

Modern Garbage:
An Eco-Critical Perspective on Trash, Art, Commodities, and
Duchamp's Readymades

by Joseph Gaudiana

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ENGLISH

in

The Department of English

State University of New York

New Paltz, New York 12561

December 2022

Introduction:

In the twentieth century, trash was drastically re-invented to become a daily fixture of modern life. Art became increasingly difficult to define, while objects and commodities were produced like never before. Most of what I'm about to discuss in this thesis has to do with objects: whether categorized as trash, art, or commodity. Jane Bennett argues that objects have more power than we're apt to perceive (or inclined to admit). Timothy Morton claims that humans are afraid to be passive because to be passive is to be an object. Just like humans feel the need to exist as something greater than plants or animals, we think of ourselves as more than mere objects. When Marcel Duchamp deems a mundane bicycle wheel "Art," we take it seriously because of the intentionality of the artist. We take a firm stance on the artwork. We say that we love it or we say that we hate it because to say nothing would be...passive. We call Duchamp's work genius because we get it or we call it trash because we think there is something to get that isn't worth getting. Any of these reactions to the readymades would neglect to afford any agency to the objects.

I'll point to places in twentieth-century art and poetry where objects cause an encounter, rendezvous, event, or transformation. Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference. Each of these instances, however, involve the illusion of human intentionality. Duchamp described selecting the readymades as a "rendezvous" in which he seems to afford some power, some allure, detached from aesthetics, that caused him to extract the object and present it as an artwork. In a quotation that upholds the notion of human intentionality, Andre Breton describes this same process as one that relies solely on the agency of the artist, suggesting that the object has no power in this interaction. I'll essentially argue against Breton, favoring the actual encounter between person and object (and treating the

encounter as an event). This encounter between humans and objects takes many shapes. We'll also look at the consumer, the collector, as well as the artist who functions with an eye for history, preservation, and documentation.

As humans, we take for granted the idea that we are in total control of the fate of objects and most nonhuman entities. We get to decide if an object is trash, art, tool, or commodity. We get to decide if a creature is an animal, a robot, a sentient vacuum, or something in between. Often, these decisions are arbitrary. Capitalism has trained us to believe that certain objects are trash long before they should be. Once an object has been discarded, whether iPhone or bottle rack, that matter continues to inhabit the earth and effect its surroundings. Some objects take dominion over the slovenly wilderness; some objects sit idly, passively. Many objects disintegrate and meld with other objects to create a vast underground microbial ecosystem unconsidered by most humans. Some stuff ends up in a museum or historical society. Other stuff sits in the garage of a hoarder. The production of all of this stuff contributes to the warming of the earth, the warming of the oceans, the bleaching of the coral reefs, the proliferation of droughts and wildfires; all the calamities you've heard about so often that you've become numb to their implications.

In this thesis, I seek to raise questions regarding the ontological status of various objects while examining the ways in which twentieth-century artists have dealt with these ontological questions in a century that produced more stuff than ever before.

Section I: Duchamp and Aesthetic Transformation

When Marcel Duchamp created his *Bicycle Wheel* in 1913, he had yet to coin the term "readymade." By the time he started using this term to describe his series of new works (1914's *Bottle Dryer*, 1917's *Hat Rack*, 1916's *Comb*, 1917's *Fountain*, among others) he had already "lost" the original *Bicycle Wheel*. In *The Duchamp Dictionary*, Thomas Girst explains, "He allowed, commissioned, authorized, certified and signed objects as readymades that acquaintances and others brought to him. He also occasionally asked close friends to pick up or buy mass-produced objects resembling his original readymades, almost all of which, by the 1920s, had been lost, thrown away, or destroyed" (Girst 158). These readymades work to defy an easy definition of art. Duchamp would sometimes refer to his readymades as "questions" rather than artworks. By purchasing mass-produced objects intended for utilitarian use, displaying these objects in the context of artwork, and nonchalantly allowing works to be discarded/replaced, Duchamp's readymades work to obscure the distinctions between different types of matter. A significant component to understanding the readymade series is to understand Duchamp's defiance of delineation. This defiance fits nicely into the discourse surrounding modernist aesthetics and the enduring question of *what is art?* Crucial to our contemporary moment, however, Duchamp's readymades carry with them an important criticism of twentieth-century consumerism; the careless trashing of physical matter in order to make room for new objects and the endless cycle in which the modern consumer has already been trapped. By creating a series of ostensibly disposable artworks, Marcel Duchamp's readymades function as a sort modern-mimesis, reflecting the twentieth-century's attitude towards objects, utilities, commodities, and garbage. While mimesis is traditionally the act of art imitating nature, culture/politics/society creates phenomena ripe

for imitation as well. Marcel Duchamp is not recreating a mass-produced object. He is reproducing the flippant attitude of the twentieth-century consumer.

Of course, the disposal of these artworks was not initially a planned performance. Duchamp loved the presence of chance in his work. In *The Afternoon Interviews* with Calvin Tompkins, he said, "Chance is the only way to avoid the control of the rational" (Tompkins 51). In line with the Surrealist and Dadaist movements with which he was associated, Duchamp sought to disrupt the rational at every turn. He allowed chance to be a pervasive factor in almost all of his work, from the readymades to the inadvertently cracked glass of *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors Even*. In *The Duchamp Dictionary*, Thomas Girst rehashes a story from Andre Breton about "a nonchalant Duchamp deciding with a toss of a coin whether he should stay in Paris or leave for New York the next day (he went to New York)" (Girst 42). In her book *In Montparnasse*, Sue Roe explains the fateful act that led to the readymade's most interesting component: their disposability. After the coin toss, "when (Marcel's sister Suzanne) cleaned out her brother's studio, just after he left Paris, Suzanne had thrown out both *Bottle Rack* and *Bicycle Wheel*, thus consigning to oblivion Duchamp's first ever readymades. They were later copied" (Roe 32). This happy accident acts as further commentary on Duchamp's defiance of delineations. Where Marcel left two works of art, Suzanne saw two pieces of garbage. She acted accordingly. This was an easy mistake to make since Duchamp did not alter *Bottle Rack* in any way to indicate that it was intended to be a work of art. "If *Bicycle Wheel* and *Pharmacy* had come about with minimal intervention by the artist, *Bottle Rack* required virtually none at all. It was an ordinary cast-iron bottle rack, of the kind used at that time to dry empties before returning them to the local wine shop to be

refilled" (Roe 20). A coincidence depicted in this passage comes with the intended use of *Bottle Rack*. The purpose of this object is to make it easier to *reuse* a wine bottle.

For most of human history, reusing objects to the fullest extent of their potential was normal. In her 1999 book, *Waste and Want: The Social History of Trash*, Susan Strasser explains that "most Americans produced little trash before the twentieth century. Packaged goods were becoming popular as the century began, but merchants continued to sell most food, hardware, and cleaning products in bulk. Their customers practiced habits of reuse that had prevailed in agricultural communities here and abroad" (Strasser 12). She soon goes on to mention bottles, which were "generally refilled; the market for secondhand bottles grew throughout the nineteenth century, in part because mechanization was slow in the glassmaking industry" (Strasser 13) adding, "mass production and mass distribution literally generated more stuff, and more trash...New processes for making and filling cardboard cartons and tin cans, and new materials such as cellophane and aluminum foil, engendered a new class of household trash" (Strasser 13-14). The object that Duchamp selected to be one of his first readymades was originally used as a way to reuse materials, as opposed to throwing those materials away. By disposing and replacing this item, Duchamp expresses a sense of disregard for the physical matter that composed the bottle rack. Partially in jest, partially antagonistic, Duchamp suggests that the hand of the artist is more important than the actual physicality of the object. The object is heightened to the status of art only when chosen by the artist. Therefore, if the artist chooses to select a new version of the same object to replace the original, the replica is just as good. In this case, the original object is wasted, for all practical purposes. By making this artistic statement, Duchamp adds to the trash issue in the same way as the system he is critiquing.

Duchamp's replicas assert that any item, replica or "original," selected by the artist can be valued as an art object. In 1938's *The Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism*, André Breton describes this process: "an ordinary object (is) promoted to the dignity of an art object by the mere choice of the artist" (nationalgalleries.org). While Breton uses the word "choice," Duchamp's description of this process is (fittingly) more elusive. In *The Duchamp Dictionary*, Girst explains Duchamp's use of the term "rendezvous," "Duchamp described the moment of randomly choosing an object for a readymade as a kind of rendezvous between the person making the choice and the item" (Girst 156). This process eschews the traditional process of creating artwork in a way that challenges the creative tradition and cultural institutions. In 1977's *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Rosalind Krauss declares, "It is a recognition that is triggered by the object but is somehow not *about* the object...(Duchamp's) work is not intended to hold the object up for examination, but to scrutinize the act of aesthetic transformation itself" (77-80). This is why Duchamp selected items that did not adhere to a sense of beauty or ugliness. It was never about the object, it was about the encounter.

In 2010's *Vibrant Matter*, twenty-first-century American theorist Jane Bennett argues that objects possess more power than we give them credit for. In an instance of "rendezvous" similar to that of Duchamp's, Bennett recounts a "sunny Tuesday morning" in which she was confronted by a seemingly innocuous set of stuff: "Glove, pollen, rat, cap, stick. As I encountered these items, they shimmied back and forth between debris and thing—between, on the one hand, stuff to ignore, except insofar as it betokened human activity...and stuff that commanded attention in its own right, as existents in excess of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects" (4). Bennett's theories attempt to tie the universe together by recognizing all matter as vibrant. In addition to contextualizing the

"aesthetic transformation" mentioned by Krauss, these philosophies could force us to draw conclusions against shallow delineations/labeling of nonhuman entities. Jane Bennett's book often, in one way or another, discusses the durability of matter. In the consumerist cycle of purchase, dispose, repeat, the matter doesn't necessarily change. It is often some superficial aspect of the object that changes (colors fade, copper turns green, etc.), and the language we use to describe the object changes as a sort of reaction. But sometimes it doesn't even require a surface-level change. The iPhone 4, for instance, was once a hot commodity but is now outdated and therefore trash despite the lack of discernible change in the object's physical appearance.

In Bennett's study of objects "the ecology of things," she must consider how capitalism/consumerism change our perception of objects. For Bennett, instead of being able to experience an object for what it is physically made of, we're often looking at objects as yet another water bottle, tennis racket, etc. She explains, "It hit me then in a visceral way how American materialism, which requires buying ever-increasing numbers of products purchased in ever shorter cycles, is *antimateriality*" (5). For Bennett, in this "cycle," consumers are quick to replace objects that remain vital. This hostility towards materiality comes only as a result of tricking one's brain into thinking that one's possessions are no longer vital. Suddenly, we are forced to deny the vitality of objects because of this "cycle" that Bennett refers to. The iPhone is trash because you've convinced yourself that this is no longer the same object that you once found to be necessary. It is a cruel hecatomb in the name of Capitalism via a strategic "planned obsolescence." Susan Strasser discusses how mid-twentieth-century marketing contributed to this "antimateriality" by encouraging consumers to use certain products once before discarding them. Strasser

explains, "Disposability became a selling point for postwar consumer goods, especially things made out of paper and, later, lightweight plastics. It was not a hard sell to people who could remember scrubbing diapers, handkerchiefs, and kitchen towels on washboards"" Though this was especially prevalent after World War II, "Convenience, cleanliness, and disposability have been effective selling points for products since paper collars in the 1860s" adding that the twentieth century was partially characterized by a "celebration of trash making" (Strasser 266-267). In addition to creating products that were made to be disposed of, twentieth-century marketing campaigns, aided by radio and then television, began to convince consumers that their utilities needed a constant update. While Bennett seeks to reverse this way of thinking, Duchamp cynically participates in this cycle with a mimetic performance that is simultaneously critical and nihilistic. Indeed, Duchamp's readymades nearly celebrate the making of trash whilst pushing the limits of permissible works of art.

In a world full of trash, Bennett asks us to look at the objects in the bin or the debris scattered on the street and consider the "thing-power" of these objects. This theory affords a certain sense of agency to nonhuman objects. In Bennett's aforementioned sunny encounter with random bits of stuff, nothing is natural in this chance meeting between human and debris. Even the oak pollen appears in this configuration because of the way it has collected on the man-made pavement. Bennett recognizes that there is a story behind each thing she has noticed in this moment. She continues, "I also felt something else: a nameless awareness of the impossible singularity of *that* rat, *that* configuration of pollen, *that* otherwise utterly banal, mass-produced plastic water-bottle cap" (4). Thing-power often refers to this sense of "singularity" that one may experience when faced with a singled-out version of an object that is usually in abundance; however, it also refers to a certain energy

exerted by the object. Bennett later states, "my goal is to theorize a materiality that is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension" (20).

Bennett and Duchamp both describe a sort of *experience*. Bennett's momentary appreciation of the bottle cap was created by the singularity of the bottle cap *in that moment*, regardless of the multitudinous array of plastic bottle caps on the planet. In this sense, Bennett's moment was an aesthetic transformation, where she was forced to reconsider the vitality of the matter before her. Similarly, Duchamp's readymade replicas promise the same moment of aesthetic transformation regardless of the amount of replicas allowed, commissioned, authorized, certified and signed by the artist. Bennett may argue that this experience comes as a result of an energy radiating from the object itself while Duchamp may place more importance on the mind of the artist.

In his study of the early twentieth-century collector, German essayist Walter Benjamin seems to agree that objects can have an allure that goes beyond utility or functionality. He posits the collector as a unique figure in modern urban life, one who is neither artist, poet, nor intellectual but someone (like the flaneur) who mills about the modern city with an observational eye. The collector, unlike the flaneur who merely participates in walking and sightseeing, must take with him a tangible object to help understand the world around him. The collector knows that objects bear knowledge. While Bennett says that some objects have a power that derives from their association with human activity, she asserts that other stuff commands attention on its own. Benjamin's analysis of the collector seems to rely mostly on the human knowledge that is embedded in an object: He continues, "We construct here an alarm clock that rouses the kitsch of the previous century to 'assembly'" (205). Bennett defines the term "assemblage" as "ad hoc groupings of

diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within" (23-24). She likens an assemblage to an electric grid in which a cluster of materials come together to create energy. In the case of Benjamin's collector, this assortment of disparate objects all bring their own energies to the assembly, combining with the energies of the other objects in order to create something newly vibrant. Benjamin is keen on calling the collector's stuff "kitsch" to distinguish this figure from the art collector, who chooses to keep Fine Art on display in their home as opposed to the outdated ephemeralia from previous decades or centuries. In the same way that the naturalist may keep an insect preserved in hardened resin to better understand the wildlife of a certain epoch, Benjamin's collector wishes to curate an understanding of the culture of man-made objects. The collector is drawn to these objects because of their association with human knowledge. Duchamp's readymades are a series of works that show an awareness of this relationship between the objects of an era and their relationship to the humans who, however briefly, shared a planet with them.

Also in *Vibrant Matter's* first chapter, "the force of things," Jane Bennett invokes Franz Kafka's "The Cares of a Family Man" which concludes its description of Kafka's Odradek with, "He does no harm to anyone that one can see; but the idea that he is likely to survive me I find almost painful." This is the critical paradox of modern life that Bennett begins to uncover. The most fascinating aspect of Duchamp's readymades involve this too. To discard an object is not the act of ending this object's life, rather, it is to send it to embark upon an entirely new life, one that will likely outlast "you," the discarder. Bennett, like Duchamp, is interested in the naive ostrich-syndrome act of throwing something away

and replacing it with something new. (Maybe it isn't naive, maybe we just don't care).

Bennett reminds us that "vital materiality can never really be thrown away, for it continues its activities even as a discarded or unwanted commodity" (6). Objects/matter/materiality doesn't stop existing because it no longer fits into our initial purpose for it.

Aside from Odradek's ability to make us consider the lifespan of nonhuman entities, Bennett seems to be interested in the ambiguity/gray area presented by Kafka's creation. Odradek is both creature and object, Bennett recognizes this by saying, "Odradek is ontologically multiple" (8). Bennett discusses Vladimir Vernadsky "who also refused any sharp distinction between life and matter" and made note of a "continuity of watery life and rocks such as that evident in coal or fossil limestone reefs" concluding, "Odradek exposes this continuity of watery life and rocks; he/it brings to the fore the becoming of things" (8). If matter cannot be created nor destroyed, then every object is just a process of fashioning certain elements/materials into something else. Humans can trim a bush into the shape of a giraffe, they can make a castle with sand, turn ore into metal, metal into a bottle rack, a bottle rack into *Bottle Rack*, etc. Bennett also reminds us the complexity of metal itself in the chapter four "a life of metal." She says, "metal is always metallurgical, always an alloy of the endeavors of many bodies, always something worked on by geological, biological, and often human agencies" (60). This should make us realize that an object contains multitudes on the level of ontology but also in physicality.

While Bennett is concerned that consumerism and mass-production can lead to the degradation of all earthly matter, Walter Benjamin expressed similar concern in regards to the degradation of all earthly art. In Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical

Reproduction," the German essayist is concerned with the conflation of art and commodity. He claims, "Today, because of the absolute weight placed on (a work of art's) display value, the work of art is becoming an image with entirely new functions, of which the one we are aware of, namely the artistic function, stands out as one that may subsequently be deemed incidental" (13). This claim exists in harmony with Duchamp's thoughts on "retinal art," which was his term for much of the post-Courbet Paris/New York painting from Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism. To be fair, these two thinkers are talking about different things. Benjamin is concerned that if the artwork's image is all that is valued, it becomes nothing but a commodity. He's talking about the cheap poster of *Young Woman With Unicorn* hanging in the bathroom of a coffee shop. Duchamp is discussing the degradation of painting as an art form throughout the years, in an art world that had begun to heavily favor abstraction. But "retinal art," for Duchamp, still pertained to a sense of commodity. He believed that it was easy for people to sell this art because there was little thought (or "grey matter") behind it. Suddenly, being an artist was a profitable profession and Duchamp did not care for that one bit. While discussing different things, both Benjamin and Duchamp express concern with the lack of intellectual/cerebral engagement that the masses are willing to afford towards a work of art.

Benjamin states this more explicitly at the beginning of the seventh section of "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by saying, "The fact that the work of art can now be reproduced by technological means alters the relationship of the mass to art" saying that ultimately, "the conventional is enjoyed without criticism, the truly new is criticized with aversion" (26). Duchamp's readymades essentially make this same critique in a manner that is based in comedic irony. He is simultaneously presenting something that is

"conventional" and "truly new." He is provoking his audience to such an extreme that we must face the synonymy of art and commodity at the sight of an aesthetically neutral object. In the same essay, Benjamin states, "Works of art are received and appreciated with different points of emphasis, two of which stand out as being poles of each other. In one case the emphasis is on the work's cultic value, in the other, on its display value" (12).

Regarding this binary, I've discussed the latter, but I will address the former by directing us towards another one of Benjamin's essays entitled, "Capitalism as Religion" where he asserts, "capitalism is a purely cultic religion, perhaps the most extreme that ever existed" (*Selected Writings Vol. 1* 288). Now, both items in Benjamin's binary of cultic value versus display value can be directly related to capitalism/consumerism. Especially when considering the readymades within the long tradition of sculpture/art objects, a tradition that has often been entwined with "cultic" or religious value, Duchamp is cynically suggesting that this (toilet, snow shovel, bicycle wheel, etc.) is our new religion. The "planned obsolescence" practiced by car, style, and tech companies creates a recurring ritual that must take place for the modern consumer: kill your darlings and buy new darlings. Benjamin adds, "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition." Duchamp relishes in this detachment because nothing is sacred, not even art. We are a culture of people who have created utility objects in order to make life more convenient and now these objects and their production are central to our modern identity.

It is clear that Duchamp's readymades have made the distinction between art, commodity, and trash especially ambiguous. We might imagine a situation in which Duchamp and an anonymous Parisian simultaneously decide to purchase a bottle dryer from

the Grand Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville in 1914. Both Duchamp and the nameless hypothetical Parisian perform the same task of extraction: selecting the item from the store, purchasing the object, and leaving the store. The only difference is that the nameless hypothetical Parisian left the store with a bottle dryer and Duchamp left the store with *The Bottle Dryer* (1914). So what is the difference? Why does Duchamp get to put his purchase in italics? Even though this moment (encounter, rendezvous) was essentially the same for each of them, they each experienced a sense of "recognition," there is a slight distinction in the sort of experience that has occurred. It mostly has to do with utility vs. aesthetics. The nameless hypothetical Parisian probably had a heap of wet bottles that needed drying. Duchamp did not. In one of his "Four Essays on Aesthetics: Toward a Global View," the Chinese philosopher and theorist Li Zehou asks "What Are Artworks?" and eventually explains, "Objects are works of art, whether created for appreciation, practical purposes, or spiritual reasons, as long as they directly appeal to, excite, and arouse an aesthetic experience...works of art exist as aesthetic objects only when a person appreciates them..." (1661). The hypothetical nameless Parisian did not have an aesthetic experience with the object, he simply needed to dry some bottles. The hypothetical nameless Parisian was not a collector because he conferred upon this object a utilitarian value.

We might also interpret this quote from Zehou through the lens of Duchampian indifference. Duchamp believed that viewing an artwork as ugly and viewing a work as beautiful was essentially the same aesthetic experience. Therefore, we can take Zehou's "aesthetic experience" to represent any sort of reaction to the aesthetics of an object (even a reaction of aesthetic indifference is still a reaction to the aesthetics). This can only happen when viewing the object singularly. In his 2005 book *On Garbage*, John Scanlan explains, "By

observing that a work of art is the product of two defining poles Duchamp had accepted that this response would await *Fountain*. One pole is the artist...and the other the beholder who at some time and place unspecified looks at it and thus...confirms its existence" (Scanlan 96). Scanlan is talking about the beholder of an art object. The moment that Scanlan is describing is the moment that Duchamp places a readymade on a pedestal, stripping its utility, and forcing the viewer to see it only as an art object. Let's say that the nameless hypothetical Parisian wanders into an art gallery (or salon) in 1914 and sees the same bottle dryer up on display. "Hey," he might say, "I have that same bottle dryer at home, drying bottles." He might look to the corner of the room and see Duchamp drinking wine, laughing with his art pals. The nameless hypothetical Parisian might say, "I saw that guy at the department store! We bought this thing at the same time!" Only in this moment can the nameless hypothetical Parisian turn back to the bottle dryer and, whether he likes it or not, see it as *Bottle Dryer*. It has been stripped of its utility and the nameless hypothetical Parisian is now experiencing it as an aesthetic object instead of a utilitarian one. This should not conflict with Jane Bennett's theories on vibrant matter. Just like Bennett's experience of being struck by the singularity of the plastic water bottle cap, Duchamp hopes to compel his audience with the singularity of each readymade, contriving a situation in which the art viewer confirms the existence of this ordinary object as an art object. Whether or not the viewer agrees that this object is in fact an art object is irrelevant. The act of recognizing the object as an object that no longer is being used for its utilitarian purpose confirms its status as art regardless. When urinating into a urinal, most people don't stop and say, "this urinal... is it art?" But the moment that you do stop to ask; that is when the aesthetic transformation begins. While Duchamp has stripped these objects of their utility and they are thereby

promoted to the status of art; what about the moment when the nameless hypothetical Parisian's bottle dryer has been stripped of its utility? What happens when all of his bottles have dried and he no longer has a use for this odd apparatus? Or, more likely, a nifty twentieth-century campaign convinces this nameless hypothetical Parisian that there is a new and improved version of his item: The Bottler Dryer 5000 (here is where marketers realize the value of a transformation via branding). Is it taken by a waste collector and brought into a landfill outside of the city limits? This moment of disposal could be considered the opposite of an aesthetic transformation, a trash-formation, if you will. The ultimate irony, given Duchamp's proclivity to losing or discarding his readymades, is that the bottle dryer that once belonged to the nameless hypothetical Parisian and the bottle dryer formerly known as *Bottle Dryer*, could ultimately meet (once again, for the first time since the department store) to comprise a trash heap, in some landfill in Aubervilliers, Pantin, or Nanterre.

This frustratingly knotty distinction between art, commodity, and trash is due to an inextricable connection between the three ontological categories. *In Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*, co-authors William Cohen and Ryan Johnson explain, "If the rest of the country wanted New York's art and commerce, it would have to take the city's trash as well" (Cohen and Johnson 9). Modern life has made these delineations a bit easier but urban living has always involved a proliferation of garbage along with innovative cultural movements and flourishing shopping centers. John Scanlan, writing *On Garbage* reiterates this point, "Modernity is inconceivable without an expansion of garbage" (Scanlan 134). People create waste. Of course, just as easily as we create waste, we are eager to create boundaries between our domestic interiors and the spaces that we've agreed to allow

garbage to exist. Susan Strasser elaborates, "Non-trash belongs in the house; trash goes outside...disposal takes place in the intersection between the private and the public, the borderland where the household meets the city..." (Strasser 6). We cast garbage out to a place where we no longer need to deal with it.

The irony of waste removal is how much we have to deal with the stuff that we throw away so that we no longer have to deal with it. "Removal is crucial aspect of the organization of the object world inasmuch as garbage is equated with externality both in material and psychological terms. It disappears outside and into a different space—a space that is beyond self-perception and out of sight" (Scanlan 135). In this sense, art is traditionally the opposite of trash. Art belongs to the realm of the interior and trash belongs outdoors. Similarly, art and commerce belong in the city centers while landfills and waste management centers are often established away from the city center, in less prosperous areas of the city's outskirts. Swift and painless waste removal is often an indication of wealth and privilege. While the twentieth century has created trash as we currently know it, we've also worked towards separating visible trash from our daily lives. When these mechanisms fail us, it can be cause for outrage. The disproportionately right-winged outrage over the cleanliness of Paris, manifesting in the #SaccageParis Twitter movement starting in 2021 and continuing into 2022, shows the entitlement that wealthier cities feel to seamlessly fast garbage removal. Perhaps Duchamp's enduring legacy should boil down to what Strauss referred to as a "scrutinization of aesthetic transformation" but more importantly, from an eco-critical perspective in 2022, the scrutinization of the inverse of aesthetics: transforming useful objects into trash.

Section II: Modernist Poetry, Objects, Power, Agency and Passivity

While Jane Bennett's theory of "thing-power" can play a role in an object's aesthetic transformation, enacting a sort of event or encounter between object and viewer, American poet Wallace Stevens' 1919 poem "Anecdote of the Jar" demonstrates a similar sort of transformation as a result of an interaction between object and nature. The poem begins, "I placed a jar in Tennessee, / And round it was, upon a hill. / It made the slovenly wilderness / Surround that hill." This first stanza establishes a human agent displacing a man-made object in a natural environment while quickly moving our attention away from the narrator and towards the power of the jar itself. The poem continues, "The wilderness rose up to it, / And sprawled around, no longer wild." Here we see the wilderness reacting to the power of the jar. This is where the interaction starts to feel like something more significant. Masahiko Abe claims, "The poem does not only embody an ekphrastic encounter with what has already been there. Rather than being a mere struggle with the pastness of things, it makes things happen. The poem is an event, a history.." (Abe 323). Related to the discussion of trash, art, and space, this event has occurred because Stevens' jar, in a sense, is not supposed to be there. Nature exists away from the domestic interior, traditionally the realm of art, yet this mass-produced object has created an aesthetic experience similar that of Duchamp's readymades. Stevens uses rhyme to emphasize the paradox of this event, "It took dominion everywhere. / The jar was gray and bare." The plainness is contrasted with its sudden ubiquity. Before the reader can grasp the impossible scope defined by "everywhere," our mind is brought back to the object's mundane appearance. This contrast in this couplet could be characterized as a comment on the jar as a quotidian object. It is a seemingly lackluster item that is taken for granted all across the world on a daily basis. This quasi-

supernatural event that takes place in the poem, is an event that is quite similar to Bennett's anecdote of the Baltimore debris. The objects, although mundane, suddenly appear significant in this new light and their "thing-power" is revealed.

Along with a revelation of the jar's power, it is important to note Stevens' tone. The poem conveys, rather explicitly, that nature is "slovenly" and after the placement of the jar, the wilderness was "no longer wild." On one hand, an impartial observer could see Stevens' narrator as nothing more than a litterer. This goes back to our discussion on space: we've allocated very specific areas where it is acceptable to leave one's various debris. In "Queer Ecology," philosopher and ecologist Timothy Morton reminds us, "Human society used to define itself by excluding dirt and pollution. We cannot now endorse this exclusion, nor can we believe in the world it produces. This is literally about realizing where your waste goes. Excluding pollution is part of performing Nature as pristine, wild, immediate, and pure" (274). This performance that Morton refers to is enacted before the poem begins. Once the jar has been placed, nature is no longer defined by exclusion. Hence, it is "no longer wild." The jar has managed to tame the wilderness, just by the deliberate placement of the object by the human hand. This relates to urban planning and the construction of the modern city. Our perception of nature changes with the development of a city. As the Hudson and East River cuddle Manhattan island, it is easy to stand atop 30 Rock and see these two surrounding rivers as facilitating the existence of this bombastic human creation. These natural waterways appear subordinate to the assembly of skyscrapers because nature has been forced to conform to the existence of human objects and structures. A city park is a vestige of the natural landscape that once took total dominion. This natural dominion, however, to go along with the cynical subtext of the poem, is slovenly and crude. The jar is

doing nature a favor by emanating its status of human knowledge and power. It is an imperialist mindset: the jar is the flag of humankind and Steven's narrator has planted it firmly in this savage landscape. Stevens' jar has given structure to the woods because the narrator has deliberately *placed* it there. Suddenly, this Tennessee wilderness has a purpose: to surround, facilitate, and accompany the majesty of man and our glorious objects. The jar doesn't "give of bird or bush" because it boasts a sense of superiority towards both. Much like Duchamp's ironic mimesis of replacing the lost readymades, Stevens uses irony to depict a modern mindset towards objects and our control over nature.

While it is easy to read this poem with a certain emphasis on human intentions, Jane Bennett persists in her attempts to unite matter by likening human and nonhuman agents to one another. Discussing the occurrence of "events" involving various forms of humans and objects, Bennett analyzes the work of Hannah Arendt: "human intentionality is positioned as the most important of all agential factors, the bearer of an exceptional kind of power" but later wonders, "If we do not know just how it is that human agency operates, how can we be so sure that the processes through which nonhumans make their mark are qualitatively different? (34). The placement of Stevens' jar gives the object a certain intentionality that Bennett admits is often embedded with a specific sense of power. Duchamp's readymades are able to use this power via a heightened intentionality: the hand of the *Artist*. For an item to be linked to the intentions of a specific profession, the item is given a specific power. Duchamp's readymades function as a provocation, taking the power of the artist to audacious new heights. Bennett attempts, once again, to erase the line between human and nonhuman agent in order to assert that human intentionality is not necessarily more significant or potent than "thing-power." For Bennett, the dominion

established by Stevens' jar speaks to the power of the object itself, as opposed to the object representing the power of humankind.

Whether we can contribute the source of the jar's power to humans or not, it is clear that "Anecdote of the Jar" asserts that objects can change a landscape. While I've focused on the human-deliberateness of this event in order to liken it to something like urban development or colonialism, we could also discuss the jar's resemblance to litter, garbage, trash, debris, or filth. In Stevens' poem, we do not see Nature disappear. The jar is clearly invasive to the natural setting and Nature surrounds the jar. Though the jar takes dominion, though the wilderness is "no longer wild," though the jar altered nature, we still see nature moving, acting, and reacting. In his 1998 *The Meadowlands*, Robert Sullivan observes, "The big difference between the garbage hills and the real hills in the Meadowlands is that the garbage hills are alive. In some completely people-less areas of the swamp, there are billions of microscopic organisms thriving underground in dark, oxygen-free communities. They multiply and even evolve so that they can more readily digest the trash at their disposal" (Sullivan 96). Steven's jar, categorized as litter or not, is a commentary on humankind's negative impact on nature. Even when confronted with a destructive force, there are nonhuman entities reacting to the presence of human objects/waste in abundance. We can relate this to Jane Bennett's theories on the power of objects. "The hills are alive" with the sound of mere objects disintegrating. These inanimate items are facilitating an ecosystem of microscopic lifeforms. These lifeforms are sustained via the vital materialist of the inanimate objects that compose the trash that is dumped there. Life is able to thrive in an environment largely composed of non-living items. This ecosystem in the meadowlands is a creation that is likely beyond the original intention of the human who dumped the objects

there. In "Queer Ecology" Timothy Morton reminds us, "Evolution means that life-forms are made of other life-forms. Entities are mutually determining: they exist in relation to each other and derive from each other. Nothing exists independently, and nothing comes from nothing" (275). While Stevens' jar works to tidy the slovenliness of the Tennessean wild, in some ways domesticating the surrounding life, it also opens up the possibility of new life forming as a result of its presence.

Steven's most significant American contemporary, William Carlos Williams, also worked with quotidian objects in his poetry, similarly offering commentary on culture and ecology. While Stevens works to create an event in which human impact is felt/seen, Williams creates a non-event and asks his reader to perceive the titular object in its purest state. Stevens shows the wilderness reacting to the object, the effect of Williams' object is subtle. Here is the most famous excerpt from 1923's *Spring and All*:

So much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

We could immediately ascribe a similar sense of object-empowerment in Williams' poem. While Marcel Duchamp put a urinal on a pedestal and called it art, Williams similarly bolstered the importance of a mundane object to the status of art, thereby undergoing the previously discussed "aesthetic transformation." But where Duchamp purposefully embraces the disposability of his readymades, Williams engages in something more like preservation.

Similarly pushing the bounds of permissible subject matter for poetic/artistic creation, while presenting objects (both physical objects and intangible bits of collected vernacular) that may have otherwise been wasted upon an art world with a narrow conception of what art should be. Williams saw common objects and common language as something to use in his work. This attitude is decidedly less cynical than Duchamp or Stevens. Especially compared to Stevens' jar, Williams allows his wheelbarrow to exist passively. The object sits adjacent to the animal, while invoking the water cycle, the cycle of decomposition (wheelbarrows being used to transport mulch and manure), and death sustaining life (eating chickens). There doesn't seem to be any push or pull. There doesn't seem to be any action or reaction. Avery Slater explains, "'Nature' in Williams is simply the totality of existing formal technological artifacts are not substantially differentiated from other biological or material entities" (197). While Bennett implores her reader to consider a less rigid delineation between objects, humans, and creatures, Slater posits the work of Williams as similarly seeing Nature as one harmonious collection of entities. Williams, on one hand, allows his wheelbarrow to simply exist. This combats the anthropocentric mindset of tools serving a specific purpose for humans. In *All Art is Ecological*, Timothy Morton claims, "Quite awhile ago humans severed their social, philosophical and psychic ties with nonhumans. We confront a blank-seeming wall in every dimension of our experience — social space, psychic space, philosophy space" (37). This goes hand-in-hand with our belief that human agency exceeds the power of objects. We are different...and "we are somewhere," as Morton continues. Williams shows us a tiny image of what "somewhere" looks like. Slater claims that this poem renders humans, objects, animals, and nature all in an equal sphere, attempting to amend those severed ties referred to by Morton.

By asserting that there is some parity between the wheelbarrow, the chickens, and their surroundings, Slater rebuffs the wheelbarrow's role as a mere tool subservient to humans. Slater continues, "These commodities, when poetically suspended between the horizon of advanced technological reproduction and the self-evidence of the everyday world, might seem to bypass instrumentality. Here, the imagination might speculate on yet-ungessed objective relations..." (198). Williams' attempt to give this object singularity indeed works to 'suspend' the object to the point of bypassing its identity to a degree but the wheelbarrow's utilitarian value is (from an anthropocentric perspective) undeniably present in the poem, especially compared to the readymades. Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* combines a stool and a wheel in a fashion that renders each object useless in relation to their originally intended purpose. But my inability to forget the utility of this wheelbarrow is simply a product of a mindset that is unable to relinquish the superiority of humans. Timothy Morton sarcastically explains, "being passive is bad, because being passive means being an object, which means not being a subject. Heaven forbid that we become an objects, heaven forbid that we ever become passive—that would be a fate worse than death" (86). In an age of automobiles, Williams shows us a wheelbarrow. Susan Strasser's history of trash shows us that twentieth-century humans felt the need for constant improvements and upgrades, which led to a proliferation of trash. She reminds us, "Trash and trash making became integral to the economy in a wholly new way: the growth of markets for new products came to depend in part on the continuous disposal of old things" (15). Here, capitalism represents human agency. This "continuous disposal" that is perpetually reinforced by the economic paradigm forces us to constantly categorize and re-categorize our objects. We're always moving things from one place to another. In this poem, Williams

creates a moment in which an object can exist outside of this proliferation of trash and passively coalesce with nature. Like Duchamp, Williams comments on the twentieth-century consumer. Instead of ironically discarding objects to reflect throwaway culture, he tells us how much depends on this wheelbarrow, while his contemporary audience is concurrently being told to throw it away and buy a new one.

Now we could return to the question: what is it about that bottle rack that struck Duchamp in the Grand Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville that day in 1914? Remember: Duchamp insists it wasn't an appeal to "beauty." Bennett would afford agency to the object itself, saying that the power of the bottle rack may have had more to do with it than Duchamp's subtle genius. Similarly, we could ask about the language that Williams identifies as common and wonder how he selects certain phrases to use. In both cases, the impetus for selection comes down to a hostility towards tradition. For Williams, this is a tradition pertaining specifically to English/European poetry. Each artist wants to create something *new*. The American idiom, found language, found objects, and readymades manifest themselves to the artist who has already decided to obliterate their preconceived notion of what art/poetry *should* look like. Bennett's question lingers: "how can we be so sure that the processes through which nonhumans make their mark are qualitatively different?" (Bennett 34). Duchamp's urinal made its mark on Marcel without possessing a sense of beauty. Steven's jar took dominion by being mundane. With *Spring and All*, Williams incites an imaginary apocalypse in order to eradicate the relationship to the sort of material that one would typically view as "poetic." Once the mind's eye has been reset, new material makes its mark with a sort of agency of its own.

By turning common language into high art, Williams is also participating in an act of preservation. This is language that would have otherwise been wasted. In this sense, Williams engages with an the eco-conscious acts of reusing and recycling materials. Williams refuses to allow common language and common items to become refuse. While Duchamp deliberately adds to the issue of over-trashing objects in order to hold a mirror up to a wasteful culture, Williams cherishes the junk he come across. The wheelbarrow, the note from "This is Just to Say," the American idiom, they all serve to augment the recognition of the quotidian. Something with daily usage is similarly mass-produced, albeit in a more holistic way, yet, Williams reshapes an abundance into something singular. The image of Williams' "Red Wheelbarrow" is scattered all across the U.S., where humans continue to tame, cultivate, and take dominion over the land with the usage of tools and language. These inventions go hand and hand with the production of trash as modernity continues to plunge onward. Robert Sullivan has described the "garbage hills" of the meadowlands, in New Jersey. The New Jersey meadowlands includes portions of Williams' hometown of East Rutherford and is not far from the city of Paterson, which is also the title of Williams' 1948 magnum opus. In this epic poem, the poet collects historical documents, urban legends, and creates pieces of site-specific historical fiction in order to give life to a city that was ravaged by industrialization in an area of New Jersey that was deeply impacted by trash output from New York City. In *Paterson*, Williams refuses to let history go to waste. He recycles materials, information, and stories to create something new; something found.

Coda:**History, Anthropocene, and the Ironic Preservation of Hyperconsumerism**

Within the pantheon of post-Duchampian artwork, the usage of everyday objects is extensively normal. I've referred to Duchamp's distaste for "retinal" art, namely the Abstract Expressionism of mostly New York-based painters like Jackson Pollock, Joan Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler, Mark Rothko, etc. This form of expressionism, though enthrallingly experimental, was still Romantic in the Wordsworthian sense. Indeed, the audience can see a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" right there on the canvas. This way of thinking about art assigns all intentionality to mind of the artist. This "overflow" indulges the ego and individuality of the painter in a way that Duchampian readymades purposefully thwarts in favor of an elusive appeal to that which is mass-produced and thereby possessing a somewhat nebulous identity. In his iconic essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T.S. Eliot discusses this conflict between the personality of an artist and their responsibility towards tradition. Eliot seems to contest the words of Wordsworth by saying, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (Eliot 107). Eliot articulates the importance of the relationship between history and the modern poet. History, for Eliot, was a step away from personal poetry. He declares, "the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of his own country has a feeling that the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (Eliot 100). To favor the historical in a work of art is to turn away from the "personal" but also, in terms that we've

been using throughout this paper, it is to turn away from human agency/intentionality and affords greater agency to the objects on display. This also connects to Walter Benjamin's discussion on the collector. The collector is drawn to certain objects because of their association with human knowledge. Duchamp's readymades are a series of works that show an awareness of this relationship between the objects of an era and their relationship to the humans who, however briefly, shared a planet with them. Duchamp's readymades set precedent for artists to present objects with the mindset of a collector, partially appealing to Eliot's keenness on history. As far as what I've (ad nauseam) referred to as a "modern mimesis," regarding the apparent disposability/replicability of the readymades, these later twentieth century artists seem to update Duchamp's ironic mimesis. For them, hyperconsumerism has created objects worth preserving, displacing, and/or altering in order to bring attention to the absurdly short lifespan of human-made stuff: objects more ephemeral than soft-pink cherry blossoms in springtime or the fiery foliage of autumn.

To create work with a mind for history is also anthropocentric, indulging in human exceptionalism, and favoring human agency. Perhaps a better document of our era is a documentation of the destruction that has taken place in nature. The "Capitalocene" refers to a geological epoch that has been shaped by capitalism, attributing the blame of global warming (etc.) to the ruling class and the economic paradigm, rather than all living humans. French philosopher Bruno Latour explains, "The "anthropos" of the Anthropocene is not exactly any body, it is made of highly localized networks of some individual bodies whose responsibility is staggering...Such an attribution of responsibility and this dispersion of the "anthropos" into specific historical and local networks, actually gives a lot of weight to the other candidate for naming the same period of geohistory, that of 'capitalocene,' a swift way

to ascribe this responsibility to whom and to where it belongs" (6-7). The anthropocene, as a term, may neglect to consider in the economic greed that has dictated the ecological turmoil that characterizes the epoch. It makes sense, in this case, for an artist to forgo the histrionics of self-portraiture in favor of depicting an object which can represent consumerism and disposability. Toeing the line between Duchampian readymade and Abstract Expressionism was the American artist Jasper Johns. In *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Rosalind E. Krauss explains, "the work of Jasper Johns...constituted a radical critique of abstract expressionism. Sculpturally, this critique was performed through such works as the 1960 Ale Cans in which Johns cast two cans of Ballantine Ale in bronze and then painted their surfaces to replicate the appearance of the tin originals" (Krauss 258-259). Johns' Ale Cans represent an act of preservation, more so than Duchamp's readymades. These cans were created to be discarded. If we recall Susan Strasser's discussion on disposable products, this was part of their appeal. Once the contents of the beer can have been imbibed, chuck it in the trashcan. Johns' act of casting their flimsy tin in a sturdy bronze and meticulously recreating the label works to conserve a moment in time, using irony that is similar to that of Duchamp. Johns is preserving these cans because this is what is important to our current cultural moment. This legacy of disposable products is a central part to our collective cultural heritage and, ostensibly, to what Latour describes as "geostory." These Ballantine cans help to create a history of an epoch shaped by consumption and capitalism, rather than any sort "natural" aspect of human existence.

In the 1960's and 70's, a French artist named Arman took this notion of preserving trash even further with works like 1964's *Garbage Can (Poubelle)* and 1971's *Frozen Civilization*. The former consists of clean paper scraps encased in a plastic display while the latter

appears to be the grimy contents of a real-life trashcan preserved in an upright rectangular pool of acrylic. *Frozen Civilization* works to help us step outside of ourself. Adhering to a sort of art-as-historical-document mindset, Arman tells generations of humans, in some far-off future exactly what we were all about: boxes of sugar, cartons of milk, High Life, and Wonder Bread. Each of these works purposefully eschew the personality of the artist as well as the agency of the human in favor of creating a historical document, one that ironically portrays our collective cultural heritage as that of trash-creators and commodity fetishizers.

Also playing with temporality, eco-criticism, and Post-Duchampian art was a pioneer of a radical form of 20th century sculpture: New Jersey's own Robert Smithson, who helped establish "Earthwork" as a legitimate conceptual art movement with 1970's *Spiral Jetty*. This site-specific piece is a sprawling rock jetty, shaped like a spiral, in Utah's Great Salt Lake. More relevant to our discussion of objects, is his 1969 series, "Yucatan Mirror Displacements," in which Smithson simply placed several mirrors in the wilderness of Yucatan, Mexico. While the previously mentioned artists work to ironically preserve remnants of hyperconsumerism as a sort of cynical time-capsule, Robert Smithson, with this series, creates a reflection of the anthropocene, demonstrating that no corner of the earth has been left untouched by humans.

This discrepancy between "placing" an item and Smithson's use of the word "displacement" is key. Similar to Wallace Stevens' jar, Smithson's mirrors are simply left in a place where they don't necessarily belong. These mirrors, like the jar, create an event in which nature suddenly surrounds a man-made object. Bennett's theories flourish: without

the presence of humans, these mirrors have an agency of their own as they reflect and interact with every creature, plant, or light beam. But like Stevens' jar, these mirrors similarly act as an imperialist flag for humankind and its inevitable ubiquity. Even in the shrouded forests human impact is felt/seen. These mirrors were placed but Smithson calls it a displacement. So what is it taking the place of? The distinction between art and trash is simultaneously pressing and irrelevant as we attempt to answer this question. Imagine these mirrors being discovered by some philistine on a hike. (Hopefully the word "philistine" doesn't seem hostile here, I suppose this hiker could be very well cultured, yet, unaware of Smithson's work). Might the environmentally conscious hiker make an effort to properly dispose of these misplaced mirrors? If this environmentally conscious hiker wishes to remove these objects on the assumption that they are trash, the hiker suddenly cosplays the role of Duchamp's sister Suzanne in 1915, who unwittingly disposed of his readymades, thinking they were trash. Suzanne, of course, was not wrong and the eco-friendly hiker might deserve even less blame. For the concerned hiker, or the Yucatan local, it doesn't matter if these mirrors have been deemed "art." They are misplaced. Smithson calls them "displaced" because he is aware of their eminent dominion. Like humankind's general impact on the earth, the mirrors seem to ruin the continuity of the natural landscape, forming a disruption.

By placing these human objects in the forest, Smithson has removed some of Nature's agency and replaced it with the power of human things. I'll repeat a quote from John Scanlan's *On Garbage*, "Removal is a crucial aspect of the organization of the object world inasmuch as garbage is equated with externality both in material and psychological terms" (Scanlan 135). Smithson works to defy the categorization of art as belonging to the

realm of the interior. But who is to say where these objects belong? By placing a mirror in nature, Smithson puts a mirror up to human nature. Neither jar nor beercan, Smithson creates an event in which anyone who chooses to interact with (remove, etc) these objects is forced to do so with their own likeness glaring back at them. These mirrors serve as a reminder that it has been tainted. This landscape is no longer natural because these objects create an artifice. They have been synthetically manufactured and their presence creates an ersatz fissure in the scene. It is a flag of human imperialism of the natural world; one that deems any human viewer as complicit. Smithson tells the eco-conscious hiker: "I put these mirrors here, sure, but look at you. What gives you the right to move them?" Any other object wouldn't have the same effect as these mirrors. Every inch of the earth is tainted by human activity, even deep in forests of Yucatan. But these mirrors create a moment of recognition in any human encounter. This part of the earth should be characterized by "exclusion" or objects, perhaps, but when the hiker sees themselves there should be a moment of creepy kinship. Timothy Morton insists that humans should not look at objects and see something that belongs to an entirely different ontological category. In *All Art is Ecological*, he explains, "Things are exactly what they are, yet never as they seem, and this means that they are virtually indistinguishable from the beings we call people... Once we start embracing difference not as rigid separation but as uncanny affinity...we see that humans are more like nonhumans, and nonhumans are more like humans, than we like to think..." (81). In the chance encounter, or *rendezvous* if you will, between hiker and mirror, the human shouldn't just see a reflection of their likeness but of their existence. This recognition would enact a transformation that would ignore any sense of aesthetics or categorization between

object and pollution. This may transform "nature" into something characterized not by exclusion but by a totality of entities: human or otherwise.

Works Cited

- Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings Vol I*, edited by Marcus Bullock Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2004.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century." *Perspecta*, vol. 12, 1969, pp. 165-72.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent Leitch, W.W. Norton & Company, 2018, pp. 973-976.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press, 2010.
- Cohen, William A. and Ryan Johnson, editors. *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*. University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
- Eliot, T. S. *The Waste Land and Other Writings*. Modern Library, 2002.
- Girst, Thomas. *The Duchamp Dictionary*. Thames & Hudson, 2014.
- Kafka, Franz. *The Complete Stories*. New York, NY: Schocken, 2011.
- Krauss, Rosalind. *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Viking Press, 1977.
- Latour, Bruno. "Anthropology at the Time of the Anthropocene." *Bruno-latour.fr*. 2014, <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/139-AAA-Washington.pdf>.
- Abe, Masahiko. "Placing a Tree in 'Anecdote of the Jar.'" *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2004, pp. 322-28.
- Morton, Timothy. *All Art is Ecological*, Penguin Books, 2018.

Morton, Timothy. "Guest Column: Queer Ecology." *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 2, 2010, pp. 273-82.

"Readymade." *National Galleries of Scotland*. www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/glossary-terms/readymade.

Roe, Sue. *In Montparnasse: The Emergence of Surrealism in Paris, from Duchamp to Dalí*. New York: Penguin, 2020.

Slater, Avery. "Technology and the Rise of the Vernacular Object in William Carlos Williams's Spring and All." *William Carlos Williams Review*, vol. 33, 2016, pp. 189-205.

Scanlan, John. *On Garbage*, Reaktion, 2005.

Strasser, Susan. *Waste and Want: a Social History of Trash*. 1st ed., Metropolitan Books, 1999.

Sullivan, Robert. *The Meadowlands: Wilderness Adventures at the Edge of a City*. New York: Anchor, 1999.

Tomkins, Calvin, and Marcel Duchamp. *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews*. Brooklyn, NY: Badlands Unlimited, 2013.

Stevens, Wallace. "Anecdote of the Jar." *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson, The Library of America, 1997, pp. 60-61

Williams, William Carlos. *Spring and All*. New York, NY: New Directions, 2011.

Zehou, Li. "Four Essays on Aesthetics: Toward a Global View." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent Leitch, W.W. Norton & Company, 2018, pp. 1658-1699.