

TRASH AND LANDFILLS

A PERSPECTIVE



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There are less controversial, piquant and risqué topics that are nevertheless urgent and vital. For example, what to do with trash. Landfills are a big problem. They're quickly closing down, full to the brim with trash. You might live near a landfill that's about to close, leaving you and your neighbors to drown in your own trash. Merely living near a landfill is harmful to your health, imagine living inside of one. Many people don't have to imagine. In fact, they will never know another life.

The narrative of early modernity was of urbanization as a sign of progress, hand-in-hand with slum clearance. Astounded projections declaring "by this or that date, more than half of the world's population will be living in cities". By now, it's a safe bet to say that soon most of the world's population will be living in a landfill of one sort or another, hand-in-hand with the growth of slums.

Out of the pernicious consequences that emerge from human activity, climate change and extreme weather events capture the imagination, while the more commonplace tragedy of trash everywhere gets considerably less attention. Imagine the current menacing horizon of hills ablaze due to forest fires, soon giving way to a horizon of burning mountains of trash. How much worse the stench will be, when instead of burnt trees, it's burnt trash that fills the air. Imagine the floods of wastewater that will become the new normal once sewage is the main content of rivers and all bodies of water. Imagine the flooding of sewage on fire. A landscape of literal shit-storms and dumpster-fires.

Anti-civ writing often focuses on extractivism, stopping extraction as the source and starting point of all industrial activity. But what about the other end? How to dispose of all the shit that's already made? If we can't manage all this waste, how can we each handle or cope with our failure to manage all this waste?

We've seen activism to stop the construction of pipelines with the slogan "Water is life" referring to the importance of protecting water from oil spills. Meanwhile, the landfills everyone takes for granted seep and pollute the groundwater around them across an area that is many times larger than the footprint of the trash mountain, which in some cases can be taller than high-rises. Tall enough to require air traffic lights.

We've seen blockades to stop logging operations, but how do you blockade the production of trash, when every household is the source? The factories make all the products that will inevitably become trash, but then the responsibility is passed on to the consumer, who passes it on to the waste-

management company. Leaving the management of nuclear waste aside, proper management of landfills, which contain comparatively less potent toxic waste, is still a gargantuan endeavor. Few can imagine their proper management by states and corporations. Can we imagine their proper management without them?

Wishcycling is a neologism that, much like Greenwashing, points to the lie that green or environmentally-friendly technological fixes will solve the problem of pollution. It turns out that recycling is not a magical alchemy that turns waste into a resource, but instead it's a resource-intensive industrial process that pollutes in order to produce a product that will still end up in the landfill, along with all the batteries, solar panels, and wind turbines from alternative energy solutions. Clearly, a real solution would require a holistic approach that addresses attitudes, habits, lifestyles, worldviews, and culture more broadly. Discard Studies is a new interdisciplinary field that investigates dynamics and consequences of waste, broadly defined. What could anarchists contribute to this field?

Anarchists often say that they're not afraid of ruins, but are they afraid of trash? Could you really live like a literal trash-panda? Sure, tell us about dumpster-diving and D.I.Y. re-using of trash, but tell us about what to do about landfills first. Then tell us about what to do with other wastes, like sewage. Sure, "take what you need, and compost the rest"; compost is great to deal with food scraps and excretion, but most trash can't be composted. What do you do with your trash? What are creative anarchist solutions to this problem?

For more check out Backwoods (An Invitation to Desertion by Bellamy Fitzpatrick and A Forest Garden Primer by Silvia Wilde), Black Seed: A Journal of Indigenous Anarchy – blackseed.anarchyplanet.org, How the Stirner Eats Gods by Alejandro de Acosta, immediatism.com, theanarchistlibrary.org, warzonedistro.noblogs.org