relationship still plays both within any possible construction of an idea of the future, and any critical engagement with current socio-ecological and political-economical affairs.

1.

Given the current insistence of the theme of waste within ecological arguments against contemporary aspects of modernity, global growth patterns and capitalism, it would appear at first that waste is an unforeseen consequence and the entropic other of modernity, one of the most resilient and ultimate obstacles towards the realization of its project. However, such recent placements of the notion of waste as a fundamental limit to our ability to manage or order the world and the various attempts to reconceptualise such limits in the wishful propositions of sustainable cities and Zero Waste policies must not deflect our attention from the fact that the central position that waste occupies within the tropes of modernity has indeed a long traceable history.

What I am arguing is that the temporary disappearances from public debates of such an omnipresent, implicit, even necessary human activity are moments of cultural amnesia partly caused by the very belief that waste is a problem to which a solution will ultimately be found, whether through management devices or technological innovation.

In their latest incarnation, the attempts at the re-incorporation of waste within production cycles through the rhetoric of recycling and resource efficiency, appears as the ultimate form of confrontation between a drive towards continuous processes of expansion of western lifestyles into a global dimension and the realization that such desires are beginning to fall short of the time-space circumstances and conditions that produced those lifestyles in the first place.

Indeed waste management, as well as hygienic and medical control, were from the very beginning a major focus of the project of modernity and one of its defining characters, a 'sanitizing' project, guided by order and cleanliness as its main tenets.

Issues of water quality, sewage discharge, waste collection and disposal were often the 'executive powers' that greatly characterized some of the defining moments of modernity in action, particularly in urban development.

The notion of sanitation then, beside its connotations of cleanliness, waste management and public health, here must be intended as an organising principle, a quest for order through socio-economic processes in which 'hygiene' is a process of separation, which today can create all kind of waste including - as Zygmunt Bauman points out¹ - superfluous human lives who are finding themselves not needed or indeed desired, in the midst of the local-global processes of constant restructuring of land, economic and social relations.

¹ Bauman, Zygmunt, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*, Polity Press, 2003

So here I will only sketch out a series of some points along a path, - without actually being able to trace its course in full detail - of the preeminence of discourses on waste and their impact on western urban development, an impact that persists to this very day.

The four publications that will provide the thread of my discourse are:

- a- *Thomas Beddoes*, 'HYGEIA: ESSAYS MORAL AND MEDICAL, ON THE CAUSES AFFECTING THE PERSONAL STATE OF OUR MIDDLE AND AFFLUENT CLASSES', Thoemmes Continuum, Bristol, 2004. Originally published in 1802.
- b- *Benjamin Ward Richardson*, 'HYGEIA: A CITY OF HEALTH', included in *The Happy Colony*, by Robert Pemberton & *Hygeia, A city of Health*, by Benjamin Ward Richardson, facsimile of the original editions, Garland Publishing, New York, London, 1985. 'Hygeia: a city of Health' is also available on-line at: www.gutenberg.org
- c- *Vance Oakley Packard*, 'THE WASTEMAKERS' [On American methods of stimulating industrial consumption], Longmans Green Co., London, 1961.
- d- Italo Calvino, 'INVISIBLE CITIES', Secker & Warburg, London, 1974. Translation by William Weaver

Through these, I will try to make clear the path of a transition from a conception of waste through a 'sanitary science'-based management, which lay at the centre of reformist utopias, to waste being depicted in the guises of pollution and resource depletion, as main ingredients in dystopian projections of the 20th century.

The impression that hopefully will emerge is that whilst the utopias of the nineteenth century were mostly born out of reformist impulses of restraint, the dystopias described in the twentieth century appear to be caused largely by behavioral excesses, in terms of the consumption, resource use and waste generation 'engineered' by marketing forces and the consumer's desire in a double-bind relationship.

The matter that was the object of control in the first instance is that which spirals out of control in the latter; in this transition, waste shifts from being one of the main targets of progressive, reformist policies, to eventually becoming the defining characteristic of a society in which to waste, to consume, is to be progressive.

And during this long period, gradually, the issue of waste receded from public debate, in the contentedness fostered by the 'achievements' of plumbing, the water closet and public waste collection, which all had the capacity of removing the grimy evidence of our existence away from both our private spaces and the very public urban spaces in which the spectacle of these achievements could be displayed.

In reality, waste, though pictured for some time at the margin of the great debates of society, nevertheless always remained at the centre of its organization: it was just made invisible, or to appear not worthy of notice, relegated from a public presence into a codified set of civic and industrial practices, as if the achievement of utopia was now simply an operational task.

Furthermore, before we come to the matter at hand, I would briefly like to raise two issues of context. The first of these is a matter of the time in which such shifts took place, and what ties it to our own moment: as the sanitary utopian projections of the nineteenth century were being constructed, the reality in which they took shape was the very first example of a global economic order bent on a search for planetary resources capable of supporting its overstretched metabolism. The second such issue of context more directly concerns our own moment, the context of this paper itself, and the contemporary discourses on waste in which it seeks to intervene.

Our contemporary society, perhaps affronted with having to deal with life problems that in its utopian checklist of obstacles to human happiness appeared to have slipped off the edge of the balance sheet, seems to encounter great difficulties with the prospect of retracing its steps, with having to reconfigure issues of waste and hygiene once again placing them, as it needs to at the centre of discussions of urban development.

It is perhaps a symptom of such denial that the neo-utopian discourses of Sustainability and Zero Waste, whilst taking into consideration all the charges leveled at the lack of ecological sense of most current cultural-economic practices, still appear to provide intellectual shelter, cultural comfort and a comfortable mode of repentance for the core of our economic structure that is the global capitalist system.

2.

The first text I would like to bring to your attention to is:

Thomas Beddoes, 'HYGEIA: ESSAYS MORAL AND MEDICAL, ON THE CAUSES AFFECTING THE PERSONAL STATE OF OUR MIDDLING AND AFFLUENT CLASSES', originally published in Britain in 1802, and recently recovered from a publishing gap of more than 200 years.

I am bringing this publication into focus for one main reason, clearly highlighted by Robert Mitchell in the introduction of the volume: Mitchell notes the important fact that: *Hygeia is premised on a belief that Britain's commercial ascendancy had resulted in new modes of disease.*² It is this link between *wealth* and *pathology* that distinguishes Beddoes' contribution to my thesis here.

Beddoes points to the historically contingent nature of desire, arguing that:

'In the social arrangements which have gradually formed themselves in Europe, wealth, the most general object of power, becomes the most

² p.2, introduction by Robert Mitchell

*general object of desire.... The multiplication of the roads to wealth unavoidably keeps pace with the multiplication of gratifications, and of contrivances for displaying accomplishments, which wealth can command.'*³

The term used by Beddoes to define such acts of desire is 'the lust for things' and Mitchell contends that 'the increasingly dominant belief that the satisfaction of desire was inextricably linked to purchases- was a drive at best indifferent to health, and more frequently, led directly to illness'⁴

Very poignant here is the delineation of one of the first instances of *critique of consumption*, or to be more precise a critique of the type of desire that the new modes of consumption -lust for things- and the promise of moral-aesthetic satisfaction that those desires would engender.

Roughly a century later, we might argue, this is the very same desire that the newly developed 'sciences' of marketing and PR would be contracted to stimulate on behalf of both state and corporations in order to sustain an economic system based on consumption in the very name of democratic advancement and lifestyle enhancement.

The pathological character which Beddoes projects onto consumerism (a consuming desire to possess and display possessions) and attaches to the condition of the affluent classes at the dawn of the nineteenth century would by then be enlarged through economic availability and by means of the persuasion aimed at all social group, in the establishment of a 'mass culture' of consumption in which consumption, deliberate acts of obsolescence and therefore waste will be transformed in acts of emancipation within a modern ethical paradigm.

3.

I would now like to switch our attention to another text, also inspired in its title by the mythological figure of Hygeia, who was the representative of cleanliness, and one of the six daughters of Asclepius, the demigod of Medicine and Healing in ancient Greek mythology: This text is Benjamin Ward Richardson's 'Hygeia: A City of Health'.

This work is a detailed and empirically evidenced account of what a city could be under the direction of a Sanitary Science, delivered as a lecture by Richardson in 1875. Richardson dedicates this address to Edwin Chadwick, his mentor, tutor and the most eminent reformist in the field of public hygiene in nineteenth century Britain, whose 1842 *Report on The Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring population of Great Britain*⁵ argued that disease was directly related to living conditions and that there was a desperate need for public health reform.

Richardson's text is unflinching and passionate in its convictions, stating from the very outset

³ p. 3, introduction by Robert Mitchell.

⁴ Mitchell, p.3

⁵ Chadwick, Edwin, *Report on the Conditions of the Labouring Population in Great Britain*, Routledge, Continuum, 2004.

his ambitions: 'Our object, to make present existence better and happier.'⁶

A sanitised city is, for Richardson, a community of dwellings, hospitals, schools and workshops, for which anything that is designed is done so with two main preoccupations: to avoid diseases, and to prolong life expectations.

This amounts, in short, to a community which begins to resemble a factory; one that rather than producing goods, it is meant to produce a healthy and happy workforce itself. His city of Hygiene is a 'future now' project, it presents itself as simply a project to speed up the progress to an endpoint which is, for Richardson, already predestined as inevitable, turning wish into fate and fancy into destiny, justifying the project by seeming to render its outcome as unavoidable as it is desirable.

Despite the fact that most of the text is by now an anachronism, particularly in regards to Richardson's own emphasis on temperance, what remains interesting in Hygeia is the firm belief that a proper application of scientific norms, will undoubtedly bring us happiness because of cleanliness. In other words, the conditions of the present can be changed only if we are to embrace a specific future, a scientifically determined one, guided through technological expertise.

This is the future city as a sanitised place, an enclave where all abjections are duly guided out of sight and out of mind.

For Richardson:

'Utopia itself is but another word for time; and some day the masses, who now heed us not, or smile incredulously at our proceedings, will awake to our conceptions. Then our knowledge, like light rapidly conveyed from one torch to another, will bury us in its brightness'.⁷

Enshrined in the capitalist myth of flow, and realised through the innovation of plumbing, Hygeia's utopia is founded on a total reliance on 'distancing' the abject matter, on safely separating the 'us' and the 'it', which encapsulates a problem-solving strategy which still largely applies to urban development today.

It was not long before Richardson's publication of Hygeia that the events recalled as the London 'Great Stink' forced the House of Parliament to interrupt their sessions urging upon the legislative body a series of interventions which culminated in the decision to assign to Joseph Bazalgette the design and the construction of a sewage system for London, at the time the most densely populated city in the world.

Prior to this final decision and the approval of its modalities, the Metropolitan Commission for Sewers commissioned a series of studies and contracted various consultants from UK and beyond to canvas for suggestions and different approaches.

⁶ p. 3, introduction *The Happy Colony*, by Robert Pemberton & *Hygeia, A city of Health*, by Benjamin Ward Richardson, facsimile of the original editions, Garland Publishing, New York, London, 1985.

⁷ p. 44, *The Happy Colony*.

As a result of these exercises, many contrasting opinions emerged, one of which is particularly poignant for our discussion, as it exposed for the first time on a scientific basis the idea of waste as resource as well as putting forward the nowadays highly popular concept of 'urban footprint'.

Augustus Von Liebig, was the foremost chemist of his days, thanks to his discovery of the part that the soil plays in plant's nutrient cycle. Because of this knowledge, he was asked to report to the Metropolitan commission in charge of deliberating the sewage construction.

His proposal for the sewage system of London entailed a separation of the solid and liquid discharges in order to divert to the agricultural land around London human manure deployed as fertilizer, in an attempt to replete the already poor quality of the overused soil struggling to cope with the demands to feed such a densely populated city, therefore recognising waste matter as a potential resource.

Such discourses are currently being reinvigorated through the potential of composting organic food waste, the spreading of sewage sludge as fertiliser for agricultural use or its compaction into combustible pellets for energy production.

However, the proposal was rejected and in 1862, when the seventh edition of his pioneering scientific work was published⁸, he included a new introduction in which he declared the intensive '*high farming*' methods of British agriculture to be a '*robbery system*' as they necessitated the transportation over long distances of food and fibre from the country to the city with no provision for the recirculation of soil nutrients, a process that he called '*the law of restitution*'.

This new introduction was omitted in the English translation of the same text. This principle was for Liebig at the core of a rational agricultural practice and it was utterly simple in its thesis: 'the minerals taken from the earth had to be returned to the earth. *'The farmer had to restore to his land as much as he had taken from it.'*

It is easy for us today to recognise in Liebig's soil management philosophy, one of the basic principles of contemporary organic farming. It is also apparent that his critique of the way in which London managed its food subsistence was based on an early formulation of a concept of 'urban footprint' nowadays one of the main tenets of an ecological critique of urban development.

4.

As the nineteenth-century utopian promises of a final sanitary solution waned with the evidence of the resilience and long-term polluting effect of the byproducts of the processes which had established a fully developed industrialized society, what instead started to emerge

⁸ Liebig, Von Justus, Die Chemie in Ihrer Anwendung auf Agricultur und Physiologie, Vol.1, Brinswick 1862. Except where otherwise indicated all the brief quotes from Liebig are taken from an unpublished English translation by Lady Gilbert contained in the archives of the Rothamstead Experimental Station (now IACR-Rothamstead) outside London. The quotes reproduced here are from Foster, Bellamy John, 'Marx's Ecology in Historical Perspective', *International Socialism Journal*, issue 96, Winter 2002.

was the notion that there was a pernicious systemic correlation between consumption, affluence, marketing, design and the rising quantities of waste that could not simply be hidden from view.

For Vance Packard and many around him, it became only too apparent that the prosperity and lifestyle attained by the US during the first half of the century had come at the expense of environmental degradation, resource depletion, diseases brought about by the heavy use of chemical substances in most production processes and a dependence on growth and consumption which institutionalised as 'progressive' the concept of obsolescence.

The emerging problem of matching consumption rates with production output through deliberate obsolescence of goods, as described in Packard's *The Wastemakers*, is the basis for a city –Cornucopia- dreamed up by the marketing gurus of the 50s, but long forecasted by novelists, marketing pioneers and, in one of the most explicit cases Edward Bernays a blood nephew of Sigmund Freud, considered the 'father of public relations' and author in 1928 of *Propaganda*.⁹

From this text we read: *If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, is it not possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing about it? The recent practice of propaganda has proved that it is possible, at least up to a certain point and within certain limits.*¹⁰

He called this scientific technique of opinion-molding the 'engineering of consent.'

It is also important for us to briefly consider another one of these instances before venturing into an analysis of *The Wastemakers*; the text in question is 'Selling Mrs Consumer'¹¹ published by Christine Frederick Taylor in 1929.

Part market analysis and part advocacy for a more intense profligacy of American women consumers, Frederick's text was a consumerist manifesto in the guise of home economics in which unashamed strands of essentialism –woman as 'natural' efficient housekeeper- blended with an equally unambiguous call for unrestrained purchasing habits in the name of emancipation and identification with the success of America's progress:

*[Our] triumph and rapidity of progress are based on progressive obsolescence. We have not been aware of it, either as consumers or producers, but we have an attitude that is quite different from the rest of the world...It is the ambition of almost every American to practice progressive obsolescence as a ladder by which to climb to greater satisfaction through the purchase of more of the fascinating and thrilling range of goods and services being offered today. We obtain a sense of speed and progress and increase fullness of life as a result.*¹²

⁹ Bernays, Edward, L., *Propaganda*, Kennikat Press, Port Washington and London, 1972

¹⁰ Bernays, p.71

¹¹ Frederick, Taylor Christine, 'Selling Mrs. Consumer', The Business Bourse, New York, 1929.
Full text available on-line at: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

¹² Frederick, p.246

Frederick elevated consumption to the level of a progressive doctrine, posing profligacy as a socially necessary, morally dutiful and fashionably advanced practice, the more so because it was posited as a suppression of an aristocratic tradition in which the purchase of objects was a sign of distinction, taste and status.

She used as a device the polarization of the appeal of 'antique', unfashionable objects as those resisting transition and opposing friction to the acceptance of the new, with the aura of the new, mass-produced, contemporary objects and their democratizing of taste.

In a sweeping critique of the detractors of obsolescence, Frederick effectively ushers the age of 'mass consumers' as a radical departure in social habits, but at the same time reinforces the social order in strongly maintaining the woman's place as the housekeeper, who: *no longer takes pride in the great square ebony piano of excellent tone her mother handed down to her, but on the contrary unsentimentally considers it a horror.*¹³

If Beddoes ascribed a pathological accent on consumption practices in the new climate of Great Britain as it edged into the nineteenth century, Frederick reverses as pathological the notion of hanging on to objects, effectively transforming the 'lust for things' into a praised new stage of evolution, where to waste is to be modern.

By equating modernity with practices whose only ultimate consequence is to produce waste, Frederick sealed the binomy of waste and modernity as inseparable. Waste, once the enemy of nineteenth-century reformist efforts, was now a steady partner in the creation and destruction of value that characterised the stages of modernity which were to follow and will almost certainly determine its future trajectory.

In making it such a visible issue, Frederick and Bernays laid the ground for Vance Packard's more critically barbed emphasis on waste as he analyzed the essential practice of a consumerist, *progressive-obsolescence* led society such as the one he witnessed in the US of the late 50s.

The transformations of social ethic and etiquette that had occurred in the following decades, coupled with the surplus of production that the US faced in the aftermath of World War II, were now utterly visible and formed the basis of Packard's case against the prospect of a future model city such as the Cornucopia City described in his book *The Wastemakers*.

As it turned out, by the time his indignation was manifested it was already at a later stage of such transformations towards a society of waste; their trajectory was already too advanced to be practically opposed.

His description of Cornucopia is filled with sardonic takes on the idea of obsolescence, such as papier-mâché houses that are trashed at the end of every season, or cars built in a plastic that deliberately shows fatigue after 4,000 miles and destroys itself.

¹³ Frederick, p.252

Born out of exuberance rather than necessity Cornucopia reveals its wealth through the capacity of its citizens of constantly exceeding their needs and of participating in an act of collective potlatch precipitated by the self-degrading nature of all they buy and consume.

Packard's moral tale and his argument that limited resources will hinder the possibilities for the construction of Cornucopia-like Utopia, bring him to declare that: 'Prodigality is the spirit of the Era. Historians, I suspect, may allude to this as the Throwaway Age',¹⁴ and later in the text to state 'that pressures to expand production and consumption have forced Americans to create a hyperthyroid economy that can be sustained only by constant stimulation of the people and their leaders to be more prodigal with the nation's resources'.¹⁵

But it is in his description of Cornucopia city centre that Packard displays his most prescient moment:

The heart of Cornucopia City will be occupied by a titanic push-button super mart built to simulate a fairyland. This is where all the people spend many happy hours a week strolling and buying to their heart's content. In this paradise of high-velocity selling, there are no jangling cash registers to disrupt the holiday mood. Instead, the shopping couples -with their five children trailing behind, each pushing their own shopping cart- gaily wave their lifetime electronic cards in front of a recording eye. Each child has his own card, which was issued to him at birth...

Cornucopia City's marvelous mart is open around the clock, Sundays included.

*Is Cornucopia City to become not a feverish dream, but instead, an extreme prototype for the City of Tomorrow?*¹⁶

Without presuming to answer such a rhetorical and by now anachronistic question, I am going to present some paragraphs of a marketing trend text found during my search for references to the word Hygeia, in which it appears that the marketing nightmare of Vance Packard might today be interpreted in a dematerialized form as 'city as a marketplace':

Welcome to HYGIENIA: a marketplace inhabited by mature consumers from South Korea to Brazil, from Australia to Canada, who can instantly and expertly point out the various hygiene factors for each and every good, service and experience on offer. They base their knowledge on many years of self-training in hyper-consumption, and on the now almost biblical flood of new-style, readily available information sources and filters helping them to track down the Best of the Best, the Cheapest of the Cheapest, the First of the First.

¹⁴ Packard, p.6

¹⁵ Packard, p.6

¹⁶ p.5, Packard, Vance, 'The Wastemakers', [On American methods of stimulating industrial consumption], Longmans Green Co., London, 1961.

If they know, so should you. Best of breed, best practices, it's nothing new, but never before has everything been so in the open, and never before have consumers done their homework so much more diligently than corporations. In fact, armed with all this information, consumers will increasingly be confident enough to try out completely unknown brands, bypassing 'trusted' incumbents.

*All in all, it leaves no excuses for brands not to know the new HYGIENIA standards.'*¹⁷

Such evolutionary development of consumers was already forecasted by Packard: 'Indeed, the only sure way to meet all the demands may be to create a brand new breed of super customers.'¹⁸ It is in such emphasis toward the consumer rather than the product that we find evidence of the critique leveled by Packard towards both Frederick's manifesto 'Selling Mrs Consumer' and of the early techniques of persuasions piloted by Edward Bernays.

If the nineteenth-century challenge was to perfect the apparatus of industrial production and attend to its development in the most efficient way, by the time Packard writes *The Wastemakers* it was obvious for most marketing experts that:

*Our enormously productive economy...demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption...We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate.*¹⁹

This is a most explicit of demand to consume, equated as it is with an imperative to dispose at ever faster rates, and by inference equally to waste at an ever higher rate. No clearer suggestion could be made to transform the category of waste from a problem to be solved to a necessity to be promoted as socially constructive, and economically necessary. A positively described and socially engineered entropy was to be embraced and the dismissal of preexisting priorities was deemed necessary, through the embrace and the promotion of a new ethic, that of consumerism.

The rise and diffusion of this new consumer ethic, the emphasis on the creation of a new breed of customers and the establishment of a deeper subset of subject-object relations are the most explicit clues to the transformation of the significance of discourses of waste from the nineteenth to the twentieth century as posited at the beginning of this paper.

Richardson's utopia of citizenship in the imaginary sanitary city where the provision of public services forms the core of its planning, fades in the distance with the appearance of the new consumerist ethic. The citizen-subject of Cornucopia City displays its citizenship only through its consuming habits, its purchasing ethic, without expecting any provision other than that of being

¹⁷ <http://www.trendwatching.com/trends/hygenia.htm>

¹⁸ Packard, p.11

¹⁹ Lebow, Victor, as quoted on p.24

able of extending its own desires into the social realm.

Through such manipulations of cultural semantic operations on the ‘*value of wasting*’ a series of polarities were confused and repositioned; waste and value were not anymore opposites, but indeed mutual aides in the pursuit of capital interests whilst scarcity and excess were simply indexes of market demand and offer in the terms defined by the relation between production and consumption.

These maneuvers had the effect of shifting the reality of waste and its agents of pollution into an abstract dimension, a rarefied secondary space from which only later it would emerge when it could no longer be diluted and dispersed.

It is this ‘*suicidal tendency of modernity, as Zygmunt Bauman*²⁰ comments, that appears at the centre of Italo Calvino’s tale of the city of Leonia.

5.

The last of the scenario I have selected, then, is that of Italo Calvino’s imagined community of Leonia, in *Invisible Cities*²¹.

The mood is set from the outset; Calvino opens with the words: *The city of Leonia refashions itself every day*. Leonia’s citizens are constantly occupying themselves with the daily exchange of the old with the new, which they do in such a methodical manner that it compels Calvino to wonder, ‘if Leonia’s true passion is really as they say the enjoyment of new things, and not instead, the joy of expelling, discarding, cleansing itself of a recurrent impurity.’²²

Calvino’s dream-like narrative echoes the concerns of the many theories of the twentieth century regarding the relations between economic expansion, consumption and waste as essential for urban development.

It is clear that his imagined Leonia, is a city where the message of pundits such as Frederick and Bernays, had slowly set in and had been internalized by its inhabitants for whom – as an example- the ‘process of Creative Destruction’ proposed in 1950 by Joseph Schumpeter was now a daily ritual²³.

Something akin to the paroxysm of a daily fashion shift, engulfs them in their reckless habits, compels them to joyfully dispose of everything as if following an intrinsic dictum written in the objects themselves, forgetting that yesterday the same objects spoke to them in a different language, a language of seduction and desire.

²⁰ p.3, Bauman, Zygmunt, ‘Wasteful Planet’, *Kainos-Rifiuti*, issue 4-5, 2004. Translation from the Italian text by the author. <http://www.kainos.it/numero4/emergenze/bauman-ita.html>

²¹ p.114-116, Calvino, Italo, *Invisible Cities*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1974. Translation by William Weaver

²² Calvino, p. 114

²³ Schumpeter, Joseph, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1950

But where does all the refuse 'encased in spotless plastic bags'²⁴ go?

In Leonia, Nobody wonders. We learn from the narrator, that 'a fortress of indestructible leftovers surrounds Leonia, dominating it on every side, like a chain of mountains.'²⁵

Calvino's landfill of Leonia is a 360-degree mountain range represented as an act of pure accumulation, a preservation 'all of itself in its only definitive form: yesterday's sweepings piled up on the sweepings of the day before yesterday and of all its days and years and decades.'²⁶ At times, when the stench from its surroundings reaches the shopping area of the city, the Leonians seem to realize that those solid, indestructible heaps of their spent desires will ultimately survive them; they are the most resilient testimony of their lives, the self-made monument of their decay.

As this realization sets in, the seemingly self-satisfied practices of Leonia, its success in turning the new into old, day after day, assumes a menacing tone, a threatening accent. As we read: 'The greater the height grows, the more the danger of a landslide looms,' the danger being that of literally 'submerging the city in its own past, which it had tried in vain to reject.'²⁷

There is no exorcism or feat of engineering powerful enough to dispel such threat, but this does not stop the Leonians from repeating *ad libitum* their daily ritual, the almost magical transformation from beauty to ugliness, from desire to disposal.

Prisoners of their own destiny, Leonia's citizens simply wake, use, dispose and slumber, whilst 'in the nearby cities they are all ready, waiting with bulldozers to flatten the terrain, to push into the new territory, expand, and drive the new street cleaners farther out.'²⁸

6.

This is how the tale of Leonia ends, with a prospect of 'driving the street cleaners farther out' and this also seems a very appropriate point for us to conclude this literary-historical foray into Waste and Utopia and enter into a specific contemporary situation, that of Cardiff itself and its paradigm of economic growth currently suspended in between two future projects.

These are the building of its new Shopping Centre (St. David's 2) and the increasingly difficult search for an alternative location of its last operative landfill, Lamby Way, forecasted at the current rates of disposal to reach saturation in late 2008.

In order to discuss this further I will now introduce the Lamby Way Time Capsule project by presenting an alternative definition of 'sanitation' proposed by the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles in 1990.

²⁴ Calvino, p.114

²⁵ Calvino, p.115

²⁶ Calvino, p.115

²⁷ Calvino, p.116

²⁸ Calvino, p.116

Sanitation is the working out of the human design to accept, confront, manage even use decay in urban life.

Sanitation is the city's first cultural system, not its displaced-housekeeper caste system.

To do sanitation is to husband the city as home.

I think it can serve as a model for democratic imagination as follows: sanitation serves everyone, it starts from that premise; it accepts that everyone must be served in a democracy and the city must be maintained in working works everywhere, no matter what socio-economic culture.

Sanitation, in democracy, implies the possibility of a public-social-contract operating laterally, not upstairs-downstairs, but equally between the servers and the served.

Out of these humble circumstances, we can begin to erect a symbol of communality.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

Sanitation manifesto!:

Why Sanitation can be used as a model for Public Art.

The Act, vol.2, N.1, 1990, p. 84-5 (abridged version)

7.

The Lamby Way TIME CAPSULE is a public art project.

It chooses to focus its attention on one of the most 'public' sites in the city of Cardiff, its own landfill, its own 'social sculpture': the Lamby Way landfill waste management site.

Lamby Way is at present the only operative landfill in the city. Its full capacity will be reached in a period of time of between 2 to 3 years. As we write, no alternative site has been found within the city limits, mostly due to the fact that within the growth pattern now established in Cardiff, rising land values make increasingly difficult to locate operational structures that are not considered revenue generating, no matter how essential they might be.

Already two articles in the recent local press have leaked attempts at finding a replacement site for Lamby Way and have promoted the kind of collective NIMBYism one could expect in these cases, albeit bringing an unexpected twist in the history of environmental justice, by

highlighting the implausibility of such a civic site next to the highly coveted homes of BBC executives and footballers.²⁹

Once Lamby Way closes, it is likely that the visibility of waste disposal operations will move further away from the city itself.

Plans for a 'world-class pay-and-play golf course with hotel and leisure facilities'³⁰ are currently being developed, with the intention of having the whole site built, run and managed by a private developer on the ex-landfill.

In the future transition from public to private management of the land lies an interesting aspect for the Time Capsule project, since the invisible character of its presence, buried underneath the development, will act both as a reminder of the site's previous identity and of its public service.

8.

The project addresses the collective cultural determination of our society's own system of values and signification to be tested and reaffirmed. Through the mechanism of a public survey it asks the largest possible number of citizens in Cardiff to respond to a simple question:

'What would you say is 'rubbish' in our world today?'

If the landfill is the place where things go when we define them 'rubbish' by our very act of disposal, then the question as posed, demands those who are willing (or able) to engage with it, to contribute to the exercise of the power of 'naming things' which culture grants us all.

The power of 'naming things', is also, in an individual form, that bestowed upon the post-Duchampian artist who has the power of 'labelling' or 'designating' what 'art' is, providing that such acts of designation take place within established structures.

But semantic authority is also crucial in governmental waste strategies for which definitions of what constitutes 'waste' as opposed to 'resource' are instrumental in attributing the preferred legal status to each material undergoing processes of transformation.

The project's question is asked to all the households of Cardiff by inserting the question cards into the council's regular door-to-door distribution chain of bin liners, and the specific answers are not made public until the TIME CAPSULE is found and opened.

The use of the word *rubbish* in the question is given its broadest significance of 'low or no value' enlarged to actions, events, objects, ideas, institutions, and individuals.

²⁹ South Wales Echo , 3.5.2006, 'Millionaire Row rubbish tip plan', Phillip Nifield.

³⁰ Cardiff County Council Financial Services Team, 'Lamby Way Golf/Leisure development plan', tender documents, 21.5.2005

Reworking the normal function of time capsules by *deliberately setting aside what a hypothetical future finder is anticipated to regard as evidence of the present*³¹, the LAMBY WAY TIME CAPSULE project combines the expected function of a time capsule, that of preserving items considered of value (only now it is our opinions as citizens of a determined area which are to be preserved), with a location (the landfill which serves that area) considered the low end of land values within a consumptive parameter.

The attempt here is for notions of *conservation* and *disposal* to become involved in a dialectic of land use that acknowledges the dilemmas often posed by the conflictual relationships between ethical and pragmatic positions.

In the spatial politics of urban developments, the accumulative logic of a waste landfill (much like that of capital, as Bataille reminds us in *The Accursed Share*³²) sets temporary boundaries to the mires of development expansion precisely because of its purpose and toxicity, whilst it mirrors the sites of accumulative consumption often placed right next to them, in this case the large Tesco store opposite Lamby Way.

Through the set up of the deliberate contrivance of its play between conservation and disposal, the project attempts to shift both the significance of the landfill within the city and its content, and to create a framework for an alternative contribution to its growth by its constituency, this being: *the disposal of 'cultural waste' as symbolic refuse*. It is the multifaceted casting of public opinions on what such cultural waste might consist of, that will make up the content of the time capsule.

The fact that the question alludes to the 'world' at large rather than its immanent cultural and geographic context is an allusion to a reality of waste disposal; whilst this takes place in a specific locality, the origins of its composition are to be found all over the world, such is the amount of imported goods which are available to us as consumers these days. Made all over the world, traded from all over the world, but dumped in a specific location.

³¹ This and other attempts of definitions can be found in: Durrans, B., *'Posterity and paradox, some uses of time capsules'*, p.51-67 in Wallman, S. *'Contemporary futures: perspectives from social anthropology'*, Routledge, 1992

³² Bataille, G. (1988). *The accursed share : an essay on general economy*. New York, Zone Books.

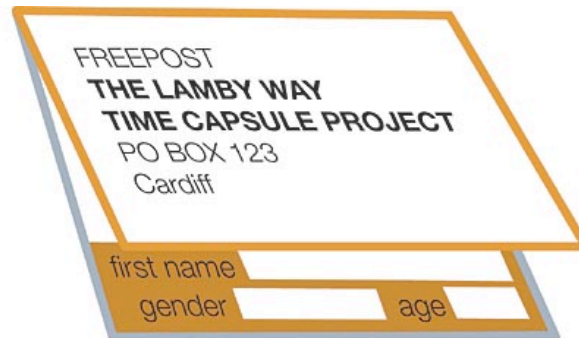
Most Anglo-American readers know Bataille as a novelist. *The Accursed Share* provides an excellent introduction to Bataille the philosopher. Here he uses his unique economic theory as the basis for an incisive inquiry into the very nature of civilization. Unlike conventional economic models based on notions of scarcity, Bataille's theory develops the concept of excess: a civilization, he argues, reveals its order most clearly in the treatment of its surplus. The result is a brilliant blend of ethics, aesthetics, and cultural anthropology that challenges both mainstream economics and ethnology.

Georges Bataille (1897-1962), founder of the French review *Critique*, wrote fiction and essays on a wide range of topics. His books in English translation include *Story of the Eye*, *Blue of Noon*, *Literature and Evil*, *Manet*, and *Erotism*.

Robert Hurley is the translator of *History of Sexuality* by Michel Foucault and cotranslator of *Anti-Oedipus* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

It is the project's intention not to establish a scheduled retrieval and opening time frame for the LAMBY WAY TIME CAPSULE; it will be found whenever the landfill ceases to be biologically active and the land becomes once more subjected to reorganization.

Just like Utopia, defined by Benjamin Ward Richardson in Hygeia as *another word for time*, the Lamby Way Time Capsule will await with confidence its own becoming, with its status as an invisible trigger of discourses around the landfill site, it will act as a rumour, awaiting the future as a virus in the midst of our waste.



THE CARD IS DISTRIBUTED THROUGH THE DOOR-TO-DOOR DELIVERY OF RECYCLING BAGS IN ALL CARDIFF HOUSEHOLDS

What would you say it's rubbish in our culture today?

War in Iraq

Fuel prices

Pollution

Not enough shops

The idea of revolution

Big brother

Young peoples morality

The Severn bridge-fare
your bloody art project

lick and seal postcard's edge

first name

gender age

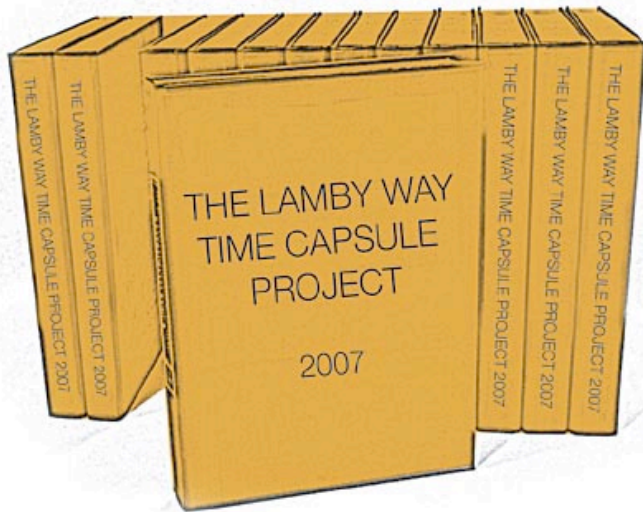
→

FREEPOST
THE LAMBY WAY
TIME CAPSULE PROJECT
PO BOX 123
Cardiff

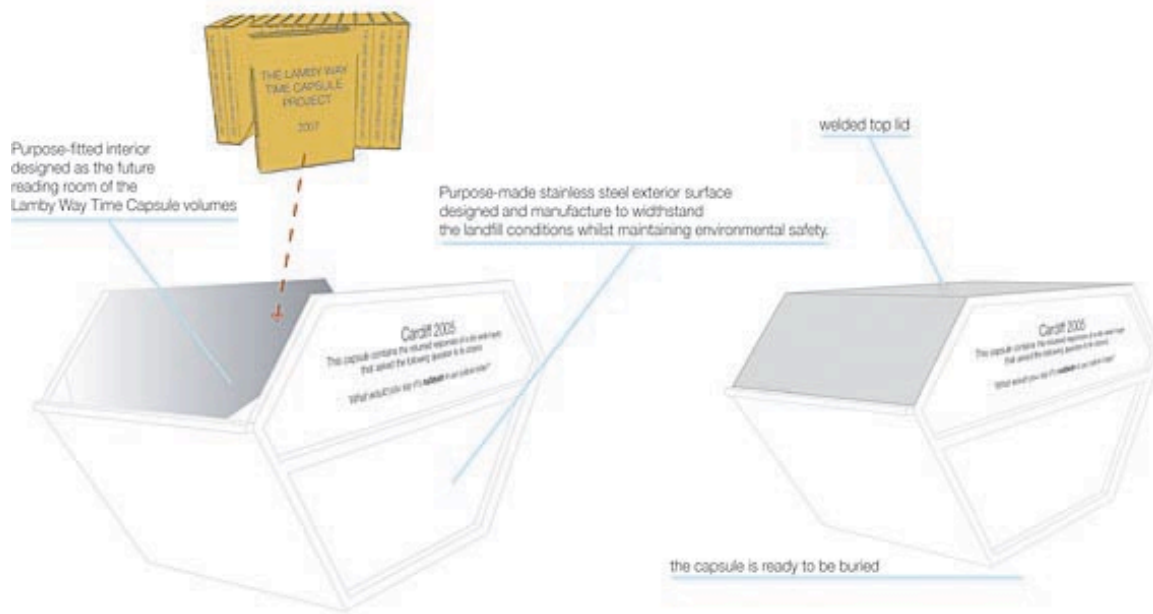
**FILL THE CARD WITH YOUR OPINIONS
AND SEND IT OFF FREE OF CHARGE**



ALL CARDS FILLED AND RETURNED ARE SCANNED;
ALL DATA ARE COMPILED INTO A DATABASE



ALL RECORDS ARE PRINTED IN A SERIES OF
HARD-BOUND VOLUMES IN ARCHIVAL QUALITY



THE CAPSULE IS FITTED, SEALED AND FILLED WITH INERT GAS



The parade and burial ceremony will begin at TESCO car park in Pengham green as seen here from the western tip of Lamby Way...
(In the foreground is the unfinished work of Jeroen Van Weston)



A PUBLIC CEREMONY/PARADE INVITES PEOPLE INTO THE LANDFILL TO WITNESS THE BURIAL OF THE TIME CAPSULE



...and terminate at the Lamby Way landfill operational cell for its public burial.



A PUBLICATION WILL MARK THE PROJECT.
IT WILL CONTAIN IMAGES, STATISTICS, INFORMATION AND TEXTS ON ART, WASTE AND TIME CAPSULES.
THESE WILL BE WRITTEN BY VARIOUS ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC PARTIES SPECIFICALLY FOR THE PUBLICATION.

9.

The viral expectations of the Lamby Way Time Capsule and its deferred agency, point at an unspecified future and attaches to its burial ceremony hopes for the unknown and trust to its trajectory, together with a sense of responsibility that the present projects in its becoming. In doing so, it attempts to materialize the concept that many futures are here with us in the present, constructed in our immanence, hence engendering a responsibility for the 'not yet' despite our 'not knowing'.

Therefore in the Lamby Way Time Capsule project, the significance of the virus is constructed in a benign sense, even when surrounded by the potentially much more maligned microbiological activity upon which our hopes of exercising full control are partly linked to our faith in technology and partly discharged within the unpredictability that characterizes any landfill waste mass and its virtually unknown composition.³³

The Time Capsule is proposed here as a reversed viral presence, enacting its infectious power within the local discourses of the landfill, inserting a new, unexpected element in the narrative of its contentious geography and its possible future development whilst reinstating the

³³ An exception to this state of not knowgn the content of landfills is the 'Garbage project' a cross-disciplinary reseach unit based at the University of Arizona begun in 1972 and still active today. A full description of the project and some of its results can be found in: Rathje William, L. and C. Murphy '*Rubbish! : the archaeology of garbage.*' New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1992)

collective ownership of its content, until then separated by the boundaries of its public management entrusted to preside over discarded public properties.

The transformation of the cultural connotation related to viruses that the project is attempting to enact, is also important as it relates to what has been discussed in this paper in terms of historical evidence of nineteenth-century utopia of urban planning.

The nineteenth-century obsessive insistence upon cleanliness as a part of its sanitary project of ordering both nature and society, encountered a moment of epiphany in the isolation and visualization of germs and the confirmation of the 'germ theory of disease' attributed to Louis Pasteur in 1856.

As the microscopic realities of the world were progressively revealed, they acquired an important aesthetic dimension and became one of the primary modes of legitimacy of scientific authority and its tools.

It is this authority that underpins Richardson's 'sanitary science' at work in his plans for Hygeia and in more general terms such authority underwrites the alliance between scientific discovery and social policies that consolidated much of the impetus of the nineteenth-century utopian reformist agenda.³⁴

Once visualized and popularized, the germ, the microbe, the virus, became objects of fascination and horror, highly prided natural science evidence harking back to an almost prehistoric past, pre-modern creatures which stood in the way of modernity and its colonizing ambitions upon the future.

Their resilience to the dramatic changes that were taking place in our world, was the subject of admiration as much as a resolution to extrapolate them out of their invisibility, classify them and whenever possible isolate them at safe distance.

Such drive is explicit in Richardson's Hygeia, ensuing a warfare in which the microbe is seen as an enemy of modernity and one of its outcasts, whose only refuge is in the waste and filth spread all across the city. It is no surprise that a great deal of Richardson's urban planning is motivated by distancing the matter in which such dangers can lurk and infect our midst.

With such cultural-historical precedent in mind, the word 'virus' as associated to the Lamby Way Time Capsule, is significant of an intentionality to reframe such discourses and open up alternative socio-semantic possibilities; rather than pointing at a past order, the notion of 'virus' becomes related to a future organization, the function of the virus being that of a carrier of information whose significance might be more appropriately valued in a 'not yet' context.

Alberto Duman
20.9.2006

³⁴ For an overview of the subject see: Porter, Roy, 'The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity', Fontana Press, 1999

