

REFUSE TO RELIC: NEOPASTORAL ARTIFACTS AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF
ENVIRONMENT IN AMERICAN MODERNIST POETICS

Refuse to Relic: Neopastoral Artifacts and the Phenomenology of Environment in American
Modernist Poetics

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by

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Abstract

Building on concepts of the pastoral, the picturesque, the “vernacular ruin,” and frontierism in an American context, this thesis explores the interest in ruin and commodity-oriented refuse within rural, wilderness, and what Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden* calls “middle ground” environments. Chapter one analyzes how “nature,” as both scenery and the natural environment removed from civilization, has been conceptualized as a place where human-made objects become repurposed through the gaze of the spectator. Theories surrounding gallery and exhibition space, as well as archaeological practices related to garbage excavation, are assessed to determine how waste objects, when wrested out of context, become artifacts of cultural significance. Chapter two turns to focus on the settler experience of the frontier in order to locate a uniquely American evolution of the interest in everyday waste objects. Because the frontier wilderness in American culture can be regarded as a site of transition and malleability, it is argued that the (mis)perception of object matter within this transitional space helped to shape modernist poetics and its association with everyday objects.

Chapters three and four return to the rural and the pastoral to focus on Marx’s concept of the “middle ground,” borderlands of quasi-natural space that are located “somewhere ‘between,’ yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature” (23). In dialogue with Marx’s theories, I propose a definition of the “neopastoral” as that which evolves from the interjection of domestic waste into these middle spaces to the aesthetic appropriation of everyday, common objects in modernist American poetry. The final chapter focuses on selected poems by modernist writers such as Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, and W.C. Williams to analyze their explicit references to everyday waste in conjunction with the mythologized American pastoral. These poets provide evidence for how the drive to poeticize an abandoned, human-made object’s proximity to a natural environment plays a significant role in the perception of the fragmented object-subject relationship in modernity.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my father, to whom much of this work is dedicated, and whose appropriation of random commodity trash to be reconfigured in enigmatic mélanges was the spark for this study. If I had not encountered what I like to think of as an updated “Anecdote of the Jar”—a Mayonnaise jar placed on a wooden pallet in the middle of a grassy pasture (an assemblage for which my father was responsible)—I might not have experienced the jolt that reinvented my all-too-familiar surroundings. Suddenly there was poetry everywhere. I would also like to acknowledge my grandmother, Hilda Mae Douglas, and my uncle, Melvin Douglas, both of whom passed away while I was writing the dissertation, and who were parents to me. They helped me get to where I am in more ways than they might have imagined.

Of course I would like to thank my committee members for their timely and detailed feedback on this project, and for helping me to navigate the sometimes labyrinthine path through to the end. My supervisor, Mary O’Connor, gave me some of the most thoughtful feedback I could hope to have; Joseph Adamson offered not only academic guidance, but also moral support; and Jeffery Donaldson put up with my random incursions into his office to talk garbage and natural space, and directed me toward some great material for use in my thesis. Mary’s archive course also offered an indispensable theoretical and structural foundation for my study, as well as the opportunity to participate in my first *real* exhibition at Hamilton Artists Inc. in Hamilton, Ontario. This thesis exists only because I had the best committee with which to work on such a project, one that offered thoughtful advice while allowing me to take a creative approach.

I would also like to thank artists Scott McKay and Paul Jacobsen for their participation and interest in my project. Their contributions add a dimension to my thesis that attests to the

popular interest surrounding tech-waste perceived in, and appropriated from, natural and rural settings. And it goes without saying that I need to thank my long-suffering partner, Jennifer Butkus, for her love and support throughout this process.

Finally, I would like to thank Bill Brown and Peter Schwenger. If it wasn't for the theoretical structure they provided in the way of "things," I would have been doing a lot more groping about than I did. I got the chance to meet Schwenger at a conference on horror fiction at the University of Guelph in 2010. A devoted teacher and academic, he went above and beyond his duties as a professor to advise me—a student whom he had just met, enrolled at a different university—on what turned out to be my first academic publication. For his selfless guidance, I cannot thank him enough. I also met Brown at a conference on Material Cultures at the University of Ottawa in May, 2011. With Brown being one of the foremost living authorities on "things" in American culture, a colleague and myself felt it fitting to send a drink we concocted on the spot called the "Wild Thing"—an amorphous mixture of blueberry liqueur with gin and something else experimental—over to his table at the reception dinner. We were sure to tell the waitress to emphasize the "thingliness" of its name when she served him the drink. When he found out who had sent the anomalous libation, he came over to our table, promptly informed us that he was drinking scotch, and we exchanged introductions. I told him that I was appropriating parts of his theoretical corpus to use for my project. He told me to do with it what I will. "Make it your own," he said. Brown's openness to allow his work to be grabbed through and applied to new contexts gave me the confidence to continue my interdisciplinary approach. So, I made it my own, and for the encouragement to do so, I am grateful.

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A Note on the Images

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Chapter 1: Artifacts of the Middle Ground

1.0. Introduction: Stumbling Over Things in (Neo)Pastoral Space—Haphazard Encounters

Some time back in 1999 when I was still a high school student I acquired a book entitled *Country: Old Memories*, written by a man named Mason Fletcher. It was purchased at Roy's Coffee Shop in Strathroy, Ontario, where the book, flanked by packs of breath mints and cigarettes, was being displayed at the cashier's counter as an impulse item. Lacking the ISBN or cataloguing information typical to a mass-marketed paperback, the book appeared to be an enigma with its uniformly flat orange exterior, the colour of a slow-moving vehicle sign—standard accoutrement adorning the rear of tractors and other sluggish but roadworthy farm machinery. In spite of my teenage cynicism (the volume, after all, is populated by what Fletcher acknowledges to be some pretty “corny ‘stuff’” [ii]), two things fascinated me about the book that directly led to surrendering the ten dollars to Roy for the purchase. I was intrigued by self-publication, which was still relatively uncommon and expensive in 1999. The book was printed in Canada at The Aylmer Express, a Google search of which will return the address and profile of a small print-on-demand service operating in the town of 7000—after which the press is named—just north of Lake Erie. More significantly, as I leafed through the book at the cashier counter I was intrigued by the thought of why someone had taken the time to produce a volume that included prose pieces and poetry on outhouses, rusty tools, and defunct farm equipment, the kind of rural objects that one might see decaying on the properties of generationally inherited family farms, “weather-beaten object[s]”—as they are described in “The Passing of the Backhouse”—of “simple classic art” (lines 3, 10).¹ Working in the ekphrastic mode, some of the poems and prose pieces are accompanied by photographs of the now anachronistic technology

¹ A number of the poems compiled in Fletcher's book are acknowledged to have been borrowed or adapted from copyrighted material; the poem “The Passing of the Backhouse” (pages 123-124), submitted by Ann McLean, is seemingly one of these adaptations. A Google search of the poem yields two possible original authors: James Whitcomb Riley or Charles T. Rankin. Absolute authorship of “The Passing of the Backhouse” is not specified by Fletcher.

they memorialize: old corn planters, antiquated surveying equipment used to measure plots of land, manually powered post-hole augers, crockery ink wells, horse-drawn hay mowers, crank pumps, glass milk bottles and so on.

Unbeknownst to me until October of 2010 (about a year after I began this project), only a few concessions from where I grew up in the vacuous outlands of southwestern Ontario lives an artist named Scott McKay. Essentially McKay's work involves the "repurposing" of discarded metal into sculpture—what might be considered a form of *objet trouvé* in a similar territory as Marcel Duchamp's (mis)appropriation of urinals, bicycle wheels and snow shovels, everyday objects rendered uncanny through a type of disuse, misuse, or de-contextualization. Because the raw material of McKay's work is comprised of "scrap" or refuse, I was struck by a description on his website about how he locates and acquires the materials for his work, a process which at times necessitates clandestine rambles through forests and the back lots of farm estates to annex the material unconscious of a way of life that both conceals its obsolescence, yet invites an aesthetic intervention. Intrigued by his artist's statement about how his "eye catches a form in the forest or a scrap pile that deserves tribute,"² I contacted McKay, introduced myself as an academic debutant of detritus, and asked him a few questions about his work. In particular, I wanted to know how encounters with human-constructed debris abandoned in forests and on rural properties influence his artistic practice. Although McKay downplayed the "rural" slant to his repurposing venture, living in a Rural Route-designated zone (a few kilometres from Newbury, Ontario, population 447 as of 2011) certainly makes him guilty by association, as much of the ready-at-hand material he requisitions is the same brand of rural objects immortalized by Fletcher in photography and verse. The premium that some of these farmers place on their piles of rusting steel seems ironically contrasted by scrap's existence as devalued

² I originally accessed the web source for this material on October 15, 2010. McKay's artist's statement has been slightly modified since then, but he still maintains that his work is "Informed by the natural world... as a tribute." His statement can be accessed at <http://www.strongarmforge.com/Artist%20Statement.html>.

refuse and the value that artists like McKay place on it as deferred art, as material with potential otherness. McKay writes: “I have asked many farmers about their scrap pile. Some are happy to see it gone, some will have it turn to dust or perhaps they say to their wives ‘This will all be yours when I am gone’...”³ Whether such hoarding of wasted technologies is driven by market conditions—the hope that one’s refuse heap will appreciate in monetary value—or by nostalgia, or by a curatorial aspiration, or by preservationist instinct (which is likely the case for older-generation farmers who experienced The Great Depression or rationing during the World Wars), the tragic irony is that nostalgia assigns curatorial value idiosyncratically. The beauty of junk is in the eye of the beholder. A scrap pile might be likened to a magic eye stereograph, where those who know how to look will decipher the encrypted significance and recognize the image woven in among the ocular static.

I asked McKay if there is any sort of preservationist motivation to his work. He is, after all, imbuing the scrap with new use-value (albeit aesthetic use-value) while at the same time altering the original design of the objects he refashions. His response was that he does “feel a motivation to preserve the work that was put into the individual pieces,” to display the visible remnants of the defunct tools and equipment he appropriates.⁴ The rationale for this will-to-preserve seems to be an infectious reverence—transferred from owner to owner, or artisan to artisan—for the human agency involved not only in the original design, but also in the history of a thing’s use:

³ McKay, “RE: Interested Spectator”.

⁴ Images of McKay’s work can be accessed at his website: <http://www.strongarmforge.com/Sculpture.html>. Considering McKay’s technique, which preserves the visible remnants of the technology he incorporates into his sculptures, one might be reminded of Walter Pater’s statement in his collection of essays *The Renaissance* (1893) about how on the crown of Michelangelo’s *David* there still remains “a morsel of uncut stone, as if... to maintain its connexion with the place from which [the creation] was hewn” (49). Pater is addressing a particularly modern aesthetic whereby the work, which always has the capacity to be modified by the present, should bear the somatic signs of its rawness, exhibit the evolution of its aesthetic development. Such works that strive to display their impromptu origin conform to a standard of high modernism—the Eliotian “fragments” “shored against... ruins” (*The Waste Land* 431)—that aims to represent the *ad hoc* nature of modernity in the fragments become monuments, ruins built as ruins. (See chapter four for an extrapolation of fragmentation motifs in relation to modernism.)

Take a gear for example. To get to that point there was ore that was mined and refined, steel produced, a form made and the rough casting produced, several levels of mill and lathe work, the gear is installed on a piece of equipment, the equipment is unserviceable for some reason, the gear is removed and taken to a scrap yard... I find it. That is a lot of people involved and I always think it is a waste that so much effort is put into a single piece. Even if it can be melted down and made into something else all those steps and human effort are gone. [...] This thought developed in me from going to auctions, which I have done for a long time. I used to buy a box of good crap for 25 cents. So many little items. Things worn out, bent steel, jars of screws that have stripped threads. Each screw has a story, each piece of string that is too short, the jar that houses the useless parts was on the table of a family in the presence of family conversations. It unsettles me at how sentimental I am about useless crap. [...] I was working on a piece of steel a few years ago that had been a set of drags which were pulled behind heavy horses. The steel quality was amazing and some collectors would have shot me knowing that I had cut it up to make a pronghorn antelope! While grinding the steel I could smell the soil, the sweat from the horses, the leather and the horse shit...

Without a doubt McKay's background as both a miner in Yellowknife and a millwright has instilled in him an appreciation for the minutiae of the manufacturing process, the progression from harvesting, refining, and shaping, as well as the life infused in those objects through use and through presence, through human exchange and residual memory of the labour. It is at the thought of how memory resides within defunct matter that a trivial object, a tool or a piece of equipment, ceases to be a mere object and becomes something beyond its phenomenological husk, something ontological, a thing. As Bill Brown explains in his 2001 article "Thing Theory," "We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy..." (4). The (dis)operative word in Brown's assertion is "working," when the antithesis of labour—dysfunctionality—permeates an object that represents former labour. A piece of equipment approaches thinghood the moment it is wrested from function, at which point, as Peter Schwenger puts it in *The Tears of Things*, we "see beyond the mode of blind pragmatism" (53), and observe the object for what it is rather than for how it is defined by equipmental value. "The thing things," as Martin Heidegger aphoristically summarizes ("The Thing" 172); it becomes almost noumenal, metaphysical, and

transforms from inanimate object to animate abstraction that evokes an arresting, perplexed spectatorship.

Catching a glimpse of the elusive thingliness of an object might sound to some like an exercise in academic sophistry. What is a *thing*, after all? What does a thing do? Where does a thing live (if indeed it dwells)? “The story of objects asserting themselves as things,” Brown explains, “is the story of a changed relationship to the human subject” (“Thing Theory” 53). This mutable relationship between object and subject is precisely where thingness occurs: in the space between the dialectical exchange of spectator and object exists the ontological trace of use, the potential for new contexts, and the capacity for new modes of observation. The task seems to be to regard the work abstractly not as the aggregated slough comprising its external structure, but as the natural core, the idea around which the external raiment is gathered. In “Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger famously attempts to decipher the mystery of common objects and their ontological significations by distinguishing things with equipmental value from those with aesthetic merit. Choosing the example of a pair of peasant’s shoes, he equates the minimalist exhibition of mere footwear with work rendered in a more readily identifiable artistic medium, namely, Vincent Van Gogh’s well-known “pictorial representation” (32). “A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more.”

And yet—

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of [the peasant’s] slow trudge through the far spreading and ever uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. (33)

Just as Heidegger traces the ontological complexity of the subject-object relationship in the leather, the “stiffly rugged heaviness” of a common object that represents metonymically the

residue of human agency, McKay's fascination with the ontology of seemingly "useless crap" functions to re-evaluate that residue through subject-object relations. Attraction to useless things becomes a hermeneutic exercise that focuses not on utility, but on trace. Perhaps this fascination with trace might explain what McKay said was most amazing about his repurposing experiences: our "insignifican[ce] in a temporal sense," the transitory memories that "live on" in ephemeral things, and that can be "quickly forgotten... and rediscovered for a moment... maybe... like the smells of horses on steel" (email).

I decided to introduce my study with the above anecdotes about Fletcher and McKay for a few reasons. First: tracing the origins and influences (direct or indirect) of my interest in the aesthetics of rural waste and obsolescence is an important way to orient my experience in relation to the narrative I am weaving out of the fragmented, artifactual, intersecting residue of human design—what McKay described as the remnants of "human effort." The distinction between whether that residue of human effort might be regarded as artifacts of significance or superfluous waste material seems to be the question up for debate in the museums and galleries of modernity and postmodernity, where, as pop artist Claes Oldenburg claims, a "refuse lot in the city is worth all the art stores in the world" (qtd. in "Thing Theory" 14). The paradox that persists in what is still idealized (perhaps by those removed from the context) as a simpler, tidier, earthier, and more idyllic existence has always been sharply contrasted, in my experiences as a rural inhabitant, by the debris of hoarded, preserved, or appropriated material things in a state of deterioration: things abandoned, vacated, left to oxidize in a field; farm homes communally ransacked; common, rusting, outmoded technologies treated to a coat of paint to take on new life as lawn ornaments; relics or refuse of former habitation—flint arrowheads, axe heads and bits of pottery, for example—turned up in the soil and offset by shards of a broken soda bottle; properties left to accumulate the detritus of consumer culture that generates a collage of newer

and older forms of technological production.⁵ Because I have been both an active and passive witness to the poeticization of decay and obsolescence I am proposing to examine, my experiences walking the line between urban dweller and rural sojourner are important to consider as I set forth to document the lore to which I potentially contribute.



Figure 1.1. *Cold Pastoral*.
Photograph, 2009.



Figure 1.2. *Preservation and Decay*.
Photograph, 2011.

⁵ The following photographs were taken between 2009 and 2011 as a part of a creative side-project aimed at collecting aestheticized representations of rural waste and ruin in southwestern Ontario. “Anecdote of the Jugs” was published in *The Torontoist* (March 28, 2011) and *filling Station* (issue 54, 2012); “Cold Pastoral” and “Preservation and Decay” were published in *filling Station* (issue 54, pages 25-28), and were exhibited in Toronto at Ryerson University’s *Literatures of Modernity Symposium* (March 2011), at *More Please: Explorations of Excess Free-Exchange Conference* at the University of Calgary, Alberta (March 2012), and at the *Canadian Pop Culture Conference* in Niagara Falls (May 2013). The creative component of my study takes me into abandoned farmhouses, dilapidated barns, and rural backlands to capture evidence of how commodity culture has altered—or rendered anachronistic—the configuration of pastoral space. Many of the assemblages I encounter tease out the idea that neopastoral space and our present conceptions of the picturesque must accommodate the disposability of consumer culture.



Figure 1.3. *Anecdote of the Jugs*. Photograph, 2009.

Second: in the midst of erudition, where one can become removed from the place where these things are happening on the ground (so to speak), I find reassurance in the idea that the impulse to archive and aestheticize the defunct materials of a past which, as it progresses, is perpetually removed from its contextual boundaries, is a compulsion that operates at a “grassroots” level. In other words, regardless of how implicated in pre-established aesthetic paradigms photographs of, say, a refrigerator enveloped by weeds and offset by a decaying barn might be, the impulse to archive such anomalies has self-sustaining fuel beyond the influence of manufactured “movements,” “high art,” mass-produced culture, and the templates of the academic world. The idea that artists like McKay and amateur poet-photographers like Fletcher possess a reverence enough for rural detritus to self-publish and monumentalize its obsolescence is an example of an enduring compulsion documented by practitioners of the “picturesque,” a brand of what Jonathan Bate has called “ecopoesis” that, in its origins, aimed to elevate low or common phenomena—particularly ruin and domestic waste material—through juxtaposition of

natural and manufactured topographies.⁶ As a Google search of “rural artifact(s)” or “rural decay” will affirm, these deviant offshoots of ecopoesis that aim to sentimentalize trash at variance with nature are not in short supply. Indeed, McKay and Fletcher are but a small representation of a larger public interest in the obsolescence of rural objects and remnants of domestication asphyxiated by wilderness. With the advent of media sharing sites like *Flickr* and *Tumblr*, rural-oriented heaps of broken images (or images of broken things) appear to be amassing into variations of cyber-landfills or digital tech-graveyards.⁷

As much as it is appropriate to put a political or ethical slant to the question of why some members of the general public might archive photographs of a station wagon being devoured by moss and forestial undergrowth, I am interested in this compulsion to archive human-contrived objects at odds with natural space as it relates to the ontology of things. My analysis of the archiving impulse in conjunction with object theory has led me to argue that human beings orient themselves to their environment and define themselves by the objective correlations of the artifacts populating perception.⁸ Because perception is an exercise in receiving external stimuli and orienting oneself in relation to those phenomena, we might conclude that human beings temper their subjectivity according to phenomenological microcosms, and that the reception of external stimuli is ego-oriented. Hence, when we archive such scenes photographically, we are

⁶ The relationship among the picturesque in eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, domestic waste, and ecopoetics will be taken up in greater detail in chapters three and four. I borrow the term “ecopoesis” (page 149) from Bate’s 2000 essay “The Picturesque Environment.” The connection Bate draws between ecopoetics and the picturesque will be examined in chapter four.

⁷ This *Flickr* page simply offers an example of the amateur, public interest in this subject area: <http://www.flickr.com/groups/ruraldecay/>. The photograph entitled “station wagon in water” is particularly striking in terms of aesthetic juxtaposition: http://www.flickr.com/photos/nw_life/7097943629/in/photostream or http://www.flickr.com/photos/nw_life/6951872448/in/pool-ruraldecay.

⁸ Throughout my dissertation I draw upon various academic and theoretical works that inform this point of view, from literary theory, to archive theory, to psychological theory, to archeological theory, to environmental theory, to theories of material cultures. In other words, I do not relegate my analysis to a single body of evidence to argue that human perception and subject identification is object-oriented. The authorities I draw upon to formulate this point of view—for example, Sigmund Freud’s theories of subject/object conflation from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, or Bill Brown’s claim in *A Sense of Things* that “humans” can become “slightly thing-like” (13)—will be taken up in the pages that follow.

holding a mirror up to nature while at the same time we are externalizing a part of our ego. That is, our spectatorial interest is projected back to us by the objects we recognize as aesthetically or artifactually valid, and captured in that engagement of thing and spectator are ontological projections of subjectivity. Such photographs, then, are tied to aesthetic, visceral impulses, particularly if we conclude that projecting one's subjectivity externally to have it reflected back—not unlike some brand of objective echolocation—is ontologically motivated. This mode of spectatorship aims to substantiate a sense of being-in-the-world through the objects filtered through perception, and the interpretation of those objects, as Brown argues (see his analysis of artifact theory and “aesthetic engagement” below), becomes an aesthetic exercise in looking abstractly rather than locating political or practical relevance in those objects.⁹ This is not to say that politics and ethics are not factors when interrogating cultures of disposability; waste and the surpluses of the manufacturing age are indeed political and ethical concerns. Moreover, the method by which one identifies oneself in relation to surrounding phenomena can be, without question, politically contrived. My specific intervention, however, analyzes the conflicting relationship between aesthetics and waste, that is, what makes a station wagon abandoned in a swamp and adorned by moss not a political object, but a poetic object. We could, of course, use such images to raise environmental alarm, or to demonize commodity culture in order to

⁹ Just as the words “nature,” “frontier,” “pastoral,” “rural,” “wilderness,” and “phenomenology” can be semantic abstractions (as will be discussed throughout this dissertation), the term “ontology” is also subject to an infinite regress of interrogation—one which would hijack the intent of this project if it were to become too caught up in its hermeneutic variances. Suffice it to say that much of Heidegger's work on the ontology of phenomena, from “The Origin of the Work of Art” to *Being and Time*, is imbedded in the fibers of my analysis of natural space and human-contrived artifacts. That said, rather than becoming deluged in incessant extrapolations of how “being means the being of beings,” while at the same time “beings themselves turn out to be what is *interrogated* in the question of being” (*Being and Time* 5), I defer to a brand of ontological theory that seeks the traces of humanity in objects—whether through artisanship, former use, or aesthetic appropriation—as a mode of being that imbues life in things through relationships between subjects and the external/material world. Rather than being informed directly by Heidegger's copious exegeses of ontology and phenomenology, this dissertation draws upon Brown, Harman, and other theorists of material cultures (from scholars of garbage to the environment), to construct the apparatus through which subjects and objects acquire ontological resonance via de-contextualization, the conflation of subject and external phenomena, and through things becoming human-like and humans becoming thing-like (see Brown in the next paragraph).

buttress the sustainability creeds of recent decades. But again, many of these images provided by the public, although revealing in their sociological and anthropological dimensions, appear to sidestep environmental ethics and politics in favour of an ontological and aesthetic reading.

There is much to be said about the political dimension of poeticizing trash as it is encountered in natural environments. Several of the resources on waste ecologies that I reference throughout my thesis address the political, ethical, and social implications of the amassing detritus of consumer cultures.¹⁰ Yet I contend that an aesthetic consideration, as it relates to ontology and phenomenology, will do my analysis justice in terms of the spectatorial and psychical reaction to the phenomena. My approach has been influenced by Brown's *modus operandi* in *A Sense of Things*. Brown states clearly that, although his study treats the subject matter of "the 'consuming vision,' 'the culture of consumption,' 'the fables of abundance,' [and] the 'market'" (13), his book is "about something other" than these frameworks (13). His book is rather "about the indeterminate ontology where things seem slightly human and humans seem slightly thing-like." Certainly there are political dimensions to the shared ontology of "humans and things," but just as Brown focuses on tracking the "metamorphosis of one into the other" (13), I also choose to focus on the phenomenon itself.

The motivation behind Fletcher's self-published book on agrarian obsolescence, as well as McKay's description of the residual history, human agency, sentiment and subjectivity cathected in even a de-threaded screw provides a fitting example for why the ontology of material things in an age of mechanization and mass-production has inspired voluminous tomes

¹⁰ See Astra Taylor's 2008 film *Examined Life*, Ben Highmore's chapter on Benjamin's trash aesthetics from *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (2002), Heather Rogers' *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* (2005), Julian Stallabrass's *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture* (1996), and John Scanlan's *On Garbage* (2005) for a more in-depth reading of socio-political dimensions of waste phenomenology. Suffice it to say that a search of "garbage and capitalism" in any decent university database will yield a glut of politically and ethically charged resources for those interested in such a focus.

of theoretical work. As Brown argues while reflecting on the “perverse” fetishization and “unmediated” objectification of obscure and seemingly inconsequential “things,” “These days, [one] can read books on the pencil, the zipper, the toilet, the banana, the chair, the potato, [and] the bowler hat”—which might be an apt summary of his own exploration of the material excesses of the modern technological age, a study whose tone is imbued with Brown’s mock-rhetorical question “Why not let things alone” (“Thing Theory” 1-2)? To put it simply, the history of, and evolution to, what is termed twentieth-century “modernism” is the history and evolution of objects and artifacts, namely, the repurposing, reinterpretation, or, as Brown phrases it in *A Sense of Things*, the “refunction[ing]” of artifacts and “object-based epistemologies” (125):

the most recognizable American modernism might be said to unconsciously and ambivalently refunction an American anthropological project. ... For the modernist fixation on things—Duchamp’s *Fountain*, Strand’s bowls, O’Keefe’s jugs—this takes place just as the historical or anthropological content of artifacts was being evacuated. ... On the one hand, the modernist attention to the physical object world can be said to extend museal anthropology’s focus on things; on the other, of course, this attention functions according to its own poetics of detachment, dislodging the object from its cultural milieu, from the scene of habitual use, from a scene of historical knowledge to one of aesthetic engagement. (125-126)

The explanation for why modernism adopted a more object-oriented epistemology based on a “poetics of detachment” has its roots, as Carsten Strathausen argues in *The Look of Things: Poetry and Vision around 1900*, in both the premium placed on empirical observation—the scrutinizing, scientific gaze or “ocularcentrism of Western philosophy in general” (46)—and in the proliferation of objects, the material things in which modern life seems to be invested and cathected. Most significantly, what Brown is arguing is that the pervading spirit of American modernism is one that appropriates the gaze of the archaeologist to restore to the object not its prescriptive delineation (its historical or anthropological content), but rather its aesthetic alterity,

the lore with which the popular mind views such artifacts, and the hallucinatory narratives spun around an object's thingness.¹¹ The evolution of modernist object theory, as Brown suggests, is one where the functionality of an artifact is sidelined in favour of an aesthetic—perhaps even spiritual—reading.

Ultimately, we cannot do an artifactual reading of the refunctioning of objects in modernity without addressing the phenomenology of waste, garbage, and their theoretical affiliates. What we are interrogating when we consider the poetics of detaching meaning from matter, or the aesthetics of repurposing, is an object's condition as something beyond utility, something *dysfunctional*: trash. What we are also examining (in the mode of the fringe archivist) is the being imbued in those dysfunctional items, an ontology of material things that reflects the desires of the curator as much as it reflects the being of the past. Books like Greg Kennedy's *An Ontology of Trash: The Disposable and its Problematic Nature* are examples of scholarly work that examine the life of the commodity object as reflected in subject-artifact relations of the consumer/spectator. Kennedy argues that "The ontology of trash... is the study of our modern technological mode of being—a kind of philosophical biography of our life as consumers" (xvi-xvii). This "philosophical biography" in fact works out to be an objective index of humanity's life both as consumers of things, and as things themselves. However, the goal of locating "being" within the disposable is not one that aims necessarily to substantiate the ghosts of the past through those objects, but to reflect back to the modern self its own image through that which has become expendable, ruined, or deposable. These disposable entities are, in a sense, extensions of the human body that offer a way to measure reconfigurations of a larger social body: "The ontology of trash thus works out to be the history of human embodied being-in-the-

¹¹ As I will argue in chapter two, the lore generated around objects in the modern period shares similar characteristics to the lore generated around artifacts encountered in the American frontier wilderness.

world that takes seriously the physiological changes wrought by technology on our embodiment” (xvii). Yet that physicality, substantiated through objects of disuse, promotes not a historiographical quantification of human presence through refused things, but an *aesthetic* qualification of our relationship to ourselves as well as to the past. As a result, one does not necessarily attempt to find contextual truth in the disposable, that is, how an object was used while in circulation, or what purpose it served for the previous owner. Rather, one constructs a narrative—perpetuates a fiction—that satisfies the desires of the spectator in terms of what those displaced objects represent from a subjective point of view.

Granted, modern industrialization and the consequent hyper-commoditization of object matter ushered in what Graham Harman in *Guerrilla Metaphysics* calls “the carnival of things,” in which a proliferation of “objects join into one another” as a phantasmagoric procession of stimuli “even while retaining their independence and integrity” (254). Yet the question of how artifactual relations evolved out of the uncanny tension between the human-made and natural design, of things encountered out of their respective industrial, urban, or commercial milieus, is one that might provide answers for how and why an ironic, askance view of object relations seems to take primacy in modernism. In other words, how does the surreal and ironic juxtaposition of the human-made situated in wilderness, frontier, or pastoral settings influence the skeptical-museal way of observing the objects of modernism? If Brown is correct in arguing that American modernism, through a “poetics of detachment” and “dislodging,” evolved “from a scene of historical knowledge to one of aesthetic engagement,” what does this blurred line between the object-as-epistemological and object-as-aesthetic indicate in terms the American spectatorial gaze, particularly with reference to the historical evolution of the everyday into an aesthetic category? In light of the rhizomatic, rhetorically proliferated pastoral roots of the United States, what does the uncanny representation of everyday objects in poetry and art—the

wresting out of context of human-contrived, common things like Wallace Stevens' jar ("Anecdote"), Duchamp's *Fountain*, or W.C. Williams' fragments of broken glass ("Lines")—have to do with the dynamics of the "middle ground," the familiar "trope of the interrupted idyll" in American culture (Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* 27) that works as a space of "counterforce" to empty, or render uncanny, the by-products of domestic and industrial civilization? If, according to Richard Slotkin, the earliest European settlers to America "found an objective correlative" in the "attempt to adjust to life in the wilderness" (*Regeneration* 15), how might the object-subject relations among human artifacts—debris and otherwise—have influenced not only the more overt pastoral themes in modern American literature, but also the instability of objects by which modernity seems to be defined?¹²

Ironically, at the same time that poets like T.S. Eliot were advocating an aesthetic methodology that aimed to remove the subject from the thing so that "art may be said to approach the condition of science" (44),¹³ the condition of science was one that, according to Strathausen, was undergoing "an epistemological crisis in [the] modern perception it had helped to instigate and continued to perpetuate by means of its own research" (55). The minutiae of heuristic observation, no matter how distilled to empirical precision, is at odds with what modern physics found to be an "irrational universe whose laws appeared evermore incomprehensible" the more microscopic the modern gaze became (55). Jon Erickson in *The Fate of the Object*:

¹² Strathausen describes how the sciences based on *fin de siècle* empiricism and ocularcentricism, the connection between "'seeing' and 'knowing' in Western culture," precipitated a "slow disintegration of matter" via "the destabilizing effects of the conventional nature of vision... and the gap between mind and matter" that needed to be "bridged[.]" A "fundamental relativity" emerged in the gap between observation and objectivity, which "plunged" the modern world "into a sea of uncertainty and instability" (54). Essentially, "The general erosion of meaning around 1900 included even the most basic of facts. ... Ludwig Wittgenstein aptly summarized the pervasive feeling of insecurity and arbitrariness that pervaded modern culture: 'All we see could also be different. All that we can describe at all could also be different. There is no a priori order of things'" (55-56). The uncanniness of matter based on its inherent unknowability appears to be the pervading spirit of modernism.

¹³ In his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot expounds his seminal modernist dictum on the poetics of detachment, arguing that "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality," and it is by this "process of depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science" (44). I will return to Eliot's theories concerning depersonalization throughout this dissertation as a way to contextualize object theory within the modernist aesthetic temperament, particularly as it concerns the poetics of deracination and de-contextualization.

From Modern Object to Postmodern Sign in Performance, Art, and Poetry traces the trajectory of this irrationality from a crisis in perception to a crisis in language, an anxiety that manifests itself in the drive to arrest and isolate material things in a linguistic form: “A great many modern artists and writers began their work as a consolidation of, or investment in, an object, predominately static objects. The static is seen as the start of the development of each art. It defines itself through difference and resistance to forces of change or alteration, including the altering power of interpretive forces” (10-11). At first consideration, this compulsion to locate hermeneutic permanence in static objects seems at odds with other modernist discourses that strive to render objects uncanny and impermanent. Yet to render an object uncanny is indeed an exercise in locating the permanent, enduring aspects of the object. In other words, to perceive objects as other is to approach the noumenal thingness of the thing (as Heidegger might put it), to wrest it out of function in order to see beyond the bland pragmatism of usefulness. Inevitably, because an object only resists alteration “in some inertial way” and “has no energy of its own” (11), the “scopic regime” of twentieth-century ocularcentrism (Strathausen 48) collapses into the subject’s relation to the object. The next step in this phenomenology of encounter seems to be a revival of Renaissance-period semiotics, the humanist drive to make language a thing itself, a natural sign or emblem that might promote a reified “phantom objectivity” (Erickson 17). This concretization of language as material artifact, audacious an enterprise as it may seem, might be residue of the uncertainty exacerbated by the sciences, a neurotic compulsion to arrest things in their proper place by taking them out of context in order to reveal the noumenal nature of material—to make the thing *thing* (in the verb sense).

My justification for this extrapolation of modern object theory is to unite the more tested conceptualizations of object relations in modernity with what I am proposing are the fringe influences on the development of those relations. At the same time that a crisis of faith in the veracity of external stimuli may have been perpetuated by the sciences through the obliteration

of empirical self-certainties, aesthetic movements that aimed to elevate—and therefore, reify—trivial phenomena via artifactualization placated those uncertainties through a zealous veneration of language’s ability to arrest and represent materiality. Indeed, this drive to arrest and elevate the minutiae of the phenomenal world stems from an archaeological compulsion that infects linguistic representation: “In modernism one can observe a cross-pollination that can be described as the ‘artifactualization of language’ and the ‘literalization of art.’ Literature becomes artifactual through the self-reflective concentration placed upon how language operates, how it is perceived, received, and preconceived” (Erickson 25). With language and literature becoming ubiquitously regarded as artifactual,¹⁴ how does the perception of artifacts—how they are encountered out of context, how they inspire a brand of museal lore, and how they are repurposed for aesthetic consumption—influence a paradoxical literalization of art that loses its literality through the wresting of objects out of context to discover their thingness?¹⁵ More specifically (and for the purposes of my particular intervention), what does the liminality of common material things, the fetishization of the minutiae of the domestic everyday caught in a state of transition, have to do with the artifactual relations of Leo Marx’s “middle ground” theory, the sometimes surreal encounter of the human-made, the urban, the residue of human agency dislocated in a non-urban setting?

The central aim of this study is to explore the artifactual encounter with this uncanny “middle ground” in order to trace the dialectical evolution of the human-made (as it is perceived out of context in a “natural” setting) from its pastoral/frontier origins to the object-based aesthetics of modernism. Particularly I will examine how the poeticization of common,

¹⁴ See Slotkin on the “myth artifact,” taken up in chapter two.

¹⁵ Discovering the inherent thingness of an object by wresting it out of context (and effectively gazing through the quasi-mystical eyes of alterity) has taken on a multitude of deviant iterations in twentieth-century phenomenology. Case in point: Aldous Huxley’s mescaline-induced enthrallment with the furrows in his trousers in *The Doors of Perception* (1954), or his fixation on the “tubularity” of the legs of a chair (22). Although *this* particular mode of spectatorship is chemically enhanced, experiments like Huxley’s that intended to tease out the thingness, aura, or innateness of objects are direct offshoots of Williams’s aphoristic decree—“no ideas... but in things”—and demonstrates the more caricatured, hyperbolic variations of modernist object epistemology.

everyday, seemingly superfluous things as they become repurposed in language, and how the “objective correlative” of an original frontier/settler encounter, evolved from the lore created around human-made objects situated in a “natural” setting to the unstable representations of common objects in the literature and museums of modernism. Although it might seem presumptuous owing to the transnational nature of “pastoral” to localize such phenomena to a predominantly American context, the idea that the United States more than any other modern culture has persisted in its identification as a bifurcated nation predicated on a frontier/urban duality makes it appropriate grounds with which to begin such an archaeological investigation.¹⁶ Conversely, to say that there is no connection at all—no cause-and-effect or evolutionary relationship—between the lore created around artifacts encountered in pastoral/frontier settings and the lore generated in the later object-based aesthetics of modernity, is equally presumptuous. This is not to say that all object-focused aesthetics, narrative theories, or poetics stem from the artifactual encounter with de-contextualized, human-made things perceived in the transitional space that wilderness and frontier represent. What I am arguing is that a more vernacular, organic evolution of the everyday object *in part* emerged from the uncanny object relations experienced in the midlands of wilderness and civilization, in the frontier and pastoral spaces that represent such potential for alterity. Although the detachment of modern life from more innate, primordial, or “natural” existence is a common theme in early twentieth-century theory and writing (see Sigmund Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*), canonical modern poets such as W.C. Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Robert Frost offer explicit versions of how the drive to

¹⁶ Marx argues in *The Machine in the Garden* that the “pastoral” motif “has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery” (3), and that this self-identification with nature motifs permeates the cultural politics of the present day. America’s naturalist roots, albeit somewhat ideologically driven by myth and propaganda, is something Marx maintains and revisits in a later essay “The Idea of Nature in America” (also referenced below), where he analyzes frontier and wilderness mythologies in relation to American nationhood. Upon examining various “obituaries for the idea of nature” in America (8-9), Marx ends his paper by considering balances between the myth of pristine wilderness spaces (what he refers to as “first nature”) as they are interrupted by the “artifacts” of human presence (“second nature”—“the artificial—material and cultural—environment that humanity has superimposed upon first nature”) (20-21). In many respects, contemporary American culture still dwells precariously on this “fault line” (21) that vacillates between nature and artifact.

archive and poeticize a human-constructed object caught in the process of obsolescence, as well as that object's uncanny relationship to a natural environment, establishes a type of primal scene for the uncanniness of the common, the ephemeral, the fragmented modern object.

My use of the term “primal scene” deserves some explanation before I forge ahead into the frontiers of analysis. The term is employed in psychoanalysis and is adapted largely out of Freud's exploration of infantile neurosis in the “Wolf Man” study, a case in which a subject's neurotic behaviour was (allegedly) ignited from the trauma of witnessing his parents engaged in coitus *a tergo* (411). Putting aside the evident sexual connotations, *my* application of the term “primal scene” in accordance with aesthetic and literary theory is borrowed from Ned Lukacher's *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis*, wherein he positions “the notion of the primal scene as a trope for reading and understanding.” In Lukacher's usage, “[r]ather than signifying the child's observation of sexual intercourse”—the original Freudian definition—“the primal scene comes to signify an ontologically undecidable intertextual event that is situated in the differential space between historical memory and imaginative construction, between archival verification and interpretive free play. Bringing Freud's notion of the primal scene into conjunction with Heidegger's ‘history of Being,’” Lukacher uses the expression “to describe the interpretive impasse that arises when a reader has good reason to believe that the meaning of one text is historically dependent on the meaning of another text or on a previously unnoticed set of criteria, even though there is no conclusive evidential or archival means of establishing the case beyond a reasonable doubt” (24-25). To clarify my application of Lukacher's adaptation: my reference to a “primal scene” in relation to the conversion of wilderness-situated objects into artifacts is meant to act as a caveat (or conduit) into conjectural, unsubstantiated territory. Within this territory there is speculative reason to conceive a connection, in the absence of a smoking gun (so to speak), between the artifactual failures of domestication perceived in natural space and a vernacular object theory that informs American

modernist aesthetics. However, I do believe the archival evidence to exist to substantiate my claim, but that it has yet to receive focused and selective analyses.

Lukacher's notion of "interpretive free play" and "archival verification" lends itself to a further analogy relevant to my waste-oriented approach. John Scanlan in his book *On Garbage* argues that the pursuit of knowledge (or capital T "truth") is akin to a figurative sifting through archaeological waste found amongst hostile and precarious terrain. Placing a phantom hand in the disorder and amorphous matter of the mind is an act of random yet contingent fumbling situated between the archive and free play:

the pursuit of knowledge places one in a kind of wasteland of indeterminacy—'the immeasurable region of truth and error,' which can result in much 'groping about' in order that the correct exit is found. ... [E]verything that goes in has to be disentangled from the mess that constitutes speculative (or experimental) thinking, which in turn means that the *working out* of what is useful knowledge is also the disposal of what is useless—in other words, we begin with garbage—it goes *in*, but then is worked out. (71-72)

Not only might Scanlan's characterization of experimental hermeneutics be the guiding philosophy of my own heuristic investigation of the artifactualization of waste situated in natural space, but it also can be directly applied to the speculative act of locating a primal scene for literary and aesthetic influence. Lukacher's delineation of the primal scene is analogous to a wasteland of indeterminacy, a state of betweenness where there is much "groping about" before the correct scaffolding, or excavation site, is located. The combination of "primal scene" and "wasteland"¹⁷ as a conflated analogy for straying into the frontiers of the experimental offers an appropriate schematic for the endeavour to harvest aesthetic artifacts (literary, pictorial, archaeological) in order to amass an evidentiary archive. Archives, in the end, are fraught with instability: they can disappear as readily as they materialize. Both wastelands (particularly in the "wilderness" sense of the word) and primal scenes represent figurative sites of instability and

¹⁷ By "wasteland" I mean both landscape hostile to human enterprise and literally a land of waste or garbage. See the introduction to chapter two for an explication of the term "wasteland."

indeterminacy with respect to origin; they are places in-between conception and cultivation where one must be equipped both to appropriate expedients and sift through “the mess that constitutes [the] speculative.”

As a means to bring order to my project, some basic concepts and terminology will be explored in the pages that follow. In summary, the aim of chapter one is to survey new forms of pastoral that ironize its traditional configurations and thereby invite the bemused gaze of the (modernist) spectator. Yet to understand how modern forms of pastoral adopt an ironic stance that has the capacity to convert the surpluses of domestic, technological, and commodity cultures—what is essentially waste material—to something with aesthetic import, it is necessary to analyze exactly how “nature,” as both scenery and the natural environment removed from “civilization,” has been framed in the human mind as a space that can facilitate this uncanny metamorphosis. Therefore “nature” as a term, in all its etymological ambiguity, will be deconstructed to consider its malleability both as a concept and as physical topography that acts at once as a “scene” (an exhibition venue) and as deracinating terrain where human-contrived objects become repurposed in the human mind. I will then turn to a reading of William Wordsworth to examine how “common,” human-made objects that have been poeticized within rural, pastoral, and natural terrains haunt the technology-saturated epistemologies of the turn of the twentieth century. By assessing the historical trajectory of how rural and pastoral space has been conceptualized in poetry to render uncanny the slough of domestication, the minutiae of the everyday, and the surpluses of urbanity, my intention is to set the groundwork for the connection I will make in subsequent chapters between rural artifacts and the poetics of everyday objects in modernist poetry and object epistemologies. Finally, and as a way to encapsulate my analysis of the counterforce between nature and human-contrived things, I will turn to theories of modern

archaeology to investigate how waste objects, detritus, and ephemera, when wrested out of context, become artifacts of cultural significance. This examination of how *refuse* becomes *relic*—that is, how waste becomes revered and adopts an artifactual significance—will demonstrate not only the arresting power that everyday objects have as waste material, but also how the twentieth-century preoccupation with the surpluses of the quotidian has its roots in aesthetic movements and modes of perception that measure decay, waste, and ruin against the forces of the natural environment.

* * *



Figure 1.4. *Countryside Car Wreck*. c. 2010. Banksy.

1.1. The (Washing) Machine in the Garden: Wilderness Space as Gallery Space

Beethoven's quartets lie in the storerooms of the publishing house like potatoes in a cellar.
—Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art"

In a fairly recent episode of *The Simpsons* (S23.E02)—one of the most culturally pervasive American sit-coms of the past two decades—Bart (a principal character, for those unfamiliar with the program), along with a collection of some of Springfield Elementary’s lesser-performing students, are taken on an out-of-doors experiential learning trek to a state park. The scene might be categorized as a caricatured throwback to Thoreau’s 1862 essay “Walking.” Whereas Thoreau advocated “sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields” as a means to be “absolutely free from all worldly engagements” (page 1994), the characters in *The Simpsons* would have worldly engagement thrust upon them. Meandering through the pristine animated wilderness while sporting backpacks and hiking apparel, one of the students (Dolph) stops to point to a location outside of the immediate scene. “One time,” he says, “I found an old washing machine over there that still had clothes in it.” The boys gasp with awe at the site of interjection, and then continue on their wilderness excursion.

We might assume by his use of past tense that the washing machine, as anomalously as it had appeared within the picturesque natural setting, has now disappeared from the fictional site. Yet the memory of its encounter is still fresh in the mind of the spectator who once happened upon this mass-produced monolith of modern technology, this emblem of industrial domesticity rendered useless and placed out of context in what is supposed to be a virginal setting unsullied by domestic interjections. The encounter with this refused item, especially one as substantial and imposing (yet commonplace) as a washing machine, would inevitably inspire questions about human trace.¹⁸ The idea that the machine still had clothes in it elevates it to the status of enigma,

¹⁸ Drawing from Jean Baudrillard’s assessment of the semiotic power of the washing machine from *The Consumer Society*, Kennedy offers a reading of “the tendency of the value of modern commodities to depart from their function” and adopt new meaning relative to context and spectatorial influence (xv). Baudrillard says: “outside the field of its denotation, the object becomes substitutable in a more or less unlimited way within the field of connotations where it assumes sign-value. Thus the washing machine *serves* as an appliance and *acts* as an element of prestige, comfort, etc.” (qtd. in Kennedy xvi). In other words, the washing machine de-contextualized takes on its condition as a sign (its apparent cultural meaning as a thing of comfort) rather than as a product; it becomes not the function it *serves*, but the signification it *enacts* in the mind of the onlooker. Hence, the repurposing of something as mundane yet profound as a washing machine—while it *does* contain inherent cultural significations—is relative to

endows it with a brand of thinghood whereby—to invoke William Wordsworth (who will be a resident ghost haunting the crawlspaces of my study)—“ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way” (“Preface” 59). It is an example of the everyday excesses of both manufacturing and mass-produced culture as the jarring appearance of the machine in the garden, what Leo Marx describes as “a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction” (*The Machine* 29), a recurring trope entrenched in American literature and culture. Just as objects more quantifiably “aesthetic” have the capacity, according to the Heideggerian model of thinghood, to regress into commonality and “lie in the storerooms of the publishing house like potatoes in a cellar” (“Origin” 19), the “stone in the road” and “the clod in the field” and the washing machine in the garden achieve ontological relevance (20), perhaps no less by their location in an expansive and malleable “field” of spectatorship. In the case of the washing machine caught out of place in a natural setting, memory is tied to trace; even in the absence of the object-become-artifact, the anomalous encounter has scorched the earth, and haunted the empty ground with lingering questions about its former presence and current absence.

The persisting fascination with the excesses of technology caught out of place in a pastoral setting begs the question of what museal or spectatorial dynamic is at work when such ironic juxtapositions disrupt those fantasies of idyllic satisfaction (see Figures 1.4 and 1.5).¹⁹ Take as another example of the neopastoral artifact the above mock-oil painting of a rusting vehicle contrasted by the picturesque debris of a ruined castle—elevated above the lowly detritus to which modern tech-garbage is associated—garnished by eighteenth-century shepherds, their

the spectator. As Kennedy argues, such “signs have no meaning. They rely on whatever significations their users bestow on them. Thus, a kind of emptiness or void conditions their being” (xvi), a void filled with the artifactual residue of cultural (and therefore *human*) agency.

¹⁹ For further images of automobiles disintegrating in natural space, see also Julian Stallabrass’s *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture*, page 84, figures 6 and 8. I will be referring to Stallabrass’s theories concerning the poeticization of trash below.

innocuous livestock, a meandering river, and vegetation aplenty.²⁰ Banksy's designs are appropriative: aside from tagging building exteriors and other sites open to public view, he (or she) borrows the work of established artists and infuses his own largely ironic slant. Case in point: his appropriation of Claude Monet's *Water Lily Pond*, a pastoral scene to which has been added the remnant overspill of commodity culture—discarded parking cones and shopping carts that are at times an all-too-familiar sight in the rivers that flow through urban centres. Although not an American artist²¹ (his identity is in dispute, but his British nationality is not), and although his artistic intent may be more political than aesthetic, appropriation art like Banksy's *Countryside Car Wreck* and his refiguring of Monet's *Water Lily Pond* attest to the increasing relevance of our (mis)conceptions of an idealized rural past versus the reality of the accumulating dross of human activity. Here a sort of ironic re-interpretation of the picturesque—the fetishization of “splendid ruin, contrasted with the objects of nature” expounded in William Gilpin's eighteenth-century aesthetic manifesto *Observations on the River Wye* (40)—becomes the groundwork for postmodern picturesque taste. However, in the case of the postmodern picturesque, the “enchancing scenery” (40) of crumbling abbeys and castles tends to be supplanted by the decaying object matter of mass-industrialization. As will be discussed throughout this study, the machinations of picturesque viewing are very much entwined with the concerns of the (neo)pastoral; in many ways, they are variations of the same theme which examine “simpler” ways of life that are threatened, are made obsolete, or are reconfigured by urbanization. Banksy's pictures extend this examination into the twenty-first century by suggesting that traditional conceptions of pastoral space, owing to the surpluses of commodity

²⁰ I have found it to be a futile endeavour to locate an academic source for figures 1.4 (above) and 1.5 (below), which the online community has titled *Countryside Car Wreck* and *Water Lilies* respectively, both circa 2010 (see bibliographical information in the works cited list). Various online sources have attributed these paintings to the anonymous graffiti artist known only as Banksy.

²¹ Photographs by American artists that juxtapose cow pastures and rusting vehicles, such as Paul Vanderbilt's 1962 *Beetown, Wisconsin* (see chapter three, figure 3.2), certainly exist, and offer an American conceptualization of new forms of pastoral that integrate industrial and domestic waste.

culture, no longer exist. However, addressing the question of whether pastoral themes will disappear with increasing urbanization and industrialization, Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* quotes Leo Marx as a response: rather than pastoral motifs vanishing, a “wholly new conception of the precariousness of our relations with nature,” an indeterminacy exacerbated by industry, “is bound to bring forth new versions of pastoral” (qtd. in Buell 51). Work like Banksy’s seems to be the fulfillment of this prophecy, bringing forth new representations of old paradigms—the *neopastoral*. Within this new form of the pastoral genre, shopping carts as symbols of commodity/domestic excess dumped into a water lily bespeckled pond take on relevance beyond their existence as mere waste.



Figure 1.5. *Water Lilies*. c. 2010. Banksy.

Images like Banksy’s *Countryside Car Wreck* and *Water Lilies* will undoubtedly provoke visceral reactions accompanied by contempt and censure, particularly in the more environmentally minded spectator. It therefore seems obvious to conclude that the waste of commodity culture situated in what is meant to be an aesthetically pleasing scene says something

pejorative about the imbalance precipitated by cultures of disposability and their influence on natural environments. As will be discussed in the chapters that follow, such portrayals do not always occupy an ethical position, but rather address ontological concerns regarding why discarded things take on an afterlife when they are put out to pasture, so to speak, and develop new aesthetic significations rooted in trace, cultural memory, and spectatorship. Who is to say, after all, that a vehicle left to disintegrate on a rural property is not being kept there for aesthetic or archival reasons?

Because the site of encounter offers important criteria by which to assess an object's affect, examining what Buell calls the *mutatis mutandis* of new world "vacancy"—the myth of America as "emptiness waiting to be filled" (*Environmental Imagination* 52)—is an important place to begin to determine how so-called virgin (or raw) wilderness spaces function as potential sites of ontological alterity.²² What this attribution of vacancy to wilderness space means in terms of a natural setting's capacity to empty things of signification has relevance for how objects within wilderness milieus are perceived with museal and aesthetic fascination. Elizabeth Grosz in *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* provides an interesting delineation of how nature, or natural space, acts as a site of in-betweenness that wields an uncanny dynamic by virtue of its ability to efface the object matter within its purview.²³ In a chapter called "In-Between: The Natural in Architecture and Culture," Grosz begins an explication of "the in-between" as "the space in which things are undone... the space of subversion and fraying, the edges of any identity's limits" (93). The connection between Grosz's delineation of the "in-between" and Freud's theories of the uncanny—meaning which develops "in the direction of ambivalence," thereby generating a space of non-meaning between

²² It is important to note that *mutatis mutandis* is a term borrowed from Latin that means "things having been changed that have to be changed" (*OED online*). Generally it carries with its usage a revisionist connotation referring to "the necessary changes" having been appended or "with due alteration of details" as the condition prescribes. See my discussion in chapter two on the American settler mentality and the use of expedients and ready-at-hand material implements as a defining characteristic of the prevailing American temperament.

²³ See chapter two for further discussion of wilderness frontier's relation to theories of the uncanny.

denotations (“The Uncanny” 226)—is palpable, and she specifically privileges “nature” as a space of ambivalence that has the capacity to empty objects of their meaning: “it is nature that falls into the space ‘between’ or before the juxtaposition and coincidence of the urban, the architectural, and the cultural” (98). More specifically,

Nature must be understood in the rich productive openness... as a force, as production, as a revelry in the random and the contingent, as a continuous opening up to the unexpected, as relations of dissonance, resonance, and consonance as much as relations of substance or identity. Rather than seeing it as either fixed origin, given limit, or predetermined goal, nature, the natural, must be seen as the site and locus of impetus and force, the ground of a malleable materiality, whose plasticity and openness account for the rich variability of cultural life, *and* the various subversions of cultural life that continue to enrich it. The natural must be understood as fundamentally open to history, to transformation, or to becoming, as open as culture, as innovative, temporal, and historical as the purview of social, psychical, and cultural life. (98)

The idea that nature has the capacity to subvert cultural life (and therefore the artifactual by-products of that life), and that it is a space “fundamentally open to history” is the sort of reading that invites not a formalist assessment of human activity within nature’s boundaries, but rather obfuscates—even circumvents—an analysis that attempts to locate rigid significations within the remnants of cultural activity. Natural space has come to signify ahistoricity; it provides ground for a scene of “aesthetic engagement” that requires a “poetics of detachment” (Brown) in order to interact with its object matter. However, some clarification is necessary before fully considering Grosz’s remarks. Admittedly, abstract nouns like “frontier” and “pastoral” and “wilderness” and “nature,” although host to historical and cultural conventions, are quite expansive and require nuanced quantifications. As Marx points out in his 2008 essay “The Idea of Nature in America,” “the word *nature* is a notorious semantic and metaphysical trap.” What, exactly, is meant by the words “nature” or “natural”?

Marx interrogates the “inherently ambiguous word” by considering its many abstruse declensions. For instance, “We cannot always tell whether references to *nature* are meant to

include or exclude people. Besides, the word also carries the sense of *essence*: of the ultimate, irreducible character or quality of something, as for example, ‘the nature of femininity’ or, for that matter, ‘the nature of nature’” (9). We might even extend the search for “essence” to objects (both natural and human-made) and variations of manufactured goods: the nature of rocks, the nature of toys (the phenomenology of particular types, brands, usages), the nature of tools, the nature of outhouses (traditional versus portable), the nature of things. When factoring humankind as a component of nature, as Timothy Clark does in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, the term becomes even more muddled when incorporating the by-products of human activity into the scheme: “At its broadest nature is the sum total of the structures, substances and causal powers that are the universe. In this sense, evidently, humanity is part of nature, could never be anything else and even a radioactive waste dump is as ‘natural’ as a snowdrop or a waterfall” (6). The idea that a radioactive waste site is as natural as a waterfall presents an interesting conundrum when considering how conceptions of the “natural” are usually weighed against gradations of human interference. In common usage, nature is not nature when humanity is too involved; however, the by-products of human-contrived nuclear fission *are* a part of nature in that they occur naturally, or that it is possible for them to occur. In other words, in Clark’s proposed definition “nature” is synonymous with life, the universe and everything (to borrow Douglas Adams’ phrasing from *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*). Anything that can occur in existence is natural because it can occur. Such lexical extrapolations, although valuable as thought experiments, come off as a bit cynical and nihilistic. However, this is the point of Clark’s chicanery: to confound a term that is taken for granted. That said, there are practical reasons why nature is set off from humanity, particularly because humanity, in general, sees itself as outside of nature, as having largely transcended the adherence to natural forces. Yet in spite of the somewhat hubristic impulse to see ourselves as acting *upon* instead of *within* nature, cultural critics such as Raymond Williams—who has written extensively on natural

versus urban dichotomies—remind us that “nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history” (“Ideas of Nature” 67).

When considering the etymological roots of “nature” as Leo Marx understands them, the word develops two interesting denotations that align with Grosz’s notion of nature being a site of “productive openness.” Not only does its “essentialist” (Marx) meaning carry with it an “ahistorical” character that purports to gesture toward the essence—i.e., the nature—of the thing and hence its noumenal character, but its Latin root, *natus*, as Marx explains, denotes “the concept of origination—of being born” (9). What we might take from its linguistic history is that “nature” as a principle signifies the conceptual essence of a *thing* while it connotes origins, an opening up to the new, a birth or rebirth of a thing (re)considered and (re)purposed outside of its cultural or historical associations. Nature, as a concept, denotes essence while it wields the power to alter and make relative. To consider the nature of an object is to consider its origin (however rudimentary or unstable), and to consider its origin is to consider its status as thing-in-itself.²⁴ How this delineation concerning origins extends to nature as wilderness space has to do with the power wilderness possesses to make the human-made relative to its chaotic surroundings, to efface and empty objects of semiotic associations. To refer back to Grosz, if nature indeed provides a space for “revelry in the random and the contingent,” and functions “as a continuous opening up to the unexpected,” then the innate condition of its relation to artifactual

²⁴ We must understand, however, that the status of an object as a thing-in-itself independent of the senses is always dependent upon the way in which the perceiver interprets the form, use, and materiality of that object. In *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing*, Harman details how one of the elusive goals of phenomenology is to articulate how material things appear before consciousness both with and without the tempering influence of perception (4). Yet Heidegger’s focus on human existence as central to the appearance of objects has an anthropological (19) dimension predicated on trace, sensory appropriation, and hermeneutics. While objects do have “a highly specific meaning even when they are not lucidly present in consciousness,” misinterpreted objects (which, upon misreading, become “things”) do not contain semantic rigidity. “Things are events... [that] cannot be reduced to a list of traits and qualities that might be found in a dictionary” (23). Consequently, when assessing the appearance of objects, “We never rise above our environment to some pure, lofty pedestal and pass judgment on the world, as if we were untainted by it. What we can do is liberate the hidden presuppositions of life even while living in it, making those suppositions partly visible by interpreting them” (31).

residue will always be one of alterity, one that repurposes, opens and transforms the material it contains into something variable with simultaneous dissonant (jarring) and resonant force.

The idea that natural space is a locus of “force” and “the ground of a malleable materiality” (and here Marx’s language of counterforce from *The Machine in the Garden* might be invoked) has significant parallels to how artifacts are represented in a more controlled space, such as that of a gallery or museum. As Schwenger explains in a chapter examining the displacement of display, “That objects have been deracinated from their cultural context... has been an objection to museums since their inception” (132); and thus the “curious amalgam of the art object” in relation to museum space “escapes from the classifications that seek to contain it” (118). Catherine E. Paul in *Poetry in the Museums of Modernism* connects this epistemological emptying of artifactual signification to an anxiety regarding curatorial practices of the turn of the twentieth century, particularly how museums “enmeshed in object-based epistemology” feared that they “were killing the objects they displayed” (15).²⁵ This particular twentieth-century anxiety concerning the obliterating effect of gallery space has particular relevance both for the destabilization of object matter in the modern period and for how we perceive such spaces as environments. Here I am being deliberately ambiguous about what is meant when I use the word “environment.” Just as the word “nature” is an admixture of ambiguous constituents conflating both human and non-human referents, “environment” suffers from a similar inability to commit to terminology—but one that is useful for my consideration of nature and environment as gallery or exhibitory spaces. When the words “nature” and “environment” (*the* environment, that is) are used on their own they invoke, at least in modern times, ideas of wilderness. As environmental

²⁵ Quoting F.T. Marinetti’s condemnation of museums in “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism” (1908), Paul reveals how some turn-of-the-century artists equated museums with “cemeteries” for dead objects (15-16). The juxtaposition of divergent styles, the “Reciprocal ferocity of painters and sculptors,” had the effect of “murdering each other with blows of form and color in the same museum” (qtd. in Paul 16). What is interesting about Marinetti’s complaint is how the emptying of meaning and signification through the curatorial practice of collage (the sharing of space with diverse forms and colours) has a similar effect to that of an artifactual encounter at a site of excavation, of things discovered and yet to be named or classified. The idea that museums are akin to sites where the dead are buried certainly conjures an excavation motif.

theorist Arnold Berleant proposes in *The Aesthetics of Environment* (1992), when we consider what is signified by the word “environment,” “The usual answer that it is our natural surroundings obviously will not do, for this overlooks the fact that most people’s lives are far removed from any kind of natural setting” (2-3). Berleant is emphasizing that in the human mind there is an intentional dislocation between nature and humanity; nature is something we visit, or must integrate ourselves into, or dislodge ourselves from, in opposition to our domestic lives.²⁶ We must also consider that, in an age of exploding human populations and globalizing technologies, our present-day wilderness areas “are not primeval nature but regions that reflect the earlier and ongoing consequences of human action” (3). On the one hand, notions of viewing land aesthetically are caught up in delineations of environment: the “word ‘landscape,’ for example, institutionalizes the conventional objectification of environment” (5). On the other hand, because landscape is something objectified and optically carved out by the spectator, environment is “more than an ecosystem” (10).

Although Berleant does not make an explicit connection between the shared dynamics of objects as they are viewed in natural environments versus museum environments, a lingering question remains: Why would a book on the aesthetics of environment, which largely defines “environment”—in spite of itself—as “nature experienced, nature lived” (6), include a chapter entitled “The Museum as a Participatory Environment” without gesturing toward the similarities between museum space and natural space? (Here I will go a step further than Berleant and take a position on *my* definition: I am referring to “nature” not in its fuzzy delineation highlighted by Marx, but as non-urban spaces affiliated with wilderness and pastoral.) Berleant, like Schwenger and Paul, speaks specifically of the deracinating effect of museum space, where works of art “are

²⁶ The word “environment,” which, in its general sense, simply means the “area surrounding a place or thing,” doesn’t acquire its popular environmentalist reference to the “natural world,” especially “as affected by human activity,” until about the 1950s (*OED*). What this demonstrates is an ideological shift that not only separates humanity from geographical space, but that also positions that space as something to be acted *upon* rather than *within*.

offered as discrete objects arranged in visually pleasing arrays, to be viewed with little regard for the difficult ways in which they call upon the viewer to experience them,” but where that arrangement “often leads to haphazard juxtapositions, forcing the viewer to adopt an incongruous sequence of movements” in order to appreciate the work (114-115). In fact, Berleant is quite adamant in his enumeration of the things museums do to rob an object of contextual environment (116). Yet the few associations he makes between the dynamics of museum and natural space require the reader to decode his encrypted meaning. The closest Berleant comes to making the connection unequivocal between wilderness space and museum space occurs when he proposes that “Like any human place, the museum is an environment” (114), and then subsequently acknowledges that “Landscapes offer... opportunities for experiencing different kinds of involvement in environmental situations” (120), including that of museum space.²⁷ Although the comparison of gallery and natural space through the ambiguous term “environment” is not made explicit by Berleant, the rudiments of the argument exist within his consideration of both spaces as sites where “aesthetic experience becomes the ordering principle” (120).

Museum or gallery space and “natural” space are, of course, not synonymous. And yet both spaces share the capacity to have a displacing effect on the objects they harbour, engendering a brand of dissonant resonance through deracination. In an essay entitled “Resonance and Wonder” Stephen Greenblatt offers a critique of museum and gallery space that complements Grosz’s, Schwenger’s, and Berleant’s affiliation of natural space and exhibition

²⁷ As Steven C. Bourassa suggests in *The Aesthetics of Landscape* (1991), the aesthetic experience is holistic, engaging all the senses—including tactile/kinaesthetic, olfactory or smellscape (8-9)—rather than just visual and aural. I think Berleant and Bourassa would agree through their ambivalent delineations of nature and environment that landscape-as-environment, as opposed to gallery-as-environment, accomplishes this holistic engagement of the senses most effectively as it concerns the perception of object matter deracinated. What is this holistic engagement of the senses meant to do but provoke the spectator to observe the object with a more attuned and invested perception? Ultimately, a brand of deracination occurs when observing human interruption in both natural environments and gallery environments, but on different levels of sensory engagement.

space with uncanny forces that empty materiality of prescriptive semantics.²⁸ The “act of displacement... is essential for the collection of virtually all older artifacts and most modern ones—pulled out of chapels, peeled off church walls, removed from decayed houses... seized as spoils of war, stolen...” (44). Archival construction is fundamentally a de-contextualizing event; it denotes a brand of theft, even in the act of witnessing or interpreting (hermeneutics).²⁹ We might be reminded by this act of contextual and interpretive theft of the effacement artifacts are subjected to when first encountered in the place they have come to rest as debris. As a matter of interpretive process there are speculations posited about their existence, lore created in order to fill in the gap(s) between thing and spectator, and narratives woven around the absence of denotation and context. The wresting of objects out of context is always a narratological act, no matter how incongruous or fictive that narrative might be. Upon deracination a new narrative of misuse is created around the artifact by the subject who perceives it no longer circulating through the arteries of societal or cultural utility. These fragmented or “wounded artifacts”—wounded by deracination and misuse—“may be compelling not only as witnesses to the violence of history but as signs of use, marks of the human touch, and hence links with the openness to touch that was the condition of their creation” (44). In other words, it is not only the ontological traces of former agency—the residual memory of the artisan who created the tool, or the peasant who used it—that imbue a common thing with artifactual resonance. The act of original artisanship, by inference of its plasticity, invites further manipulation, further (mis)application. What we can conclude, then, is that there is a malleable materiality (interpretive openness) involved in identifying any object as artifactual, a plasticity that is sustained in an artifact’s encounter and

²⁸ Greenblatt explains spectatorial and artifactual “resonance” as “the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand” (42).

²⁹ See chapter four, section three for further explanation on the connection between hermeneutics and theft. With the root of the word derived from the name of the patron god of theft (Hermes), the act of interpretation becomes an exercise in sophistry meant to beguile and deceive as a way of seeking truth. In other words, intentional misreading, while outwardly contrary to the search for meaning, is a significant component of hermeneutics, if only as a means to verify how and why we believe the way we do.

display. This plasticity promotes a brand of “misuse” that, as Brown puts it, presents “the unforeseeable potential within the object” (“How to do Things with Things” 956), potentiality made variable by the subject’s relation to the object, and by the violence done by (mis)interpretation and (mis)perception.³⁰

According to Greenblatt, everyday commercial objects when placed in strange contexts particularly have the capacity to achieve museal value via misuse or displacement. In an anecdote about encountering a Coca-Cola stand at the foot of some Mayan ruins (strategically placed owing to the already museal nature of the ruins the stand is set against), Greenblatt says: “My immediate thought was that the whole Coca-Cola stand could be shipped to New York and put on display in the Museum of Modern Art” (49). The irony of a Coke stand being placed in the vicinity of a ruin—aside from it being a “most impressive example of contemporary Mayan architecture” (49)—is that the ruin portends what that everyday commodity object will become once consumed: a material husk, detritus displaced. It appears that the durability of waste, the resilience of mass-marketed products yet to be discarded, creates an odd juxtaposition that serves a similar purpose in terms of branding: to stand out as the central object in the midst of a grander historical narrative (the Mayan ruins), to have the background gradually fade from view as the object with museal clarity appears as if on a pedestal (because it *is* essentially on display). Greenblatt follows his defence of the Coke-stand-as-museal-object with an extrapolation of “enchanted looking,” where “the act of attention draws a circle around itself from which everything but the object is excluded, when intensity of regard blocks out all circumambient images, stills all murmuring voices” (49). Perhaps because many commodity items are deferred waste (Stallabrass 407), this brand of enchanted looking—where a Coke machine is cast into

³⁰ In his essay “How to do Things with Things (A Toy Story),” Brown discusses the value of artifactual misuse in relation to aesthetic potentiality: “If the use value of an object amounts to its preconceived utility, then its misuse value should be understood as the unforeseeable potential within the object, part of an uncompleted dream” (956).

relief against a ruin—is ironically out of place but in the right place. Commodity objects are ruins in progress.

If commodity objects are ruins in progress, then there must be something aesthetic tied to the idea of waste in general. Arguing that we “can think of commodities as deferred trash” (407), Julian Stallabrass in *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture* locates the aesthetic otherness of garbage in the disintegration process (and here we might read dis-integration as a form of de-contextualization, the removal of an object from its integrated framework or function). He particularly notes how various juxtaposed and incongruous articles of domestication, “their mixing and eventual merging with other diverse products” (408), generates “relationships of a more poetic and intrinsic interest” (416). Somehow “during this process [of disintegration],” Stallabrass goes on to suggest, “their allure is not lost but, loosed from exchange and use value, it takes on an apparently more genuine aesthetic air” (408). Certainly we might privilege grander forms of waste, like ruined abbeys, over more ubiquitous manifestations of excess. Yet even in the original manifestoes on picturesque viewing, those grand ruins at odds with natural environments were usually flanked by the shabby dwellings of subsistence farmers (Gilpin 43), vernacular habitation that offered something superfluous yet ubiquitous, something rough yet varied, to accentuate the grandiosity of more culturally valuable detritus. Fast-forward to present day and one can locate this vernacular habitation in variegated heaps of old and new debris, and in much the same way the run-down implements of the everyday continue to provide that coveted aesthetic variation. Bearing in mind that commodity objects are ruins in progress, modern waste becomes a type of enchanted advertising, especially when offset by its antithesis: nature, the rural, the pastoral, the in-between spaces embodying the “random and contingent” (Grosz). For example, when we see a lonely beer bottle or an isolated soda can on the side of a country road, or flanking a highway that cuts through rural space, we are immediately drawn to its disjunctive resonance. It is when this litter accumulates (say, in landfill sites), becomes an

aggregate of excess, that the object does not achieve what Greenblatt calls “enchanted looking.” Circumambient images do not dissolve; the object does not become central, but is lost in a collage (which, according to Stallabrass, has aesthetic value in itself, but in a different way than the museal, isolated object). Ironically, the ultimate favour a consumer can do for a corporation is isolate its logo amidst a natural setting like a gaudy billboard situated in a bean field beside a highway. Such guerrilla advertising approaches the museal focus an art object might enjoy. In fact, Stallabrass has a term for this type of display, and he places a premium on its spectatorial effects. “This trash writing”—as he calls it—“may be seen as another form of graffiti, omnipresent like its wall-bound counterpart, critical, and, unlike brand-name graffiti, full of content” (416).

* * *

1.2. Artifactualization of the Common: Old World and Modern Traditions Compared

Granted, natural or wilderness space in its apparent rawness, openness and malleability might act as an impetus for enchanted viewing simply by virtue of its liminality in relation to human design, its status as yet-to-be-purposed. Yet in order to determine how “natural” space functions as a mechanism to render uncanny the produce of human labour, it is necessary to begin at the beginning, to address what is largely a transnational phenomenon that has its roots in eighteenth-century “Old World” aesthetics—poetry, for example, that captures the transmutation of the pastoral into that which is forced into obsolescence by modernity.³¹ Included in Mason

³¹ See Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination* for discussion on the transnational evolution of pastoral in settler cultures. Buell argues that “European romanticism’s canonization of nature” provided settler cultures with the foundational rhetoric through which to digest frontier spaces (56), and, like Marx and other scholars (see George J. Leonard below), he cites William Wordsworth as one of the main proliferators of this ideology. “American writers borrowed freely” from these conventions; moreover, “a glance at traditional landscape poetry by Anglophone settler cultures in Canada, Australia, South Africa and the United States tells the story” of a ubiquitous “arcadianization” of colonial history (57, 60). Evidence of the transnational nature of pastoral and environmental aesthetics is palpable not only in the frequent borrowing of themes and conventions, but also within the interdisciplinary approach to the

Fletcher's self-published book on defunct rural equipment is a poem by Wordsworth called "The Solitary Reaper," reprinted from Fletcher's fourth grade reader—a fitting poet to make the cut in terms of the subject matter of *Old Memories*. Wordsworth, one of *the* monumental literary precursors attesting to the drive to poeticize rural landscapes as well as the deteriorating dwellings and objects found within them, helped to popularize at the close of the eighteenth century what he calls in the prospectus to *The Recluse* the "simple produce of the common day" (55). As an advocate of the rural excursion (a prototype, perhaps, to the urban flâneur's *dérive*), Wordsworth, as he puts it in the "Preface" to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, set out to locate that "simple produce" not only in the "plainer and more emphatic" "elementary feelings" attributed to "the real language of men" (60), but also in strange but common "rural objects," uncannily familiar yet anomalous artifacts that "will be found unnamed... [of] a private and peculiar interest" ("Poems on the Naming of Places" 323). The nameless status of these rural objects—unnamed by the poet that is, and nameless in spite of the fact that they served a practical function in their former everyday use—attest to the idea that common objects in a state of *disuse* invite a brand of *misuse* that imbues them with poetic as opposed to purely anthropological significance. Responding to the imposition of industry and new technologies on the rural landscape, poems like "The Ruined Cottage," which aestheticize the remnants and waste materials of rural dwelling—the "broken wall" of forsaken habitation (60), "a well / Half choked with willow flowers and weeds" (62-63), a "garden-ground, now wild" with nature's malicious return (55), "The useless fragment of a wooden bowl" (91)—offer the most explicit

topic. Just as in my dissertation I often draw from my own experiences as a Canadian-born, rural southwestern Ontarian to inform my approach to American pastoralism, American environmental and cultural theorists like Rod Giblett draw upon their outsider perspectives to edify theoretical frameworks regarding the American frontier and wilderness. Giblett, for example, in his 2011 book *People and Places of Nature and Culture* conflates the dynamics of the Australian outback and the American frontier in his analysis of wilderness as both home and unhome (see chapter two for more on Giblett and frontierism).

examples of the archaeological drive to sift through, catalogue, and re-configure the still-visible remains of a past that is quantifiable only at the moment of impending loss, the moment when those objects become obsolete and abandoned, and are slowly consumed by the wilderness that surrounds them.

In light of his interest in the pastorally situated detritus brought about by technological advance, the idea that Wordsworth seems to haunt the technology-saturated epistemologies of the turn of the twentieth century (and beyond) is not difficult to reconcile. His concern for the obsolescence of a way of life that seems more “real”—a reality determined by abandoned and discarded objects yielded by the past—is an anxiety that pervades many of the imaginative works generated by industrialized and commodity-based cultures. Evidence of his influence on subsequent generations of American artists has been the focus of studies like George J. Leonard’s *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (1994), in which object-based epistemologies from Emerson to Warhol are directly linked to Wordsworth’s drive to preserve the fragments of a “common” history. Wordsworth’s poetic documentation of common things, Leonard argues, is particularly linked to how the object-saturated tenets of commodity culture have developed an interest in “dumb real objects” (54).³² These dumb objects, both mute and trivial, “till now *tanto inferiore all’arte*,³³ sculpted from the despised *materia*, [have] be[en] elevated through the new artist’s power” (54)—and while the emphasis should be placed on *new*, this novel way of perceiving that despised *materia* has a

³² For more on Wordsworth’s connection to modern period poetics, see also: David Rosen’s book chapter “Wordsworth’s Empirical Imagination” in *Power, Plain English, and the Rise of Modern Poetry*; David Simpson’s *Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity*; and Marit J. MacArthur’s *The American Landscape in the Poetry of Frost, Bishop, and Ashbery: The House Abandoned*. MacArthur particularly draws a fairly obvious link between Robert Frost’s pastoral poetry and that of Wordsworth: “The imaginative scene of the abandoned or ruined farmhouse in [Frost’s] poetry evokes at once Frost’s own family history and his dark romanticization of America’s rural past, as he transposed Wordsworth’s ‘The Ruined Cottage’ onto the cellar holes and abandoned farms of the American landscape” (34). See chapter four for more on Frost’s connection to Wordsworth, particularly the trajectory they share regarding the aestheticization of vernacular ruin and domestic waste in (neo)pastoral phenomenology.

³³ Italian for “much inferior to art.”

deep-seated historical trajectory. The question to answer then becomes: how does Wordsworth's specifically rural documentation of a past undergoing obsolescence inform, or enlighten, a modern impulse to elevate everyday objects, assemblages of what Margaret Iverson in her 2004 article "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph" calls "manufactured" items that are "raised to the dignity of works of art" while boasting "a lack of obvious aesthetic quality" (45)? In an American modernist context, the impulse to poeticize the remnants of a rural past seems to be directly tied to the compulsion to archive the "common" in a broader sense.

If Wordsworth, as Leonard points out, is a progenitor of the type of aesthetic philosophy that focuses on the simple produce of the common day, it is important to state explicitly that "common" to Wordsworth is, for the most part, synonymous with "rural." In his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, which delineates the *modus operandi* for his poetic undertaking, Wordsworth is unambiguous about his subject matter: "Low and rustic life was generally chosen," he explains, "because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language" (60). If we transpose this notion of "a plainer and more emphatic language" onto encounters with *things*, we can argue, if we agree with Wordsworth, that the object matter perceived in rural space takes on a strange but allegedly uncorrupted (noumenal) representation. So as Wordsworth sets out to document that "plainer" language, his task becomes enmeshed in the poetic documentation of obsolescence and deferred waste, a way of life progressing "From ruin and from change" to the material traces "being[s] leave behind" ("The Ruined Cottage" 521-522). The idea that these ruins appear "as an idle dream that could not live / Where meditation was" situates them in the realm of the untranslatable and unsymbolizable (523-524), as mute objects that are nonetheless "full of content" (Stallabrass 416) in their isolation and which engender a brand of misprision upon contemplation of their artifactual significance. Perhaps this is why Wordsworth's project becomes one that is so modern: in spite of the language of *Lyrical Ballads*

being infused with the rhetoric of authenticity—setting out, as it were, to document the “real” through “a selection of language really used by men” (59)—there is also a sense that these artifactual remnants yield a fragmented, unknowable epistemology that must be tempered by “a certain colouring of imagination” in order to be comprehensible, a proto-surrealist dictum “whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way” (59). Ultimately, what is most modern about Wordsworth’s aesthetic strategy is the conflated rhetoric of authenticity *and* defamiliarization (an apparent paradox), the presentation of ordinary things in unusual ways that alleges to approach the truth of the thing by placing it within unfamiliar, seemingly inauthentic (coloured) contexts.

Indeed, Wordsworth’s aesthetic philosophy, as can be deduced from poems like “The Ruined Cottage,” “Rural Architecture” and “Poems on the Naming of Places,” derives part of its effect from the dynamics of encounter, the jarring force of an everyday object or subject defamiliarized. This effect for Wordsworth particularly has resonance in a pastoral or natural setting, where the imposition of humanity into nature, or nature into humanity, becomes a brand of “enchanted looking” (to borrow Greenblatt’s term) by virtue of a thing’s isolation in a realm of malleable materiality. Thus, Wordsworth’s presentation of the everyday through defamiliarization and the counterforce produced in Marx’s “middle ground” are of common poetic genus, and such encounters become “a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction” (*The Machine* 29), a grating engagement with the failure of human expenditure in the face of nature—the *real* real. Speaking of the dislocating or jarring experience associated with modernity and mass-productivity, Ben Highmore in *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* explains how the defamiliarization of everyday objects via the “juxtaposition of disparate elements” is a very conscious component of modernist movements like Surrealism (46): “generated by the juxtaposition of different materials,” a shock or spark is produced “that jolt[s] us out of the familiar” (51), urging the spectator to re-evaluate the phenomenological character

of everyday things produced by commodity culture and how those things are perceived and consumed. Highmore goes on to suggest that the general motive of modern-period Surrealism was “to recognize the everyday as a dynamic montage of elements, to make it strange so that its strangeness can be recognized” (47).³⁴ To draw a parallel between Wordsworth and modernism: the “colouring” of “ordinary things” to which Wordsworth refers is analogous to proto-modernist statements like those of Georg Simmel, whose essay “Sociological Aesthetics,” published in 1896, hypothesized that

Even the lowest, intrinsically ugly phenomenon can be dissolved into contexts of color and form, feeling and experience which provide it with significance. To involve ourselves deeply and lovingly with the even most common product, which, would be banal and repulsive in its isolated appearance, enables us to conceive of it, too, as a ray and image of the final unity of all things from which beauty and meaning flow. (qtd. in Highmore 39)

This philosophy of “aesthetic pantheism”—as Simmel terms it—where every banal thing “contains within itself the potential of being redeemed to absolute aesthetic importance” (*ibid.*), appears to be a Wordsworthian adaptation of the drive to colour common produce and artifactual ruin encountered in the “middle ground” of pastoral space.³⁵ At the very least, when placed side by side, the proto-modernist drive to repurpose, recolour, and recontextualize everyday objects is present in Wordsworth. Whether or not modernist artists, writers and theorists directly or indirectly adopted this philosophy from Wordsworth, it is worth noting that what has largely

³⁴ Although the projects of the Surrealists in the early twentieth century might be associated more with “the street” than with the rural excursion, there is an argument to be made that such excursions had their birth in the rural *dérive*—an encounter with the “common” or the everyday that still has significance in terms of how pastoral space has the capacity to render the material of technological production uncanny. However, aligning the Surrealists with the banality of urban living, Highmore claims that the “classic Surrealist can be seen as Sherlock Holmes-like: faced with the deadly boredom of the everyday, the Surrealist takes to the street, working to find and create the marvelousness of the everyday” (47).

³⁵ The philosophical threads connecting Wordsworth to modernist object theory will be taken up again in chapter four. Rather than being the omniscient, lone authorial architect of the aesthetics of the “common,” Wordsworth will be placed in context among eighteenth-century theories of the picturesque, which greatly influenced his poetic output as it concerns the “simple produce of the common day” and the aestheticization of waste and ruin.

been framed as a movement emerging from “the street” owes part of its conceptualization to encounters with domestic ruin in non-urban backlands.

The notion that rural dwelling represents a space caught in transition “From ruin and from change” (“The Ruined Cottage”), a place that is littered with the remnants of human effort while at the same time it is regarded as unspoiled, is a trope that has persisted since the eclogues of Virgil.³⁶ The “rural” (in relation to the “pastoral”) is traditionally considered to be more virginal than spoiled; yet Marx’s assertion that “the pastoral ideal has been incorporated in a powerful metaphor of contradiction” (*Machine* 4) between “the opposing forces of civilization and nature” (23) creates a binary that complicates the virginal and the spoiled and, consequently, the object matter found within the middle ground. Although Marx is interrogating an industrial and post-industrial conception of pastoral in an American context, works like Raymond Williams’ *The Country and the City*—which revisits the pastoral in a modern British context—contain the same language of liminality or in-betweenness. While the life of both “country and city is moving and present,” “moving in time,” and “moving in feeling and ideas” (8), it appears as though, rather than maintaining focus on “a renewed intensity of attention to natural beauty,” pastoral space has been corrupted by the scopic gaze of modernity via “observation... of the scientist or the tourist” (20).³⁷ According to Williams and Marx, rural space is a borderland situated among various urbanities, a place where the technologies and practices of urbanity interject, but with a different set of regulations for engaging the materials that are by-products of the urban.

³⁶ The eclogue, as well as the origins of the pastoral in dialogue with the neopastoral, will be taken up in chapter three, section three.

³⁷ Roderick Nash—introduced below—draws a conclusion similar to Raymond Williams’s notion that environmental concerns championed by a burgeoning environmentally engaged public, as benevolent as those concerns may appear on the surface, have a corrupting and detrimental impact on natural space: “[wilderness’s] preservation is now threatened as much from enthusiastic visitors as from economic development” (*Wilderness and the American Mind* xi).

When considering how urbanity blurs into rural space and vice versa, it can be argued that what is “rural” does not represent a vehement counterpoint to the urban, but rather exists as a shifting and unstable paradigm into which urban and modern practices spill over. Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind*, which, since its publication in 1967, has been represented by four editions (the latest being 2001), offers in its antipodal account of wilderness and civilization an apt delineation of the middle range of rural space as it has been conceived in American culture. While considering the problem of what constitutes a stable designation of “wilderness” as a concept, Nash argues for a definition fomented on a continuum:

The possible solution to the problem [of defining wilderness] is the conception of a spectrum of conditions or environments ranging from the purely wild on the one end to the purely civilized on the other—from the primeval to the paved. This idea of a scale between two poles is useful because it implies the notion of *shading or blending*. Wilderness and civilization become antipodal influences which combine in varying proportions to determine the character of an area. In the middle portions of the spectrum is the rural or pastoral environment (the ploughed) that represents a balance of the forces of nature and man. As one moves toward the wilderness pole from this midpoint, the human influence appears less frequently. In this part of the scale civilization exists as an outpost in the wilderness, as on a frontier. On the other side of the rural range, the degree to which man affects nature increases. Finally, close to the pole of civilization, the natural setting that the wild and rural conditions share gives way to the purely synthetic condition that exists in a metropolis. (my emphasis 6)

Like Marx and Williams, Nash regards rural space as the “shading or blending” of human and non-human forces; it is an outpost that exists as a pacified facsimile of “frontier” conditions while at the same time it harbours the material traces of human enterprise. I will examine parallels of pastoral and frontier space in more detail in chapter two. For now we might consider, in summary, that if at one time the concept of pastoral connoted scenes of wholesome natural virility, it has undergone in modern times a significant shift in semantics akin to Wordsworth’s presentation of “ordinary things... in an unusual way”—an aesthetic methodology based on misconception, misprision and intentional misreading. Pastoral in America, while at one time

pretending virginity, at some point began tacitly to accept the inevitability of the “corruption” of urbanity—the shading and blurring.

The invitation to intentionally misread “common produce” associated with the de-familiarizing practices of modernist discourse has other interesting connections to both modern and (neo)pastoral representations of “things.” Pieces like Duchamp’s *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915), which involved the hanging of a shovel on an otherwise bare gallery wall, and *Fountain*, a urinal turned upside-down and displayed on a pedestal, appear to encapsulate what scholars like Brown consecrate the great modernist dictum (*A Sense of Things* 124), W.C. Williams’s “No ideas / but in things” (“A Sort of Song” 9-10).³⁸ As Brown suggests, the idea that in the modern period “thoughts could be found in, and expressed by, things” is not some esoteric credo that materialized out of thin air. It is offshoot of “museal and local-colourist” “*objet sauvage*” initiatives that aggregated by the 1890s; therefore, object epistemologies of modernity are part of a historical trajectory, particularly if we consider that “the most domestic of American modernisms may have pursued a materialism adamantly expressed by the curatorial anthropologists of a preceding generation” (*A Sense of Things* 124-125).³⁹ Throughout his study Brown gestures toward the significance of those curatorial “things” being dislocated from cultural context and encountered within the landscape, particularly with his reference to Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House* (1925), a piece of historical fiction revolving around modernity’s curatorial perception of the remnants of native prehistory. Brown quotes one of the protagonists in the novel (the epithetically named Tom Outland, whose character is associated with the backlands he explores) to make his point: “there is something stirring about finding

³⁸ “A Sort of Song” was published in 1944. Though the poem appeared much later than Duchamp’s work, Williams’ famous dictum captures the phenomena-obsessed spirit of early modernism.

³⁹ Although Brown’s study locates this curatorial zietgiest within late nineteenth-century American literature and object-based anthropologies, my study backtracks even further to the settler and frontier encounters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as to the transnational picturesque movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

evidences of human labour and care in the soil of an empty country” (qtd. in Brown 129). Such sentiments attesting to the “stirring” or jarring effect of landscape infused with artifactual remnants have been documented repeatedly by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cultivators of the New World soil—Henry David Thoreau’s bean field exploits in *Walden* being a canonical example. Apart from such objects being de-contextualized by their imbrication with landscape, the encounter with artifactual refuse is always an appropriative act, a wresting out of context, by virtue of the spatial dynamic between spectator and thing.

I will return briefly to Duchamp’s work in order to draw another parallel between the defamiliarizing capacities of both natural landscape and gallery space that hearken back to Wordsworth’s interest in rural-situated common objects. Schwenger offers an account of how Duchamp’s “appropriative act” of removing everyday objects and tools from their typical function—met with much ambivalence and outright opposition—is a gesture that “restore[d] to the shovel⁴⁰ its status as a thing, rather than a[s] object” (54), and by doing so, fulfills “the ‘look-again’ function of art” (53). As Schwenger also remarks of the capacity for common things to achieve aesthetic value, sometimes “it is enough for an artist to appropriate an actual tool with no further modification than a change of name and the application of the institutional frame that declares the object to *be* art” (53). Similarly, when we consider emblems of modern poetry like Wallace Stevens’ “Anecdote of the Jar” we are presented with an analogous act of everyday appropriation (or appropriation of the everyday) that changes the institutional frame of reference by exchanging controlled gallery space for a wilderness setting. The speaker of the poem consciously “place[s]” a common object (the eponymous jar) in what the reader can surmise to be a natural environment or non-urban space (line 1). The function the jar had in everyday life is inconsequential; it has been (mis)appropriated, deracinated, exhumed⁴¹ from context. The jar is

⁴⁰ Schwenger is referring here to Duchamp’s *In Advance of the Broken Arm*.

⁴¹ I mean “exhumed” in the sense of the object being resuscitated from neglect or obscurity.

both static and active, noun and verb, a physical object, albeit common, that is (according to its verbal meaning) “out of harmony or at discord in character or effect”; “at variance”; indicative of “disunion,” that which “cause[s] the nerves or feelings to vibrate painfully, to send a shock through”—*jarring* (“jarring,” *OED Online*). Owing to the ubiquitous and humdrum nature of the object Stevens chooses, it might be argued that the jar is not necessarily a “jar” in the conventional nominative sense, but is a catch-all signifier for the interjection of common, human-oriented things into a wilderness setting. It is the placement of a thing meant to jar (the verb) rather than a jar itself (the noun). (But of course it is both verb and noun.) Ultimately the jar’s spatial dislocation is intended to jolt the spectator out of familiar modes of perception. In other words, the jar acquires the elevated spectatorship that it does because of its placement in a natural setting, because of the uncanny way in which the “slovenly wilderness” (3) rises up and “Surround[s]” a common (4)—and potentially mass-produced—object imbued with human artifice. The wilderness (indicative of a natural or frontier setting) approaches the space of the object; but rather than overtake the jar, it generates a scene where the juxtaposition of human artifice and wilderness renders both the jar and the wilderness uncanny to themselves, empties either of denotation: the natural setting is “no longer wild” in the presence of the object (6), and the jar itself, though “gray and bare” and common (10), takes “dominion everywhere” (9) on its wilderness-situated pedestal (“hill”). The jar mutates from what it is as a common object to what it might be as pervasive and ubiquitous thing, both empty yet with a shape that holds emptiness, active yet passive. In essence, both the setting and the jar become effaced and emptied of their common significations. One obliterates the meaning of the other.

Perhaps it was Stevens’ intent to use a jar as the paradigmatic common object rendered uncanny not only because of its ubiquity as a domestic object, or because of its static and active connotations, but also because of its symbol as a vessel which denotes a thing to be emptied and filled, cathected with the perceptions of the spectator. A jar as a vessel, as Heidegger would say,

is a thing that gives shape to emptiness,⁴² that encloses nothingness, and the binary components (object and space) reflect the other as a *mise en abyme* image; the setting—a wild, heretofore vacant landscape—reflects the emptiness of the thing it harbours. In Stevens’ poem both object and space reflect emptiness like mirrors at contrast, and so-called “empty” or natural landscape cultivates appropriate and spectatorially discordant encounters of the human-made perceived out of place. In much the same way, modern-period poems like Williams’ “Lines” or “Pastoral” are meant to complicate the divide between objects of human and natural design through the anomalous juxtaposition of “greygreen” “leaves” in conjunction with “glass broken, bright green” (“Lines” 1-2),⁴³ or “old chicken wire” and outhouses in relation to the “street” (“Pastoral” 10, 14, 5)—the encounter with pastoral motifs and symbols contrasted by the waste matter or ephemera of human-constructed and, at times, mass-produced objects. Again, as Schwenger suggests, works of art unifying such contrasts strive “to break the familiar patterns of perception” and (53), by breaking from those patterns, situate the object within an uncanny space where, with its practical application obliterated, its status as dislocated object invites a brand of surrealist archaeology associated with twentieth-century modern and postmodern aesthetic values.

Archaeology is a discipline that operates according to its own uncanny dynamics when assessing an abandoned or discarded object’s relationship to the landscape, and the juxtaposition of anthropogenic refuse with natural space offers a schematic that can be mapped onto the

⁴² Using the example of a jug, Heidegger in “The Thing” offers a rather protracted explication of a vessel’s status as that which holds emptiness waiting to be filled:

When we fill the jug, the pouring that fills it flows into the empty jug. The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel’s holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel. ... But if the holding is done by the jug’s void, then the potter who forms sides and bottom on his wheel does not, strictly speaking, make the jug. He only shapes the clay. No—he shapes the void. ... From start to finish the potter takes hold of the impalpable void as the container in the shape of a containing vessel. ... The vessel’s thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds.

And yet, is the jug really empty? (167)

⁴³ We might parallel the broken glass of “Lines” to Thoreau’s description of cultivating a bean field in *Walden*, where Native American artifacts “lay mingled with... bits of pottery and glass brought hither by the recent cultivators of the soil” (1891).

excavation of modern landfills as an archaeological practice. Because objects like Stevens' jar abandoned in the wilderness might remind one, as Patricia Merivale suggests, of "the aftermath of an untidy picnic" (527), I will now turn to an examination of waste's uncanny interaction with the landscape as it pertains to theories of waste-scavenging within the discipline of archeology.⁴⁴ Both waste and many archaeological sites share a unique connection to the landscape in that both are seemingly abandoned to the elements (if not intentionally buried) only to be rediscovered—willingly or unwillingly—at some point in the future where their removal from cultural circulation reclassifies them as artifacts. To re-invoke Cleas Oldenburg, a "refuse lot in the city is worth all the art stores in the world" (qtd. in "Thing Theory" 14); whether relics encountered in a wilderness setting as part of an archaeological excavation or the detritus of commodity culture abandoned and buried at the dump, the distinction between refuse and relic becomes increasingly contested the more we progress into a disposable manufacturing culture. More importantly for my study, this lack of distinction between refuse and artifact is one that takes place owing to the interjection of landscape into the equation. The placing (and burying) of our garbage in sites beyond city limits might be regarded as the largest archive project ever undertaken in human history, one that inters within the landscape the artifactual remains of our domestic body. The irony is that what we throw away will probably have more longevity, and

⁴⁴ In the section that follows I will be drawing upon several theorists connected to The Garbage Project initiated at the University of Arizona in 1973 as a way to analyze the transformation of discarded objects to artifacts. The artifactualization of abandoned objects and waste material is an important dimension of my project, not only because of how de-contextualization facilitates an uncanny conversion of object to artifact, but also because fragments of waste are brimming with the ontological traces of the people once attached to their design and use. *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage* by William Rathje and Cullen Murphy explains through an excavation of the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island in New York how "the garbage of the United States... is a mirror of American society." Yet while fragments of waste-become-artifact provide at least an effigy of a particularly society, Rathje and Cullen highlight that "the problem with the mirror garbage offers is that, when encountered in a garbage can, dump, or landfill," the image reflected "is a broken one." The same could be said of other types of artifacts turned up in an excavation. However, while "our civilization is reflected in billions of fragments that may reveal little in and of themselves," it is the archival compulsion of "Fitting some of the pieces back together" that bespeaks the importance of the discarded ephemera of the everyday as both a conundrum and an orienting device in the age of commodity (11). The manner in which these fragments of everyday domestic activity are perceived and interpreted, particularly as they interact with settings removed from urbanity, will provide a framework to assess the spectatorial engagement with the fragments of domestication in the modern period.

will infest the subsoil as evidence of our being-in-the-world long after the human race has fizzled out. The infusion of waste into the landscape is akin to the creation of the artifactual, turning refuse to relics projected into the scavenged middens of the future. Landfills are the sites of future archaeological inquiry.⁴⁵



Figure 1.6. Paul Jacobsen, *The Final Record of the Last Moment of History*, oil on canvas, 2008. Reprinted from *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*.⁴⁶ Included with permission by the artist.

⁴⁵ The semantic connection between waste-as-landscape and waste-as-discarded-object will be taken up in detail at the beginning of chapter two. Determining the symbiosis of these two ostensibly stark contrasts in meaning conflated within the word “waste” will help to elucidate the trajectory of how landscape makes human-made things artifactual at the moment spectatorship is afforded within a natural landscape setting.

⁴⁶ In this 2008 painting by American artist Paul Jacobsen (Figure 1.6), inert heaps of tech-waste ironically mirror and compete for stature with the tranquility of a green mountain landscape. Jacobsen, as per the title of his work, is presumably drawing a parallel between refuse and artifacts by elevating the heaps in the foreground to an archeological “record” of sorts—the “fashioning [of] an object-based historiography and anthropology” of tech culture, as Brown might put it (*A Sense of Things* 5). The last will and testament of humankind’s presence are the ruins it leaves behind, and in the case of disposable/manufacturing cultures, that ruin revolves around the products of our age of technological mass production. The isolation of tech-waste in a natural setting not only draws attention to its existence as anomalous artifact whose intent is to produce a “look-again” effect, but also to its status as aesthetic object rendered painterly through its uncanny oscillation between bearing the stamp of human design and being amalgamated into the natural landscape. The refuse heaps are at once separate from the landscape yet imbricated with the scene; the heaps’ juxtaposition with the mountain range induces confusion in the spectator regarding the

1.3 Refuse to Relic: The Artifactualization of Waste in Archaeology and Modern Aesthetics

In the 2008 film *Examined Life*, a documentary featuring cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek, a segment on contemporary waste ecologies begins with an arboreal riverfront shot of a picturesque park. The camera meanders from a panorama of the riverbank into the canopy of serene forestial greenery overhead, the sun casting benevolent rays through verdant branches, birds twittering tranquil and aloof. Then: accompanied by the grating twang of an electronic synthesizer, the image abruptly shifts to a shot of a cold, metallic, sterile warehouse ceiling. The camera pans downward to reveal what the warehouse contains: heaps upon heaps of the colourful, gaudy, intermingled remnants of conspicuous consumption, the domestic slough of an age of disposability. As the camera roves meticulously over the prospect of trash bags bloated and bursting at the seams with plastic bottles, discarded clothing, and other household waste-objects, Žižek interjects with a voiceover commentary. “This is where we should start feeling at home,” he says.⁴⁷

Perhaps “start” is a little belated. The defining boundary between “home” and refuse began to blur well before 2008. The contrasting shots of a manicured park setting interrupted by the refuse of manufacturing culture imply that human beings, especially those subsumed within postindustrial cultures, ingest so-called “natural” environments with a slice of nostalgia. The picturesque park circumfused with a metropolitan skyline represents something long misplaced, a facsimile of the garden state, the dream of a more authentic, primal home ingrained as an archetype from bygone earthier dwelling. It is the debris of our hyper-commodified age, like the

symbiosis of heaps of refuse and the majestic peaks in the background. At first sight of the contrasting phenomena, the eye is drawn to the focal point (the conspicuous and gaudy waste) that facilitates a jarring encounter. It might be posited that the heaps of refuse stand at direct denotative opposition to the mountains formed under natural processes; yet there is a satirical interplay of mountains and heaps that prompts the spectator to lose sight of, or to question, the semantic line between the surpluses of manufacturing culture and the landscape that surrounds it.

⁴⁷ The bibliographical information for the film is included in the works cited list, but a clip of the relevant portion of *Examined Life* can be viewed on *YouTube* at the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGCfiv1xtoU>.

abrupt twang of an electronic synthesizer (or perhaps a train whistle in the woods), that becomes the raucous interlocutor intruding on that idyllic fantasy of an untouched natural setting.⁴⁸ With the root of “commodity” connoting both “convenience” and a chamber pot (*OED*), being at home with our commodes means learning to live with our excretions. From a vantage point steeped in postmodern incredulities it is not difficult to make the case that we should reacquaint with the surpluses we try so ardently to conceal, and why the wastes of material culture should be a familiar topic—if not a discipline—deserving of academic attention. As the study of material cultures gains validity in the humanities, surely the study of its remainders and excesses has a place in the discussion. Moreover, in a time where the conventions of what satiates the aesthetic palate are often inverted (or at least destabilized), and in an era where irony, satire and cynicism provide the common schema by which new ideas are evaluated, why wouldn’t the interrogation of refuse be a topical subject? With the numerous books, articles, films, essays and artwork being produced over the past few decades on the aesthetic and cultural value of trash, it is at least not difficult to compile a list of resources by which to piece together a narrative articulating what appears to be a mounting obsession with the surpluses of the quotidian.

But is this seemingly modern turn to waste as an academic subject the culmination of an innate fascination with ruin, decay, and detritus that has persisted for hundreds, if not thousands, of years? As William Rathje and Cullen Murphy argue in *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage*, “the examination of refuse is, of course, as old as the human species—just watch anyone who happens upon an old campsite, or a neighbor scavenging at a dump for spare parts or furniture” (14). There is something both archival and historiographical about scavenging a dump for spare parts, of sifting through the remnants of the past to find useful material for the present.

⁴⁸ See *The Machine in the Garden* pages 13 – 15, where Marx references both Nathaniel Hawthorne’s and Thoreau’s documentation of the abrupt interjection of the machinery of the industrial age within a romanticized natural setting.

The study of history itself is an act of sifting through the offal left in the wake of wars, migrations and general decay—at least according to scholars in the field of archaeology like Michael Shanks, David Platt, and Rathje. In their co-authored 2004 article “The Perfume of Garbage: Modernity and the Archaeological,” Shanks *et al.* offer a wry and divisive analogy between refuse and artifacts by using the debris of the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks as an exemplar.⁴⁹ “There is something profoundly archaeological about the experience of 9/11 and its aftermath” begins the article.

Less than a month after the attack a meeting of representatives of thirty-three museums, headed by the Smithsonian and New York’s City Museum, considered how they might document the event, asking what things should be collected and preserved for display and for posterity. . . . A year later an exhibition opened at the Smithsonian. . . . “Bearing Witness to History” displays artifacts and associated stories, photographs and documents from the events of 9/11: a battered wallet, a melted computer screen from the Pentagon, torn clothing, a structural joint from the World Trade Center, a window washer’s squeegee handle, a stair-well sign, as well as *artifacts* associated with the aftermath (commemorative coins, artwork, patriotic ribbons, rescue equipment). (61)

In our modern culture of “archive fever”—as Jacques Derrida characterizes the interminable, neurotic compulsion to curate the minutiae of the everyday in his theoretical work of the same name—preserving the leftovers of the most horrific civilian-targeted attack on domestic U.S. territory is an explicable reaction to a traumatic event that demands to be revisited as an act of remembering and working through.⁵⁰ The idea that Shanks refers to newly created debris as “artifacts” is indicative of the pace with which modernity regards itself as historical. The elevation to “artifacts” of newly made rubble intermingled with quotidian objects might also reveal an inherent narcissism, or self-absorption, that modernity has with the present—i.e., with

⁴⁹ For an earlier (essentially pre-September 11) treatment of garbage’s potential as artifacts, see again *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage* by Rathje and Murphy (2001), which details the University of Arizona’s Garbage Project, initiated by Rathje in 1973.

⁵⁰ Derrida’s theories concerning archiving as they relate to waste and modernity will be taken up in greater detail in chapter four.

its own immediate image. As Shanks notes, the Smithsonian's archiving project "was explicitly one of documenting history in the making... one that ties [each artifact] to an individual or event that bears significance and pathos" (61). This overtly self-conscious, self-reflexive archiving of history in progress is at once an act of witnessing while it is an act of creation. Sifting through the rubble, archivists must carefully construct a narrative that reflects a larger societal self-portrait. They must meticulously scrutinize their own cultural imago, choose their omissions, appendages and catalogues, and decide what to put in and what to leave out.

At least three significant objects lessons emerge from "Bearing Witness to History." First, what are seemingly trivial, everyday things, when wrested out of context (say, when displaced to the ash-heaps of history) become the artifacts most able to represent the grander narrative of a particular time and place. The juxtaposition of all these material items dislocated from their human contexts (a battered wallet, a melted computer screen, a window washer's squeegee handle, a stair-well sign) amass an object-oriented collage of temporally situated human trace. My reference to *trace* leads to the second lesson. Material human-contrived objects are not, and never have been, merely objects. Even in their transformation from usefulness to dysfunction—at which point their overt utility has been exhausted, or their application has been disrupted—there is a residue, an imprint left by human investment. Objects, through their connection to human effort and cathected sentiment, always have a tinge of the archaeological and anthropological through correlations to human context. And yet "Here we approach the irony at the heart of the archaeological project. The twin towers site was designated a scene of crime and the debris was removed to the newly reopened landfill site on Staten Island to be carefully sifted for evidence, personal remains and effects, and memorabilia. So, choices having been made and the valuable retrieved, the debris has been consigned to the biggest garbage tip in the

world” (61). Revealed in this rather cynical estimation of artifactual residue is the third object lesson. The point of Shanks’s article is not merely to draw attention to the irony of modern archiving practices that privilege one form of debris over another. Rather explicitly, Shanks is making the case for why all forms of archaeology involving the reclassification of quotidian objects to artifacts is an act of rifling through the garbage heaps of history, and that all human-made (particularly commodity) objects, as Stallabrass puts it, are “deferred trash” (*Gargantua* 407). “Put aside choice of what to keep: this is the real stuff of archaeology and history—what gets thrown away—garbage” (Shanks 64).

To put it more bluntly:

99 percent or more of what most archaeologists dig up, record, and analyze in obsessive detail is what past peoples threw away as worthless—broken ceramics, broken or dulled stone tools, tool-making debitage, food-making debris, food waste, broken glass, rusted metal, on and on. These are society’s material dregs that even those most clever at salvage couldn’t figure a way to use or sell. But ask archaeologists what archaeology focuses on and they will mention “the past” and “artifacts” and “behavior” and “attitudes and beliefs,” but you will rarely, if ever, hear the words “garbage” or “refuse” or “trash” or “junk.” (65)

Such a premise asserting that all archaeological excavations, at least those concentrated on the debris of material cultures, are instances of rummaging through trash heaps can be criticized as an excessively reductionist estimation of what history represents, and might be relegated to the heaps it sardonically explicates. But is a visceral reaction to such a statement owing to the frame of reference, the use of the 9/11 towers as an example? Or rather, is there something disquieting about the idea that the speed with which artifacts become waste, and vice versa, suggests that commodity and architecture, all the expenditures and culminating efforts of modern society, are future ruin? The wounds might still be fresh in the case of 9/11, but because such sweeping categorizations atemporally reduce *all* potential archaeological finds—the remnants of wars, of genocides, of traumas—to material “dregs,” objections to Shanks’ claim are justifiable.

If such claims have any redeeming quality, Shanks' reference to the towers as his example of rubbish-become-artifact is, at the very least, discordant enough to spark a debate about the significance of ephemera and the ephemerality of objects of significance—a viewpoint iterated by icons of American culture like novelist Don DeLillo. In his 2007 book *Falling Man*, DeLillo offers a similar estimation of the towers through the voice of an art dealer named Martin, who regarded the Trade Center as future ruin:

But that's why you built the towers, isn't it? Weren't the towers built as fantasies of wealth and power that would one day become fantasies of destruction? You build a thing like that so you can see it come down. The provocation is obvious. (116)

The rubbish left by the collapse of the towers is tied to an identifiable trauma, a “crime”; and yet the artifactual—indeed, aesthetic—nature of that ruin becomes manifested in its museal value, its provocative nature as a fantasy of wealth and power destined to crumble, and its capacity to be de-contextualized by the dynamics of display. The aesthetics of display relate not only to the act of deracination, but also to the ruin itself which exists as a heap of discordant but intertextual images, and in its heapness it becomes a site of inquiry and aesthetic investigation. Again, the point of Shanks' article is that the ruins of the Trade Center have a conflated signification predicated on their existence as preordained waste; the towers represent the ephemeral nature of icons of power and the iconic nature of objects of transience. Intermingled in the waste of the towers are not only the concrete fragments of the obelisks they once were, but also the traces and pieces of the everyday life of the inhabitants within. In the end, the overtly ephemeral material has greater iconic value than the crumbled grandiose pieces of the outer structure; the ephemeral-equipmental objects that have become waste reveal the human traces, bespeak the human effort invested, better than the cold and sterile outer shell of concrete and steel.

Shanks' article, therefore, is not as its sole objective meant to be polemical (although it may elicit a vehement rebuke). It is meant to offer an example of how the quotidian is ingrained in material history, and how material history is irrevocably subsumed under the category of the disposable. Material history comprises an objective correlative of what has been abandoned, laid waste, discarded, buried and/or consumed by nature, and then rediscovered. In the case of the twin towers, it is trauma that makes the ephemeral valuable, and the artifactual nature of its debris might be characterized as an aesthetic of trauma (of something lost). Moreover, as Stallabrass suggests of the garbage heap, "When objects are seen together as trash, relationships of a more poetic and intrinsic interest emerge. The qualities of the thing itself begin to appear in sharp relief like pictures in a developing tray. We see them for the first time with clarity..." (416).⁵¹ Thus, perhaps the frame of reference might not revolve around the trauma attached, the wound that is, according to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, unsymbolizable in its representation, and that exists as emptiness at the heart of the thing.⁵² Rather, the frame of

⁵¹ Part of this quotation was cited above in section 1.1.

⁵² As Catherine Belsey explains in *Culture and the Real*, Lacan's notion of "the Thing" (das Ding) with respect to trauma theory—that which can only be "represented by emptiness, precisely because it cannot be represented by anything else" (*Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 129)—developed into his concept of "the real" (Belsey 47). Sean Homer in his book *Jacques Lacan* offers a delineation of the Lacanian real as a site of trauma that "resists symbolization absolutely" (qtd. in Homer 83), that which is missing or unaccountable (83), but which is nevertheless luridly present. In other words "the real," a lack or missing object (the *objet a* or "otherness," as Lacan terms it), is an abstract, nondescript "thing" that the subject strives towards without ever attaining, but which ultimately defines his/her subjectivity *through* that interminable reaching. Ultimately, the real is "trauma [that]... remains unsymbolizable and is a permanent dislocation at the very heart of the subject" (84). Although Lacan's interrelated concepts of the thing and the real were developed in relation to clinical practice, in Lacanian fashion the line between art and psychology is very much blurred, as artistic practice and trauma, according to Lacan, are symbiotic. Schwenger recounts how in expounding his notion of the thing, "Lacan returns to Heidegger's example of the jug, which he misreads, perhaps deliberately, as a vase" in order to invoke "hollowness" or emptiness rather than "pouring out" (31). Statements like "All art is characterized by a certain mode of organization around this emptiness" (Lacan 130) might be quantified pragmatically in that "the potter builds the object up around the hole" represented by a sort of grappling with thin air (Schwenger 31). In Lacan's view, narrative, poetic or artifactual meaning is extracted from a mélange of things emptied of signification or symbolic meaning, as the artist always begins with the intention of representing the thing they wish to create; however, the imperfect method through which these things are wrought leave something always wanting, something unfinished, a lack. The thing—along with the real—is an unstable paradigm owing to an object's incapacity to represent its intent, and it is "this instability [that] makes the work, and the object that is its subject, something unfamiliar, disturbing, uncanny" (33).

reference might interrogate the blurred binary between archive and rubbish heap. Questions to ask might be: What does the juxtaposition of a battered wallet, a melted computer screen, a structural joint, a window washer's squeegee handle, a stair-well sign and rescue equipment represent as a carnival of things removed from the directed viewing of a museum curator? What of the things consigned to the dump that didn't make the curatorial cut? On the one hand we have the gallery; on the other, we have the mass grave at Staten Island—a phantasmagoric intertext of objects, crumbled structures, and human remains. The intermingling of objects in heaps of ruin deracinated by their existence *as* ruin makes those objects become something less rational and more poetic, things where the creative faculty is implicated in deciphering their object-ness and artifactual being. It is through this mode of spectatorship, where the object is viewed as simultaneously emptied of yet brimming with signification, that “the whole process of manufacture and discarding becomes an accelerated archaeology” (416). This “accelerated archaeology”—the speed with which modernity regards itself as historical—might begin to explain how and why we are so ready to fetishize the everyday. In a culture of disposability, the speed with which modernity sees itself as historical parallels the speed with which it sees itself as waste. And thus, modern products are created with a sense of loss and nostalgia built into their ephemerality.

The irony of this nostalgia (and this might explain modernity's rather skeptical, cynical position when it comes to object relations) is that it denotes a home (*nostos*) to which none can return. The ability to revisit a home symbolically via the archive, yet to be obstructed from a proper return, is an interesting paradox when considering Žižek's statement that we ought to begin to feel at home with our garbage. As the refuse of domestication, garbage denotes a home, but a home discarded at the same time it is archived and given preservational burial. Certainly

one may return to the archived remnants of the past via a neurotic form of repetition compulsion, but home in the sense of waste is always a fantasy to which we are barred access—a lack. With the ruins of the past appearing as aestheticized, artifactual decay and fragmented rebuses of what once had utility, the modern gaze must always be looking awry at its objects. The modern gaze, when perusing the fragmented structures of the past, becomes imbued with a mock-nostalgia because of the intuited impracticality of returning to that past; it is a way of looking predicated on the impossibility of questioning the pragmatic qualities of what it sees while it relegates objects to the abstractions of thingness, poetic interest, and aesthetics. Indeed, ascribing to the unknowable past and to wasted objects of its passing aesthetic and poetic interest offers an artificial way of returning home through artifactual quantification. Nevertheless, commodity objects, or objects possessing use value, are intuited as ruins in progress, and if waste is synonymous with artifact and artifact synonymous with waste, then the ephemeral and the disposable are readymade artifacts.

* * *

1.4. The Aesthetics of Waste and Historical Connections to Green Space—Concluding Remarks

In order to sift through the history of what is ostensibly a literary and artistic investigation of American culture that has an archaeological bent to it (an interdisciplinary focus that will be justified throughout this study), I felt it appropriate to analyze a rather current application of waste aesthetics in context with a contentious and newly sacred iconographic site of American trauma. Deciphering how present-day American culture—one of the greatest

proliferators of waste and the disposable⁵³—processes the debris of its symbols of wealth and power offers an entry point into further discussions regarding the trajectory of those processes. With the former presence of obelisks of wealth being represented by traces of quotidian, common objects, the destruction of the towers stands as yet another example of how the material of the everyday has evolved in American consciousness to overshadow the overtly monumental structures laid waste. What is of particular significance about Shanks' article in connection to my study is his suggestion that the (post)modern artifactualization of waste—begrudgingly accepted by some in the field as the *raison d'être* of archaeology—has its roots in a time well before twentieth-century artists like Duchamp decided that positioning a urinal upside-down and signing it “R. Mutt” was an iconoclastic feat that would furrow the brows of cantankerous curators.⁵⁴ To bring the analysis back to the original questions with which I began the previous section: What is it about ruin that is so appealing to the probing (modern) gaze of the archaeologist and the museum curator? And: Is the modern epistemological turn from relics to refuse a product of the gradual acceptance of a fascination with ruin, decay and domestic detritus that has persisted for a significant portion of industrialized history (especially the portion that witnesses a turn toward high technological productivity and an increased manufacturing output)? Moreover: What does any of this have to do with the deracinating effect of waste in relation to natural space? Shanks argues that “modernity is unthinkable without its museal and archaeological component”—a statement with which Brown would agree—and “given the association of archaeology and garbage, this cultural imaginary is at the heart of the composition

⁵³ As journalist Heather Rogers writes in her book *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* (2005), “The United States is the world’s number one producer of garbage: it consume[s] 30 percent of the planet’s resources and produce[s] 30 percent of all its wastes.” This figure is indeed astonishing when considering that the U.S. represents only 4 percent of the total world population, as Rogers goes on to note (2).

⁵⁴ As Schwenger tells us, Duchamp submitted the notorious *Fountain* to the Society of Independent Artists’ Exhibition in New York in 1917, “whose policy was to accept any artist who paid the exhibition fee of six dollars. After a heated argument, *Fountain* was rejected and stuck behind a partition where it would not be seen” (54).

and decomposition of modernity and modernism” (64). In other words, modernity’s museal gaze evolved out of fascination with not only object-based epistemologies (that is, the archaeological, the artifactual), but also out of an obsession with the otherness of those objects, their (de)composition that renders them equipmentally useless—waste matter. Aside from Shanks’ equation of the (modern) archaeologist to the rag-picker, what is of additional interest is his reference made in passing to the origins of modern waste archaeology. Shanks says that we can trace the aesthetic metamorphosis of waste-to-artifact to the “beginnings of the romantic movement” and the eighteenth-century preoccupation with the deterioration of human habitation contrasted by the intervention of nature (the overgrowth of vegetation, for example):

The most striking imagery [of modern ruin and waste] is often the direct descendent of romantic images of ivy-clad classical ruins, of sketches and paintings of the silted-up Roman forum, of ruin and the picturesque in Turner and Friedrich. Even within these beginnings, there were examples of the contemporary city imagined as ruin... (74)

The relationship among the modern fascination with the disposable, the ephemeral and the picturesque has been identified by various authors who will be discussed in chapters three and four. But it is the picturesque’s origins, largely concerned with decaying human-made objects situated in, or encroaching on, rural and pastoral environments that provide the link between waste and modern object ontologies. Because the “picturesque” has its genesis in the appraisal of ruin and decay caught out of place in a natural, rural, or pastoral setting, it is necessary to examine how the rural and the urban picturesque evolved and intersected to facilitate the object-based epistemologies of the early twentieth century and beyond. Determining how interest in ruin and human-oriented detritus developed from jaunts in the countryside—where the remnants of human presence were more jarring, I might add, when set against a (quasi)natural backdrop—to the mythologizations of objects in modernity will help to demonstrate the influence that

domestic waste in natural space had on the artifactualization of everyday things in twentieth-century modernism.

Chapter 2: Waste Lands and Wilderness Frontiers: Interstices of Uncanny Space

2.1 Waste as Landscape – Waste as Refuse: An Introduction

In the following section I will continue my examination of how natural space works to artifactualize (through rendering uncanny) the abandoned, ruined, or refused objects of human contrivance. As a means to determine how, as Grosz puts it, nature represents a locus of malleable materiality—one that facilitates an aesthetic encounter with waste artifacts that might be traced back to American frontier psychology—I will consider how waste-lands and waste-objects share etymological heritage, and how, just like Stevens' jar, one renders the other uncanny through their conflicting yet symbiotic significations. This etymological symbiosis is important when examining waste matter's relationship to the landscape, as well as natural space's ability to make the ruins of human contrivance strange, alluring, and artifactual. An examination of the uncanny confluence of waste-as-landscape and waste-as-refuse will help to set the stage for an analysis of how the inherited frontier mythologies of American culture, as well as the object matter encountered within those frontiers, may have tempered the perception of object matter within twentieth-century object aesthetics.

John Scanlan's 2006 book *On Garbage* in its opening chapter prefaces its examination of waste cultures, aesthetics and epistemologies by delving into the history of "waste" as a concept in English—and what better way to substantiate waste's capacity to become aestheticized within landscape than to explore the etymology of waste *as* landscape? The concept of "waste," like Freud's *unheimlich* ("The Uncanny"), has undergone a significant lexical mutation whereby it has come to signify, if not its opposite meaning, at least a stark contrast in meaning. "Waste" possesses a conflated signification referring to both the refuse of human enterprise (something overtly human-influenced) and wilderness landscape (something purportedly devoid of, or

hostile to, human enterprise). As Scanlan points out, “The word ‘waste’ in Old and Middle English originally referred to a land or an environment that was unsuitable to sustain human habitation, but as the Middle English lexicon expanded to replace this older sense of the term with equivalents like ‘wilderness’ and ‘desert,’ new uses of waste emerged that began to indicate moral censure. But if we are to generalize, we can say that in both its premodern and modern usages the notion of waste generally refers to an imbalance” (22). This notion of “imbalance” as it pertains to landscape, human intervention, and the manner in which human beings perceive themselves in relation to wilderness is relevant for how modernity generates an object-oriented binary with the material of civilization (e.g., the urban) and the material of wilderness at odds with each other.⁵⁵ It is also important to consider that the original meaning of “waste,” a wilderness or environment inhospitable to humans, shifted denotation through metaphor and juxtaposition, that is, through analogizing the power or force that wilderness possesses to render the material of human effort useless, other to itself, waste material.

The imbalance emerging from the symbiosis of waste-as-wilderness and waste-as-refuse reveals a great deal about how this etymological conflation reflects humankind’s perception of

⁵⁵ The list of modern and postmodern American novels, stories, poems and plays that take up the dualism of a sentimentalized primitive existence contrasted by cosmopolitanism, some of which will be reviewed below, could go on *ad infinitum*. In my estimation, nowhere is the psychological imbalance between civilized/urban life versus primal/wilderness impulses better narrated (at least from the point of view of the modern period) than in Freud’s 1931 essay *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Although Freud is not an American theorist he is certainly caught up in the pervading zeitgeist of the modern period when it comes to urban/wilderness dualities. The disavowal of the materiality of urban life advocated by writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thoreau—for example, statements like “The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet” that romanticize the “wild virtue” of “aboriginal strength” (“Self-Reliance” 1175)—might bring to mind what Freud calls the “renunciation of instinct” upon which civilization is “built,” a renunciation of primitive impulses that generates “cultural frustration” in “the large field of social relationships between human beings” (742). Plays like Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story* are great (post)modern examples of cultural frustration based on renunciation of “primitive” instincts. The plot of *Zoo Story* revolves around all the petty neuroses one experiences in the conflict between, say, staking claim to something as mundane as a bench in Central Park (residue of a primal, bestial drive to mark territory that has been sublimated to the possession of objects), and the Thoreauvian desire to “simplify things” by renouncing such trivial materiality (33). In the play the character Jerry, self-described as a “*permanent transient*” (37)—a man caught in perpetual transition—provokes the more straight-laced, button-down Peter to engage in a knife fight over said bench (45-47). Peter *does* eventually stab Jerry and, although horrified by his actions, the final scene appears to be a celebration of Peter’s acceptance of his repressed animalistic instincts. “You’re not really a vegetable,” says the dying Jerry, “it’s all right, you’re an animal” (49).

itself in relation to the landscape. The earliest entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for “waste” (c. 1290), as Scanlan reveals, assigns the word to that which is “barren” or a “desert,” “Uncultivated and uninhabited or sparsely inhabited. ... Incapable of habitation or cultivation[.]” By 1300 the word carried connotations referring to abandoned sites of civilization, “former places of habitation or cultivation,” “buildings” perhaps laid waste, “Devastated, ruinous.” The verbal phrase “to lay waste” in relation to “land” and “buildings” (c. 1535)—literally to turn the landscape into a place inhospitable for humans, to make it a “former place of habitation” or something “ruinous”—is an idiomatic expression representing the power that both human beings and wilderness have to undermine human enterprise and make former habitation uncanny to itself as it might appear in a *wasteland* (that is, a land rendered useless or that exists in a state of uselessness for prospective dwelling, in which the material of human effort becomes abandoned to the elements). A definition circa 1439 goes even further in its disassociation from human utility by defining “waste” as that which is “Not applied to any purpose; not utilized for cultivation or building.” This blurring into purposelessness, or an inability to be put to use, is where the word begins to become its most nuanced, where “waste” begins to hover uncannily in the space between polarities of meaning. It retains its connection to landscape (“cultivation”) but becomes loose enough to be applied to the products of human design that have no purpose or application—in other words, useless for (human) contrivance or enterprise. Indeed, this is the precise point where the word as linguistic sign becomes infected by its contrasting signification, becomes emptied of meaning. It is the site where the uncanny semantic alteration occurs, moving from that which is altogether separated from human enterprise (a virgin wilderness, for example) to its modern denotation of being the refused and defunct material of human expenditure—“Of materials, incidental products... Eliminated or thrown aside as worthless after the completion of

a process... Of manufactured articles: Rejected as defective... produced in excess of what can be used" (*OED*).⁵⁶ Rather than consider that waste-*product* and waste-*land* are completely at odds owing to human versus non- or anti-human subtexts, waste-as-landscape is ultimately tied to notions of human trace through civilization's conspicuous presence (surpluses) *and* conspicuous absence, and is therefore never divorced as a term from connoting a type of human agency or lack thereof.

The point of this protracted exegesis is to emphasize that, although the meaning of "waste" is predicated on both an excessive presence and conspicuous absence of human activity, there is an undercurrent in the word that has waste-as-landscape—ironically (in terms of modern usage)—stand at direct opposition to human habitation or evidence of human trace. Perhaps this lexical counterforce, to borrow Leo Marx's language, is what makes waste-as-wilderness symbiotic with the notion of human refuse, of the human-made being wasted or degraded: human enterprise, subject to the ravages of nature when left to linger abandoned, becomes refused by nature itself. Because a wasteland is a place that is useless in relation to human enterprise, the shift in meaning to human-oriented objects rendered useless is logical. Without the maintenance or constant interjection of human activity, nature is always in a state of refusing evidence of human presence. Therefore both waste-as-landscape and waste-as-refuse stand as symbols of human mortality and futility, and the combination of the two inevitably presents a more poignant picture about human inefficacy and ephemerality in the face of nature.⁵⁷ The

⁵⁶ These definitions referring to the products of human design and manufacture span the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (approximately 1678 – 1890), the latter century being most representative of our modern definition, which directly signifies the excesses of a manufacturing culture. Interestingly, the shift in the meaning of "waste" marks the onset of a movement away from rural and natural settings and into a period of ever-bloating cities and urban industrialization.

⁵⁷ Speaking of the self-importance with which humanity regards itself within nature, Friedrich Nietzsche wryly sums up human transience in his 1873 essay "Of Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense:" "how insubstantial and transitory, how purposeless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature; there were eternities in which it did not exist; and when it has disappeared again, nothing will have happened" (874).

appearance of ruin or waste-products within a natural setting causes, as Heidegger says of the broken tool, “a distinctive disturbance which forces us to pause” (qtd. in Harman, *Tool-Being* 45). While having its lexical *natus* as an absence of human presence in a wilderness landscape, “waste” as noun, in its modern usage, more often than not refers to the traces of human material presence, the surfeit of human activity, particularly in relation to manufacture and commodity culture. What we can deduce from this uncanny evolution is that waste-as-landscape and waste as decayed, superfluous human objects share an anomalous origin that appears to be symbiotic, and whose conflation within the same term raises questions about how human beings regard themselves in relation to the traces of ruin and object matter perceived within natural environments. To put it curtly, waste-as-landscape and waste-as-human-refuse share a similar intuitive etymology because of the capacity of either to defamiliarize the other.⁵⁸

To be as unambiguous as I can, waste *is* the uncanny. It is the uncanny not just because of its dalliances into its opposite meaning, but also because of the “return of the repressed” both waste-as-landscape and waste-as-refuse represent. In order to know what waste is from either antipode, we must consider its opposite, and measure those opposites through the phenomenology of trace and absence of trace, as the familiar become unrecognizable or unfamiliar. My assertion that “waste” is the uncanny is in slight contrast to Scanlan’s claim that “garbage” is uncanny (see his chapter “Garbage and the Uncanny” in *On Garbage*). The main difference between Scanlan’s attribution of uncanniness to refuse and my attribution is that I am tracing the etymology of “waste” as it pertains to both natural environments *and* garbage, whereas Scanlan tends to focus on the uncanny qualities of “garbage” in urban spaces (i.e., sites

⁵⁸ Here we might refer back to my discussion of Stevens’ “Anecdote of the Jar” in which an object abandoned in the wilderness has the capacity to make that wilderness “no longer wild” while the juxtaposition empties the object itself (the jar) of denotation owing to the frame of reference.

removed from natural environments).⁵⁹ I argue that we cannot truly evaluate waste-as-refuse without considering refuse's relationship to nature, just as we cannot evaluate waste-as-wilderness without considering nature's relationship to humankind, the traces of humanity's failures and being-in-the-world. What this uncanny symbiosis of "waste" means is that imbuing subjectivity into the anthropogenic discards found within settings indicative of wilderness, so-called greenspace, or the randomness and contingency of natural environments is a psychological impulse. The appreciation of ruin in the landscape is a way for the subject to orient herself to the subtexts within that landscape by converting remainders to artifacts that can be subdued, interpreted, and categorized.

To return briefly to Scanlan's notion of waste and imbalance: the application of waste to that which is not "applied to any purpose" or "not utilized for cultivation" has implications beyond its connection to landscape that can be applied to modern object theory, particularly to Schwenger's and Brown's conceptions of "the thing" as that which has exhausted its practical purpose to appear as its effaced, phenomenological remainder. Among his many frames of reference for "garbage," Scanlan refers to "waste" as an imbalance caused by a "defect of effort," a lack of "equilibrium" that an object must circumvent in order to avoid "falling away into the pointless and futile" (22). Here we encounter overtones of wilderness-generated obsolescence within the word "waste," of tools and objects taken out of pragmatic functionality and rendered uncanny *things*. Although the metamorphosis of "dumb real objects" (Leonard 54) into phenomenological thinghood generates a new aesthetic way of perceiving, the achievement

⁵⁹ Moreover, "garbage" in its linguistic heritage is more directly tied to the excesses of human contrivance whereas "waste" possesses an uncanny conflation that refers to both wilderness and the surpluses of human activity. Although we differ in our focus, our investigation of waste material and the uncanny do overlap, particularly when Scanlan attributes a ghostly resonance to the surpluses of the domestic: "Garbage is civilization's double—or shadow—from which we flee in order to find space to live" (179). While I agree that waste, garbage, and trash stand as ghosts of domestic activity, ones that, owing to anthropogenic trace, have ontological import, I would argue that we are drawn to the ominous shadow as much as we wish to flee from it.

of this thingness takes place under pejorative circumstances, as an act of erosion, dysfunction or ineffectualness brought about through the same power that wilderness has to efface or erode human things, or through the same capacity that gallery space has to efface objects in the absence of curatorial context. This removal from context is where an everyday object blurs into its artifactual classification, becomes archaeological. Even in the archives of the everyday, things really only become artifactual when removed from context and placed on display, or in a gallery, or in a musty library vault—or when they become displays waiting to happen. Again as Scanlan points out, “the meaning of ‘waste’ carries force because of the way in which it symbolizes an idea of improper use,” and that improper use creates instability within the object that imbues it with vacancy, empties it of meaning through its revised (mis)use or de-contextualization.

Conceptualizations of waste-as-landscape and waste-as-refuse, when unified with this notion of “improper use,” become interesting in terms of their capacity to render the objects of human activity uncannily other. According to Scanlan,

There are two main aspects to any understanding of how meanings of waste operate, and have been related historically to an understanding of nature in general, and more narrowly to places and things. On the one hand notions of degradation point to the overuse of once valuable resources, where land for instance, becomes barren or depleted through overuse and where objects and places are exhausted of some capacity prior to being garbaged—that is, abandoned. On the other hand, there seems to be some idea of a kind of natural blankness of nature having no existence beyond its human uses—and this has historically informed an understanding of the significance of wasteland...” (23)

We can parallel Scanlan’s idea of wasteland as “a kind of natural blankness” to Grosz’s extrapolation of how natural space acts as a site of in-betweenness that possesses an uncanny dynamic, a “malleable materiality,” a “force” (or counterforce) obliterating the semiotic representation of an object. Waste-land and waste-object both suggest a blankness that has fallen outside of the useful, that is emptied of anthropic function. Suffice it to say that “waste” by its

lexical history, in both its reference to landscape and to the defunct surpluses of human effort, at its very core encapsulates a bifurcated signification that denotes an effacement of meaning, a blankness, a movement into the terrain of the uncanny that is predicated on the oppositional forces of humankind and the landscape. Etymologically, waste's movement from "unsuitable to sustain human life" to "wilderness" in general, of a "natural blankness" that either effaces human trace or makes human-made objects other to themselves, demonstrates the kind of power the human intellect invests in nature to make objects appear as noumenal things, as artifice rather than equipmental or practical—as aesthetic. Although refusing or garbaging is a critical act that suggests a censure or devaluation, waste is ultimately nostalgic, whether it takes the form of ruins devastated by the elements and taken back by the wilderness, or the manifestation of discarded objects of the everyday. Waste is nostalgic because it is the objective, artifactual evidence of humanity's dwelling—or, in the case of devastated habitation, the evidence of broken dreams, of mislaid intensions, of failed enterprise in the face of a chaotic and unpredictable external forces (nature). Through the process of making the familiar unfamiliar, as Freud puts it in "The Uncanny," a paradoxical value is derived by representing as symbolic the excesses of societal loss, the residue of which can be interpreted not unlike the nonsensical fragments of a dream. Waste is paradox: it is both an excess (abundance) and a loss—loss of value, loss of use. But where that uselessness becomes valuable is where it enters the realm of the aesthetic, the Kantian dictum of "purposiveness without a purpose" within a work of art (519), something that has use in its existence as artifact rather than equipment, as thing rather than object.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The quotation is taken from Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which contains one of his definitive treatises on taste in relation to objects of aesthetic and non-aesthetic value.

At this point it will be useful to revisit a concept that I introduced in chapter one: Buell's attribution of *mutatis mutandis* to New World "vacancy," the myth of pre- and post-contact American wilderness as "emptiness waiting to be filled" (*Environmental Imagination* 52). In order to investigate the dynamics of spectatorship with respect to object matter encountered in the American wilderness, as well as the capacity for wilderness spaces to function as sites of uncanny alteration, my focus in chapter two will be to examine this altering capacity of frontier wilderness in order to frame the vernacular evolution of interest in quotidian objects in modernist American culture. Just as Brown argues in *A Sense of Things* that "the most domestic of American modernisms may have pursued a materialism adamantly expressed by the curatorial anthropologists of a preceding generation" (124-125), my aim is to devise a theoretical structure through which to measure the residual effects of wilderness and frontier psychology on the aestheticization of common, quotidian, domestic objects in the modern period. Buell's characterization of frontier space as *mutatis mutandis* (that which is mutable, ever changing, predisposed to the ready-at-hand) is quite aesthetically charged, especially in its connotations of extemporaneity that turn the settler experience into a *bricolage*, a sort of groping about for implements to decipher a *tabula rasa* experience. As Fredrick Jackson Turner concludes in his 1893 essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," "to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics"—one of those characteristics being the ability "to find expedients," to appropriate the *ad hoc*, the ready-at-hand—"that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends" (75). We might consider that the frontier was a place where material goods and object relations took primacy in a space that afforded little certainty. Although Turner claims that the expedients created out of the impromptu use of material things were "lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends," we might

parallel such estimations of frontier material culture with those “manufactured” items of the modern period that are “raised to the dignity of works of art” while exhibiting “a lack of obvious aesthetic quality” (Iverson 45). The encounter with human-oriented object matter woven into the fabric of the frontier wilderness represents the mystery of human trace: abandoned, discarded or broken things lacking in the artistic but powerful in the enigmas they represent.

* * *

2.2 Uncanny Materiality and Origins of the Middle Ground in the American Frontier

Because my dissertation examines human-contrived object matter situated in natural environments and its influence on modern American culture, I will be considering the dynamics of frontier space as it pertains to the mythopoeic paradigms established in the Euro- and Anglo-American mind during periods of settlement in the New World wilderness. But again, words like “wilderness” provide slippery equipment with which to proceed. What is important to establish at the outset is that “wilderness” in the mind of the early American settler was synonymous with “waste” (in the topographical sense of the term, at least). As environmental theorist William Cronon explains in his essay “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” “Go back 250 years in American and European history, and you do not find nearly so many people wandering around remote corners of the planet looking for what today we would call ‘the wilderness experience.’” Rather than conjure Disneyesque visions of benevolence and harmony, the word carried biblical connotations of “moral confusion” and marginalization; indeed, “To be a wilderness then was to be ‘deserted,’ ‘savage,’ ‘desolate,’ ‘barren’—in short, a ‘waste,’ the word’s nearest synonym” (70). It is this ideological connection between “waste” and “wilderness”—essentially, how wilderness converts objects to uncanny *things* that become

aesthetic, imbued with lore, or artifactual—that will be a pervading theme within this chapter. The overall aim of this chapter, however, is to explore the mythopoeic aspects of “frontierism” in relation to Marx’s “middle ground” theory, and to establish a framework through which the development and persistence of these middle spaces influenced the perception of object matter into the twentieth century and beyond. The influence of wilderness frontier psychology on the development of American culture, lore, and mythology cannot be understated and should be recognized as ongoing in the present.⁶¹ Although Slotkin argues that “looking back on... the failure of the ideological consensus that reached its fullest expression in the New Frontier [of the twentieth century], it may be time for a post-mortem assessment of the Frontier *Myth* in American history” (*Gunfighter* 627), the frontier, if truly reduced to a shadow of its former self, is nevertheless Lernaean in its doggedness as a formative American myth.⁶²

⁶¹ I will discuss below a few examples of frontier influence in contemporary popular culture as it relates to the uncanniness of American wilderness environments, and how icons, symbols, and objects representing Anglo-American values become effaced by a wilderness haunted by mysterious artifacts. Essays like “The Persistence of the ‘Frontier Thesis’ in America: Gender, Myth, and Self-Destruction” (1992), “Frederick Jackson Turner’s Frontier Thesis and the Self-Consciousness of America” (1993), and “Longing for Wonderland: Nostalgia for Nature in Post-Frontier America” (2004)—not to mention Richard Slotkin’s two influential books on the pervasiveness of frontier mythoi in the age of industrialization and beyond, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (1985), and *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992)—can serve as exemplars for how frontier concerns have not only persisted in their paradigmatic form, but also have transposed themselves onto other concerns regarding national expansion, wilderness preservation, selfhood, identity, alterity, and so on. In fact, essays like Susan Zieger’s “Pioneers of Inner Space: Drug Autobiography and Manifest Destiny” (2007) extend the frontier metaphor to the drug narratives of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American conquests of the subconscious, the interior continent of the self. Instead of confronting the dark inscrutabilities of the external wilderness, indulgers of hash, opium, and other hallucinogens psychically brave the “‘boundless’ space that engage[s] all the tropes of the frontier experience... [p]rojecting the deep subjectivity of inner space onto the seemingly vast, unpopulated continent” (1532).

⁶² In many ways the United States is still popularly regarded—and regards itself—as a frontier nation, although those frontiers have, on the benevolent side, expanded to the extraterrestrial frontiers of space and, on the malicious side, transformed from Cold War sabre rattling to the “stabilization” of oil-rich nations around the globe (see chapter 15, “Conquering New Frontiers: Myth, Ideology, and Violence on the New Frontier, 1960-70 in *Gunfighter Nation*). Throughout *Gunfighter Nation*, Slotkin repeatedly references late twentieth-century American military conflicts, and how counterinsurgency was analogized to popular (and flippant) versions of frontier conflicts between European settler and aboriginal populations. For example, during the Vietnam war (c. 1959 – 1975), Slotkin reports that American military intelligence would describe “Vietnam as ‘Indian country’ and search-and-destroy missions as a game of ‘Cowboys and Indians’” (3). These modern, international frontiers represent wilderness owing to resistance from local populations and *not* because of traditional notions of self-reliance and “new” discovery. Yet the rhetoric of quelling hostile Native populations (a characteristic of early American frontier expansion) still rears its monstrous head.

American cultural history can be represented by two pervasive motifs: the fantasy of a pastoral Eden and the expedient encounters with wilderness frontier. It has been widely acknowledged that the pastoral motif, sold to would-be settlers, was a manufactured myth that had a corrupting influence on occupants who had to reconcile the rhetoric of the Edenic idyll with the reality of the forbidding and hostile wilderness against which they were pitted.⁶³ In light of the pervasiveness of myths that ultimately characterized America as a liminal zone caught between fantasy and discordant reality, my analysis aims to identify a unifying theory that connects American wilderness motifs to the object epistemologies of twentieth-century poetics. I believe this unifying theory to be located in the waste-become-artifacts encountered in rhetorical pastoral landscapes and wilderness frontiers, and that evidence of this ubiquitous trope—although the focus of my study specifically shifts to the poetry of the *modern* period—is ongoing

Although I am shifting focus to the object matter of the frontier as opposed to the human conflict that is ingrained in ideologies of subduing the land, the opposition between aboriginal populations and Euro-American settlers informs my reading of frontier dynamics. I am making a point to state this because, in spite of the scholarship that has revisited the myth of the frontier as a democratizing event (see O'Brien *et al.* 309), all too often the very conspicuous presence of America's first inhabitants is glossed over in favour of a liberating portrayal of frontier conquest. Writing in 1995, environmental scholar Richard White considers that since the 1970s "academic historians have produced a respectable body of work on humans and the environment in North America that concentrates on how Indian peoples shaped the natural world they lived in. But, by and large, this literature either has not penetrated popular treatments of nature or has been dismissed. The first white man always enters an untouched paradise" (175). White would be encouraged to see that, fifteen or so years later, pop culture textbooks that explicate frontierism and wilderness as a concept in American mythology consider how "the displacement of traditional ways of [aboriginal] life is awkwardly repressed in the construction of a sentimental image of the 'noble savage'" in relation to frontier wilderness (O'Brien 310). My argument also aims to peer behind the veil of sentimentality to disinter the repressed artifacts of frontier conquest; however, my approach defers to a psychological and phenomenological reading of the artifactual remainder of frontier cultural development, a history that is very much influenced by the mythologies spun around the confluence of Native and settler object matter. I must make it clear, however, that this chapter does not aim directly to elucidate, contribute to, or position itself within the field of Native American Studies, but rather offers a reading of the vernacular evolution of object relations through the tensions of frontier development.

⁶³ See below Kolodny's discussion of the "garden" myth. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx also deconstructs the ideological paradox of how "America was *both* Eden and a howling desert" (43). "Life in the garden is relaxed, quiet, and sweet, like the life of Virgil's Tityrus, but survival in a howling desert demands action, the unceasing manipulation and mastery of the forces of nature..." (43). While continental America is at the same time regarded as a land of plenty, some early settler accounts, like those of William Bradford (who will be discussed below), "saw deprivation and suffering in American nature." As Marx goes on to explain, these contrasting views of American wilderness are not merely "ecological images," but also "poetic idea[s]" that imbue the landscape, and the phenomena within, with contrary significations.

in the present owing to the endurance of frontier, pastoral, and wilderness motifs in American culture.

As mentioned in chapter one, I realize that the United States is not altogether unique in its frontier heritage. Speaking as a Canadian scholar of American culture, I can't help but call to mind the similarities between Canada and the United States when extricating wilderness and frontier tropes.⁶⁴ While it has been posited that European-descended Canadians are more associated with a "garrison mentality," where populations, alienated both by conflicting cultures and a harsh wilderness, hunkered down and huddled against the American border,⁶⁵ Canada in its juxtaposition between the behemoth of the United States and the vast hinterland of the North has become, in more recent years, the outer edge of a wave that pushes northward in search of resources for an increasingly energy-hungry global economy. There are, of course, many significant differences regarding the frontier experiences of Canada and the U.S., one of these notable differences being the declared "closing" of the American frontier in the 1890s, which, having been relegated to history, allows for a post-mortem assessment of sorts. The struggle against a wilderness frontier is not unique to American culture, yet the spatio-phenomenological correlations do contain idiosyncratic elements unique to the United States that have influenced

⁶⁴ Canadian cultural and literary theorist Northrop Frye, in his "Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada," offers a comparative analysis of "the position of the frontier in the Canadian imagination" in relation to American frontier influence. "In the United States one could choose to move out to the frontier or to retreat from it back to the seaboard," Frye argues. "In the Canadas," on the other hand, "the frontier was all around one, a part and a condition of one's whole imaginative being. The frontier was what separated the Canadian, physically or mentally, from Great Britain, from the United States, and even more important, from other Canadian communities. Such a frontier was the immediate datum of [the settler's] imagination, the thing that had to be dealt with first" (excerpted from *The Bush Garden* 222-223).

⁶⁵ In the above-mentioned essay included in *The Bush Garden*, Frye presents his theory of the garrison mentality, a psychological remnant of the Canadian frontier which, according to him, has impressed itself upon a great deal of Canadian culture. I am including this citation merely as an extrapolation of the term: "Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological 'frontier,' separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting—such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality" (227).

its vernacular aesthetics. Therefore, it is essential to determine how the uncanny dynamics of frontier space have influenced the perception of artifactual relations in a uniquely American way that links the waste materials of industrial culture as a brand of (neo)pastoral and (neo)picturesque ruin to the fragmented aesthetics of modernity.

Frontier space represents a dualism of opposites competing between wilderness and civilization, the domestic and undomesticated, the home and the not-home. The best way to begin an examination of the frontier as the not- or un-home is with a rather lengthy quotation from Rod Giblett's *People and Places of Nature and Culture* (2011). In a subsection called "Wilderness is Not Home," Giblett contemplates the ideological and corporeal oppositions of wilderness space in a way that complements the malleable materiality proposed by Grosz:

Just as mute wilderness was antithetical to the cultural semiosphere, it was also antithetical to home, to the private [domestic] sphere. In European societies and their settler Diasporas wilderness... is 'the antithesis of home,' it is 'places where space failed to congregate into picturesque forms, where nature failed to speak.' Wilderness was the place where nature was inchoate and inarticulate, like the wild children of the wild men found in it. Wilderness was the place where nature was not composed into the picturesque. It was the place where nature was either transcended into the sublime, or decomposed into the slimy or swampy. ... Either way, wilderness was antithetical to the picturesque, to the pleasing prospects of the gentleman's estate park, to landscape and to the aesthetics of the beautiful and the picturesque. In its swampy downside it was unaesthetic, or anti-aesthetic, or even anaesthetic. Wilderness was both the antithesis of the home and the picturesque. *It was the unhomey, or in Freud's terms, the uncanny* (my emphasis, 105-106).

Because of the oppositional binary Giblett constructs whereby wilderness exists as the negation of the home, we can immediately draw a parallel between the terms "wilderness" and "wasteland," particularly when we consider that, in being the "unhome," wilderness is defined by future domestication or lack thereof. Although Giblett contends that wilderness is antithetical to the conventions and "pleasing prospects" of manicured, picturesque versions of nature, we must not forget that wilderness as an ideological concept is just as contrived as the estate park—or it

has, at the very least, become increasingly so in American culture. As Cronon points out, “Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, [wilderness] is quite profoundly a human creation...” (69). Indeed, the “irony” of American environmentalist activities is “that in the process wilderness came to reflect the very civilization its devotees sought to escape. Ever since the nineteenth century, celebrating wilderness has been an activity mainly for well-to-do city folks. Country people generally know far too much about working the land to regard *unworked* land as their ideal. In contrast, elite urban tourists... projected their leisure-time frontier fantasies onto the American landscape and so created wilderness in their own image” (78-79). Wilderness seems preordained, then, to blur into its opposite, or at least to be defined against the domestic, or domesticating activities. As a product of ideology, “wilderness” is a self-effacing paradox denoting the “nonhuman” while it is contrived by the human mind. Moreover, couched in Giblett’s reference to wilderness as “anaesthetic” is again the rhetoric of blankness and effacement, but one that pertains to the senses with which I do not wholly agree, as it suggests that the wilderness is responsible for dulling sensory stimuli rather than nullifying the denotation of object matter. I wish to adapt Giblett’s “ana-” prefix to connote not necessarily a blunted perception of wilderness proper, but rather the middle space approaching the un- and the anti-, the neutralizing zone between the domestic and the wilderness—the space of the picturesque and the pastoral where human encroachment is more evident.

To be certain, Giblett’s assertion that wilderness is a failure to congregate into the orderly forms of the picturesque positions the picturesque as a middle ground between wasteland and aggregates of civilized space.⁶⁶ Of more immediate importance, however, is the binary Giblett

⁶⁶ This symbiotic bifurcation of wilderness and the picturesque will be addressed in chapters three and four, where the picturesque as a middle-space paradigm will be delineated in relation to the pastoral and the neopastoral. As

sets up between the domestic and undomesticated in relation to wilderness space, which offers an entrance point into the dynamics of the American frontier as a site of uncanny alteration that both absorbed yet rejected the objects and subjects within its influence. “Wilderness, on the one hand,” Giblett continues, “like landscape, involves a disjunction between subject and object; wilderness, on the other hand, like the sublime, involves a conjunction between subject and object. Wilderness operates in the interstices of this paradox” (107). The operative word here is “interstices,” denoting “a space that intervenes between things” or “a gap or break in something generally continuous” (*Merriam-Webster’s*). The space between harbours paradoxical mechanics based on negation, defining the things, the excesses, the human-contrived objects encountered in wilderness by “what they are not” (Giblett 107). This same negation provides the structure for the uncanny encounter with what becomes malleable material in a space perpetually in transition, but which nonetheless operates symbiotically as a confluence of objects and negations, “a conjunction between subject and object.” The conclusion that can be reached is that within wilderness space—particularly the expedient, ready-at-hand character of the American frontier—misuse or misperception of object matter persisted as a psychological predisposition. “The frontier, whether it is the frontier of settlement, or the mining frontier, or the pastoral (cattle or sheep) frontier, defined civilisation and wilderness against each other” (108), and it is within this oppositional binary that modern American culture formulated the underpinnings of its relationship with the refuse of the everyday.

* * *

evidenced by his claim that “wilderness was antithetical to the picturesque,” Giblett’s treatment of picturesque theory appears to be quite reductionist, as it does not take into account what has been called the “ironic” mingling of wilderness and ruin (waste and waste) that registers symbiotically rather than oppositionally.

2.3 The Frontier and Middle Ground in Dialogue with Material Cultures

The formative mythos of the American settler mentality is one that owes its development to an uncanny encounter with absence—an absence made all the more poignant by the lingering presence of former habitation and abandoned objects hauntingly embedded in the fabric of the landscape, generating what might be considered, from a retroactively modern estimation, the conditions for a surreal experience.⁶⁷ De Villo Sloan in *The Crimsoned Hills of Onondaga: Romantic Antiquarians and the Euro-American Invention of Native American Prehistory* sets the scene. In a chapter entitled “Literary Archaeology and the Literature of Archaeology” he considers how Americans of European origin first encountered wilderness frontiers like those in present-day Elbridge, New York as “vast uninhabited tract[s] of land” (133). Such descriptions of the “empty” or “uninhabited” nature of the colonial American landscape are endemic in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century advertisements and romanticized depictions of the virginal wilderness.⁶⁸ Although the myth that North America was an unoccupied wasteland has been debunked (see Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*), it is partly owing to the aftermath of European contact that an orientation based on abandoned, discarded objects and forsaken earthworks (the original American ghost towns) becomes a salient feature of the settler experience. Such objects constitute a sub-terrestrial material unconscious that lies dangerously

⁶⁷ Nowadays the word “surreal” is applied rather carelessly to describe, in general, something irrational, fantastical, of a dream-like quality. With the term roughly three hundred years removed to the future from the time of the first permanent European settlements, it is not being suggested that settlers were happening upon something analogous to the famous Surrealist dictum—that “chance encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella” (qtd. in Highmore 46)—but rather were exposed to a jarring acquaintance with object matter that might elicit, if nothing else, an unhomely (*unheimlich*) response.

⁶⁸ Articles like William M. Denevan’s “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492” (1992) are among the counter-historical investigations that have challenged the idea that “frontier” America was virginal (that is, previously unpossessed). Drawing on Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Denevan considers how “The pristine view is to a large extent an invention of nineteenth-century romanticist and primitivist writers such as W.H. Hudson, Cooper, Thoreau, Longfellow, and Parkman, and painters such as Catlin and Church,” a mythological construction that “has since become part of the American heritage, associated ‘with a heroic pioneer past in need of preservation’” (369). Other relevant scholarship on the topic of pre-contact America are Thomas R. Vale’s book chapter “The Pre-European Landscape of the United States: Pristine or Humanized?” in *Fire, Native Peoples, and the Natural Landscape* (2002), and Charles C. Mann’s *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (2005).

close to the surface, a voice that progressively fades in from the background like an entity or “foreign body”—as Sigmund Freud characterizes repressed psychological trauma (*Studies on Hysteria* 57)—that invades as a symptom to infuse that absence with an enigmatic disquiet. “Upon closer examination,” Sloan goes on to explain, settlers “recognized signs of former human occupation... overgrown by forest. As the land was cleared and tilled, abundant artifacts were discovered at these sites, including ceramics, flint tools, objects of polished stone, and other curious items that defied explanation based on settlers’ understanding of Native American culture. Naturally, they speculated about the origin of these antiquities, and their stories became part of regional lore” (133). The settler experience, then, is one that is in part predicated on wilderness *and* human-constructed objects juxtaposed, an acquaintance with human-made things taken back by the wild, “overgrown by forest,” a sort of *mise-en-scène* that is untranslatable in the moment of encounter, the lacunae of which begin to formulate regional mythologies that speculate on what haunts that encounter.

These haphazard acquaintances with the object matter of a fragmented and ruined past—the produce of human habitation caught in the process of decay and obsolescence, engulfed by a wilderness which, to the European mind, ought to be subdued and repelled—register as subcategories within a larger formative mythology, one that has been adopted (for better or for worse) as a quintessential ingredient of American cultural development. I am referring to what Richard Slotkin in *Regeneration through Violence* calls America’s “adherence to the ‘myth of the frontier’” (5). Defined by Slotkin as “the conception of America as a wide-open land of unlimited opportunity for the strong, ambitious, self-reliant individual,” we can trace in such language the rhetoric of that vacuous “uninhabited tract of land,” a sort of blank space or no-man’s-land—a virginal colonial canvas, perhaps—that has become a pervasive allegory representing the colonial American landscape. The conditions stipulated by such a mythology

founded on vacuity suggest that the material of the colonial frontier is uncannily present yet lacking prescriptive meaning. The settler experience is an encounter with not only the rawness of regression into primitive, chaotic, or yet-to-be-classified conditions, but also with the ordering of raw material and unclassified object matter into something coherent and comprehensible to the European mind. It is an exercise in somatic/psychical mapping not unlike Freud's arrangement of dream-content into rational categories that generate a unified narrative out of enigmatic and fragmentary things, psychical objects that leave somatic, topographical traces as artifacts to be unearthed and interpreted.

Examining the psychological component of the settler encounter with wilderness-situated, fragmented object matter is essential for deconstructing the lore imbued within frontier artifacts, a mythopoetic mode of perception that operates as a scene of aesthetic engagement rather than as a logical quantification of historical reality. To develop this understanding we can turn to Freud both as a psychoanalyst who had a significant interest in archaeology and object relations,⁶⁹ and also as a Janus-faced theorist identified with the modern period but who was obsessed with historical causalities. In his 1905 *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (metonymically known as "Dora"), Freud analogizes the task of the psychoanalyst to that of the "conscientious archaeologist" who must "bring to the light of day after their long burial the priceless yet mutilated relics of antiquity" (7). Freud's statement on how these relics are "mutilated" attests to the violence done by the process of discovery and interpretation, as such relics or artifacts are always fragmentary, are fragmented further by their removal and de-contextualization, and more often than not must be recovered by force (via "catharsis," purgation

⁶⁹ Freud's interest in objects and artifacts not only as sites of cathected memory, but also as historical curiosities, is well-documented. Freud's study was famously decorated with artifacts, sculptures and trinkets from Egyptian, Chinese, and Greek culture (among others). See *Sigmund Freud: His Life in Pictures and Words*, pages 310-312, to view photographs of the artifact collections he preserved in his study.

or “abreaction” facilitated by the analyst, that conscientious archaeologist). In unearthing these psychological artifacts, it is somatic topography that points to evidence of their buried existence; like artifacts overgrown by forest, those relics, representing a physical thing that is at once a wound and a gap in memory (see *Dora* pages 10-11 on lacunae or psychological “gaps”), are brought to the light of day, drawn out of their hiding places to be deconstructed—indeed, mutilated. The analogy I am making here is that the undetermined and chaotic nature of the American colonial landscape functions figuratively to the settler mind as a disordered psychological frontier that needs to be cleared and classified, not unlike Freud’s language of psychological clearance, that is, of “the clearing-up of a particular symptom [that] emerges piecemeal” through persistent rummaging, disturbance, or “conscientious” exploration (6). In other words, the landscape acts simultaneously as a physical *and* psychological space in which artifacts are lost objects (*objet a*, to use Jacques Lacan’s term) that have been registered somatically. They represent a lingering trauma that is ultimately a gap in the settler mind, and around which lore and mythologies are built in order to fill in the gaps. A comprehensible narrative is woven around what is missing in order to piece together the fragments of mutilated and sometimes indecipherable relics.

Freud’s delineation in *The Interpretation of Dreams* of “dream-content” and “dream-thought”—both of which are “presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages” (381)—offers a further analogy for the gaps that exist in the encounter with anomalous artifacts and their delineation or classification. Using a rebus as an example, Freud explains how dream-content “is expressed as it were in a pictograph script, the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts.” In other words, what appears to be nonsensical pictorial content—“a house with a boat on its roof, a single letter of the alphabet, the figure of a running man whose head has been conjured away”—

must be “disentangle[d]” into latent thought, from “pictorial value” into “symbolic relation” (381-382). What is interesting about Freud’s theory is that when confronted with linguistic ambiguity it is the imaginative faculty that produces meaning; somewhere in the undetermined space between the dream-content and dream-thought, between the literal and the “nonsensical,” between the image as it concretely *is* and the nuances it posits, is generated “a poetical phrase of the greatest beauty and significance” that somehow deciphers latent meaning (382). Just as Freud’s dream interpretation draws to a significant degree on creative faculties in order to syntactically arrange images into yet another language (poetry), so too might we regard the “lore” of settler accounts as an interpretive measure of this kind, as a language that attempts to make sense out of an encounter that can be determined only through the symbolic relations of objects situated out of narrative context. Here we return to Brown’s “aesthetics of engagement” concerning the object relations leading into the modern period. In the same way that the artifactual relations of modernism operated according to a “poetics of detachment” rather than by prescriptive archaeological delineations (Brown, *A Sense of Things* 126), the lore generated around artifacts of the frontier operated on a more poetic rather than prescriptive level, a poetry predicated on the hermeneutic relationship between subject and object.

One need only refer to a handful of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s tales, sketches and stories—“Young Goodman Brown” or *The Scarlet Letter* would be the most conspicuous examples—to corroborate how the American wilderness and the “the dark, inscrutable forest” are imagined by Hawthorne as operating in the colonial mind according to the dynamics of a dreamscape (*The Scarlet Letter* 60). Indeed, the wastelands of New England are refuge for “fiends and night-hags” (111), symbols for otherness that convert Christian iconography to something inexplicable to the European mind. Central is the capacity of this dream-like (even nightmarish) quality of the colonial wilderness to make the material of the frontier experience other to itself, to empty it of

signification until it develops, as Freud says of the uncanny, “in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite” (“The Uncanny” 226). In other words, what is important in terms of frontier dynamics is not necessarily how the material encounters of the frontier become eerily “opposite” owing to their enigmatic presence in those dark, inscrutable forests. Rather it is how the very concept of frontier space is synonymous with the middle ground of Freud’s definition of *unheimlich* (literally “unhomely”), a space where denotation begins to blur into its opposite, and where objects become emptied of meaning. Just as the word *heimlich* possesses a meaning “which is identical with its opposite, ‘*unheimlich*’” (224), and thereby generates non-meaning between the denotations—embodying, to some degree, the ambivalence it always gestures toward—a “frontier” ideologically represents a border which demarcates difference (as in the boundary of a marked region or country). A “frontier” is an uncanny middle ground that represents neither one polarity nor the other; it signifies no particular thing about one denotation or its contrasting meaning, but rather exists in-between that which is “opposite” (*OED Online*). According to modern definitions of the term, and like Freud’s extrapolation of *unheimlich*, a “frontier” has come to represent “a line of division between different or opposed things” (*Merriam-Webster’s*), the unsymbolizable at the heart of difference, a space of blurred signification that can only connote where difference begins and ends. Here again we can trace the etymology of “frontier” from its wilderness connotations to its existence as a sort of natural blankness (Scanlan 23), a space representing “the in-between” “in which things are undone” (Grosz 93).

The other more traditional way to approach frontier semantics in terms of its American context is through its cultural etymology. As Turner phrases it in his *fin-de-siècle* essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” the frontier in its closing came to be regarded as “the outer edge of the wave... [and] meeting point between savagery and civilization,” the liminal boundary between the “primitive conditions” fostered by wilderness and that of settled

society (59)—two ostensibly opposing concepts that warp the meaning of one another at the “meeting point” where they clash. If we are to continue the comparison of “frontier” dynamics to Freud’s delineation of the uncanny—how a “frontier” ideologically represents a middle ground that adopts an uncanny non-meaning caught between denotations—“frontier” literally signifies a liminal space between civilization and perceived un-civilization, home and un-home (*heimlich/unheimlich*). Yet it is important to note that the mythology surrounding the encounter focuses to a greater degree on the dynamics of what is un-civil or not-home, and how the un-civil has the capacity to warp and distort “what is known of old and long familiar” (that is, what is of the home, the domestic) (220). However, one of Slotkin’s problems with this pervasive trope that sets wilderness against civilization, home against un-home, amounts from how such “myths reach out of the past to cripple, incapacitate, or strike down the living” (5). Situating frontierism as a representative continuum for the collective American psyche casts both the past and present into rigid molds by failing to consider the United States as a union of regions and fractured identities, one that is itself weaved together, perhaps somewhat arbitrarily like the symbols of Freud’s manifest dream content, to form a comprehensible and convincing narrative. Because frontierism focuses on clashes between civilized and “primitive” topographies, such rigid adherence, according to Slotkin, “has blinded us to the consequences of the industrial and urban revolutions” (5). With frontier myth predicated on what is ostensibly the non-urban and non-industrial, significant gaps emerge in our understanding of American-ness by neglecting the symbiotic relationship between urbanity and wilderness and the spaces in-between, spaces occupying a middle ground on the fringes of both urbanity and wilderness. Slotkin’s objection to how the pervasiveness of frontier mythology has blinded us to America’s urban influences seems to entrench us further in this middle ground caught between wilderness and the city.

Of course, to speak of a “middle ground” in American cultural theory is to conjure that persistent trope generated by the oppositional forces of urbanity and wilderness, one that has its

own set of mythologies and criteria for engaging the object matter of industry within the fabled “pristine” landscape. This is precisely the point of Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*: to interrogate the binaries of rural dwelling and urbanity, to extricate how the pastoral ideal “has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery” (3), and to reconcile the alleged paradox that has been manufactured in relation to the pristine (virginal) character of American cultural development and its existence as a not-so-virginal, feminized and conciliatory harlot sullied by the material of industry and urbanity.⁷⁰ Roughly a decade after Marx’s text appeared, Annette Kolodny in *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975) would offer an explicit deconstruction of what Marx only alluded to in passing. Analyzing how “Eden, Paradise, the Golden Age, and the idyllic Garden, in short, all the backdrops for European literary pastoral, were subsumed in the image of an America promising material ease without labor or hardship,” Kolodny proposes that much of American culture has been formed around a “single dominating metaphor: regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape” (6). The implications that this metaphor has for the formation of American myth is that “Colonization brought with it an inevitable paradox: the success of settlement depended on the ability to master the land, transforming the virgin territories into something else—a farm, a village, a road, a canal, a railway, a mine, a factory, a city, and finally, an urban nation” (7). In other words, wilderness in the settler mind is conceived from the outset as a space for future domestication. It embodies the incongruity between the rhetoric of Edenic virginity and the eroticized intrusion of cultivation and civilization, the progression (and blurring) from farm, to village, to railway, to city and so on. So while the attraction to pastoralism “is the felicity represented by an image of natural landscape, a terrain either unspoiled or, if cultivated, rural”

⁷⁰ Part of Marx’s objective in *The Machine in the Garden* is to analyze how intrusions of the technology of industry and civilization into a pristine wilderness “invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to landscape” (29).

(Marx, *Machine* 9), “the pastoral ideal is the embodiment of... ‘semi-primitivism’; it is located in a *middle ground* somewhere ‘between,’ yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature” (my italics 23).⁷¹ The significance of all this language of “primitivism,” “primal warmth,” “vice,” “virginity,” figurative invasion—indeed, “raping and deflowering” (Kolodny 7)—of the American landscape is the pervasive paradox at the centre of these oppositions: the middle ground generated out of the engagement, that which has been allegorized by both Kolodny and Marx as something liminal, violently (pro)creative, and complicated by the activities of domestication and urbanization.⁷²

What is also significant about this paradox is how the material of the American frontier is caught up in a framework that both effaces yet attempts to classify the material that is essential to what Kolodny calls “the uniquely American ‘pastoral impulse’” that emerges from “accounts of the earliest explorers [and] onward” (8). As Kolodny explains, “such an impulse must at some very basic level stem from desires and tensions that arise when patterns from within the human mind confront an external reality of physical phenomena” (8). Yet those physical phenomena, the object matter of the frontier encounter, is something that, at least to Kolodny, continues to be evasive in its classification: like the lacunae that exists between object and interpretation, manifest dream content and latent thought, “the precise psychological and linguistic processes by which the mind imposes order or even meaning onto the phenomena—these have yet to be understood” (8). Hence the paradox—or, as Marx puts it, the “powerful metaphor of contradiction” (i.e., “counterforce” [*Machine* 4])—that exists between civilization and

⁷¹ This notion of pastoral America being the embodiment of perpetual semi-primitivism, of its existence as a “middle ground” that transcends—effaces through conflation—both civilization and nature might bring to mind the pejorative characterization of frontiersmen in eighteenth-century texts like Hector St. John de Crevecoeur’s *Letters From An American Farmer* (1782), which demonizes those who sit on the figurative fence between civilization and wilderness, “those who are half cultivators and half hunters,” who “contract the vices of both” while being neither one nor the other (665).

⁷² This notion of procreative—albeit violent—reproduction might remind us of Marx’s explication of the word “nature” as that which denotes a birth (*natus*), the new. The violence perpetrated by the archiving and reclassification of objects, particularly in relation to (neo)pastoral artifacts, will be taken up specifically in chapter four.

wilderness as conflated within pastoral or frontier ideology where civilization and wilderness meet. Extrapolating the “trope of the interrupted idyll” in American culture, Marx explains that “[w]hether represented by the plight of a dispossessed herdsman or by the sound of a locomotive in the woods, this feature of the [pastoral] design brings a world which is more ‘real’ into juxtaposition with an idyllic vision” (25). That “real” world in modern times, according to Marx, is the reality of encroaching technology:

the term *counterforce* is applicable to a good deal of modern American writing. The anti-pastoral forces at work in our literature seem indeed to become increasingly violent as we approach our own time. For it is industrialization, represented by images of machine technology, that provides the counterforce in the American archetype of the pastoral design. (26)

While Marx prefixes these forces of industrial encroachment as “anti-” and “counter-” and “violent,” it is worth noting that he does not suggest industry is altogether obliterating the pastoral. What Marx appears to be arguing is that the anomalous juxtaposition of the “real” (technology) with the “idyllic vision”—“the sound of a locomotive in the woods”—fosters a negational dynamic that elicits a jarring or shocking experience predicated on opposition between authenticity and idealization, reality and fantasy, a poetics dislodged from archaeological validity. Such a force, where objects imbued with human agency become other to themselves as they are encountered within the transitional space between civilization and wilderness, is the very composition of pastoral or rural design. Indeed, rural space in many ways is an ostensible remnant, offshoot, or mollified facsimile of frontier idiosyncrasies.

* * *

Before moving into a more direct examination of the lore created around artifacts of the frontier, I would like to take the next few pages to reiterate and rationalize my choice of methodology. Although Kolodny argues that the psychological and linguistic phenomena of the

American frontier experience “have yet to be understood,” Marx’s delineation of the middle ground and the counterforce generated within offers an important lens through which to analyze this evasive aspect of American cultural development. First, the Marxian middle ground presents a more flexible framework by which to engage the objects of both wilderness and urban-industry as they have been archived in literature: rather than having these objects exist as contrasting elements, Marx’s theory is founded on the confluence of the two, as the space of opposition between civilization and nature (the rural) transcends the rigid binaries established by the “opposing forces” or conflicting polarities. As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, there is much hullabaloo about terms like “wilderness” and “nature,” particularly regarding whether or not they include human agency and development within their semantic scope. While some theorists, such as Cronon, acknowledge the human agency imbued within the fabrication of wilderness as a *human* concept, other scholars, such as Giblett, see wilderness as the antithesis of human agency, and might ostensibly like to keep the term unsullied by anthropomorphisms. My analysis tends to fall somewhere in-between, aligned, as it is, with the “middle ground” approach. The confrontation with frontier space does not merely represent a push against raw wilderness, but also the gradual blurring of industrial and wilderness milieus into the pastoral, the creation of an uncanny buffer zone where an established denotation (for example, “wilderness”) begins to blur into its perceived opposite (e.g., “industry,” “urbanity” or the human-made). This blurring is incremented, in the case of the American frontier, by encounters with the object matter of former human presence witnessed as an intertext of artifacts and natural space.⁷³ To be clear about my approach to “nature” and “wilderness,” these terms are neither wholly human-contrived nor fully removed from human concerns.

⁷³ It can be argued that such “middle ground” theories not only offer a way to contextualize the American canon by interjecting between the binary tropes of civilization and wilderness, but also offer yet another approach to the literature through the object matter of “wilderness” and “civilization” as they have been conflated into uncanny

This is where Brown's object theory becomes indispensable to analyze, via a phenomenological schematic, the middle ground (or divide) between the prevailing urban versus wilderness tropes under which the development of much of American culture appears to be subsumed.⁷⁴ While mythologies surrounding frontierism and pastoralism are predisposed to invest much of their focus on a monomaniacal view of wilderness and "garden" spaces, an "objective correlative" approach to the materiality of American culture offers, to a greater degree, a disinterested entry point to cultural theory that can operate not unlike a middle ground, a space of inquiry not necessarily corrupted by, and consigned to, rigid archetypes—although those archetypes still hold value in how they interact with the object matter in question. Brown's *A Sense of Things* operates according to an artifactual methodology for what he calls "an understanding of the phenomenal object world through which human subjects circulate" (18), what ultimately amounts to a reinvention of T.S. Eliot's "objective correlative" from his 1920 essay "Hamlet and His Problems."⁷⁵ The imperative of Brown's study, at its most distilled, is to analyze how "objects mediate relations between subjects, and how subjects... mediate the relations between objects"—how "things and thingness" are "used to think about the self" or the subjects textualized. We might even consider the objectness of things that are not real-world, material phenomena (e.g., the virtual objects within a novel, or the narratives spun around

partnerships. As Brown argues, material cultures represented in literature mediate the relationship between subject and object both within the text and extra-textually (*A Sense of Things* 18).

⁷⁴ Marx even goes as far as saying that the "strong urge to believe in the rural myth along with an awareness of industrialization as counterforce to the myth" "has served again and again to order [American] literary experience"—at least since 1844, he specifies (229).

⁷⁵ Perhaps one of the more well-known theories attesting to the object-focused aesthetics of modernism derives from Eliot's "Hamlet and his Problems," wherein Eliot outlines his "objective correlative." Eliot writes, "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative;' in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" (85-86). In other words, the emotive qualities of an aesthetic experience are determined by a set of object relations rather than by the expressed views of the writer/artist/narrator of a given work. Whether or not a literary piece's emotional and aesthetic character might be determined by the objects that stock a scene is debatable, as the semiotic meaning of objects varies from spectator to spectator. What is significant about Eliot's claim, however, is the marked turn in twentieth-century aesthetic theory toward the capacity for objects to represent, and influence, the ontology of the characters as well as the spectator.

artifacts that become a part of cultural myth) in order to piece together a larger narrative about artifacts as the externalization of cultural memory. “Along with the subject matter of any novel,” Brown explains, “is its ‘object matter’” (18), and those virtual objects, transmitted from the materiality of the text, function as artifacts. In other words, one might excavate a text to measure the subjectivity (or ontology) of the text-as-object in terms of its artifactual relations. At first consideration this excavation method might seem like an overly prosaic, formulaic, or even sterile way to approach the products of American cultural history. Yet it offers a way to analyze not only subject/object relations as they are textualized, but also the consumption practices of literary texts that have become objects of knowledge—artifacts—in and of themselves. In fact, myth-making is tied to a type of object-based hermeneutics in what Slotkin calls the “myth artifact,” “the actual tale or some sacred image or object connected with the myth-narrative... [which] symbolically embodies the mythopoeic perception and makes it concrete and communicable” (8). Because the “mythopoeic mode” considers object matter, images, and even lore-based tales as “artifacts,” weighing the relations of the object matter of American mythologies against the myth-tales themselves seems obligatory. In fact, one could not properly analyze myth in all its dimensions without considering the artifacts and objects that aid the myth in its cultural circulation.

If we are to trace the evolution of American cultural identity through the object matter of a middle ground between urbanity and wilderness, it is necessary to begin at the beginning with those anomalous artifacts encountered during the expansion of the frontier. This is where I will return to what I am arguing was an encounter with object matter both uncanny and surreal that worked as the formative psychology for American cultural development, and that operated according to a similar poetics of detachment identified by Brown as the *genius loci* of modern period object relations. The idea that settlers knowingly treaded upon the debris of former habitation—and that this encounter with former habitation played a significant role in the lore

and mythologies that characterized the settler experience—makes Henry James’s infamous proclamation that America has no ruins corresponding to the “high civilization” of European life all the more interesting in terms of how “ruins” are evaluated and assessed for their artifactual significance (qtd. in MacArthur 1). As Marit J. MacArthur argues in *The American Landscape in the Poetry of Frost, Bishop, and Ashbery: The House Abandoned*, “James’s complaint about the American landscape may have been fairly accurate once, though only if we accept the oversight of Native American ruins...” (5), an oversight that has left an irritating gap (wound) in the formative mythos of Euro-American self-identification.⁷⁶

The enigmatic encounter with the debris of Native American dwelling and habitation presents a conundrum for Slotkin that is grounded in the anomalous nature of that debris. For example, one of Slotkin’s “critical problems” with “frontier psychology” is counter-assimilation. In other words, the essential question for Slotkin is “whether our national experience has ‘Americanized’ or ‘Indianized’ us, or whether we are simply an idiosyncratic offshoot of English civilization” (6). That essential question is only answerable through assessing the artifacts encountered, as well as the secondary artifacts created *from* the encounter: the lore, fables, and narratives that make these formative mythologies “concrete and communicable” (8). On the whole, in defining themselves against their new surroundings, colonists

found an *objective correlative* in the racial, religious, and cultural opposition of the American Indians and colonial Christians... [attesting to] the emotional difficulties attendant on the colonists’ attempt to adjust to life in the wilderness. (my italics 15)

⁷⁶ In the next section, I will turn to Sloan’s examination of the intentional misreading of Native American artifacts by a Eurocentric culture that wished to mythologize itself in relation to the American wilderness. Sloan argues that the distinction between lore and more disciplined historical investigations was fuzzy at best: “Satisfying and fuelling public curiosity about relics and earthworks provided opportunities for the full spectrum of writers—ranging from earnest seekers of truth who wrote papers for scholarly societies and their journals to hacks whose methods included plagiarism, gross distortion, and the fabrication of far-fetched tales. In the antiquarian realm, the finished product is much the same...” (4).

Early settler accounts like those of William Bradford in *Of Plymouth Plantation* are among the canonical colonial texts that evince this “objective correlative” predicated on racial, religious and cultural opposition. In their attempt to find shelter or “habitation,” Bradford’s party of nomadic Puritans stumbles upon a food store and burial mound—“a good quantity of clear ground where the Indians had formerly set corn, and some of their graves” (170)—which they proceed to pillage (or excavate). The haphazard wandering into burial mounds and sites of former dwelling, which appear to inspire awe in even the mundane appearance of diversely coloured corn (“having never seen any such before” [170]), is a recurrent theme that haunts the colonial encounter. Such useful debris becomes the objects by which the settlers orient themselves. The excavation of what appear to be abandoned human-oriented things in the wilderness, the juxtaposition of sustenance, graves, and forsaken habitation, creates an uncanny mélange that warps the character of Puritan religious dogma. In fact, Bradford’s depiction of the wilderness is one where the more modern European-made equipment of civilization disintegrates in the clash with wilderness: the fecundity of “thickets... ready to tear their clothes and armor in pieces” literally strips the settlers of the objects and implements of European identity (170). Scattered about the New World is an intertext of implements and useless tools left behind.

To answer Slotkin’s question, there is no doubt that adjusting to life in the American wilderness tempered the American character according to the demands of that new existence. The encounter with this wilderness paradoxically Edenic yet wild would have “Indianized” settlers by virtue of the phenomena encompassing them. As Marx argues, “all the significant American ideas of nature are hybrids, conceived in Europe and inflected by New World experience” (“The Idea of Nature in America” 10). “Hybridity” is the loaded word here. But when we speak of hybridity we should not merely focus on the adoption of psychological traits

that turned the “devout,” Puritan settlers into Crevcourian hybrids,⁷⁷ reducing them, out of necessity, to foragers and scavengers unbefitting of proper European manners. We must also consider hybridity in terms of the object relations of the Euro-American settler and the wilderness-situated artifacts outside of their comprehension. These mysterious objects, both superimposed in nature but outside of it, represent things to be repurposed in the image of the European mind.

* * *

2.4 Uncanny Objects, Hallucinatory Narratives: Hybridizing Frontier Artifacts

The anxiety of whether the national colonial experience “Americanized” or “Indianized”—that is, whether colonists acquired “an Indian-like vision of the New World, an Indian-American mythology” (Slotkin 6)—can be traced from some of the earliest settler narratives to present-day mass-market fiction. Because “Indianize” is Slotkin’s terminology, I will continue to use it. A less politically charged word might be “hybridize,” but hybridity does not accurately represent the specific Native American influence in this case. Nevertheless, myths emerging from the anxiety of cultural hybridity, particularly as they concern the Native American influence of the early frontier, demonstrate how the object matter of the colonial experience is predisposed to be warped by the interloping spectator. To make subjective rather than objective claims about an object’s identity, and to misclassify that object for aesthetic rather than pragmatic or archival purposes, is part and parcel of frontier dynamics. It is how this pervasive mode of misperception has facilitated the misclassification of phenomena into the

⁷⁷ Crèvecoeur’s notion that the New World provides a space where “individuals of all races are melted into a new race of man” (660)—adapted to the famous “melting pot” analogy—is significant in relation to Bradford’s Janus-faced tension regarding who is to blame for the corrupting hybridity of the colonial wilderness, as it positions the frontiersman, the new colonial American, as a sort of *tabula rasa* or blank slate.

twentieth century that provides a schematic for the repurposing of waste and abandoned objects in modern American poetry.

Jump ahead to present-day and one will find that pop literature and culture will affirm not only the “Indianization” of American consciousness, but also an uneasiness emerging from the object matter of what Sloan calls haunted space. Referring to Gesa Mackenthun’s essay “Haunted Real Estate: The Occlusion of Colonial Dispossession and Signatures of Survival in U.S. Horror Fiction,” Sloan considers how “A haunted America built upon Indian burial grounds is a pervasive image,” one that substantiates “guilt and unresolved concerns” that reflect “the Euro-American fear of reverse assimilation... that the land would gain possession of them and that they would take on the traits of Indians...” (24). Films like Tobe Hooper’s *Poltergeist* (1982), in which a white middle-class family struggles against an invasion of otherworldly visitors because of having built their blasé suburban enclave on a former burial ground, might remind one of seventeenth-century Indian captivity narratives such as *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (published 1682 by the titular Rowlandson).⁷⁸ The association made in the film between the netherworld and the mystery that the wilderness once inspired in the settler psyche presents yet another frontier to be engaged, one that validates the fears that the puritanical mind had all along about wandering into the woods and being corrupted by its enigmas. (Indeed, the entire film is premised on the “restoration” or return of a button-nosed, blonde Caucasian girl who has been tempted into this other world by ghoulish fiends.) Such “modern” fears are offshoots of colonial anxiety showcased in early Americana, stories like Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” that hyperbolize the doubleness of “high dames” and “wives of honored husbands,” the scores of “church-members... famous for

⁷⁸ Throughout her essay, Mackenthun makes the connection between the *Poltergeist* films and the colonial anxieties documented by Indian captivity narratives—colonists’ fears of being captured, of being removed from European influence, and of adopting Native American customs.

their sanctity” mingled with “Indian priests” and the “howling of wild beasts” in a “benighted” and “unconverted wilderness” (283-285). In *Poltergeist*, the young protagonist’s failing, like Goodman Brown’s, is to wonder about what lurks in that strange “other” world, to venture in any capacity into a space beyond her suburban—or in the case of Brown, his Puritan—stronghold.

To continue with the pop-horror theme, novels and short stories like Stephen King’s *Pet Sematary*⁷⁹ and “Children of the Corn” (both of which were adapted to film) present yet another uncanny synthesis of European and Amerindian object matter that has become a mainstay of American pop culture. As Mackenthun explains, “King’s novel *Pet Sematary* (1983) brings together the classic site of the uncanny, the haunted house, and the American cultural symbol of the Indian graveyard,” a piece of haunted landscape which literally facilitates a return of the repressed colonial encounter, as those who are buried at the site come back as wild cannibalistic zombies, a reference to “the Micmac cannibal spirit Wendigo” (101). “Children of the Corn” revolves around a plot where adolescents in small-town Nebraska become corrupted by an otherworldly force and, consequently, instead of engaging in the wholesome leisure activities expected of white, Christian, suburbanized American children, they instead pass the time by making blood sacrifices to a god of the harvest, one associated with maize or “Indian corn.”⁸⁰ An altered representation of Jesus hanging in a defiled Baptist church offers the best example of this Indian-Christian intertext, where “a gigantic portrait” “grinning” and “vulpine,” with “green hair

⁷⁹ “Cemetery” is intentionally misspelled by King.

⁸⁰ Stories revolving around the plot of blood sacrifice for harvest, which allude to the frontier-wilderness corruption of rural American culture, ironize the benevolent portrayals of agrarian society championed by figures like Thomas Jefferson in his canonical *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Although tales of sacrifice for harvest are not unique to the United States, such motifs depicting the degradation of Christian religious values through transplantation to the American wilderness enjoy a lineage that begins as far back as Bradford, and that can be traced through to the twentieth century with stories like Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery” (1948). Jackson’s tale, for example, features a small American town where presumably European-descended inhabitants draw straws to determine who will be sacrificed for the corn harvest (as Old Man Warner aphorizes, “Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon” [230]). A 2008 episode of *South Park* called “Britney’s New Look” parodies Jackson’s “The Lottery” and themes within King’s “Children of the Corn,” demonstrating how such myths have survived as a part of contemporary American mythology.

which on closer examination revealed itself to be a twining mass of early-summer corn,” creates an uncanny depiction of “a pagan Christ that might slaughter his sheep for sacrifice instead of leading them” (265-266). The capacity for “green” to become a symbol for otherness—for that which signifies the “instead” within the semantic, spectatorial relationship—is quite revealing in the pejorative connotations “green” (and by association, “environmentalism”) can carry in American culture.⁸¹ Green, when affiliated with raw nature, connotes both pastoral purity and wilderness corruption. Stories like King’s that represent an anxiety concerning the fusion of Native American and Christian iconography—an anxiety that culminates in the superimposition of green onto the most sacred icon of Christian self-certainty—are a symptom of the uncanny object relations that haunt the subsoil of the settler narrative, and that warp the archaeological material and object correlations of European tradition.

Although this admixture of New/Old World myth-artifacts might admittedly take place under different conditions than, say, encountering Stevens’ jar in the wilderness of Tennessee, the distorted syntheses of opposing object matter, as perceived in natural or wilderness locations, further substantiate the myth of the American frontier wilderness as that which represents malleable materiality, the random and contingent (Grosz). To be clear: the so-called “Indianization” of artifacts is a symptom of the power that the American wilderness has to distort the material under its influence, and has less to do with the systematic attribution of all that is wild and unpure to America’s first peoples. The wilderness is the substrate that transforms both

⁸¹ Richard White in his aforementioned 1995 essay “‘Are You an Environmentalist, or Do You Work for a Living?’: Work and Nature” interrogates what, in our post-2008 recession crisis, has become ever more exacerbated: the division between industries working within nature, and those who believe nature and humanity should be entirely separate entities. Although White calls himself an “environmentalist” (173), he takes a middle-of-the-road approach to the conflict between greenspace and labour, arguing that “Environmentalists must come to terms with work [in nature] because its effects are so widespread and because work itself offers both a fundamental way of knowing nature and perhaps our deepest connection with the natural world” (174). Regardless of this proposed balance, the rhetoric denigrating those associated to “green,” ecological movements through the specious argument that they are anti-labour or anti-economy can still be quite virulent.

people and objects—this includes European settlers *and* Native Americans—into something not easily reconcilable within European systems of archival classification. Sloan references the work of nineteenth-century American historian Joshua Clark, who wrote extensively about the abandoned mounds, villages and earthworks of colonial New England, to describe how “[i]n the blackened earth beneath the pastoral beauty of the forests and fields... [is] reveal[ed] a wasteland of prehistoric debris” (126) that works to obfuscate the materiality by which the colonial experience is interpreted. In light of the above delineation of “waste” (see section 2.1) as that which erodes and spectralizes the material of human enterprise, it is only fitting that Sloan refers to the prehistoric debris buried beneath an otherwise serene, pastoral setting as a “wasteland.” It is literally a terrain harbouring, and preserving, cultural detritus. This is precisely where the pastoral, in spite of its manicured, Edenic surfaces, reveals its subtextual alterity through its capacity both to create waste and to render it artifactual. Describing an earthen enclosure epithetically named “Indian Hill,” Clark writes that when settlers first migrated to Pompey, New York, from 1791-1793, the cultivated ground turned up “gun barrels, sword blades, hatchets, knives, axes, clay pipes, copper kettles, brass chains, beads of glass, pewter plates, rings for the fingers, ear and nose jewels, lead balls, iron gate hangings, copper coins, tools for working wood and iron, and other articles used by civilized men and unknown to savages” (qtd. in Sloan 128). The uncanny mingling of European and Native American (prehistoric) objects—the archaeological remnants of war, conquest, and colonial failures—and “The rapid-fire juxtaposition of pastoral images with myriad, strange artifacts,” Sloan explains, “adds a surreal element to the descriptions” (128). Particularly surreal in the modern sense of the word is the collage of what would be considered everyday objects familiar to their respective cultures: abandoned and wasted articles of human habitation and civilization subdued by the wilderness

yet preserved in a haunting exhibition, “pastoral images” juxtaposed by the ruins of human enterprise.

To theorists like Highmore, Surrealist-oriented collage or strange juxtapositions of the everyday represent not just works of art. They also act as “documents” of “social research into everyday life” with respect to ethnography or cultural studies (46). The same could be argued of the reverse: the palimpsests of collaged objects embedded in wilderness terrain are mislaid documents that, when regarded holistically, become works of art that are perceived through a scene of aesthetic engagement. Here the everyday is rendered strange (defamiliarized) by natural processes, and art, no matter how fantastical, imitates life. In Surrealism, argues Highmore, the everyday is “*already strange*” because “it is collage-like” (46); it is the act of witnessing that lends credence to the extraordinary nature of everyday objects, and, as I argue (and I think Highmore would as well), context is everything. These collaged objects are indeed social documents, but ones that do not function, at least at a popular level, according to traditions of archival designation. Clark describes a gun barrel abandoned and discovered “leaning against a tree,” a haunting and arresting image of what might be considered an everyday frontier implement forsaken yet positioned as though it were ready-at-hand. Though the object appears to have been momentarily mislaid, “as the result of growth” and the progression of time, “two-thirds of it was embedded in the tree” (132). The interjection of man into environment, and environment into the remnant technology, tools, and objects stamped with human artifice or agency, indeed offers an uncanny and surreal tableau of how each interfere in the world of the other (see figure 2.1), and how such objects, although equipmentally beyond use value, take on new denotations through their removal from typical application. Everyday objects are ultimately imbued with this capacity to arrest as they straddle the nexus between ephemera and artifact. As

Highmore proposes, “The everyday offers itself up as a problem, a contradiction, a paradox: both ordinary and extraordinary, self-evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic” (16). The paradoxical relationship between what might be considered the everyday, the familiar, the commonplace and its environment is one that is fraught with ambivalence, particularly in the case of natural space, a terrain that epitomizes blankness, and the blurring of the human-contrived into both natural and unnatural forms.⁸²

The idea that aboriginal artifacts would be subsumed, according to Shanks’ estimation of archaeology (as outlined in chapter one), under the category of “waste” is a politically charged proposal. Yet the reality is that the criteria specifying *when* the remnants of wars and abandoned habitation become artifactual are arbitrarily prescribed within the discipline itself. Citing an archaeological venture undertaken by the University of Arizona in 1973 called the “Garbage Project,” intended to be the “collecting, sorting through, and recording [of] household refuse as it was put out onto the curb” (65), Shanks recounts how the project was rejected as faux-archaeological because

... the Project’s garbage wasn’t old enough to be worthy of archaeological analysis. When pressed, these critics would cite the “fifty-year rule”—mandates

⁸² Figure 2.1. Image removed for copyright purposes. Giuseppe Penone. *Maritime Alps: It Will Go On Growing Except at That Point*. 1968-78. Steel hand and tree. From *Collage, Assemblage and the Found Object*. This example of postmodern installation art (which depicts a steel hand imbedded in a living tree) offers a parallel depiction of how the intervention of human-made things—literally, the hand of humankind responsible for both creative and atrophic influence—arrests nature at the point of its interjection and generates a disturbance in the progression of the natural environment that forces both nature and the foreign object into symbiotic contention. That conflicting symbiosis—a blurring of opposite things into the other—is analogous to the interruption of space and artifact facilitated by gallery exhibition: the hand, if sequestered to a garbage heap, or to a more applicable context, might not unsettle the spectator the way it does by its singular influence in arresting the development of nature at the site of imposition. A clichéd, superficial consideration of Penone’s piece might provoke readings of environmental concern, how humanity’s interposition in nature is detrimental, pejorative, strangulating (etc.). Yet the aesthetic, “look-again” dynamic that draws attention to such superficialities overpowers, in my estimation, any afterthought concerning humanity’s asphyxiating influence on natural space. Rather than generating a response of revulsion regarding man’s capacity to apply a choke-hold to the environment, the idea that the tree will go on growing except at the point of interference offers an equalizing portrait of the wilderness-man dialectic; it is an example of a type of neo-picturesque philosophy, where nature both envelops (overgrows) yet allows space for the interjection of human-made things. It is in this very space, where the tree can only grow around the hand of man, that the object is imbued with the lore, the enigmas, the arresting and jarring qualities that make it artifactual and aesthetic.

legislated around the country that (depending upon the state) artifacts and sites had to be at least twenty-five to fifty years old in order to be considered appropriate grist for an archaeologist's mill or for government protection. (65-66)

Shanks subsequently argues that waiting such a long period of time to document the anthropological significance of an object “seems a strange riddle in itself, since every single day a new batch of materials methodically emerges from the black hole of modern times into the light of archaeological research.” Rather than learn about an object's cultural value while extant, “a significant aspect of the garbage conundrum [is] that archaeologists believe they should wait an arbitrary time to begin research while all kinds of information about how and where and when artifacts and sites were generated—critical information on the most intimate dynamics of our social systems—degrades” (66). In other words, if we truly wish to know everything we can about the cultural significance of an object, it makes sense to study it while still in circulation, or while it has been removed from its context for only a short time—while it exists in living memory. What Shanks is equivocally suggesting is that, no matter how much the discipline alleges to be searching for some kind of objective truth in the cultural and anthropological significance of objects, archaeology is partially founded on the lore that permeates the de-contextualization of artifacts. The fifty-year rule only corroborates that archaeology is predicated on locating significance in that which is de-contextualized—the rummaging around in abandoned middens and habitations in order that context might once again be discovered and assigned by a group of experts. At the same time it might sound as if I am being disingenuous about the enigmas of archaeological practice, archaeology is, at the very least, an attempt to piece together the past, to generate a coherent and cohesive body out of the fragments of history. It is where these fragments become accepted as fragments (vignettes of ruin) that archaeology begins the transition into its modern counterpart, letting the broken narratives of the past stand

for themselves as a reflection of the present. Quite literally it is when the fragments of modern progress are perceived as superimposed onto fragments hundreds (or thousands) of years removed that the objects of modernity appear to be imbued with their most uncanny character. Such temporal (dis)unity is a figurative “return of the dead” (“The Uncanny” 247)—the past reflecting the future of the present—bringing to the surface the remnants of “forefathers” whose inscrutable, “discarded beliefs” or anachronistic orientations were thought to be “*surmounted*.” These tapestries of the old intermingled with the new become “purely an affair of ‘reality-testing,’” Freud says, “a question of the material reality of the phenomena” (247-248) that is nonetheless infected with the chimerical lore of an unknowable past that resists classification.

There is a point I am making by returning to Shanks’ argument that equates archaeological excavation to rag-picking and artifactual inquiry to mysticism. This point has to do not only with the provisional, *ad hoc* character of frontier psychology that is willing to accept ephemera as artifacts, but also with the direct misreading of objects that is a product of a vernacular archaeology influenced by the malleability that natural space fosters. Sloan in his study reveals how Eurocentric examinations of colonization contemporaneous with the late American colonial period almost completely disavow evidence of proto-urbanized aboriginal civilization, and such disavowals (however erroneous) are relevant to assess how the settler and colonial mind interpreted the object matter of the American wilderness. Sloan cites cultural architects, such as nineteenth-century French political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville (in a text circa 1831), to demonstrate how enigmas surrounding aboriginal artifacts encountered in the New World landscape were exacerbated: “I have often come across fortified works,” says Tocqueville “which bear evidence of the existence of a people who had reached a fairly high state of civilization. Whence did that people come? Whither did it vanish? There is a mystery

there. But one cannot doubt that it existed, and nothing indicates that the Indians of our day are the remnants thereof” (qtd. in Sloan 4). This “mystery” evinces an uncanny brand of reality-testing caught between the enigmas of the past and the spectatorial misprision of the present. One cannot doubt the material existence of objects, but one may certainly disavow their origins, their nature.

Some amateur antiquarians, such as Josiah Priest, further aggravated the enigmas by spinning narratives attributing these vacated proto-urban sites to anything from the lost civilization of Atlantis to evidence of early Roman presence in the Americas. Logically (according to Priest) these European-descended pre-inhabitants were exterminated by the nomadic aboriginals presently occupying the land (10). Priest’s claim is indicative of not only the dismissive attitudes toward the surviving Native populations perpetuated by Eurocentric myths of the New World, but also of intentional misreadings of frontier object matter, ruins, and wastelands through which part of the American settler mentality was formed. This mythopoeic misprision might have been, as Sloan argues, an attempt to create myths tying European culture to the Americas. Concerning Priest and his significance as a pseudo-anthropologist:

His views seem fantastic, entertaining, and at worst absurd to most contemporary readers; however, to his contemporaries, his positions were plausible. The settlers who encountered earthworks and artifacts shared similar interpretations that were essentially irrational and reveal a preference for Romanticism over reason. Perhaps it was reassuring to imagine a prehistory not unlike Europe’s in a strange land where cultural continuity was problematic. It also displays an unwillingness to recognize the accomplishments of Native American civilizations and a desire to create an American culture. Public interest in antiquities waned, ironically, the more that archeology offered hard proof that the antiquarians were in error; and within Priest’s hallucinatory narratives of great cities, fierce battles, and firsthand accounts, is a strange, surprising, and sometimes disturbing portrait of the American psyche. (100)

There is much to unpack from Sloan’s estimation of the “hallucinatory narratives” produced from misreading the object matter of the American frontier wilderness. What Sloan is suggesting

is that the waning in interest in aboriginal artifacts once their cultural origin was verified is owing to the Euro-American desire to establish a Euro-centred objective correlative. This might explain, in part, the interest not only in things displaced in a rural setting among aboriginal artifacts (at least those related to technology of European origin), but also the subsequent appropriation of common things from everyday life as artifactual. The European remnants of war and cultivation interspersed with aboriginal artifacts weave a spatial narrative that imbues newer objects with a pseudo-history based on joint occupancy. According to a description of “time perspectivism” as it concerns excavation and archaeological practice, part of the rationale for temporal removal (the above-mentioned fifty-year rule) within the discipline is that it serves “the useful purpose of filtering out the ephemeral” (qtd. in Bailey, “Time Perspectivism” 14). In other words, while “time” is precariously positioned as a natural cleanser that will sort out what is important and what is not, the remains of the new become ingrained with the remains of the former. Descriptions of fragments of broken glass and rusted gun barrels ingratiated with flint and stone tools⁸³ might parallel (in a postmodern viewpoint) Greenblatt’s image of Mayan ruins being saturated by the deferred refuse of commodity culture—Coca-Cola cans scattered around remains thousands of years their senior. Such juxtapositions create a jarring binary that many contemporary Western minds—in the case of the Coke can—would be able to place into their proper categories of old and new ruin. But when removed from context by time or by ignorance, the division blurs, and newer objects, some of which overtly may have been garbage, end up in the same cabinets as properly demonstrable “relics.”⁸⁴ In archaeological terms, this layering of

⁸³ See Clark above.

⁸⁴ In this sense, Duchamp’s *Fountain* is a joke on posterity. When the structural form of the toilet eventually transforms enough so that the object is no longer recognizable as what it is, naïve spectators of the future may finally focus first on the smoothness and curvature of the piece, and see it as a thing instead of an object.

old and newer artifacts is known as the “palimpsest” phenomenon,⁸⁵ and such imbrications of older and newer objects work to confound the process of verification⁸⁶—especially owing to the succession of temporal removals.

When considering modern poetics and its relation to fragmentary reproductions that aim to replicate the palimpsest as reflections of the subject within modernity,⁸⁷ one can begin to see how the aesthetics of the fragment both embraces yet disavows the artifactual through adopting an ironic position toward its usefulness as waste. As William D. Melaney suggests in *After Ontology*, much of modernist writing acts as a “poetic text that shows how traces of the past,

⁸⁵ In his article “Time Perspectives, Palimpsests and the Archaeology of Time,” Geoff Bailey, Professor of Archeology at the University of York, provides a handy definition of palimpsests with respect to the discipline of archaeology. Acknowledging that the term has been applied as a metaphor within many disciplines—quite famously in Freud’s discourses on the unconscious in his 1912 essay “The Dynamics of Transference” (here the palimpsest is modernized as a “stereotype plate”), and in “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad” (1925)—Bailey defines the concept generally as “the interplay between erasure and inscription... between the text and the material medium through which it is expressed, and how that interplay creates complex layered and multi-temporal entities that disrupt conventional views of temporal sequence” (203). He offers five subcategories of the palimpsest: the true palimpsest, the cumulative palimpsest, the spatial palimpsest, the temporal palimpsest, and palimpsests of meaning. The first two categories are the most relevant to address in this section. A true palimpsest “is a sequence of depositional episodes in which successive layers of activity are superimposed on preceding ones in such a way as to remove all or most of the evidence of the preceding activity.” In other words, “all traces of earlier activity have been removed except for the most recent.” The cumulative palimpsest—“one in which the successive episodes of deposition, or layers of activity, remain superimposed one upon the other without loss of evidence, but are so re-worked and mixed together that it is difficult or impossible to separate them out into their original constituents”—is what most resembles Clark’s description of gun barrels interfused with trees and stone tools, and are, according to Bailey, the most “common” type (204).

⁸⁶ As Bailey suggests, “In archaeology, palimpsests are typically viewed as a handicap, an unfortunate consequence of having to rely on a material record that is incomplete, and one that requires the application of complex techniques to reconstitute the individual episodes of activity, or alternatively a focus on the best preserved and most highly resolved exemplars at the expense of everything else, *or the application of theoretical or imaginary narratives to fill the gaps*, which are in consequence *immune to empirical challenge*” (my italics, 203). In other words, the imaginary narratives conjured out of thin air to fill in the gaps of a fragmented, unknowable past are reified as myth-artifacts that become immune to any sort of reality check. These artifacts are then subsumed within the wider cultural understanding of the phenomena, and perpetuate the original violence done by misperception.

⁸⁷ See chapter four on the fragment in modernist culture and poetics. Again, writings like Freud’s 1912 essay “The Dynamics of Transference” analogize the human mind as an intertextual “stereotype plate” (i.e., a metal sheet used in printing, and which is reusable like a palimpsest). At the same time that cognition seems to have an ultimate cast from which it is derived (the metal form of the plate, which represents innate drives and impulses), that mold is itself composed of secondary material and is dependent upon the precarious (and inverse) impression derived from the cast. The unconscious is a surface, Freud implies, that might be constantly “reprinted afresh” as far as external circumstances are involved; however, it is “certainly not insusceptible to change in the face of recent experiences” (100). The plate, in other words, absorbs and is altered by all subsequent imprints of external phenomena. Modern subjectivity is thereby, according to Freud, a disjointed, fragmentary, and impressionistic mélange of external and internal impressions.

both ancient and modern, are preserved in writing, just as a palimpsest sometimes reveals the earliest designs of an ‘original’ document” (122). This image of past trace is recycled by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* with his reference to the layering of Rome (Melaney 122), its mixture of ruined and new architecture as analogous to the modern subject and the unconscious. Interestingly, this sentiment is also paralleled by Eliot in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” when he concedes that, when it comes to the stratified state of the modern poet, “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (41). But what does all this mean in terms of the specific American conversion of common things, even waste objects, to relics, and how artifacts of the middle ground influence the modern subject? I would like to suggest two possibilities, one that relates directly to my thesis, and another that relates indirectly. First, the indirect proposal. Perhaps the artifactualization of the everyday in American culture takes place at an accelerated rate because, at the time of colonialism, European-descended artifacts, imbricated with aboriginal artifacts, did not meet the standard of historical valuation—the fifty-year rule, as it were—and therefore expedients, the *ad hoc*, the ready-at-hand became imbued with artifactual character. This accelerated artifactualization may have in part occurred by the newer, yet-to-be-disintegrated ephemera becoming imbued, through proximity, with the lore surrounding remnants attributable to older civilizations—bits of wasted, broken glass being turned up in the soil beside flint arrowheads. What the artifactualization of expedients might also indicate is that the pace with which American culture regards itself as artifactual is based on a Eurocentric re-mapping and reclassification of the landscape and its objects; the aesthetic appropriation of the disposable (particularly in modernity) has its roots in this endeavour to fill an absence, to create an object-based mythology comprising Anglo- or Eurocentric phenomena where there was none. As Sloan notes above, misclassifying frontier artifacts was a way for

colonists to imbue the landscape with Eurocentric history (100), and this willingness to misread, fortified within the popular American (settler) psyche, has contributed to the “poetics of detachment” and the misreading of everyday objects—common things, ephemera, waste—in modernity.

Yet the idea that the aesthetic appropriation of the disposable in American culture is an accelerated archaeology based on the desire to create a Eurocentric mythology in the New World is speculative play. It is doubtful, no matter how alluring, that such a claim could be substantiated holistically, and so it will have to wade in that transient and insubstantial space of the primal scene,⁸⁸ the lacunae between reason to believe and hard evidence. What is more relevant in relation to this study is the unique disposition of the American colonial mindset that is ready to misuse, misperceive, and mislabel artifactual things unearthed in the wilderness spaces of the frontier, and the lore and speculative mythologies that such encounters have generated in relation to object matter. All such “hallucinatory narratives” spun around the absence of positive object identification contribute to the formation of the popular American psyche, as those who entered the frontier to clear, cultivate and “civilize” the wilderness through the creation of rural property were amateur archaeologists and lore generators. What this means is that the lore generated around the object matter of the American frontier is a grassroots phenomenon perpetuated by the popular rather than the academic mind. Romantic antiquarians—people like Priest, for example—who helped to disseminate the misguided lore surrounding frontier ruin and abandoned objects “often relied upon accounts they gathered from settlers who cleared the land and were the first to find artifacts and earthworks.” As land became cleared and rural settlements established, antiquarians “interviewed farmers who worked the land” and who, by Sloan’s

⁸⁸ See Lukacher’s definition of the primal scene as it relates to speculative analyses in chapter one.

account, both destroyed and preserved the objects discovered.⁸⁹ Not only were farmers unwitting archaeologists; they were amateur curators, perhaps out of necessity.⁹⁰ The objects they encountered were the main source of early American artifactual mythology, and “antiquarian writing preserves [that] regional lore from the nation’s early days—true Americana” (11). The preservation of lore as a brand of pseudo-history, based on the misprision of objects and observations of the cumulative palimpsest of relic and refuse, highlights a cognitive disconnect in object relations that is willing to suspend scientific reason for idiosyncratic hermeneutics, a conflation of object/subject that cathects the self into *things*.

This is my second proposal. In light of the idea that the misclassification of frontier artifacts was a way for colonists to organize the New World wilderness as something both familiar to their cultural understanding, yet unfamiliar to the context, it can be argued that many of those amateur lore generators who disinterred object matter from the frontier undergrowth saw what they wanted to see—and many times, they saw themselves. That is to say, they classified abandoned objects according to their limited cultural knowledge, saw their cultural subjectivity reflected in the landscape as a way of self-orienting and illuminating the blankness.⁹¹ The

⁸⁹ As Sloan says, settlers accelerated the de-contextualization process by “gradually leveling the earthworks, destroying artifacts, or carrying them away in large quantities to build collections or sell” (11).

⁹⁰ This necessity both arose out of the need to clear the land for agriculture and what might be regarded as an archival impulse. Yet this archival impulse might also have been driven by monetary incentives. Sloan describes how “Prehistoric remains were considered part of the spoils of national expansion and commodified. Reviewing the nineteenth century, archeologist Arthur C. Parker wrote, ‘Indian relics became a passion and a considerable traffic sprang up. The great firm of Tiffany and Company had its small beginnings in the sale of Indian implements and became a jewelry company only after a partner named Young added a watch repairer’s table to the shop and began to sell inexpensive jewelry...’” (8).

⁹¹ That people orient themselves to, and self-identity with, landscape as it is encountered in everyday life has been widely established in disciplines concerned with humanistic or cultural geography. As Berleant notes, “Geographers speak of a cultural landscape, one shaped by the objects and changes by which people have imprinted their practices on the land through distinctive field patterns, farming practices, architectural styles, and settlements” (6). We might add to this definition that subjectivity plays a part, at least at a popular level, when orienting oneself to the object matter abandoned by previous inhabitants, and that materiality can take on misperceived, idiosyncratic definitions as a mode of staking claim to a particular place.

discourse of these antiquarians who seemed to interpret “Objective images of nature” via “subjective associations in the writer’s mind” (16), according to Sloan, is “profoundly irrational, relies heavily upon generating imaginative reveries, and borrows from the themes and modes of both European and American Romanticism” (16). With “Romanticism” being the dirty word here, irrational or not, there is a connection to be made between these object-oriented narratives spun out of the landscape and conceptions of the modern self. As Sloan adds with regard to antiquarian frontier lore, the tendency to mingle the fractured objective images of nature with subjective interpretations, “so influential in the modernist cultural enterprise, has resulted in modes of expression in 20th century literature and art where object/subjective oppositions collapse into each other, and traditional notions of self are fragmented” (17). The idea that settlers and antiquarians are quick to adopt a Eurocentric appraisal of frontier object matter corroborates the egotistical desire to see the self reflected in the soil as loco-descriptive orientation. These fragmented, ruined, and incongruous objects as they are perceived embedded in the landscape are fractured reflections of selfhood caught somewhere between a primal home and civilization—a highly rhetorical modernist aesthetic.

A rather curious account of aboriginal sculpture will bring this section full circle—back to the modern period—with what I would like to present as Priest’s version of “Anecdote of the Jar.” Priest recounts of one of his rural excursions that “down the Susquehanna, some thirty or forty miles below Tawanda, at a place called the Black-walnut Bottom, on the farm of Mr. Kinney, was discovered a most extraordinary specimen of *pottery*.” Relevant to the fragmentation motif, this pottery is “in a broken state” (qtd. in Sloan 94); yet still it stood

twelve feet across the top, and ... thirty-six feet in circumference, and otherwise of proportionable depth and form. Its thickness was three inches, and appeared to be made of some coarse substance, probably mere clay, such as might be found on

the spot,⁹² as it was not glazed. Whoever its makers were, they must have manufactured it on the spot where it was found, as it must have been impossible to move so huge a vessel. (94)

One might even speculate that this oversized (and therefore pragmatically useless) jar, which sat inert in the wilderness until rural space was created around it, took dominion—maybe not everywhere, but at least within the immediate landscape—through its enigmatic location in a pastoral zone, by the conjecture it incites, and by the look-again function it elicits. This is the precise moment that a thing becomes artifactual: when the interrogative is evoked, a groping about for denotation. Why the location? Why so large? Why thirty or forty miles below Twanada (or in Tennessee for that matter)? What is its function (practical or otherwise)?

But who can tell for what use this vast vessel was intended? Conjecture here is lost, no ray of light dawns upon this strange remnant of antiquity. (qtd. in Sloan 95)

⁹² Here we might be reminded of expediency that characterizes frontier mythology. In this case the expedience directly infects artistic representation.



Figure 2.2. *Trowel II*. Sculpture. Claes Oldenburg. Photograph by Coosje van Bruggen, 1976. Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens at PepsiCo, New York. Included with permission by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen's Studio Manager, Hallie McNeill. In a display analogous to Priest's jar, Oldenburg's *Trowel* will perhaps inspire similar hallucinatory narratives in future lore generators. A version of *Trowel* also exists in New York's Central Park.

Chapter 3: Dynamics of Decay: The Irony of Neopastoral and the Artifactual in Environmental Aesthetics

3.1. Potatoes in Cellars, Clods in Fields: Lumps of Inert Matter and Scenic Vision



Figure 3.1. *The Mythic Stone—Hidatsa*, Edward Sheriff Curtis. Photograph, 1908. From *American Landscapes: Photographs from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*. Page 27. Originally published in *The North American Indian* (1909) by Edward Sheriff Curtis, page 184.

The centripetal movement of this dissertation has been to examine how seemingly unaesthetic (or anaesthetic) human-oriented things acquire aesthetic qualities when observed out of context in natural or quasi-natural environments. To put it plainly, I have been trying to determine how variations on the theme of waste and refuse take on characteristics associated with traditional and anti-traditional conceptualizations of beauty when perceived in non-urban settings. How the interjection of garbage into the landscape, if at all crossing over into the realm

of aesthetics, might satisfy *anti*-traditional notions of beauty is more conspicuous. It is where these interjections are genealogically related to traditional ideas of beauty that the association becomes complicated. In spite of the emergence of trash aesthetics as an acknowledged artistic subgenre—one that scours “the detritus of modernity... for its use value” (Highmore 63)—I realize the difficulty in arguing any position professing the attractiveness of waste. The opposition to such a premise is obvious. The general reaction to the surfeit of the domestic when perceived, for example, in a state park or nature preserve is quite visceral and automatic. Although when perceived from afar the out-of-place interjection of gaudy, colourful fragments of trash offset by greenspace might provoke an intuitive reaction that is more ambivalent than automatically repellent, when seen up close the ambivalence tends to transform to feelings of distaste, or even of abjection. Such incursions are considered blights on the extension of the idyllic fantasy manifested in the North American park system. I am not arguing that garbage in itself possesses intrinsic aesthetic properties, although sometimes it may. Garbage, after all, is a *mélange* of things. Some of those things—ephemera, for example, related to advertisements and commodity hocking—have aesthetic considerations incorporated into their design, while others are merely functional, pragmatic, anaesthetic, disposable objects of the everyday. It is important to remember when considering the attractiveness of the un- or anaesthetic that the force of encounter is not necessarily propagated by the thing itself, but by context, reaction, and spectatorial dynamics. “Beethoven’s quartets,” Heidegger reminds us, “lie in the storerooms of the publishing house like potatoes in a cellar” (“Origin” 19-20). Without the spectator, art is a lump or aggregate of inert material.

The above image, *The Mythic Stone—Hidatsa* by Edward Sheriff Curtis (Figure 3.1),⁹³ provides an analogy applicable not only to the affective interjection of anthropogenic detritus into an otherwise natural space, but also to Heidegger's claim that a lump of inert matter (a clod of dirt, for instance ["Origin" 20]) achieves aesthetic value worthy of photographic expenditure by virtue of location and spectatorship. If we refer back to Heidegger's exposition of Van Gogh's painting of a peasant's shoes (the modern equivalent of which might be an image of black rubber boots), it is not the representation of mere shoes that "stares forth" as if in an optic clash with the spectator (33). It is also the spatial dynamic that brings the shoes to life to unravel the narrative of the peasant woman's "slow trudge... through the furrows of the field swept by a raw wind." In Van Gogh's painting, "we cannot even tell where the shoes stand. There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they might belong—only an undefined space" (33). The shoes float eerily unanchored to context, deracinated from use. Again we are introduced to the language of blankness and phenomenological indeterminacy that both gallery and natural spaces embody, and that fosters the repurposing and re-evaluation of mere things. Admittedly, "perhaps it is only in the picture that we notice all this about the shoes." The woman whose ghost appears in the footwear in the form of a speculative history "simply wears them." And yet this pair of common shoes set against an undefined space is cast against another expansive backdrop as "equipment [that] belongs to the *earth*," and also to the microcosmic "*world*" of the subject attached to their being (Heidegger's italics 33).

⁹³ Edward Sheriff Curtis undertook much of his photographic enterprise between 1904 and 1930. His practice appeared to be driven by both aesthetic and documentary motivations to capture the way of life of *fin de siècle* frontier settlement and native tribes scattered throughout the Western United States. For an encapsulation of his life and work, see *Edward Sheriff Curtis: Visions of a Vanishing Race* by Florence Curtis Graybill and Victor Boesen (2000). For the complete, most updated version of Curtis's work, see also *The North American Indian: The Complete Portfolios* by Edward S. Curtis (1997).

Like the machine's appearance in the garden, it is not Curtis's stone itself that arrests attention or that proclaims itself to be art. Rather, it is the spatial dynamic that, like an object on a pedestal, assigns aesthetic relevance. In other words it is the semiotic power underlying the structures of spectatorship—the signification of the pedestal or gallery space—that aids in the construction of aesthetic identity. The object, meanwhile, is simultaneously a void—a vanishing point—at the centre of the scene while it appears as something other to itself, with interrogatives concerning its unstable signification aggregating to comprise its arresting nature. Here I am speaking both of gallery space and natural space where, in the absence of curators or expansive descriptions pasted to walls directing the observer in how to enjoy and interpret the artifact, the object de-contextualized adopts a malleable teleology. In the case of natural space, it is also important to consider that the scene as *scenery*, from an aesthetic point of view, could not exist without the object, at least in the case of Curtis's photograph. If the stone were absent in the photo, the image would simply be a humdrum representation of a bare field with a few trees, something akin to taking a picture of an empty stage or a bare gallery wall (which, admittedly, can have metaesthetic relevance). As Paul Shepard points out in *Man in the Landscape: A Historic View of the Esthetics of Nature*, “scenery,” which has its origins in landscape appraisal, “comes from the Greek word for ‘stage’” (117). It should not be taken for granted that the foundation of our modern conception of scenic vision—in all humanity's compulsion to personify and to analogize its surroundings according to anthropologic experience—is rooted in the idea that nature exists as a series of spatially relative exhibition venues.

While some environmental theorists might advocate viewing nature as a holistic object in itself,⁹⁴ the compartmentalization of nature as a space where things are to be enacted, contrived,

⁹⁴ See my discussion in section 3.4 on Holmes Rolston and the “aesthetic value of the dead elk with maggots” (Saito 242). Rolston argues for a holistic view of scenery wherein “Every item must be seen not in framed isolation but

interpolated, put on display—in essence, as a backdrop for other objects—should not be overlooked. Furthermore, while the *indeterminacy* of natural space becomes more anthropically *determined* the closer its proximity to the antipodal extremity of civilization, there is still something to be said about the psychodynamics of staging with respect to the *mutatis mutandis* of wilderness, natural, and pastoral scenes as framed topographically into independent, loco-descriptive events. “The idea that the world contains scenery marks one of the great evolutions of human perception” Shepard goes on to argue. “Scenery [is]... a product of analytical and detached vision” (117), a way of framing nature into interchangeable compartments of spectatorship while imbuing in those compartments (scenes) aesthetic neutrality and disinterestedness. “Scenery” is the vacant stage⁹⁵ where objects dialectically determine the *mise-en-scène*.

In the case of *The Mythic Stone*, one cannot help but imagine Curtis carting a heavy box camera, equipped with wooden tripod and blackout curtain, over the plain or through a grassland-become-pasture, en route to immortalize in silver halide subjects of more obvious importance, only to stumble upon the enigmatic, mystical rock that has been anomalously plunked, abandoned, or ignored during the land-clearing process. Or we might imagine that this stone was his quarry all along as recalled from a previous impromptu encounter, and the special trek made into the field had this singular object as its *raison d’être*. Without knowing the context

framed by its environment, and this frame in turn becomes part of the bigger pictures we have to appreciate” (qtd. in Saito 242). Particularly, I will examine Rolston’s language of “framing” as compartmentalized components of objective interplay within nature. Part of the problem with viewing nature-as-itself (as the wholly removed “bigger picture”) is that it ideologically sets humans and environment at odds, and disavows the way in which nature is a stage within which human activity plays out. Buell notes that the adaptation of the pastoral mode to an environmentalist subgenre in American culture has accelerated the conceptualization of nature as something incongruent with human activity: “As this ecocentric repossession of pastoral has gathered force, its center of energy has begun to shift from representation of nature as a theater for human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake” (52).

⁹⁵ By saying that scenery is “vacant” I am drawing upon Grosz’s, Buell’s, Scanlan’s, and Giblett’s theorization of nature or wilderness as vacancy, blankness, or emptiness. Scenery-as-stage is only ideologically vacant; it is filled with meaning by its objects.

we could venture all kinds of speculations. Although it appears to be a rather ordinary mid-sized field rock, it is difficult to tell exactly how large the stone may be, or why it has been left to linger in the middle of an otherwise cleared grassland. We might deduce, owing to the Siouan tribe after which the stone is named (Hidatsa), that it has cultural import to the Native American peoples Curtis is known to have photographed. To the typical European onlooker, speculation might here be lost.

Curtis has spoiled it for us. In his field study *The North American Indian* (1909), he explains that “This stone, partially embedded in the turf on the bench south of the Missouri, nearly opposite Elbowoods, North Dakota, is pointed out by the Hidatsa and by the Apsaroke as the one dropped by the Sun upon the head of his truant wife” (185). Yet at the same time that the stone’s artifactual significance is revealed to us, by removing one mystery, Curtis has unveiled another. The Hidatsa obviously found the rock no less mysterious than Curtis did as an interloping, European-descended cultural historian. We know that Curtis at least had interest enough to set up his camera and take a photograph, the processing of which, in 1908, would have been expensive. In other words, he didn’t dismiss the stone as a mere rock; nor did he dismiss the mythology surrounding it. Rather, and perhaps because of its placement in a bare field away from other rocks like it, he saw the same aura of intentionality that led the Hidatsa to ascribe traces of anthropogenic use. This stone is indeed brimming with human agency, not only through its cultural significance, but through its role in a drama that is itself a mythic misprision. Its capacity to be misinterpreted lives on in its original misreading. Our modern scientific minds would speculate that the stone, if not located there by human will, may have been plunked in the middle of a bare field through natural processes, by glacial activity millions of years in progress. It doesn’t necessarily matter how the stone got there. What matters in terms of the stone’s

capacity to inspire lore is the spectatorship it elicits, and how that spectatorship is tied to human intervention reflected in the stone's reproducibility as an aesthetic or museal artifact. It is arguably just an ordinary field rock—but one that is spectralized with a narrative symbolizing the fate of disobedient gods.

What is important to note is that the stone does not appear to us as something that defines *itself* as what it is. The stone is a testament to how people orient their individual subjectivity, as well as the profundity of their cultural subjectivity, topographically and metonymically to the landscape and the dramatic staging of its objects. We might posit similar speculations about the appearance of the (washing) machine in the garden, not with respect to the machine's potential apotheosis, but rather to its ontological agency tied to human trace. Although we know that there is nothing natural about the machine's sudden appearance (its design and placement had to have been orchestrated by human will), the incongruousness with the setting is charged with human artifice and intentionality. One inevitably questions the motive underlying the imposition of technology on wilderness, whether that technology is discarded, abandoned, or serves pragmatic purposes. Where there is intentionality, there are potential aesthetic considerations. Even if the machine's appearance in the garden occurs because of practicality (easy dumping, or, in the case of farm estates, preservation for future use-value, to rescue a motor and a few screws from a broken-down refrigerator), the encounter, owing to the enigmas surrounding its appearance and intentionality, evoke an aesthetic spectatorship—a look-again function. Whether or not *The Mythic Stone* is actually beautiful, and regardless of the story elucidating its cultural significance, Curtis's photograph epitomizes, in my estimation, the twentieth-century modernist aesthetic of locating in the mundane, the trivial, and the everyday the ontology of things.

3.2. What Is Neopastoral?: The Irony of Pastoral Amplified

This dissertation has two overarching intents. One of those intents is to establish a theoretical structure through which to conceptualize a vernacular evolution of object theory in the United States that revolves around two significant cultural signifiers: 1) the mythology of an Edenic, pastoral existence and 2) the artifactual lore generated out of American (frontier) wilderness mythoi. In a more general sense, my objective is to determine how the artifactual relations of encountering human-inspired detritus in natural environments influenced, even marginally, a more organic American poetics that extends into the modern period. In many ways the signifiers “pastoral” and “wilderness-as-frontier” share a mutual heritage,⁹⁶ not merely because of their connection to natural environments and “simpler” ways of life,⁹⁷ but also because of the similarities shared between the pastoral as self-contained, manicured natural space (*hortus conclusus*) and the wilderness as natural space in the process of being carved out, enclosed and domesticated. My ultimate goal is to demonstrate the connections between these cultural signifiers and the tenets of modern-period phenomenology that have led to object reorientation as it relates to waste lands, natural space, and the environment.

The other main intent of this dissertation is to define “neopastoral” as a term, and to identify its substantiation in modern period American poetry and literary culture. Through a

⁹⁶ I say they are opposite (but related) because of what either signifies: Eden represents peaceful, paradisiacal components of nature; the frontier represents the potential violence of natural space—where nature meets violence.

⁹⁷ As Cronon explains, the rhetoric of the wilderness frontier, particularly as the American frontier closed and began to withdraw its democratizing promises of self-reliance and self-reinvention, overlaps with pastoral ideology. For example, pastoralism and frontierism share an ambivalent attitude toward modernization and urbanity: “If one saw the wild lands of the frontier as freer, truer, and more natural than other, more modern places, then one was also inclined to see the cities and factories of urban-industrial civilization as confining, false, and artificial” (“The Trouble with Wilderness” 77). Indeed the frontier, like the mythoi of prelapsarian Eden, is allegorized as “a place of freedom in which we can recover the true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives. Most of all, it is the ultimate landscape of authenticity. Combining the sacred grandeur of the sublime with the primitive simplicity of the frontier, it is the place where we can see the world as it really is” (80). This grandiloquent notion of how the frontier, as a facsimile of the pastoral in popular American psychology, represents a place where “the world” appears as it is (or is more “authentic”) will be revisited below when I discuss the mechanics of the pastoral as a genre that ironizes the urban.

comprehensive delineation of the term neopastoral, it is also my intent to show how the influence of domestic waste in mythologized pastoral environments runs concurrent with the definition of neopastoral as I am conceptualizing it. In other words, the development of the neopastoral in conjunction with the interjection of domestic waste into greenspace is concomitant with interest in repurposing objects of the everyday in modern American poetry (and some theories contemporaneous with that poetry). This modern-period interest in the phenomenology of everyday, common objects wrested from usefulness (essentially wasted) is both fed by, and responsible for substantiating, a new brand of pastoral that sees the self reflected in the binary of wilderness and vernacular waste. As I will discuss below, it is my position that the neopastoral as we might apply it today, although ambiguous in its dimensions, had its conceptual birth at the onset of industrialization, but its substantiation in the age of commodity disposability. The neopastoral as it is represented in poetry extends beyond the modern period of the early twentieth century; yet this time period, I argue, yields a more identifiable genesis of the phenomenon that works to ironize humankind within nature through the domestic remnants left in its wake. I will be using the term “domestic” not only in its adjectival sense as that which belongs “to the home, house, or household” (*OED*), or that which denotes “human habitations” (*M-W*), but also in its nominal sense as “an article of home produce or manufacture” (*OED*, c. 1817-1940), a meaning tempered by a world driven by industrial commodity.⁹⁸

To begin, the term “neopastoral” is not a new coinage. It has been used by a handful of theorists and scholars in several different contexts to connote variants of new phenomena taking place within the rather broad genre of pastoral, and within cultures associated to rural

⁹⁸ I also employ the word “domestic” as a signifier that sets humanity off from nature or wilderness. To domesticate is not only to proliferate the objects of human habitation in order to construct a familiar environment, but is also an act of cultivating, mitigating and essentially repurposing wilderness space to be hospitable to man. In this sense, domestic connotes “Living under the care of man, in or near his habitations; tame, not wild” (*OED*).

communities.⁹⁹ Most significantly, it has been employed by Raymond Williams in his landmark study of rural/urban bifurcation *The Country and the City*. Williams never defines “neo-pastoral” in *The Country and the City* but nevertheless brandishes it as an intuitive, catch-all term for post-Renaissance counter-pastoral, a subgenre which emerged at the onset of the industrial revolution in England as a raucous and ironic rebuttal to clichéd versions of the eclogue. My use of the term is more concerned with the by-product of that industrial age as it makes itself present in the landscape. The infusion of the domestic dross of manufacture is a phenomenon that begins to be poeticized and documented more so around the modern period, where the industrial age shifts its focus from the presence of the ironworks themselves to the manufacture of grand machines and domestic commodity (and the remnants of those commodities). Other uses of the term neopastoral have been attributed to everything from its industry-oriented conception to post-1940s witchcraft literature, in which a version of nature and garden worship becomes an extension of the pastoral genre apparently deserving of the “neo” prefix.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ While it is important to note that not everything rural is pastoral and not everything pastoral is rural, the genre of pastoral has come to be identified, or at least overlaps with, representations of the rural as it has been mythologized in American culture. Terry Gifford in his book *Pastoral* (1999) identifies three subcategories of pastoralism that help to explain the evolution, as he sees it, of this great overlap. There is the traditional version where, as Marx bluntly puts it, “No shepherd, no pastoral” (qtd. in Gifford 1); there is the version that “refers to any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban,” where “pastoral is usually associated with a celebratory attitude towards what it describes, however superficially bleak it might appear to be” (1); and there is the post-pastoral, which will be described in the final footnote to this section in relation to the neopastoral. Although some scholars of the pastoral, who will be discussed in this section, might find Gifford’s definition of “pastoral” too broad and inclusive, Gifford’s exploration of the term demonstrates how the rural has become very much intertwined with the aesthetic and ideological tenets of pastoralism. Referencing Buell, Gifford notes that the term pastoral, like it or not, has been popularized to suggest “writing ‘that celebrates the ethos of nature/rurality over against the ethos of the town or city’ rather than ‘the specific set of obsolescent conventions’ of the original literary form” (4). Marx himself locates this rural idealism in what he calls the “ideal type” “of the classic American fable,” “the intricate interplay between the tripartite topography” of “urban, middle, [and] wild” (“Pastoralism in America” 54).

¹⁰⁰ See the essay “‘And with thee fade away into the forest dim.’ Neopastoralism and Romantic Renaissance in the Ritual Literature of Modern Witchcraft” by Peg Aloï. Similar to Aloï’s approach, Joan Anderson Ashford’s *Ecocritical Theology: Neo-Pastoral Themes in American Fiction from 1960 to the Present* aligns its “neo” attribution to the theistic aspects of pastoralism. Quite ironically—and as a further testament to the precarious nature of the term—rather than focus on witchcraft ceremonies, Ashford’s text situates itself at what might be considered the theological opposite of “witchcraft” through its examination of neopastoral in conjunction with Christian philosophy. What this contrary application of the neopastoral reveals is that the term needs to be lexically anchored.

Apart from witchcraft, a search of the university database will return a Master of Fine Arts thesis entitled *Neo-Pastoral*, written by John Daniel Walters and archived at the University of Michigan in 2010. Walters uses himself as the central subject for his research, as his thesis is written on an art exhibition called *Neo-Pastoral* for which he is responsible.¹⁰¹ His synopsis of the neopastoral seems to follow in the vein of Marx and Williams by attributing to the term the products of the industrial and technology age. His thesis, like much of the scholarship I have encountered that wields the term neopastoral, lacks a precise definition of the concept as *he* envisions it. However, a description of his project encapsulates what we might call modern pastoral as it has been influenced by the tech age: “*Neo-Pastoral* explores a more complex type of pastoral role described by [Leo] Marx. It uses human, machine, agriculture, and landscape to illicit (*sic*) an imaginative response to the sophisticated order of human existence and the spontaneity of nature: a serene partnership whose basis is the integration of technology upon the rural environment” (8). What we can determine from these variegated applications of the word

While Ashford invokes Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*, Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination*, and Gifford’s *Pastoral* as the theoretical groundwork for her study (16), she seems to elide a reading of the machine’s disruption of the garden for the rather broad categories of “God and Politics,” “Apocalypse,” and “Ecofeminist Theology”—which are all vaguely connected through their religious attributions. Yet the association of the neopastoral to religious analyses, in my view, does little to define what is meant by neopastoral other than that the texts she examines are published after 1960. In essence, the neo-pastoral, as applied by Ashford, simply “extends and renews the process of [Marx’s, Buell’s and Gifford’s] research in regard to the post-1945 American novel.” By doing so, Ashford is emphasizing—again, similar to, but in theological contrast with, Alois’s “pagan” approach—“the harmonious nature between the gods, man, and nature that ultimately suggests a theological idealism” (16).

¹⁰¹ While I do not deny that scholars are complicit in manufacturing myths surrounding their subject matter, I wonder about Walters’ focus on his own creative work to substantiate and manufacture mythologies surrounding his argument. I wonder because of my own myth-making activities mobilized through scholarship and errant field research (in the form of creative photography) that is both external to yet very much ingrained in this project. As Slotkin notes, “Even academic critics who address themselves to the problem of the ‘myth of America’ have a marked tendency to engage in the manufacture of the myth they pretend to analyze in an attempt to reshape the character of their people or to justify some preconceived or inherited notion of American uniqueness. Such critics are themselves a part of this national phenomenon of myth-consciousness” (*Regeneration* 4). This is an important self-reflexive—or even meta-scholastic—sentiment to keep in mind, as my own project is one where, as an academic writer, I am consciously involved in excising, documenting, systematizing, and creating the myths/artifacts I encounter and preserve in writing. In spite of existing historical precedent for the object matter I seek, it is true that, on a conscious or unconscious level, I organize and arrange that material into a coherent body that facilitates and participates in myth-making no less than manufacturers of lore. If anything, academia validates certain types of lore and, to some extent, makes “myth” non-fictive through positioning those myths as artifactual objects to be interpreted and scrutinized.

neopastoral—from post-renaissance industry to modern witchcraft—is that the “neo” prefix seems to be applied rather haphazardly to signify any “new” form of pastoral. What “new” means is left to the imagination, but the “neo,” more often than not, appears to abandon the bucolic visions of Pan and his oaten flute in favour of smokestacks in a green valley, or sidesteps the shepherd and his sheep to substitute “neopagan” (James and Tew 18) ritual incantations involving mass-processed herbs from the grocery store rather than freshly grown, organic ingredients.¹⁰² Modern pastoral, whether explicitly or not, is implicated in the age of technology and accelerated domestication, as well as in the remainders of that domestication.

Any ambiguity attributable to the neopastoral moniker likely stems from the elusiveness of its parent word. The more reading one does on the pastoral, the more one will encounter a mix of cantankerous and resigned statements attesting to how the term stubbornly resists definition. As Andrew V. Ettin explains in *Literature and the Pastoral* (1984), pastoral as a mode is “inherently multiplicitous” (7); the “subject is so diverse that little could be gained by trying to offer a generic definition” (1). Overleaf, however, Ettin does attempt a definition that, in somewhat comic style, tries awkwardly to wriggle backwards into the term rather than approach it head on. We know when we are dealing with Theocritus’s *Idylls* or Virgil’s *Eclogues* that we have pastoral in its purest form. Other than that, this will have to suffice for an approximation: “The further we get from shepherds and nymphs, fields and groves, the less sure we can be that we are still in the pastoral world; but the more we try to adhere to those restrictions, the less certain we can be that we are telling all that must be said about the limits of the pastoral mode

¹⁰² This last remark refers again to Aloï’s aforementioned essay, and to the application of neopastoral to modern Wiccan ceremonies—an application I believe to be wanting in definition. In this sense, Stephen King’s tale of terror “The Mangler” from his first collection of short stories *Night Shift*, in which an industrial laundry press is animated to life by the unwitting ritual combination of herbs and ingredients now ubiquitously present in our grocery stores and mass-produced commodities, is a version of neopastoral. King’s story, however, should not fall under the (neo)pastoral rubric simply because it interweaves both modern technology and offshoots of neopagan nature rituals. The same problem arises in Aloï’s essay, which lacks a quantified justification for why modern witchcraft ceremonies belong even to the pastoral genre.

and the influence of the pastoral genre on literature as a whole. Writing about a literary kind always means mediating between the description too inclusive to be a definition and the definition too exclusive to be a description” (2). As a response to this reluctance to commit, scholars like Paul Alpers, in his influential study *What is Pastoral?* (1996), decry the “ungoverned inclusiveness” (ix) brought about by lexical fumfering and opt for formalistic readings of the term. He argues: “the central fiction of pastoral... is not the Golden Age or idyllic landscapes, but herdsmen and their lives.” Pastoral, he goes on to say, “does not include all poems about nature or landscape, nor does it include all poetry, drama, and fiction about rural life” (x). Depending on whose theory one subscribes to, pastoral can be on the one hand all-encompassing while, on the other hand, about farmers and their cows and goats and sheep. As if the terminology has not been muddled enough, Buell proposes in *The Environmental Imagination* (published one year before Alpers’ text) that since the renaissance-period pastorals of Spenser and Milton, “pastoral conventions started to modify and multiply, so that in modern times it has become impossible for one of its shrewdest interpreters to define, for example, gentry-class mimesis of urban working-class life as a version of pastoral” (32). How one regards pastoral largely depends on how literally that shrewd interpreter adheres to its traditional strictures and conventions, and whether or not the topic is approached with an eye to thematic significations or to the literal presence of shepherds and sheep in a pasture.

Suffice it to say that pastoral is a resilient, malleable, and somewhat parasitic form. In spite of crabby nay-saying regarding its inclusiveness, pastoral does not, in my estimation, merely relegate itself to the lives of herdsmen. If this were the case we might indeed argue that, because the lifestyle giving rise to traditional forms of pastoral has nearly disappeared, or has become irrelevant in an age of mass productivity, pastoral is dead. Its death throes in the Western

world would have commenced at the onset of the industrial revolution and amplified as the amenities of the tech age integrated themselves into the lives of goatherds. Yet instead of pastoral having been asphyxiated by rigid formalisms, I would tend to agree, as Buell does, with Marx's statement that "wholly new conception[s] of the precariousness of our relations with nature... [are] bound to bring forth new versions of pastoral" (qtd. in Buell 51).¹⁰³ Pastoral does not die. It adapts.¹⁰⁴

So rather than become seduced by cranky, inflexible definitions of pastoral, or become deluged by the superfluity of applications for the *neopastoral*, I would like to suggest, in the vein of Williams's and Walters' application of the term, my own conceptualization of the neopastoral.

¹⁰³ I have repeated this quotation several times in my dissertation because it is so central to my own rather "inclusive" investigation of the pastoral. As noted above in a footnote, Gifford also finds central to his reading Marx's positioning of the pastoral as a malleable literary form, a genre that will adapt to modern concerns.

¹⁰⁴ An ongoing example of this adaptation in American culture is palpable, according to Cronon, in the ideologies of the environmental movement and, according to Marx, in the underlying maxims of 1960s American counterculture. Highlighting the rather simplistic and "uncomplicated" binary conceptualized between "natural things, which are good, and unnatural things, which are bad," Cronon frames the post-World War 2 crystallization of "environmentalism" as a philosophy in the United States in a way that is comparable to the dynamics of fictionalized pastoral space. Just as the pastoral functions as a paradigm to unveil the folly of urban conventions, "Much of the moral authority that has made environmentalism so compelling as a popular movement flows from its appeal to nature as a stable external source of nonhuman values against which human actions can be judged without much ambiguity" ("In Search of Nature" 26). In other words, "natural" or "nonhuman" is synonymous with purity (untainted by human intervention), while "human" (and, by extension, the "urban") is synonymous with corruption and artifice. What Cronon's suggestion reveals is that the same pastoral paradigms that regard natural topography as unaffected are alive and well in the environmental dictums of present-day United States, where manufactured concepts of a mollified instead of threatening wilderness take the place of the shepherd and his crook. In his essay "Pastoralism in America," Marx makes similar connections between what he concluded to be the "anachronistic" idealisms of pastoralism in America and new countercultures that, over time, adopted the rhetoric of pastoralism. In a reflection on writing *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx reveals how "the book ended in the present tense with a suggestion that today, in the era of high technology, pastoralism almost certainly had become anachronistic, even less feasible as the basis for a political ideology than it had been in Jefferson's time, and therefore it soon might be expected to lose its hold on the minds of disaffected Americans." However, at the same time Marx was considering his study to be a post-mortem on pastoralism as a political ideology in the United States, "That tacit prediction hardly could have been more quickly contravened by events. On December 2, 1964, a few weeks after the publication of *The Machine in the Garden*," Marx explains, "the Berkeley student rebellion began. The manifest continuity between the extremist rhetoric of the rebellious students' leader, Mario Savio ('You've got to put your bodies upon the [machine] and make it stop') and that of Henry Thoreau ('Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine') turned out to be the mere surface expression of a much deeper ideological continuity between our nineteenth-century pastoralism and the radical movement (or counterculture) of the 1960s" (38). Indeed, it wouldn't be too far-fetched to connect these countercultural movements to the more vehement protestations of environmentalism. The "machine" that invades the virginal purity of a mythologized Eden is a metonym not only for industrial capitalism, but also for a political culture that positions itself as acting *upon* nature rather than *within* it—in other words, as an entity outside of, and pitted against, a natural world.

I argue that the “new” versions of pastoral portended by Marx graduated from: 1) traditional forms of the eclogue depicting shepherds and sheep; to 2) the counter- or anti-pastorals immediately preceding the age of industry in the Renaissance period; to 3) the interjection of the machine in the garden in the industrial age, which was documented in the British and American Romantic periods and later examined by Marx; to 4) the imposition of the vernacular and domestic wastes of the manufacturing and industrial periods caused by both the invasion of urban commodity and the displacement of rural domestic dwelling. Certainly there is room for further subcategories when assessing pastoral’s historical evolution. The purpose of such a list, reductionist as it may be, is to highlight the end game, to orient the term to its present manifestation. The reason I have settled on a definition of the neopastoral that integrates the vernacular waste of domestic culture into the spectrum is not merely because it propels my argument. The reality is that alternative versions of pastoral since the age of industry have largely acknowledged the influence of urbanity and industry on the pastoral scene.¹⁰⁵ It could even be argued that much “pastoral” literature following the age of industry has as its central conflict, whether explicitly or implicitly, the clash between primal impulses represented by natural landscapes and the artifice represented by urbanity and industry.¹⁰⁶ Rather than focus on nature in itself, or on modern witchcraft ceremonies, the trajectory for “new” forms of pastoral tend toward definitions that revolve around industry, technology, and the imposition of the urban. Therefore, tracing that trajectory, from the silhouettes of factories looming in a farmscape to the remnants of domestic commodities produced in those factories and plunked in a pastoral setting, appears to be the direction to maintain. Ultimately, what I am arguing is that the

¹⁰⁵ This assertion will be fleshed out in sections on the picturesque below, as well as in chapter four.

¹⁰⁶ For the sake of argument, “industry” as it relates to manufacture is usually associated with the forces of urbanity. Although there are industries that exist outside of urban spaces, these sites are ideologically connected to the urban scene, even if they are related to agriculture.

neopastoral of modernity deals more specifically with the introduction and intermingling of the defunct and expired slough of the age of commodity labour as a new, largely ironic form of the tradition. In adherence to the components of irony, it is domestic waste that acts as the interlocutor rather than the wise but plain-spoken rustic clown, the comic foil to the pedantries of civilization who often appeared in eclogues from Virgil up to the Renaissance period—the dual character of “the foolish clown and the idiot savant” (James and Tew 15). Whereas in Marx’s study it is the ominous machine that interjects, as we move into the modern period it is the remnants of the domestic, as well as the rusting cadavers of those grand machines, that speak. While the urban dweller might turn to the pastoral as an escapist mode to indulge nostalgia for simpler times, the wastes of industry become ontological and personified, and act as ironic deflators to destabilize the fantasy.

Certainly it is not a stretch to locate irony in forms of modern pastoral that unabashedly draw attention to waste among greenspace. Yet the crucial point to recognize when considering the genre in its entirety is that pastoral, as a mode, has always had an ironic tinge to it. At its core, pastoral acts as a foil to undermine and satirize not just urban convention, but also the nostalgia for a home to which none can return. The rather brutal irony of pastoral amounts from the idea that, while the genre might be used as a vehicle to pillory urbanity in reverence to a naturalist existence, this primal home is but an indulgent phantasm perpetuated by the urbanized (courtly) audiences at whom pastoral is (and was) targeted.¹⁰⁷ In its association to myths of the Golden Age—an “elegiac lament for a lost age of innocence which shares many of the characteristics of the Christian idea of Eden” (Loughrey 9)—lost, mislaid, or abandoned ways of

¹⁰⁷ Arguably, pastoral is still targeted at urban audiences. Here we might be reminded of Cronon’s statement concerning the “irony” of American environmentalism: “celebrating wilderness has been an activity mainly for well-to-do city folks. Country people generally know far too much about working the land to regard *unworked* land as their ideal” (78-79). Also see the footnote below on Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* and the “most photographed barn in America.”

life where humans were once attuned to nature (or god's presence within nature) become sardonic reminders of the affectation and superfluity of modern civilization. Ultimately, the pastoral mode was meant as a vehicle to do what irony does best: stand on the outside looking in. It realizes this outsider perspective by reframing urban conventions in what would be the antithesis of urbanity: an unostentatious setting characterized by cloying minimalism (greenness). As Bryan Loughrey notes in his introduction to *The Pastoral Mode*, "The constant factor in pastoral, its informing idea, is... 'the recognition of a contrast, implicit or expressed, between pastoral life and some more complex type of civilization'" (20). Pastoral is epitomized by holding disparate ideas in unity in order to regard a particular concept for what it is rather than for how it functions within its social context. Pastoral, whether directly or equivocally, operates by de-contextualizing the urban, making the everyday conventions of urbanity strange so their strangeness can be recognized.

Ben Highmore's statement (cited in chapter 1) referencing the mechanics of twentieth-century Surrealism and the everyday—of which the previous sentence is a paraphrase—is relevant to a consideration of the pastoral mode and how it operates.¹⁰⁸ I am drawing this parallel between tenets of modern phenomenology and traditional forms of pastoral to show how pastoral, as a mode, not only has the capacity to function as a site of uncanny alteration, but also has a history of operating according to a phenomenological paradigm that strives to understand the essence of a thing through making it strange and other to itself. This dynamic is important when considering how criteria associated with pastoral (particularly environment or nature) might function to render those phenomena uncanny, and how the uncanny, as it relates to nature, haunts early twentieth-century poetics and beyond. It is the ostensible simplicity of nature—its

¹⁰⁸ Ben Highmore claims the function of Surrealism as it pertains to modern phenomenology is "to recognize the everyday as a dynamic montage of elements, to make it strange so that its strangeness can be recognized" (47).

existence as *mutatis mutandis*, a blank space—that positions the pastoral as a genre where phenomena are examined for their thingness rather than for functionality. Whether or not this was the conscious intent of pastoral as an aesthetic mode, it appears to be a tacit part of the tradition that the unaffectedness of nature as a scenic backdrop provides a space where things in conventional context can be inverted and viewed in their otherness. As Ettin explains, it is through the contrasting unity of “the fool and the philosopher” that pastoral works as a rhetorical strategy to disentangle the artifice of ornate social convention and intellectual sophistry. In the absence of the idiot-savant shepherd who embodies, personifies, and gives voice to that environment, the landscape of neopastoral acts autonomously as the lens through which the external world of urbanity is filtered. The pastoral environment, indicative of a brand of primitivism or minimalism, offers a space less affected by, or lacking in, artifice.¹⁰⁹ However pejorative a lack of artifice might sound to some, “being artless clarifies one’s understanding” in the pastoral mode (105). In other words (and to reiterate), being artless works to reveal the essence of a thing unaffected by context—or, conversely, affected by a different context: the natural rhythms of the seasons and an idealized notion of labour within the land. One could parallel such rhetoric with the creeds of modern phenomenology and “thing theory,” where intentional misperception offers a method to perceive objects as they are rather than by their contextual function. Both modern phenomenology and the pastoral mode perpetuate misperception through a brand of de-contextualization and intentional misprision, and that misprision often revolves around misreading the urban, the antithesis of the pastoral.

Indeed pastoral, although immediately connected to verdant greenery, innocence, and simplicity, is Janus-faced in its loyalties; it has one foot in the pasture and one in the urban court.

¹⁰⁹ Again, this idealized ability of the pastoral to “clarify” one’s perception can be related to the rhetoric of the American wilderness frontier. As Cronon explains, “the primitive simplicity of the frontier... is the place where we can see the world as it really is” (80).

In representing unabashed simplicity, it is caught up in the cosmopolitan conventions it disavows by rendering uncanny the affectations of the civilized, and it achieves this uncanny alteration through a dynamic of contrasts related to ironic modes. In his discussion of pastoral and its relation to ironic tropes, Ettin contends that “The pastoral *is* an ironic form, based on a perceivable distance between the alleged and the implied. It lets us know either that its point of view is significant largely because it contrasts with some other point of view, or that its real subject is something in addition to (or perhaps instead of) its ostensible subject” (italics added 12).¹¹⁰ As Ettin goes on to argue, “The pastoral impulse toward containment involves holding contraries together in apparent unity, forged by art out of discordant emotions and perceptions” (12). Not only does Ettin’s extrapolation serve to situate pastoral as a space of contraries; it also highlights the confluence of disunity—to hold “contraries together in apparent unity”—that we might apply to the perception of object matter within the pastoral environment. Just as waste in a pastoral setting connotes discord, the pastoral as a mode thrives by such incongruities and draws breath from the reconciliation of discordant phenomena. If we apply this notion of holding contrasts in unity to the remnants of the human-made in natural space—be it the detritus of domestic manufacture, the ivied ruins of the picturesque, or the vernacular ruins of the American frontier—it would seem that the pastoral in its conventions does not barricade itself from the

¹¹⁰ The binary of real versus ostensible (indeed, real versus ideal) functions as a motif in nearly all forms of pastoral. In modern times the farm that represents this ideal/real dichotomy, the home to which none can return, is essentially a useless artifact that has become more a museum piece to be viewed along the highway than anything of practical relevance. The pastoral is a fabricated sanctuary where urban tourists can escape to indulge in nostalgic fantasies, not unlike “the most photographed barn in America” from DeLillo’s *White Noise*. At what should be considered a humdrum agrarian setting “forty cars and a tour bus” ferry urbanites to a cowpath that leads “to the slightly elevated spot set aside for viewing and photographing,” where “A man in a booth [sells] postcards and slides—pictures of the barn taken from the elevated spot” (12). What’s important about DeLillo’s deflation of the pastoral fantasy is the intentional misreading of the object (the barn) perpetrated by the tourists. As one of the characters notes in true ironic-savant-deflator fashion, “Once you’ve seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn.” Pastoral as a mode is based on misprision and misperception of its object, a brand of misuse we might connect to the phenomenology of the modern period.

urban. It is predisposed to admit the urban into its purview, to allow those remnants to speak their alterity, to become something ontological and aesthetic.

Throughout this dissertation the point I have argued repeatedly is that natural space is predisposed to render the remainders of human habitation artifactual by virtue of both its antithetical position to domestication and its uncanny dynamics. The objects interred in a landfill become more artifactual when located beyond the city's limits;¹¹¹ rusting car bodies become more artifactual when left to linger in a cow pasture. These abandoned material things are evidence of human trace where trace is scarce, and play into the counterforce of contrasts characterized by the pastoral mode.¹¹² By conceptualizing the frontier wilderness as pastoral in progress, I have attempted to situate the pastoral as the meeting point where an ironic inversion occurs that renders the fragments of domestic obsolescence artifactual, where such objects attain

¹¹¹ This point is, of course, debatable. I am not arguing that waste located in urban space does not possess artifactual qualities. But I imagine that a dump located in the heart of a city would require some distance from urban perception for it to become uncanny and unfamiliar. Greenspace provides this buffer between the urban and the onlooker, and facilitates the unity of contrasts necessary to warp the ontological significance of domestic detritus. Garbage encountered in a city, to a greater degree, becomes lost in the static of the cityscape. Fragments of waste are not an uncommon sight on curbs and sidewalks (depending on the city), and therefore possess less artifactual intrigue to the common urbanite going about her daily business. However, garden imagery, when applied to the city, can most certainly warp the phenomenological characteristics of urban-situated waste matter. Interestingly, there are a few examples in American literature where waste, when located within the limits of the urban sphere, adopts uncanny, artifactual characteristics through superimposition onto garden mythoi. If "pastoral" as a cultural convention has indeed found its way into the realm of the urban proletariat (as Buell suggests), novels like Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* act as ironical, updated versions of the settler story, with a working-class immigrant family central to the artifactual encounter with the neo-garden myth. In a chapter called "The Monkey Garden"—a satirical reinterpretation of a prelapsarian return to innocence—children frolic in a refuse site where "Dead cars" appear to pop up "overnight like mushrooms" (95). Seeing how the novel takes place in urban Chicago, the irony of associating a garden to a makeshift landfill located within the city functions to invert, and repurpose, the garden myth through the waste material that has now come to represent such a fantasy. A similar inversion of the waste-garden occurs in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* with what Marx describes as a "hideous, man-made wilderness [that] is a product of the technological power that also makes possible Gatsby's wealth, his parties, his car" (*The Machine* 358)—the image of the "valley of ashes" (*Gatsby* 27). Located "half way between West Egg and New York" in "a certain desolate area of land," it is "a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke" (27). The point I am arguing is that these literary representations of waste-become-garden are further evidence of the uncanny power of natural space, particularly as it concerns clashes with the surpluses or ruined material of incessant domesticating activities. Owing to the power of the garden myth in American culture, both Cisneros and Fitzgerald found it appropriate to evoke garden imagery in order to have the waste representing urban excess appear strange and other to itself (artifactual), offering an extended metaphor of the garden as waste—a pastoral fantasy literally in ruins.

¹¹² See discussion of counterforce as it pertains to pastoral space in chapter one.

new use through misuse or misreading. Although the volumes of scholarship on pastoral and natural aesthetics would seem the appropriate place to engage theories surrounding the aesthetics of waste in natural environments, there appears to be reticence surrounding the topic. Either that or the subject is deliberately overlooked. This reticence, which will be explored in section 3.4, persists in spite of the reality that the imbrication of human-generated waste in natural space recurs throughout the oeuvres of notable modern American writers, particularly in works generally linked to the pastoral mode. Regardless of its existence as an aesthetic aberration, the topic materializes from time to time like a house floating down the Mississippi River (*Huck Finn*), or a discarded tire visible just beneath the surface of a pond. One must question the absence of direct discussion about such demonstrable phenomena, especially when bearing in mind the pervasiveness of human presence in the landscape.

The tragic irony of my study is that, while I am trying to determine how pastoral is deserving of the “neo” prefix, scholars like Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind* have asked the question of whether or not wilderness, in its pure form, deserves the “post” prefix. In a chapter called “The Irony of Victory” Nash offers a tongue-in-cheek reading of wilderness preservationist attitudes in which overpopulated and swelling metropolises, having “turned to the nation’s remaining empty places in unprecedented numbers,” “Ironically... threatened to prove its undoing.” Indeed, “wilderness could well be loved to death” (316). In light of overpopulation, increasing appetite for natural resources, and meddling forms of environmental interventionism we must take into account the effects of human presence, the consequences of which are shifting our conceptions of natural space.

There is the problem of how wild a region must be to qualify as wilderness, or, conversely, how much of the influence of civilization can be admitted. ... Does the presence of Indians or range cattle disqualify an area [as wilderness]? Does an empty beer can? How about airplanes overhead? (4)

Like a postmodern “Anecdote of the Jar” the wilderness is no longer wild with the interjection of a discarded beer can. What Nash is ultimately arguing: it is becoming ever more doubtful that there are any places left on the surface of the earth unaffected by human activity and the interjections of the technology and manufacturing age. If we are indeed approaching a post-wilderness on earth, then perhaps we should examine whether or not we might reach a post-pastoral phase as well. But before we attach the “post” prefix to the pastoral as some scholars have done,¹¹³ there needs to be acknowledgement of waste’s conspicuous and lingering presence in the new idyll before any post-phase could be wholly quantified.

* * *

¹¹³ See the chapter “Postpastoral” in Gifford’s book *Pastoral* (1999) for further reading on how the genre has been read in its post-conceptualization. Gifford does not apply the “post” prefix to indicate that pastoral has disappeared, or that it has been surmounted. Rather it is applied to demonstrate how various “strands can overlap” to create new versions of the pastoral (126). Gifford, as in my own study, references Leo Marx’s prediction that “the precariousness of our relations with nature is bound to bring forth new versions of pastoral” (qtd. in Gifford 4). However, where Gifford and I differ in our terminology of post-pastoral and neopastoral has to do with the specific link I am making to the refuse of domestic and commodity cultures as the next representational step in the pastoral genre that offers an ironic vision of man in nature. In his conceptualization of the post-pastoral, Gifford is also concerned with man’s position in nature, and how the “traditional conventions of the pastoral and the anti-pastoral” combine to make “an alternative ‘post-pastoral’ vision” (5). This “alternative” vision of the pastoral appears to be a conglomeration of environmentalist ideology that might fall under the broad rubric of ecocritical theory; post-pastoral simply seems to stand for any piece of literature that exhibits an adherence to, or consciousness of, contemporary environmental issues (such as sustainability, for example). Post-pastoral also presents a more pejorative view of the man/nature dichotomy. For example, within the category of post-pastoral a “Greenpeace supporter might use the term as a criticism of [a] tree poem if it ignored the presence of pollution or the threat to urban trees from city developers” (2). While Gifford’s study parallels my own in the sense that certain pejorative aspects of human interference have been ignored in conventional pastoral, the technological effects of humankind on natural space is not his only focus, and there is no reference to how trash or domestic waste factors into his reading. Moreover, Gifford does not comprehensively address the ironic foundations of pastoral, and how irony works with his attribution of the “post” prefix. To summarize, “post-pastoral” seems to be a catch-all term for anything that overlaps with the three categories of pastoral (“the literary convention, literature of the countryside and the pejorative of idealisation” [146]) that he defines at the beginning of his book. Because I believe the term “post-pastoral” to be premature and underdeveloped—particularly when bearing in mind the lack of coherence and consensus with the term that would precede it (neopastoral)—I will focus instead on the “neo” usage as I have conceptualized it, and will leave it to the reader to extrapolate and weigh the merits of the “post” usage as a brand of ecocriticism.

3.3. The Washing Machine in the Garden Revisited: Interjections of the Domestic and Eden Ironized

Marx's influential study of the machine's abrupt appearance in the American idyll is one that largely concerns the interjections not of domestic refuse, but of the grander technological innovations of the age of industrialization.¹¹⁴ The locomotive, the steamboat, the monstrous silhouettes of the smoke-stacks of industry as viewed from a distant garden alcove—these images all play prominently in Marx's configuration of an interrupted pastoral fantasy in American culture. In early to later portions of the twentieth century we are presented with an addendum to Marx's grand machine that offers a variation on the interrupted idyll. Rather than the machine proper, the American landscape becomes adorned with the remnant minutiae of industrial produce, the interpolation of the everyday by-products of the manufacturing and commodity age, the interjection, and abandonment, of the husks of the domestic. This is where we might diverge from Marx in both schema and terminology, as in the modern and postmodern periods it is less the sublime shock of grand technologies that jars us out of familiar perceptions and more the jolts of everyday minutia that prompt us to re-interpret and re-assess our

¹¹⁴ In "Pastoralism in America" Marx offers a synopsis of the scope and intent of *The Machine in the Garden* that is worth quoting at length as a way of orienting the achievements and limitations of his study. "The representative event alluded to in my title was the sudden, dramatic appearance of the new machine technology in the native landscape. Between 1820 and 1860 such events became a part of the everyday experience of many people, and variants of the complex machine-in-the-landscape image became an omnipresent feature of American popular culture. This was a time when the widespread awareness of the accelerating pace of change far exceeded most people's capacity to describe, much less explain, those changes. Most of the words and catchphrases we have come to rely on to designate the transition to modernity—industrialization, industrial revolution, the rise of industrial capitalism, urbanization, rationalization, mechanization, bureaucratization, modernization, and so on—either had not been coined or had not won currency. To read widely in the public discourse of the period is to become conscious of a large conceptual void and a yearning to fill it" (37). As Marx explains, the scope of *The Machine* is limited to "ambivalent responses of certain Americans... to the onset of industrialism" that would send locomotives screaming across a newly cordoned nineteenth-century wilderness (36-37). In spite of this limitation, Marx's identification of a "conceptual void" of terminology that is waiting to be filled is applicable to my own study of how domestic waste in natural environments, as an aesthetic consideration, requires elucidation through naming. What is also important is the lacunae Marx highlights between the phenomenon and its identification, phenomena that, in the absence of naming, would have inspired an aesthetic mode of engagement rather than an empirical, scientific one. Indeed, Marx's study focuses on the *aesthetics* of the machine's abrupt appearance, and the subjects populating his examination, by his own admission, are "writers, artists, and intellectuals" (36) rather than scientists, historians, and the architects of that change.

subjectivity in relation to the surpluses of domestic life.¹¹⁵ My reference to an episode of *The Simpsons* in chapter one, where a collection of students on an experiential learning trek recall having stumbled upon “an old washing machine... that still had clothes in it” in the middle of a wilderness preserve, offers a pop-culture vignette of the transition in (post)modernity from the sublime interjection of grand machines in the landscape to concerns of the domestic excesses of commodity culture. By supplementing a washing machine for the interjectory whistle of the locomotive, a fusion of the machine and domestic by-product takes place, as the remnant clothing abandoned inside the machine haunts the scene with traces of subjectivity. These concerns are aesthetic in nature regardless of their existence as waste, and what they highlight is the movement away from the grand to the minutiae of everyday objects that preoccupies the modern period. Even difficult-to-reach natural spaces that still present the dangers of wilderness—like Mount Everest, for example—are not immune to incursions of the domestic. Increasing numbers of tourists leave traces of themselves behind in the form of discarded packaging and broken tools as makeshift flag posts attesting to their former presence.¹¹⁶ Perhaps in the future the peak of Everest will not merely house domestic waste as the artifactual evidence of conquest, but will further augment its implication in domestic refuse by becoming home to the world’s largest billboard peddling to the middle classes who brave the mountain the amenities of consumerism. While Beethoven’s quartets lie like potatoes in a cellar, the “stone in the road” and “the clod in the field” (“Origin” 19-20)—and the washing machine in the garden and the waste atop Everest—achieve ontological relevance, become the artifactual remainder and raucous

¹¹⁵ Jolts prompted by domestic waste occur on a more personal level, I argue, than on the impersonal level facilitated by industrial machinery or grand machines. In other words, there is less of an “awe” factor with domestic waste and more of a look-again function similar to works in a gallery. The reaction to waste in nature is less associated with the immediate danger or terror of the sublime and more with the introspection of the beautiful. Also, because the waste of commodity culture is interwoven into our everyday lives, its familiarity evokes a more intimate reflection of the spectator’s subjectivity, whereas the more sublime shock of grand machines can work to obliterate that subjectivity.

¹¹⁶ See the online article “Cleaning up Mount Everest” by Sara Jeswani (2011): <http://blogs.sweden.se/sustainability/2011/01/31/cleaning-up-mount-everest/>.

ghosts of a hyper-domestic age of disposability. The irony is that what we believe to be disposable haunts the present as well as the future. The packaging we might carelessly toss aside will exist long after the organic material of our bodies has turned to dust.



Figure 3.2. *Beetown, Wisconsin*, Paul Vanderbilt. Photograph, 1962. Included in *American Landscapes: Photographs from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*, page 69. Compare with Banksy's *Countryside Car Wreck* in chapter one. Included with permission by the Wisconsin Historical Society.¹¹⁷

The drive to aestheticize, photograph, or commemorate in poetry the waste of the domestic—a home to which none can return—as it imposes itself on natural space is an exercise imbued with callous irony. How, exactly, is it ironic? Aside from the obvious argument that

¹¹⁷ Vanderbilt's photo is archived online by the Wisconsin Historical Society at the following link: <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/pressroom/photos/archives/10676.jpg>.

irony serves to reveal the inverse of its surface intention (as in the case of verbal irony), that inverse usually presents itself not necessarily as an opposite, but as the disturbance of an ideal, the interjection of the real. Much like the function of paradox, the inverse reveals a truth. As literary theorist Northrop Frye explains in *The Anatomy of Criticism*, “Irony, as a mode, is born from the low mimetic; it takes life exactly as it finds it” (40). Taking life as it is found rather than as it adheres to the tenets of its idealized traditional structure is precisely what new versions of pastoral represent. One can only speculate on what Thoreau might have written if on one of his woodland saunters he happened upon a scene akin to Paul Vanderbilt’s *Beetown, Wisconsin* (Figure 3.2). The prospect of abandoned and rusting vehicles among rolling green hills might have inspired a rather mutated version of his essay “Walking,” where instead of romanticizing the ruins of past civilizations come to reside in the subsoil of his bean field, he would decry how the superfluities of modern technology have come home to roost within the rhetorical American waste-garden. On the other hand, just as Thoreau tends to aestheticize the “unaffected” domesticity of the rural dweller’s home and “the citizen’s suburban box,”¹¹⁸ perhaps he might find picturesque value in the encounter with remnants of domestic technologies vis-à-vis the rural excursion. It is difficult to know for certain what Thoreau’s position might be. He does, after all, compare “The whistle of the locomotive” that “penetrates [his] woods” to the “scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer’s yard,” an arresting interjection figuratively conflating

¹¹⁸ As Thoreau says in *Walden*, “The most interesting dwellings in this country, as the painter knows, are the most unpretending, humble log huts and cottages of the poor commonly; it is the life of the inhabitants whose shells they are, and not any peculiarity in their surfaces merely, which makes them picturesque; and equally interesting will be the citizen’s suburban box, when his life shall be as simple and as agreeable to the imagination, and there is as little straining after effect in the style of his dwelling” (1832). Thoreau’s reference to these homes as a “shell” or material husk that stands as a metonym for the inhabitants offers an objective correlation between home and subject that becomes a reified marker of subjectivity. Domestic objects and the lives associated to them are conflated as artifactual remainders “agreeable to the imagination,” predicated on aesthetic rather than scientific modes of observation.

industrial and natural phenomena (*Walden* 1868).¹¹⁹ One can surmise based on his condemnations of commodity and material culture, however, that the imposition of technological and domestic waste, to him, would be grating rather than aesthetically moving. Yet buried in that offensive encounter with surpluses of the domestic (the ironized “suburban box”) resides a willingness to see in the “humble” and “unpretending” “shells” and “surfaces” the “inhabitants whose shells they are” (1832), the look-again function that forces the spectator to re-evaluate, repurpose, and resuscitate the ontological significance of domestic produce as traces of human presence. The subjectivity imbued in objects through trace, whether a reflection of the past or the present’s reflection of itself, facilitates the conversion of mere objects to artifacts.

Examining “waste” as the refused of the home, or the home *itself* refused, offers another angle through which to approach the topic of waste’s aesthetic impositions into natural space. If technological waste is the by-product of the domestication of nature and humankind, then it would appear that our homes are becoming undomesticated waste-lands as the refuse heaps become ever more unmanageable, or return to haunt us in aesthetic configurations, documentaries, dissertations, and monographs on the cultural significance of garbage. Just as theorists of environmental aesthetics have noted the parallels between natural wildernesses and urban wildernesses, and, therefore, the uncanny character of “wilderness” as a concept,¹²⁰ so might the remnants of domestic activity be regarded as the civil become wild or feral (i.e., waste-as-garbage equated with waste-as-uncultivated-wilderness).¹²¹ Anyone who has visited a landfill will be able to envision this parallel between waste-as-landscape useless to human enterprise and

¹¹⁹ From the chapter “Sounds” in *Walden*.

¹²⁰ See Berleant’s section on “Wilderness as a Metaphor for the City” in *Aesthetics and Environment* (2005), pages 42-43. Berleant’s metaphor will be examined below.

¹²¹ This concept of the civil becoming feral further explains how waste underwent its etymological evolution: the term refers to once domesticated (human-contrived) things turning wild—to a waste(land)—just as how the city becomes a mirror of wilderness.

waste-as-refused-human-made-things (also considered, generally speaking, useless to human enterprise). Conflations of waste-as-wilderness and waste-as-refuse are comparable to the cognitive associations made between wilderness and the city. The city, at least figuratively, has become a wilderness in the modern mind owing to commodity-driven hyper-domesticity; the drive to domesticate the wilderness that is responsible for modern civilization becomes foiled by the inverted replication of the wild within an urban space surfeit and deluged with things. According to Berleant's *Aesthetics and Environment*, the association between wilderness and the city is palpable in everyday urban experience: "Moving among buildings and along the streets has some of the perceptual quality of walking among stands of trees and around dense growth. The background hum of traffic may remind one of the wind rushing ceaselessly through the trees when a weather front is coming through. Pushing one's way through a crowd resembles the experience of pressing through thick vegetation" (42-43). Such correlations may derive from cognitive dissonances between primeval and technocratic minds. But owing to our desire to create such frames of reference—to map human identity onto the non-human—garbage also has its natural counterpart whereby the ambient "odour of decaying leaves or the effluvium of a marsh in the hot sun may resemble the smell of garbage containers on the sidewalk awaiting pickup" (42).



Figure 3.3. *The Last Spectacle*, Paul Jacobsen. Oil on canvas, 2005. Included in *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*. Image reproduced with permission from the artist.

In spite of the city representing an amplification of domesticity, there is a difference between the domestic and the urban civilized. Domesticity connotes the individual, vernacular traces of the subjects who demarcate a space contrary to raw wilderness; it focuses more on idiosyncrasies, an individual “member of a household” for example (*OED*), and the distinctive lives of those who populate either country or city. “Urbanity” connotes a “state, condition, or character of a town or city” (*OED*), something that is more removed from raw natural (and even rural) space that stands “opposed to the countryside” (“urban” *OED*). Domesticity is not necessarily “urban,” but a space where traces of urbanity begin to coalesce. It is in this way that both terms share common genus in their connection to human influence, presence, and contrivance. Again, we should keep in mind that while “domestic” connotes—all at once—visions of human habitation, the home, and opposition to wilderness (i.e., taming), it also

contains references to the material by-products of that incessant activity of wilderness repression that has culminated in modern urbanization, a world driven by industrial commodity (*M-W*).

Consider the above image, Paul Jacobsen's *The Last Spectacle*. The painting, whether consciously or unconsciously, is both an ironic statement on the culmination of humanity's wasted efforts to be domesticated through commodity, and a satire on the American myth of the Edenic wilderness garden, the desire to return to the bosom of an idyllic natural existence within a feminized landscape disfigured by the lingering detritus of tech-culture. Like *The Final Record of the Last Moment of History* (see Figure 1.6 in chapter one), the inert mountains of tech-refuse both contrast and insinuate themselves within the rolling green hills of verdant scenery. Although it appears that Jacobsen's painting is a representation of Eden interrupted—the natural curves of the flanking hills displaced by implanted, artificial mammae—a strange balance has been achieved between human influence and the surrounding greenspace. While subjects in the foreground appear to be indifferent to the presence of waste piles, others closer to the heaps stand gazing as though piles of tech-junk possess museal value as remnants of antiquity now surmounted. The idea that each of the piles is closely replicated in their arrangement as both waste and artifactual objects also suggests a brand of aesthetic contrivance on the part of the curators, whoever they may be. Truly in such an apocalyptic vision of a postlapsarian, naturalist America, museum space would indeed be out-of-doors. The binaries of natural environment and the technological efforts of humankind would best reveal their noumenal distinctions with this kind of dialectical display. To the spectators within the painting, the former practical function of each manufactured item—from rockets to tractor tires—is irrelevant. Time has mollified and expunged their necessity. What gives the heaps relevance is not only their existence *as* heaps, but also their useless, aesthetic value as artifacts. Like the haphazard encounter of the washing

machine in the garden, or of abandoned tools, implements, and forsaken habitation overgrown with vegetation, the things appear as they actually are rather than as their equipmental significations. Their functionality displaced, we see beyond the mode of blind pragmatism (Schwenger 53). They appear as something holistically poetic in relation to the environment and to each other.

The ultimate point I am making is that the environment in which Jacobsen's waste appears is the catalyst for its overall arresting nature. It is commodity culture out of place. In terms of the aesthetic effect, artifact and environment are co-dependent. To directly parallel *The Last Spectacle* with the earlier reference to *The Simpsons* episode: neither the washing machine in the garden nor Jacobsen's pastoral tech-waste are necessarily soliciting environmentalist alarm, but are rather presenting a satire that echoes Zizek's assertion that we must learn to be at home with our waste, whether that home be an idealized, feminine wilderness or the enclaves of urban development. Many such assemblages tease out the idea that our present-day conceptions of pastoral space, or even the picturesque, must accommodate the imposition that accompanies the disposability of domestic commoditization run wild.

The figurative relationship between hyper-domestication and wilderness, particularly in light of the binaries of waste (as the refused of the home) and waste (as landscape), has an interesting lineage in American culture. Rod Giblett, an Australian scholar of American culture and the environment (referenced in chapter two), does a transnational reading of the detritus generated through human intervention in the landscape by paralleling United States wilderness preserves and the Australian outback. While I am undecided whether I am convinced by the rhetorical reading Giblett does of the "rape" of nature in relation to psychoanalytic or Freudian impulses (for example, mining and dumping are analogous to the oral- and anal-phases where the

mother—earth—is “suck[ed] dry” and excreted into [191]), Giblett makes an apt point regarding the pan-national ubiquity of pastoral waste that can be verified by those who are willing to observe the phenomenon for itself. “Mining scoops out the earth and creates hollow places; sanitary landfill finds hollow places in the earth and fills them up.... An all too familiar scene in Australia and the United States has been of what was once a wetland, but is now a wasteland full of rusting car-bodies, bald tyres, superseded whitegoods and sundry other household rubbish; the detritus of capitalist production and consumption” (191). The presence of all this household rubbish again prompts the question of how domestic and wilderness space, the home and the un-home, become binary oppositions that create an uncanny symbiosis, which in turn facilitates an aesthetic response. If the garden has been excreted into by the surfeit of domestic goods, how does such refuse generate museal fascination? In contrast to Giblett’s reduction of modern wetlands to post-industrial wastelands conditioned by some Freudian impulse to excrete into our mother, Berleant regards the city and its phenomenological residues as a sort of “rationalized wilderness” (43): “the city becomes not the opposite of wilderness but its double: wilderness is not only a metaphor for the city but its mirror” (45). The dualism of city and wilderness, their existence as doppelgangers of their respective counterparts, furthers the uncanny associations one might make between the object-matter of either (how the “effluvium of a marsh in the hot sun may resemble the smell of garbage containers”). In this reciprocal relationship we might surmise that wilderness, if we are to adhere to Freud’s definition of the uncanny, is the repressed remnant of the past—known of old and long familiar—that returns to haunt the present state of urbanity. But more often than not in modern times it is the domestic present that interjects to haunt the past, and that domestic present manifests itself as the refused of the home: rusting car-bodies, bald tires, superseded whitegoods and sundry other household rubbish.¹²²

¹²² Figure 3.4. Image removed for copyright purposes. Untitled photograph depicting a discarded tire just below the

There are multiple examples in American literature of the waste of domestic commodity come home to roost in the Edenic garden,¹²³ but none so pervasive, and in such a canonical piece of Americana, as the encounters with both modern technologies and domestic refuse in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). As an author that both influenced and presaged modernist American writing, Twain's recognition of the tyranny of objects, particularly those surrounding domestic and industrial culture, certainly deserves acknowledgement. The significance of *Huck Finn* specifically is that it is a text documenting (and aestheticizing) the precarious transition from a pastoral to an urban America interrupted by and deluged with things. Citing the interjection of the monstrous steamboat that "suddenly bulges out of the night" to interfere with the bucolic idealism of the agrarian South, Marx in *The Machine in the Garden* highlights the cultural significance of the American pastoral fantasy disrupted by technological

surface of a natural water source. From *Accommodating Nature: The Photographs of Frank Gohlke*. Frank Gohlke is associated with the New Topographics movement, a collective of American artists who photographed the changing suburban and neo-picturesque landscapes of the United States. The New Topographers will be discussed briefly in the epilogue of the dissertation as an example of where the study of the neopastoral might be expanded.

¹²³ See the note above (footnote 111) referencing *House on Mango Street* and *The Great Gatsby*. Other examples would be DeLillo's *Underworld*, and Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America* (1964). A rather comic portrayal of the destructive influence "back-to-nature" proselytes have on wilderness is illustrated in "Footnote Chapter to 'Red Lip'" in Brautigan's text. The narrator's account of living in the Californian bush where he "had no garbage service" is a burlesque on how the wilderness bears deeply entrenched signs of domestic diaspora and its failures. After locating three abandoned houses, one in which "children's toothbrushes were still in the bathroom medicine cabinet," the narrator decides to inter his surplus of "tin cans, papers, peelings, bottles and Popeyes" in an outhouse belonging to one of the homes (134). The garbage heaped into a space connoting both failed domestication and wilderness is pleasing ("funny") when they can only discern the "murky abstract outline of garbage" in the "darkness below," but becomes repellant when it is seen as what it truly is in its "bright, definite and lusty" appearance "heaped up almost to the top" (135). It is when the garbage loses its abstraction, its mystery, its poetics of detachment—when it becomes too real—that the wilderness sojourners decide to abandon the site to "stranger[s]" trying "to take an innocent crap" who will get "quite a surprise when... lift[ing] up the lid," and they leave "the California bush just before it became necessary to stand on the toilet seat and step into that hole, crushing the garbage down like an accordion into the abyss" (135). We might connect this image of crushing garbage into an abyss within a domestic space located in the wilderness to Giblett's reading of the Freudian impulse to excrete into a maternalized earth. For the purposes of my argument, however, more relevant is the phenomenological conversion of abstract representations of domestic waste (viewed amelioratively) to something with too much proximity, something too real (viewed pejoratively). When these interruptions happen from afar (for example, buffered or circumfused by natural space), they take on pleasing—albeit, ironic—characteristics, whereas when they have too much proximity, they are no longer things but oppressive objects. Offered in Brautigan's account are two brands of vernacular ruin: 1) the abandoned outhouse that then becomes a gallery for 2) commodity refuse. Conflated, the outhouse and commodity trash act as a symbol for the aesthetic evolution of sentimentalized pastoral domestication laden with tin cans and fast-food containers.

by-products (15). The rhetoric associating Huck's pastoral South to an ironized Eden is blatant: Huck and Jim reject the corrupting influence of antebellum social mores for an allegorical return to innocence represented by the fantasy of an idyllic wilderness garden. They live a life of relative freedom on the river, "float[ing] wherever the current wanted" them to go, and the idea that the two were "always naked, day and night," situates the duo as characters in an Edenic parody (125). And what would a parody be without interjections of crass, out-of-place, off-the-cuff interlocutors meant to deflate the existing authoritative paradigm the two are complicit in interrupting?¹²⁴ The crass interlocutor in this case is represented by the steamboat that appears out of nowhere, belching, polluting, disrupting tranquillity. The imposition of the machine, owing to its place as deflator, can be one that produces anxiety and apprehension. Yet rather than categorize the imposition pejoratively, Twain injects the scene with aesthetic ambivalence, a brand of sublime spectatorship, as the machine is observed from afar:

Once or twice of a night we would see a steamboat slipping along in the dark, and now and then she would belch a whole world of sparks up out of her chimbleys, and they would rain down in the river and look awful pretty; then she would turn a corner and her lights would wink out and her powwow shut off and leave the river still again; and by and by her waves would get to us, a long time after she was gone, and joggle the raft a bit, and after that you wouldn't hear nothing for you couldn't tell how long, except maybe frogs or something. (125)

There are a few items of note in this passage. Intentional or not, Twain is introducing a schematic for both *in situ* and residual ontological effects produced by a machine-in-the-garden

¹²⁴ Linda Hutcheon in *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* encapsulates how irony, parody, and satire as interrelated species persist according to the concept of assailment "wherein irony is seen to operate as the aggressive putdown that keeps people in their place. In his analysis of humor in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*," Hutcheon explains, "Freud had argued that ironic modes such as parody, travesty, and caricature are always, despite their seemingly innocent humor, actually 'directed against people and objects which lay claim to authority and respect'" (the word "aggressive" is bolded in Hutcheon's text, 53). We might apply this deflation of authority to the pastoral paradigm itself; the machine's sudden appearance in the garden, particularly as it might be rendered in aesthetic media, is iconoclastic and subversive, but also contains a symbiotic quality meant to shock while it ingratiate itself into the scene in order to unify the contrast. This unity is ironic, as it is a "stretcher," as Huck might put it, to associate harmony with something shocking and interjectory. Yet as I explained in section 3.2, the conflation and inversion of opposing concepts, particularly as they concern the rural/urban dichotomy, is a distinct and deliberate feature of the pastoral mode. Suffice it to say that the machine, as well as the by-product of domestic refuse, or both, act as deflationary interlocutors meant to jar the spectator out of normative modes of perception.

brand of spectatorship. Initially we are introduced to the machine's silent yet ominous presence "slipping along in the dark" until suddenly its existence becomes luridly manifested in a sudden belch of sparks that "rain down in the river and look awful pretty."¹²⁵ The sudden shock is mediated not only by the natural space, but also by the river itself which absorbs—some may even say, becomes polluted by—the ejecta. Then, the once interrupted silence is restored as a rift is created between the spectator and the mechanical imposition. Lights go out; then stillness; and then the Zen moment: the silent ripple effect—waves—created by the encounter, which "joggle" the spectators "a long time after [the steamboat] was gone." Finally, the engulfing presence of nature tunes in from the background in a course of frogs to instate a sort of postcoital serenity.¹²⁶

The jarring effect produced in the observer does not dissipate with the reestablishment of nature as the primary object. Rather, the encounter is haunted with the resonant force of the mechanical interjection. Even as the rippling waves lose their influence, the double negative of "you wouldn't hear nothing" highlights the resonance and residual effect of the encounter long after object and spectator have diverged paths. Indeed, the encounter with such imposing technology in the agrarian setting leaves its imprint on the spectator; its echoes become something internalized in memory rather than merely existing as run-of-the-mill, superfluous

¹²⁵ The oxymoronic use of "belch" and "pretty" further ironizes the aesthetic conversion of a personified ("she") machine polluting the Edenic scene. The feminization of the machine is also an ironic departure from the rhetoric of a masculinized, phallic interjection into virginal wilderness space. The feminization of the machine in this case works to mollify the violence of the machine's invasion.

¹²⁶ I use the word "postcoital" in spite of the feminization of the steamboat, as the phallic iconography of the smokestack lends itself to a masculinized characterization. Although I have referenced several scholars who, having a Freudian or psychoanalytic bent to their analyses, eroticize humanity's incursion in the landscape (for example, Marx, Kolodny, and Giblett), I use these eroticized terms cautiously, as I realize that sexual readings of aesthetic phenomena can become specious exercises in prurient doublespeak. That said, I am aware of the relationship suggested by Freud between aesthetic representation and libidinal desire, a topic that I covered in an essay I published in *English Studies in Canada* in 2011. In it I articulated my skepticism of "speciously disinterring sexual tropes," as "it seems all too easy to argue... that there is always something libidinal buried beneath the portrayal of invasion or subjugation" ("Wooden Reels" 98), however figurative or innocent. This disclaimer is in reference to a footnote in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* where Freud posits that all aesthetic representations are organized around libidinal impulses. As Freud argues, there is "no doubt that the concept of the 'beautiful'" in relation to aesthetic theory "has its roots in sexual excitation and that its original meaning was 'sexually stimulating'" (qtd. in "Wooden Reels" 98).

external stimuli. Of course one could argue that this encounter is made to appear extraordinary owing to Huck and Jim's position as rural bumpkins less acquainted with modern technology. Yet the description of the space—the juxtaposition of the chimney ejecta and the river—enhances the aesthetic nature of the encounter, as the same event taking place in the marina dock of an urban centre might be too commonplace, too appropriate for the scenery, to be exceptional. What we are presented with is not merely an object isolated on a pedestal, but a symbiosis of thing and space as the polluting sparks mingle with the river in a “pretty” display, and then, like some mythical, extra-dimensional being, amalgamate with the scene by slipping back into the darkness.

The juxtaposition of the pastoral and the products of modern/urban technology facilitate one type of curious display that can be related to another more vernacular type of encounter, that being the meeting point between the domestic and the natural. As noted above, “domestic” has become a rather ambivalent word that connotes both the home and articles of manufacture, that which is made by hand. In other words, “domestic” refers at once to activities surrounding human habitation and to the objects that are by-products of that habitation. It cannot fail to produce a visceral response in an observer to happen upon the remnants of domestic produce in a natural space, and it matters little whether this response is owing to moral objections to the defilement of nature, or stems from a curiosity regarding those who left ontological traces to linger. Yet rather than being the more sublime encounter facilitated by the grandiosity of the steamboat, the encounter with domestic waste is one that elicits a probing, inquisitive spectatorship that is dissimilar to the feeling of ineffectualness associated with the sublime.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Because theories surrounding the sublime resonance of technology materialize from the background of my analysis, it is worth noting David E. Nye's 1994 study *American Technological Sublime*—a valuable historical reading that examines the American hybridization of sublime natural topography and feats of modern technology, architecture, and urban/industrial engineering. As Nye argues, awe-inducing human-made structures, such as the

Grandiosity, however, still has a place in encounters with the domestic. While William Gilpin in his 1770 manifesto *Observations on the River Wye* identified the natural decay of formerly grand structures (like abbeys and castles) as the principal object of “*picturesque curiosity*” (43), that panoramic is usually flanked by more domestic styles of architecture. Both Gilpin in *Observations* and Thoreau in *Walden* highlight these domestic garnishes as part and parcel of the picturesque dynamic; those humble dwellings “little straining after effect” highlighted by Thoreau (*Walden* 1832), or “humble plants” in flower, fringed by “shabby houses” emphasized by Gilpin (43), represent their own aesthetic subcategory in what Priscilla Paton in *Abandoned New England* calls the “vernacular ruin” (210). What these vernacular “emblems” signify in the case of a text like *Huck Finn* becomes endemic of the pastoral satire. As Paton goes on to explain: “The vernacular ruin as an ‘antidote,’ a moral paradigm, a picturesque commodity or merely an eyesore again reflects ambivalent attitudes toward the rural, the regional, and the imagined yesteryear of pastoral purity. Those attitudes can lean toward the ideal: a time when the community is nurturing, the self virtuous, and the land edenic” (210). Although one might tend to idealize vernacular ruins (for example, a farmhouse abandoned and left to disintegrate) and

Golden Gate Bridge, become sublime not merely because of the terror or sense of grandiosity they inspire, but also because of how they stand in defiance of, yet ingratiate within, the equally awe-inspiring aspects of nature. “By conflating the man-made and the natural,” we are presented with “that typical American amalgamation of natural, technological, classical and religious elements into a single aesthetic. In it, natural wonders, such as Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, and Yellowstone, became emblems of divinity comparable to the wonders of the ancient world and the greatest architectural achievements of modern times” (23). While Nye’s study is certainly applicable to a reading of the interjection of technology into the landscape, I find it less applicable to my reading of the interposition of the minutiae of the everyday into natural space. The presence of detritus, (vernacular) ruin, and waste in natural space has less to do with the sublime, which isolates the viewer from the phenomenon by obliterating subjectivity, and more to do with an artifactual aesthetic, which tends to project—even amplify—subjectivity in relation to the probing inquisitiveness that derives from encountering the minutiae of the everyday. In other words, whereas the sublime produces a feeling of powerlessness and alienation in relation to its phenomena, the waste of the domestic inspires a curiosity analogous to an archival impulse, which seeks to arrest power by the cataloguing, or narratological repurposing, of those objects. Regardless of the applicability of Nye’s study to my analysis, the conceptualization of sublime topography shares an interesting lineage in relation to the concept of “waste” as natural space and as a metaphor for refuse. As Nye points out (quoting from Marjorie H. Nicolson’s 1959 study *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*), “Until c. 1650, mountains were ‘warts, blisters, imposthumes, when they were not the rubbish of the earth, swept away by the careful housewife of nature—waste places of the world, with little meaning and less charm’” (5).

what they symbolize, we must keep in mind that the existence of both ruin and domestic waste, as a trope, also represents a critique of a way of life that has been discarded and destabilized. As Stallabrass argues, “Disposal may... be seen as a form of criticism; the way in which objects are thrown down... reveals a certain contempt” (“Trash” essay 408). In other words, domestic waste represented aesthetically is always a loaded symbol, and while those symbols may tend to evoke nostalgia for a thing abandoned, they simultaneously evoke a brand of mocking or satirical criticism. While in *Huck Finn* we are presented with a fairly conspicuous satirical representation of an “Edenic” agrarian South, we also are pitted against the vision of rural America as a thing detached from its foundation and in a state of precarious transition. Such a transition is exemplified not only by the “monstrous” steamboat interjecting into a scene of idyllic satisfaction (*Huck Finn* 106),¹²⁸ but also by the curious encounter with the floating house, a vernacular ruin literally detached from its foundation and drifting down the Mississippi River.

As mentioned above, the floating house is less an interjection of the machine and more an imposition of domestic refuse drifting eerily through the Edenic scene, something akin to seeing discarded shopping carts adorning a water lily speckled pond. Springing into action as relic hunters, Huck and Jim paddle out to the house, where among the debris is discovered a dead

¹²⁸ Here I am referencing, as Marx does in *The Machine in the Garden*, the “ominous” scene of the steamboat bearing down on Huck and Jim (329) and “smashing straight through the raft” (*Huck Finn* 106). It is interesting to note the chronology of the various steamboat events. The first encounter with the machine is indeed monstrous; it “creates awe and terror and a sense of powerlessness” (*The Machine* 349) owing to its physical proximity. However, three chapters later the description of the machine abruptly shifts to something more sublimely aesthetic, owing not only to the interplay of nature and technology, but also to distance. The requirement of distance for a terrifying event to be considered sublime is explained by Edmund Burke in his 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Burke suggests that “When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience” (40). Just to be clear, my reading of the steamboat as an aesthetic interruption of the idyll is greatly informed by Marx’s reading in *The Machine in the Garden*. Where we depart in our readings is with my focus on the spectatorial effects of the second steamboat encounter as an aesthetic event predicated on the mingling of machine, waste (ejecta), and natural space. The second, more poetically charged encounter with the machine is, in my estimation, a culmination of both the sublime shock of the monstrosity of technology and the archeological fascination with the house floating down the river. The steamboat incident and the floating house incident require different types of aesthetic engagement, but they are nonetheless united through the spectatorship they command by existing as something both integrated in, and outside of, the natural scene.

body (revealed in the final chapter to be Huck's villainous father). Although we could argue that this body supplies the ontological trace in connection to the things that surround it, in both the floating house chapter and Chapter the Last, the dead body is of little significance. It is merely a thing heaped among things, and after Jim "threw some rags over" the carcass (71), Huck begins to enumerate the objects of greater import: "heaps of old greasy cards scattered around over the floor, and old whisky bottles, and a couple of masks made out of black cloth... two old dirty calico dresses, and a sun-bonnet, and some women's underclothes hanging against the wall," "a bottle that had had milk in it... a seedy old chest, and an old hair trunk with the hinges broke" (71). Heaping items into the canoe, Huck and Jim come away with objects both useful and of no practical value. The aesthetic significance of this scene is that it represents a way of life that is simultaneously in a state of decay and transition—in the case of Twain's underlying message, a transition from agrarian antebellum society to modernized postbellum existence. The waste objects heaped among the more useful and anomalous things—a wooden leg with the straps broke off, "medicine that didn't have no label on them," "a butcher-knife without any handle" (71-72)—create a surreal collage of object matter that works metaphorically to represent the foundational instability of an idealized agrarian past while inviting museal, aesthetic spectatorship. Even though that collage represents the past as waste material, there is still value in sifting through that domestic detritus to orient oneself to the future.

The floating house episode is a scene brimming with ironic contrasts, and the comic irony is compounded through Huck and Jim's representation as a couple of itinerant hoarders attempting to archive the common waste of an antebellum domestic past in the process of obsolescence. Yet in their case, Huck and Jim do not archive for mere reasons of nostalgia, but rather because of the interest generated by the strangeness of domestic waste floating through a

pastoralized wilderness. Even though they surely could not afford the space in their canoe (a canoe which mysteriously goes missing, thus affirming the ultimate uselessness of their enterprise [105]), there is ontological value invested in that wooden leg with the straps broke off that compels them to preserve the intertext of objects. What is of greatest note for my study is Twain's juxtaposition of both the steamboat and the remnants of domestic produce represented by the floating house as the most jarring interjections of object matter into the idyll. In light of the significance of these interjections in Twain's text, Ernest Hemmingway's assertion that "all modern American literature comes from" *Huckleberry Finn* (qtd. in Graff 277) becomes particularly prophetic: the modern period would begin to turn to both the machine in the garden and the remnants of the domestic offset by natural space as phenomenological variants of human subjectivity, an objective orientation based on the ontological traces located in everyday domestic things. Such interjections offer a counterpoint to inauthentic, aesthetically conservative, and clichéd considerations of natural environments as something completely divorced from human imposition. Twain certainly sensed the mounting significance of domestic artifacts as they pertain to everyday life and,¹²⁹ as unaesthetic (or anaesthetic) as domestic ruin might appear within nature, natural space as that allegorized primal home would have to learn to live with domestic excess.

If humans see nature as a reflection of our ontological selves, then the unbridled integration of domestic residues into wilderness space is merely a reflexive yardstick by which to gauge our attachment to material things. In light of the domestic detritus we allow to linger

¹²⁹ In *A Sense of Things*, Brown begins his initial chapter with an exposé of Twain's rather fetishistic archival impulses as it pertains to domestic space, an impulse that appears to become more pathological than preservationist. He describes how Twain, afflicted with the nesting impulse, decorated his lavish house in Hartford with everything from European artifacts to stencilled Chinese motifs juxtaposed by salmon pink and peacock blue walls. Brown explains that this rather garish nesting instinct, a "new national pathology" in *fin-de-siecle* America whereby "we fill our rooms, our walls, or tables, our desks, with things, things, things" (qtd. in Brown 24), represents a popular curatorial impulse that is also a hazard: "Clearly, those objects were for Twain objects of fascination and repulsion, modes of self-definition and self-obliteration, sources of safety and threat" (24).

beyond city limits, modern conceptions of the pastoral, the natural, and wilderness—if indeed wilderness still exists on earth in the purest sense—must incorporate the remnants of hyper-domestic and technological ages in order to bear authenticity. Pastoral is indeed *past*—not bygone, but rather in a perpetual state of alteration, constantly leaving itself behind. It is based both on the present’s nostalgia for the past’s idealized, unaffected nature, and on the past’s interjection into the present. As I have argued, American culture long ago entered an age of the neopastoral and neo-picturesque in which domestic waste becomes the raucous interlocutor, the interjectory deflator of an idyllic vision. When debating whether domestic waste should or should not be considered part of new ecocritical and pastoral aesthetic paradigms, Berleant in *The Aesthetics of Environment* offers the best justification for evaluating the aesthetics of the unaesthetic in natural environments: “Just as art since the late nineteenth century has moved far beyond the pleasing and pretty to accept into its range all manner of things, from the ugly to the grotesque, the bizarre, and even the repulsive, so an aesthetics of nature must also dissolve its protective borders and admit the world” (11). When considering the leviathan that is commodity culture and the ubiquity of its castings, it is waste’s absence in theories of environmental aesthetics that is most conspicuous.

* * *

3.4. Intersections of Waste Aesthetics and Natural Aesthetics: A Survey of the Scholarship, or Considerations of the Conspicuously Absent

According to Malcolm Budd in his 2002 book *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature* (and I think many scholars in the field would agree with Budd), “Prior to the last decades of the twentieth century there had been little serious philosophical reflection on the aesthetics of nature.

Before that time, in the entire history of western philosophy, notwithstanding the insights that can be found in the works of Addison, Burke, Hume, Schopenhauer, Hegel, and Santayana, for example, there had just been one major contribution to the subject, that of Immanuel Kant.”¹³⁰ Since the 1960s, as new life was breathed into the subject, “a trickle of publications... has now developed into a veritable flood” (vii). In light of this deluge of academic material on the subject of environmental (or natural) aesthetics, it seems reasonable to assume that the topic of human-generated garbage, detritus, ruin, or waste material—even as a referential counterpoint to the contrived idea of natural beauty—would be addressed, even glossed over, in relation to natural environments. Here I am not talking about the waste humanity generates through interaction with nature itself (something akin to Wordsworth’s poem “Nutting,” where natural beauty is ravaged in order to harvest the rewards of the garden), but rather the interjection of the discarded beer can observed while on a forestial excursion, or the makeshift haunts of teenagers, or drifters, or the homeless—vagrant dwellers of the woods, as Wordsworth might call them—evidenced by anything from weathered plastic patio chairs, to old soda bottles, to fast-food wrappers and other excreta of the age of disposability.¹³¹ Interestingly, out of the many academic studies purporting to guide the artist or scholar through the intricate matrixes of environmental aesthetics, there are few (closer to none, actually) in which the interjection of waste into that idyllic fantasy is taken up directly or even indirectly.¹³²

¹³⁰ Budd is referring specifically to academic work and theory, and not necessarily to poets or artists. Of course there are many examples in the Romantic period of poets and aesthetes who extensively wrote on nature—Wordsworth, Gilpin, and Ruskin to add just a few more names. Budd also appears to be overlooking the entire picturesque movement initiated in the eighteenth-century. In spite of this omission, Budd is correct in claiming that the field of environmental aesthetics picks up steam sometime after the 1950s and into the 60s.

¹³¹ Just as an anecdotal aside: while on one of my own ventures off the beaten trail of a municipal forest preserve, I stumbled upon a cardboard box of VHS tapes, many of which were Disney films and movies for children. There was no VCR in sight that I could tell. No children either.

¹³² While reading the following books I kept a keen eye out for the following topics: “debris,” “detritus,” “excess,” “garbage,” “junk,” “landfill,” “leftovers,” “refuse,” “remainder,” “rubbish,” “ruin,” “scrap,” “trash,” “waste,” “dregs,” “filth,” “excreta,” “excrement” and “offal.” When available as an e-text (either through university

It is not mentioned in *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*, edited by Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant, published in 2004. Nor is it mentioned in “What is the Correct Curriculum for Landscape?” also by Allen Carlson, printed in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*. It is not considered, as far as I can tell, in *Environmental Aesthetics: Theory, Research and Applications* (1988); however, the book contains an interesting chapter called “Aesthetic Preference for Rural Landscapes: Some Resident and Visitor Differences” by Brian Orland, in which scenic rural beauty is scored on a “summaries” scale based on the scene being “predominately natural” or “human-influenced” (372). Although the topic of “garbage” appears in passing in *Environment and the Arts: Perspectives on Environmental Aesthetics* (2002), and in Berleant’s above-mentioned *Aesthetics and Environment: Variations on a Theme* (2005), it is not discussed in any meaningful capacity in relation to waste material and its influence within the realm of environmental aesthetics.¹³³ It is not mentioned at all in Roger G. Courtney’s 2011 book *My Kind of Countryside*, nor in Yi-Fu Tuan’s *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature and Culture* (1993). Ruins are mentioned in Susan Herrington’s 2009 book *On Landscapes: Thinking in Action* in a chapter called “Memory and Emotion,” but there is no mention of waste or garbage in relation to the landscape.¹³⁴ There is also no mention of waste or garbage in *Scenery and the Sense of Sight* by Vaughan Cornish, D.Sc., published 1935.¹³⁵ The topic is not

databases, Google Scholar or Google Books) I ran an electronic search for each of these words, just to make sure that I did not overlook anything.

¹³³ See my discussion above on wilderness as a metaphor for the city.

¹³⁴ Herrington covers the aesthetics of the ruin, from the eighteenth-century picturesque to post-industrial decay, and even includes images of digital reproductions of post-industrial landscapes (within video games, for example) to demonstrate the emotive characteristics and signatory function of ruin.

¹³⁵ Although waste is not mentioned in Cornish’s work, the book contains an intriguing but crude sketch (rendered by the author) of reflections of trees as they appear in still water versus in ruffled water. The reflections of three trees are parallel to one another in the still water, and “converged towards the observer at an angle of 36°” in the ruffled water (66). The trees reflected in the ruffled water look like a transient, ruinous version of their unruffled representation. The sketch was done from memory rather than *in situ* (Cornish had forgotten his sketch book), and the idea that they converge to point toward the spectator is ominous in that the vanishing point becomes inverted toward the onlooker, who becomes the subject of the erratic reflection. One might deduce that the ruined

discussed overtly in *The Feeling for Nature and the Landscape of Man* (1980); however, in a chapter entitled “Civilization and Landscape” by Vladimir Soloukhin, the author notes “the difference between looking at a star and a crushed frog, a glade in bloom and a rubbish heap, a clean stream flowing over rocks and a ditch filled with waste water” (115).¹³⁶ Although it contains a section on picturesque beauty, the topic of waste is not explicitly discussed in Jiahua Wu’s *A Comparative Study of Landscape Aesthetics* (1995). Nor is it referenced as a topic in Emily Brady’s 2003 book *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*. It is also not mentioned in *Aesthetics and Nature* by Glenn Parsons (2008), nor in *Natural Beauty: A Theory of Aesthetics Beyond the Arts* by Ronald Moore (2008). Ruins are mentioned several times in Christopher Thacker’s *The Wilderness Pleases: The Origins of Romanticism* (1983); the epigraph to chapter ten is particularly relevant to the study of waste cultures: “The road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom” (181).¹³⁷ However, any discussion of garbage or waste is absent, just as it is largely absent in Timothy Clark’s 2011 book *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*.¹³⁸

The purpose of this protracted enumeration¹³⁹ of waste’s non-existence in both traditional and contemporary conceptualizations of natural aesthetics is to highlight that, while the phenomenon indeed exists, particularly as a category of counter-aesthetics, one will be hard-put

representation of the trees points toward the onlooker as though the spectator—the subject who observes—is the true ruin in progress.

¹³⁶ He also mentions that “The landscape, complex as it is, taken as a whole is not merely equal to the face of the earth or of a given country. It also says something about the face of a certain society. A cluttered forest, roads in disrepair with cars up to the running-boards in mud, clogged waterways, green fields cut apart by tractor treadmarks, half-deserted villages, farm machines rusting in the open, monotonous standardized houses, fields overgrown with weeds tell just as much about the people of a small village or an area as an ugly, ill-kept block of flats does about its tenants” (118).

¹³⁷ The quotation is from William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

¹³⁸ Although the topics of detritus, ruin and/or garbage are not taken up directly, “waste” is mentioned in passing on pages 6, 67, 88, and 97; but again, the topic is not explicitly considered in relation to the aesthetic phenomenology of the human-made within natural environments.

¹³⁹ See the chapter “Trout Death by Port Wine” in Brautigan’s *Trout Fishing in America* to review the methodology undertaken in my search for garbage in environmental and natural aesthetics.

to find its presence acknowledged by the conventional scope of the discipline. Whether this omission is intentional or not, the phenomenon has not only contemporary precedence, but also historical antecedents that serve aesthetic functions. By exiling the conspicuous reality of waste from the canons of environmental aesthetics, many theorists of the genre are complicit in extending mythologies surrounding biblical notions of perfection and paradise on earth. Consequently, these myths abandon realistic portrayals in favour of sentimentalized fabrications bordering on delusion. Perhaps there is no room for refuse in paradise. Yet the foundation of aesthetics is variation. As Shepard argues, “The comfort and uniqueness of the *perfect* environment create a paradox: paradises are notoriously bland” (26).

I would be perpetuating my own brand of misrepresentation if I didn’t acknowledge that the topic *has* been analyzed in a roundabout way within the realm of environmental aesthetics. The following is a literature review that focuses on theories of environmental aesthetics most pertinent to my study of the artifactualization of waste and ruin within nature. In essence, by considering what some theorists have and have not said about the topic, a more cogent understanding of how domestic detritus can be poeticized within a natural environment will aid the elucidation of the neopastoral, and will establish further theoretical scaffolding for chapter four. Essays like Yuriko Saito’s “The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature” (published 2008) begin to take steps toward what factions of the artistic community have been considering since the counter-aesthetic movements of the modern period and prior. Saito does not factor domestic detritus, garbage, or other forms of vernacular waste into her advocacy for the scenically challenged parts of nature. Instead she ponders the “positive aesthetic value of a rotten carcass of an elk full of maggots (not our typical example of scenic beauty),” which duly “advises against our tendency to look for pretty objects and picturesque scenes fit for a postcard” (239). Although

the carcass of a rotting elk complements the natural ecosystem and is therefore not artifactual in the sense of artifice or the human-made, Saito's example provides an analogy for the interjection of the ostensibly unaesthetic into natural spaces. After all, we cannot forget that nature produces its own waste materials, and even thrives on them, ultimately inverting waste to something meaningful. Saito frames her argument within conventional notions of the picturesque, but offers the rotting elk carcass as a counterpoint to the tradition, arguing that "considering nature as a series of landscape paintings is inappropriate, simply because that is not what nature is" (239).

I agree that it is an arrogant fallacy to elide a holistic view of nature in favour of a mollified, idealistic, delusional portrayal that perpetuates myths about how nature represents itself. I would go further and suggest that nature, more often than not, resists painterliness and scenic conventions. Nature is replete with jarring, pejorative interventions from which seekers of traditional beauty must avert their eyes, but which nevertheless evoke a fascinated spectatorship.¹⁴⁰ Saito offers a possible reason why the unaesthetic in nature has been glossed over within the discipline of natural aesthetics. Referencing the work of artist Holmes Rolston, Saito points out that "the presumed negative aesthetic value of the dead elk with maggots stems from isolating these objects from a larger context. 'Every item must be seen not in framed isolation but framed by its environment, and this frame in turn becomes part of the bigger pictures we have to appreciate—not a "frame" but a dramatic play'" (242). Here we reencounter the rhetoric of scenery-as-stage engaged in an intertextual drama. It is by considering the rotting elk within the context of nature that the object, through a unity of contrasts, acquires aesthetic properties. "[E]ven if we agree that the whole is aesthetically positive, it does not follow that the beauty of the whole implies the beauty of its parts" (242). Waste isolated and regarded as waste

¹⁴⁰ Natural space, in this respect, provides the perfect milieu for ironic deflation. It is ironic in its realism, and ironic in its obstinacy to painterly conventions advocating benign and inoffensive depictions of nature.

cannot avoid becoming unaesthetic when measured through the lens of traditional beauty. Yet context, as well as intentionality, can work to invert perception.

Putting aside the attribution of positive and negative characteristics to objects as they are perceived in natural landscapes, studies on environmental phenomenology do exist that directly engage the artifactual relationship of the human-made contrasted by natural space. In a subsection called “Non-Pristine Nature” in Malcomb Budd’s above-mentioned 2002 book, Budd assesses (as Nash does) the near impossibility in our modern age of locating places untouched by human contrivance. Nature is inundated with objects of artifice:

much of our natural environment displays, for better or worse, the influence of humanity, having been shaped, to a greater or lesser extent, and in a variety of ways, by human purposes, so that little of the world’s landscape is in a natural condition. ... Accordingly, our aesthetic experience of the natural world is often *mixed*—a mixture of the aesthetic appreciation of nature as nature with an additional element, of a variable nature, based on human design or purpose or activity. (7)

The disparity between natural and artifactual is confounded in Budd’s study by the conundrum of whether or not human beings are a part of the natural world or, rather, exist in some antipodal dyad that stands opposite to nature. As he contends, much of our perception of nature is a mixture of nature *as* nature variegated by human design, purpose, or activity. If it is the case that much of nature has been influenced by human activity, how, then, do we determine the natural from the artificial (or artifactual)? By examining the “mixed” perception of human influence within nature, Budd settles on a binary that distinguishes natural from non-natural objects: “what is natural... should be opposed not to what is man-made but to what is artefactual (a work of human artifice).” This binary between nature and the artifactual is paradoxically as oversimplified as it is complicated. Yet the “opposition between the natural and the artefactual,” according to Budd, “captures the prime meaning of the idea of nature as it figures in the aesthetic

appreciation of nature” (4). To condense Budd’s proposal to even simpler terms: with respect to natural aesthetics, nature is nature, and (almost) all else that is product of human intentionality, as it contrasts nature devoid of human intention, is artifactual. Within such a dialectic structure, questions undoubtedly arise. If human beings are a part of nature, where does one draw the line between the natural and the artifactual? Suffice it to say that Budd distinguishes the human body as natural and, say, the clothing a human wears as non-natural through considering that an object’s “principle of growth as it endures through time is a matter of nature, not human contrivance” (3). Therefore “contrivance” seems to be the litmus test for distinguishing a natural from a non-natural object, although an object can be “partly natural, partly artefactual, and something that is a natural object might nevertheless not be in a natural state” (4).

If Budd’s extrapolation sounds confusing, it is. The balancing act he does between nature and artifact tends to mediate (to borrow Ettinger’s disclaimer regarding the creation of rigid dualisms) between the description too inclusive to be a definition, and the definition too exclusive to be a description:

Of course, it is possible to appreciate nature *as looking like a beautiful picture of nature*—nature as picturesque—although the occasions when this would be a natural thing to do are rare, since, except perhaps for landscape, nature does not in general strike us as looking like a picture—as it might when the prevailing conditions of illumination greatly weaken the impression of the third dimension—and other occasions would require the adoption of a peculiar attitude to the world, one that it does not invite. But this possibility is beside the point, for to appreciate nature as looking like a picture is not to appreciate nature as nature. In sum: the aesthetic appreciation of nature, as I understand the idea, is identical with the aesthetic appreciation not of that which is nature, but of nature *as nature and not as art (or artefact)*.

However tangential and complicated these extrapolations of natural aesthetics may appear—one might begin by asking to what the pronouns refer—the binary that tends to dominate the field is one between nature (as itself) and artifact (as human derivative). Again, this binary generates

more questions than it answers. For example, is a photograph of nature natural? Of course the physical print or the camera that captured the image is not natural. What about the image itself (the referent), framed and substantiated by human perception? The concept of nature as it is framed in the mind, standing at contrast to the machinations of human will, is arguably unnatural. How about orchards or pastures (8), which ostensibly represent a version of nature, but one that has been cultivated, enclosed, or managed through the invasive ideology of stewardship? What of the picturesque, and the act of ascribing painterliness (or photogenic qualities) to a natural setting, an act that involves the conversion of nature into human-contrived scenery? In spite of the endless regress of interrogatives a subject such as this might stimulate, it is important to point out that the dyad of nature and artifact functions more as a dialectic than as independent phenomena representing complete antitheses. One requires the other to validate the contrast; yet the counterforce of the contrast, the struggle of the object to dominate the scenery-as-stage, can render the line between artifact and nature unstable.

While Budd's periphrastic groping about may be wanting in clarity, his study provides useful equipment for confronting the binaries imposed by the spectator when viewing natural space. As perceived within nature, the human-made, as a brand of artifice, cannot avoid blurring the line between object and thing; it cannot avoid becoming artifactual. Budd's assertion that human-contrived things, as they appear framed within nature, cannot be regarded as anything but artifactual—that is, nature distorts the line between practical function and artifice—is a critical stance that complements the framework of my argument. Budd does not directly deconstruct *why* nature possesses the ability to convert human-contrived objects to artifacts; however, when placed in context with Grosz, Marx, Buell, Giblett, Scanlan, and others, all of whom have attested to the uncanny malleability of natural and wilderness space, Budd becomes

another link in the chain of theorists who are intuiting the phenomenon. I will quibble, however, with the ascription of artifactual status to anything human-made that appears within nature.

When cross-examining the process of artifactualization within the discipline of archaeology (see chapter one), one needs to consider the requirement that a human-made object be removed from context or circulation before it can acquire the branding of “artifact.” Therefore, a tractor in use ploughing a field is not artifactual simply because it is set against a more natural backdrop. A tractor abandoned for several years in the middle of a pasture, corroding to red dust and arrested by wild grapevines, however, does approach artifactualization. Here we will be reminded of the fifty-year rule, the dislocation between individual and object, the removal of the thing from immediate circulation and context required to grant human-contrived objects artifactual signification. This prerequisite of separation within time perspectivism is not wholly arbitrary, as there needs to be, as I have argued in previous chapters, an element of lore and mystery created around an object’s appearance to aid artifactualization. I am not unreservedly endorsing the fifty-year rule; certainly ephemera and disposable objects would have to accelerate their timelines in order to become artifactual. That said, time, through de-contextualization, facilitates the development of lore, perpetuates the fantasy of, and yearning for, a bygone home. The problem with Budd’s treatment of the artifactual is that, rather than balancing his approach between aesthetics and the field of archaeology, he subsumes his argument solely within the scope of aesthetics. Quibbles aside, the binary he identifies between nature and artifact is one with which I agree in principle. Nature has a way of positioning the human-contrived—whether the ruins of a grand structure or the remnants of domestic waste—within this dyad of nature and artifact by virtue of its contrasting dynamic. Although Budd does not mention human-generated waste in his

study, if it is a product of human contrivance, waste would most certainly fall under the category of the artifactual.¹⁴¹

Although Budd forgoes waste in his binary of human-contrived objects and the environment, studies do exist that flesh out the interaction between nature and the artifactual by considering the imposition of unpleasant or anaesthetic human-contrived things on the landscape. Emily Brady's 2008 essay "Relating Humans and Nature through Agricultural Landscapes," for example, examines the "aesthetic appreciation of industrial farming in contrast to more traditional agricultural practices" in the UK, and she argues that "a more harmonious relationship, and greater aesthetic value, may be found in traditional agricultural landscapes" (121). In other words, newer forms of industrial, commodity-driven farming are blights on the landscape when weighed against traditional forms (she uses as her exemplars of tradition the practices of hedge-laying and stonewalling). Interestingly, she begins this comparison by reflecting on the middle ground between environment and human-contrived objects:

Many environments, landscapes and objects lying between unmodified or uninfluenced nature and human artifacts express an interactive relationship between natural processes and human activity. This space 'in between' is neglected within environmental ethics, probably due to a bias towards wild nature, a bias which is also evident in environmental aesthetics. (121)

Two significant points emerge from Brady's attribution of artifactual status to human-made things that lie in proximity to "unmodified" spaces. First, one might be directly reminded of

¹⁴¹ Although the nature of what constitutes an "artifact" has been explored repeatedly throughout this study in dialogue with scholars of archeology, material cultures, and object theory, I feel it necessary to reiterate my use of the term. An "artifact" in general refers to an "object made or modified by human workmanship, as opposed to one formed by natural processes" (*OED*). However, my application focuses on the oppositional (and aesthetic) phenomenology of "natural processes" and the human-contrived. As I have argued, an artifact is also that which inspires a brand of aesthetic spectatorship (imaginative reconstruction) owing to temporal dislocation or de-contextualization. At its core, an artifact is that which shows traces of human artifice in opposition to natural causation, but that also elicits a brand of imaginative hermeneutics that balances aesthetic interpretation with historical. Artifacts straddle the line between positivist empirical investigation and creative (even poetic) modes of assessment. To refer back to an earlier footnote, Bailey reveals that archeological hermeneutics at times involves "the application of theoretical or imaginary narratives to fill the gaps" (203), a mode of observation rooted, I argue, in the aesthetics of misperception. It is when objects are de-contextualized, misinterpreted, and made uncanny that they have the potential to become artifacts.

Grosz's argument that nature is a site of malleable materiality, the space of the "in-between" that blurs into, and juxtaposes, "the urban, the architectural, and the cultural" (Grosz 98). Whether or not Brady is drawing on Grosz's text (she does not reference Grosz in her essay), the language and rhetoric attributing powers of the uncanny to natural environments is manifest. Moreover, this space "in between" is mediated by human artifacts, an "interactive relationship" that is influenced and repurposed by the malleability of natural space. Indeed, it would appear that the in-between could not exist without human influence to demarcate the binary. The middle ground, Brady tacitly suggests, is determined by the counterforce of environment and the human-made.

The second significant point: Brady confirms the conspicuous neglect of this subject area within the corpus of environmental aesthetics, a negligence she attributes to a bias toward wilderness or the myths surrounding pristine, virginal environments. Yet however neglected the "interactive relationship between natural processes and human activity" may be, Brady's study borrows its theoretical framework from a previous study, an essay by Donald W. Crawford called "Comparing Natural and Artistic Beauty," published in 1995. Crawford's insights into the dialectic of nature and the human-contrived offer not only scaffolding for my own thesis, but also theory-based evidence extrapolating how waste and other forms of human detritus become artifactual when enveloped by natural environments. Crawford proposes three dynamics for the aesthetic composition of natural space as it pertains to the artifactual. The first, called "aesthetic symbiosis of the artifactual and the natural," represents a harmonious relationship between the human-made and nature, "beneficial interaction" that sometimes "enhanc[es] the aesthetic qualities of the natural setting" (194). It is his second dynamic that is most applicable to the transmutation of waste into an aesthetic artifact:

The second dynamic relationship between the artifactual and the natural I termed *dialectical*. In general, in a dialectical relationship the two elements of the

relationship are *conflicting forces* whose interaction brings into being some *third object*—the product of their interaction. The emergent *third object may become a new object of aesthetic appreciation*, one which results from the *synthesis of opposing forces, artifactual and natural*. In some cases the synthesis need not negate or dissolve either the natural or the artifactual; each may retain its identity, and the aesthetic significance of each is dependent upon the interaction between the two—hence the term “dialectical.” (my italics 194-195)

The chief significance of Crawford’s delineation of the dialectic among nature and human-contrived objects (natural and artifactual) is that his theory, though it does not directly factor waste into the equation, can be mapped onto the aesthetic attributes conjured by an encounter with domestic detritus in natural space. The idea that the “conflicting forces”—indeed, the counterforce—between nature and artifact create “some third object” that “may become a new object of aesthetic appreciation” validates a parallel argument wherein waste may act as that contrasting object, and may therefore become the third object of aesthetic valuation. Moreover, the notion that the interaction produces a “third” object, rather than simply having the thing appear as its practical design, highlights the uncanny alteration that takes place within the dialectic of nature and the human-contrived. Certainly anything wrested from its ordinary use has the capacity to metamorphose to some tertiary meaning caught between thing and context. Yet the point of Crawford’s argument is that the antitheses of nature and human influence represent a dichotomy where human-contrived things, waste or not, hover on the margins of mutable (aesthetic) contexts. It is important to note: Crawford explicitly states that this particular dialectical synthesis does not destroy or negate the natural *or* the artifactual—the dynamic does not cause some manner of spectatorial implosion, or the dissolution of either object.¹⁴² The artifactual object in nature both retains its equipmental status while it becomes something other, something noumenal or thingly—or, as he puts it, either item retains identity while “the aesthetic

¹⁴² The idea that a repurposed, human-contrived object might take on a third function while retaining the identity of its constituent parts could be related to repurposing ventures like McKay’s, which preserve the minutiae of the metal equipment, tools, or parts he reconfigures while making the object something other.

significance of each is dependent upon the interaction between the two[.]” Like the machine’s abrupt interjection into the idyll, context creates the third object—the aesthetic response—based on the dynamic of contrasts.

While I find Crawford’s proposal of the third object generated by the oppositional synthesis of artifact and nature extremely relevant for my study, and while I find Brady’s treatment of Crawford, as well as her language of the environmental “in-between,” also applicable to an examination of waste in natural aesthetics, I would like to carve out my own space in the discussion by examining some of the assertions made by both Crawford and Brady. By doing so, my aim is to steer the discourse toward an analysis of “artifacts” conspicuously absent in either study: the remnant by-products of domestic and manufactured produce. I will begin with Brady’s main argument that there is something more aesthetically pleasing about the interference of traditional farming practices in the landscape as opposed to industrial agricultural practice. My view of such a position is that the perception of traditional practice as more “beautiful” is naively tied to nostalgia for a simpler way of life rather than to any pure aesthetic concern. As Brady concedes, “both traditional and industrial farming are principally functional,” and because their “design and appearance is a means to an end... the beauty of farmlands is for the most part unintended” (125). In light of the functionality of both newer and older representations of farming, Brady’s preference can be linked more to the lore created by the passage of time (the fifty-year rule) than to spectatorial valuation of form and appearance. The monolithic presence of some industrial farming operations, with their uniform metallic exteriors, smooth facades, sharply defined edges, and modernist architectural pragmatism, undoubtedly contain *some* brand of aesthetic, even artifactual, appeal (see Figure 3.5). We also should not forget: at one time makeshift farmsteads with gnarled, wooden fenceposts and crudely thatched

roofs would have been considered blights rather than beautiful; time converts the material of the everyday to artifacts, and then to aesthetic things. Moreover (and more significantly for my approach), in modern times many traditional operations have not buffered themselves from the proliferation of contemporary commodity. One cannot measure the ornamentality of the “traditional” farmscape while eliding the imbrication of manufacturing cultures within neopastoral topography. To do so would be to divest oneself of reality in favour of a misleading belief that agrarian tradition exists in some pure, unaffected form. Perhaps it still does in a handful of American rural enclaves. The reality is that, in an American context, these so-called pure pastoral spaces unaffected by the output of the industrial machine are indeed disappearing. The dialectical relationship between excess of human contrivance and natural space is one that, in modern times, has adopted a more jarring aesthetic property that has surpassed the interjectory affect of waste categorized as “traditional”—say, for example, the interjection of vernacular and ivied ruins of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the new paradigm of environmental aesthetics as it concerns artifacts, we must consider that ivied ruins, and subsequently vernacular ruins, have been inundated with, or wholly supplanted by, the detritus of domestic activity linked specifically to mass-produced, manufactured, and commodity-driven ways of life.



Figure 3.5. *Reflection of the Interloper*. The above image is a digitally manipulated photograph that I took in August of 2012. I believe it highlights the disparities that exist when attributing elevated aesthetic merit to traditional farm implements in lieu of modern—in this case, older methods of wind farming versus contemporary. The older windmill has, as Gilpin might put it, no doubt been endowed with the ornaments of time (42), those rough and asymmetrical edges necessary for proper picturesque appreciation. However, the modern windmill with its sleek symmetry wields its own aesthetic features. Admittedly, the spectatorial effect of this image amounts more from the juxtaposition of objects, contrasting the new with the old; yet the aesthetic appeal to what should be considered waste having yet to corrode to the ground may be less tied to the object's pure appearance and more to nostalgia and lore. Because the older windmill has outlived its functionality, it becomes, in its persistence, imbued with the mythology surrounding its impracticability, and is repurposed by the onlooker into the home beyond revival, some simpler way of life now lost. In the end, I find the argument that the holistic image of traditional farming somehow triumphs aesthetically over contemporary agricultural architecture wanting in further explanation. *Reflection of the Interloper* was part of a feature exhibition at the Canadian Pop Culture Conference held in Niagara Falls in May, 2013.

This misleading notion that traditional forms of agriculture aesthetically trump contemporary forms leads to my second point of divergence. In order to argue that tradition is

more pictorially pleasing, Brady sidesteps a third dynamic offered by Crawford, what he calls the “parasitic relationship” between artifact and natural environment, “an interaction between art and nature which results in destruction of one by the other—the domination of nature by art or of art by nature” (195). The model Crawford uses for this parasitic relationship is “endless rows of tract homes eradicating the natural landscape” (195). He offers two additional fictitious examples: “In the first an artist dynamites a small, isolated hill, leveling it, destroying all natural vegetation; he fully documents the event and displays the documentation in a gallery. In the second example, the artist pours various types of oil on the surface of a lake to create striking color patterns that change over time; in effect he *uses the lake surface as his canvas*” (italics added 195). I appreciate Crawford’s extrapolation of the spectrum that can exist from harmonious, benevolent interaction to wholly destructive interaction as it concerns artifacts and the environment. Where I disagree slightly with Crawford is on the finer details of the models he fabricates. Although we can regard a parasitic relationship as symbiotic (in a pejorative way), the symbiosis emerging from encountering tech-waste in natural space is not one that aims to drain the scene of vitality, or have one antipode conquer the other. The prospect of nature conquering an obelisk that once stood testament to human ingenuity is precisely the dynamic cultivated by the neopastoral, as long as traces of that obelisk are visible throughout the assault.¹⁴³ If, on the other hand, the human-made triumphed wholly over nature and obliterated any trace of it, the

¹⁴³ A great example from American pop fiction of this type of neopastoral (indeed, neo-frontier) display occurs in Chuck Palanuck’s 1996 novel *Fight Club*. An admixture of Emersonian and Thoreauvian ideologies advocating a balance of civil and primitive existence, the plot revolves around the rejection of mass consumer culture, and contains a representative scene depicting the highest achievements of urbanity being subdued by the wilderness. In an America having been cleansed of its fetish with mass-productivity and commercialization, the antagonist of the novel (Tyler Durden) explains how one will plant “radishes and seed potatoes on the fifteenth green of a forgotten golf course,” “hunt elk through the damp canyon forests around the ruins of Rockefeller Center, and dig clams next to the skeleton of the Space Needle” juxtaposed by “department store windows [with] stinking racks of beautiful rotting dresses and tuxedos on hangers” (116). The description of abandoned superhighways reclaimed by primitive peoples who pound “corn” while “laying strips of venison to dry in the empty car pool lane” (116), and skyscrapers wrapped with vines contrasted by the rotting, now-useless items of commodity culture, is both a horrific yet aesthetically-charged vision that epitomizes the continuing relevance of both pastoral and frontier psychology in American fiction—a psychology externalized by its artifactual residue and debris.

prospect would cease to belong to the realm of environmental or natural aesthetics. It would be a moot point to consider the natural aesthetics of something that has become completely unnatural. Without the function of contrast, we are left gazing at polarities—a scene either wholly natural or wholly human-contrived.

In terms of environmental aesthetics, traces of both nature and the human-made are necessary if we are to consider artifactual relations within environmental phenomenology. Adhering to Crawford's third example is like arguing that in a museum the object conquers the space or vice versa. Rather, each is dependent on the other for their aesthetic function; the interaction of medium and object creates the media. When contextualizing the image of human interference within environmental aesthetics, the canvas—the lake in Crawford's example, but the landscape in general—still needs to be visible or perceptible. Over the past decade tangible models have materialized for what Crawford could only fictionalize in his study, which in turn can provide a riposte to Crawford's "parasitic" exemplars. Recent photographs of manufactured landscapes, like those of Canadian landscape artist Edward Burtynsky,¹⁴⁴ illustrate how extreme forms of human interference in natural topography acquire aesthetic properties at the expense of threatened environments. Burtynsky's photographs, which may capture anything from the paradoxically destructive yet elegant lines of industrial tailings ponds to a hillocked tire yard, require traces of landscape to bleed through the areas interrupted by waste in order to elicit an aesthetic response, no matter how much that response is couched in moral concern surrounding environmental degradation. Regardless of the degree to which humanity has intervened in his

¹⁴⁴ Although Burtynsky is Canadian born, his photography traverses borders. Not only has he photographed American industrial landscapes in Utah, Vermont, and Montana, but he has travelled the world (China most recently) to locate landscapes interrupted by extreme forms of human intervention. I am referencing him as a general example rather than as a nationalistic one. To view his photographs of oil harvesting operations, see the book *Oil* (2009); for more information on his work, see *Manufactured Landscapes: The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky* (2003), and also the 2006 documentary of the same name (*Manufactured Landscapes*).

landscapes, many of Burtynsky's images are aesthetically poignant because they do not omit traces of nature; the tension between nature and human contrivance is what drives much of the arresting, perplexing, and uncanny optic effect. One cannot obliterate the other and expect the same uncanny phenomenology that converts the landscape to a canvas and the surpluses of refined fossil fuels to paint. Landscape is the medium, the stage; the human-contrived is the catalyst for uncanny alteration; the "third object" is the thing rendered both uncannily other and aesthetic by the spectator. Although Crawford's fictitious examples offer a more direct act of destruction of natural landscape, the landscape itself is necessary to provoke a response as it concerns natural aesthetics, as oil poured onto a manmade, indoor lake might peak interest, but would fail to provoke the visceral reaction summoned by natural space. This reaction, to reiterate, can be propelled by moral objections as well as by artistic concerns stemming from anti-aesthetic conventions; however, the existence of photography that exhibits jarring interruptions in the landscape cannot fail to have pure aesthetic concerns along with moral ones.

As a way of closing this section I would like to return to Brady. Despite the endeavour to infuse balance into her approach—taking, as she does, the middle road of Crawford's three scenarios—her argument that traditional farm artifacts have more aesthetic value than modern farm implements still vies for, and props up, the same mollified paradigms that are proponents of even more flavourless boluses of mainstream painterliness. Rather than omitting the reality of a potentially parasitic relationship between the human-contrived and nature (one that might be instigated by modern industry and technology), Crawford's examples offer a framework through which the third object generated by the nature-artifact dialectic can be regarded as something both injurious to environment yet aesthetically charged. The reason scholars might contend that "traditional" farming practices are more aesthetically measurable is the same reason why the

domestic waste of neopastoral space has largely been co-opted in contemporary natural aesthetics by passé portrayals of environmental maidenhood, or by pacified depictions of the simple life perpetuated by clichéd versions of pastoral. Images of a pasture punctuated by fragments of commodity refuse are not considered “traditional” or at harmony with the landscape. Tradition, in environmental aesthetics, prefers to keep its pastoral fantasies virginal and unsullied by waste rather than face the reality propagated by the age of commodity. I would challenge scholars like Brady to take a drive down a paradigmatic country road and calculate how many of those traditional farms that were “at one” with nature, laid waste by time and disuse, have become exhibition grounds for the detritus of modern commodity and tech culture. She might encounter a computer monitor parallel to a century-old plough, a twenty-year-old refrigerator flanking a wood-plank barn with mossy roof, a Wal-Mart tea kettle on a tree stump flanking an antique, manual posthole-digger left upright two feet in the ground, a porcelain toilet sinking into the earth, glazed with rain water beside some white chickens. Indeed, these new representations do not fit traditional ideals of an idyllic agrarian existence. But they are real.

* * *

3.5 Conclusion: The Picturesque, Mock-Nostalgia, and Artifact-oriented Ecophenomenology

What of this question of the real versus the ideal as it pertains to waste in nature? Is it to say that reality cannot share space with paradigms of perfection, or does the question reveal something about our changing ideals? If it is true that we must learn to be at home with our excess, then the question aims to uncover the uncanniness of the perfected home, and what constitutes the new, inverted visions of an idyllic, bygone existence caught in the middle ground of pastoral purity and disposability. Although their studies do not directly grapple with waste vis-

à-vis natural environments, Budd, Brady, and Crawford offer a place to begin piecing together the structures through which we might approach an artifact-oriented ecophenomenology,¹⁴⁵ the study of how human-contrived objects interact with natural environments to become artifactual. In an age of disposability where, as Budd puts it, “little of the world’s landscape is in a natural condition,” analyzing the ontological connection between subjectivity and the debris of the domestic everyday is of increasing relevance for understanding how objects of disposability gain artifactual status, particularly in the poetry of the modern period, and what this changing paradigm means in terms of our new relationship to natural space and the objects we abandon there (waste-as-wilderness and waste-as-refuse). As William Doreski suggests in his essay “Wallace Stevens at Home in the Wilderness,” “The dump is the place where cultural objects begin to metamorphose into natural ones” (21). It is this uncanny intersection of the cultural and the natural that acts as a projection of the modern self: a stratum of natural topography imbued with the fragmented object matter of modernity.

¹⁴⁵ The proposed field of “ecophenomenology” is represented in a collection of essays titled *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (2003), edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvin. The abstract of David Wood’s chapter in the book, “What is Ecophenomenology?” (originally published in *Research in Phenomenology* in 2001), provides a definition of the field: “eco-phenomenology, in which are folded both an ecological phenomenology and a phenomenological ecology, offers us a way of developing a middle ground between phenomenology and naturalism, between intentionality and causality.” Wood also privileges temporality—its “invisibility,” “finitude,” “rhythms,” and “interruption[s]”—as part of this dynamic, a fourfold formula of “time’s plexity” that “is also transformed by a meditation on the role of boundaries in constituting the varieties of thinghood” (78). More recently, the term has been considered within the scope of “OOO” studies. Timothy Morton’s 2011 article “Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology” highlights the potential of ecophenomenology and OOO studies to assess how both natural and unnatural phenomena such as “oil spills and strange weather really do ‘speak’ to us,” and how “OOO is timely in giving us concepts with which to address the feedback we are receiving from Earth” (165). Morton’s proposed amalgamation of ecophenomenology and object-oriented ontology is relevant for my study; yet my methodology differs somewhat because my focus has been on aesthetics. I am particularly interested in object orientation as artifact orientation, that is, critically assessing the phenomenology of *human-contrived artifacts* as they appear in natural environments. Moreover, whereas object-oriented ontology tends to align itself with posthumanist philosophy (i.e., phenomena as they interact outside of human influence), my focus has been to examine artifactual- and eco-phenomena through the lens of thing theory as it relates to the aesthetics of encounter and spectatorship. Differences aside, “OOO” studies and artifact-orientated ecophenomenology certainly overlap. Other books that are relevant to an object-oriented study of nature are Morton’s *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007), Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), and several works named in Morton’s abovementioned “Here Comes Everything”: Graham Harman’s *The Quadruple Object*, Levi Bryant’s *The Democracy of Objects*, and Ian Bogost’s *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It’s Like to Be a Thing*.

In light of garbage's exile from the canons of environmental aesthetics, I will now defer to a body of theory that deals more directly with imbrications of waste in natural environments, and that thrives on such contrasts. Saito's and Brady's use of the picturesque as a framing device for their essays befits a consideration of waste materials in natural space, and provides an appropriate segue into an area of aesthetics that unites the uncanny power of nature with the callous irony of the (neo)pastoral. In many ways, the state of the modern idyll in American culture was anticipated by the eighteenth-century poeticization of picturesque rural landscapes at the onset of the industrial revolution. What the picturesque largely represents cannot be reduced to a mode of spectatorship that, as Saito bluntly puts it, encourages us solely to "look for and appreciate the *scenically* interesting and beautiful parts of our natural environment" (238). Although the gaze of the picturesque observer, as it developed in the eighteenth century, was trained on the pictorially significant, it by no means focused on "the beautiful" as its object, as is evidenced by the numerous manifestoes which advocated rough, irregular, and asymmetrical prospects, and made the ruin and destitute habitation the axis around which its machinations revolved. As Steven Jacobs explains in his introduction to *Beyond the Picturesque* (2009), picturesque spectatorship is not only interested in the human-contrived laid waste, but also in the dynamic interaction of waste and natural phenomena as a form of productive aesthetics:

The same way a built construction can only become picturesque once it has been subjected to the forces of nature and the ravages of time, a landscape can only be picturesque once the natural scene has been stripped of its idealised unity and pure structure by human intervention. It is precisely that continual, unpredictable dialectic between nature and culture that forms the ultimate breeding ground for picturesque aesthetics. (9)

When we consider that the ultimate breeding ground for the picturesque is the "unpredictable dialectic between nature and culture," we can begin to see how the picturesque is relevant to a study of the remnant by-products of domestication, particularly if we subscribe to Doreski's

claim (as influenced by a reading of Stevens' "The Man on the Dump") that landfills are "the place where cultural objects begin to metamorphose into natural ones." Yet it is not merely the contentious interaction between nature and the phenomenological products of cultural development that comprise the picturesque. It is also the dialectic of landscape and the remnants of vernacular, common, pastoral life that drives its spectatorship. As I will argue, the mock-nostalgia for a "common," simpler existence, flanked by ivied ruins representing a grand but obsolete past, transforms into the poeticization of the common, everyday appearance of the remnants of the domestic within the neopastoral. In order to support my argument, a link must be substantiated not only between picturesque aesthetics and vernacular ruin as they evolve and blend within American contexts, but also between vernacular ruin and increasing depictions of domestic waste as framed within tenets of modern-period pastoral. Just as the picturesque draws breath from the "unpredictable dialectic between nature and culture" (Jacobs 9), the final resting place of our manufactured, domestic refuse—the landfill beyond city limits—represents an even newer version of the modern object, our fragmented ontology reflected in trash become uncannily other.

Chapter 4: Fragments of Modernity, Domestic Ruin, and Neopastoral Aesthetics in Modern American Poetry

4.1. “Boys and Bad Hunters”: Archives and Violence

Chapter Abstract

Throughout my examination of the artifactualization of waste in natural space, I have explored the spectatorial interest in refuse as an archival impulse that perpetrates hermeneutic violence through distortion. That is, the fascination sparked by domestic debris in nature is associated with a poetics of detachment that searches for the aesthetic potential, rather than the historical veracity, of everyday things. What is meant by “violence” emerges from the language of disinterring, deracinating, and dislodging from context, which cannot but suggest a figurative wound or injury exacerbated through phenomenological misperception. As I have argued in previous chapters, archival configuration as a de-contextualizing event is a brand of theft, an “act of displacement,” as Greenblatt puts it, wherein artifacts are “pulled out,” “peeled off,” “seized,” “stolen” (44, see chapter one), and then misread as an act of subjective orientation. The propensity to misread objects—on both a popular and academic level—that become appropriated and disinterred from context extends this figurative violence through the creation of myth-artifacts and hallucinatory narratives that displace or supplant the history inherent in those objects. Mere objects become things, and then artifacts, when dislodged from their typical function and imbued with the speculation of the onlooker, the invasive archivist. The following chapter aims to explore how that figurative violence—the hallucinatory narratives and lore spun around objects of the “middle ground”—facilitates a scene of aesthetic engagement that influences how the everyday ruins and discards of domestic dwelling become poetic artifacts, and how the incursion of both the archivist and domestic waste into natural space operates as a hermeneutic invasion to generate a third aesthetic object (to borrow Crawford’s term) through

the poeticization of the encounter. The phenomenon of aestheticizing everyday ruins and discards in the American pastoral, in dialogue with theories of the picturesque and “vernacular ruin” (Paton, MacArthur), substantiates the role that refused human-contrived objects perceived in natural space played in the deracinating tenets of modernist aesthetics. Yet at the same time that the material excesses of incessant domesticating activities were influencing an aesthetic mode of spectatorship that aimed to locate the alterity of everyday things, this drive to deracinate was aggregating to identify, however unconsciously, a new phase of pastoral. This new phase—what I have termed the “neopastoral”—marked the transition from the interjection of the machine in the garden to the interpolation of the machine’s defunct and refused surpluses into the mythologized American idyll.

* * *

When travelling across southern Ontario from Ottawa to Windsor on any of the 400-series highways, farm property punctuates (with several elongated ellipses) the excursion between urban centres. While continuing the journey on the interstate roads that unravel across the Eastern and Midwestern United States, motorists will encounter a similar panorama once the silhouettes of urban diaspora have disappeared in the rear-view mirror. Leo Marx in his essay “The American Landscape in the Era of Postmodernity” offers a description of the phenomenon as viewed from 36,000 feet: “Extensive greening begins with the dark stretches of forest along the Appalachian range, and it spills over into the agricultural mid-west, a vast patchwork of farms in shades of lighter green and tan segmented by the rectangular grid pattern of the geological surveys, with occasional built areas (small towns or mere clusters of buildings), the

whole terrain criss-crossed by whitish bands of highway” (13). These whitish bands, concrete arteries inscribing sterilized swathes throughout North America, meander among what was formerly the Bradfordian “hideous and desolate wilderness” (“Of Plymouth Plantation” 168), now meek and subdued stretches of pasture, ploughed fields, nature preserves and greenspace, but still active enough to require the intervention of rangers, groundskeepers and manicurists to demarcate and defend the ditches that act as moles buffering humans and environment.

Because the majority of provincial and interstate roads pass through what is largely classified “rural space,” travelling from city to city, more often than not, necessitates an encounter with what antiquated writers of the idyll might call pastoral scenes. Of course these scenes, from a modern point of view, have changed from the days of the imaginary herdsman, crook and oaten flute in hand, tending to oblivious sheep. Yet if we revisit Marx’s definition of the pastoral from *The Machine in the Garden*, we see that the founding principles of the concept are alive and well, manifested in the “vast patchwork... of lighter green and tan” and rectangular grid patterns criss-crossed by whitish bands. These liminal borderlands of quasi-natural space are indeed “the embodiment of... ‘semi-primitivism’”—the fantasy of a still-accessible simple life more attuned to nature—“located in a middle ground somewhere ‘between,’ yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature” (*The Machine* 23). They are sites of counterforce where nature and the human-contrived exist in a state of betweenness, a condition of topographical indeterminacy where suburbia blurs into a mélange of seemingly random, exurban diaspora, what Marx in his above-mentioned essay terms “rurbia” (“The American Landscape” 21).

A portmanteau of “rural” and “suburbia,” rurbia represents a brand of sub-suburbanity, a space which not only flanks but also invades the regions designated as wilderness proper.

Examples of ruburbia might be a commercial outlet erected on the fringes of a nature preserve, or a corporate head office to some paper manufacturer plunked beside a dairy farm on a newly paved side road, or a house built at the dead end of some low-service, winding mountain road in the Appalachians—habitation that is out of place the moment the ground is broken. In Marx's words, ruburbia "is created by the piecemeal dispersal, beyond the suburbs—beyond the old exurbia—of industry, small business, and residential housing. ... It has emerged in two kinds of hitherto underdeveloped terrain: the last productive agricultural areas beyond the outer rim of suburbs, and the truly remote areas of sparsely settled states" (21). The operative descriptor, as Marx also highlights (21), is "piecemeal dispersal." Here we might be reminded of Freud's characterization of the modern subject from his 1905 *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, in which the human psyche, fractured and caught between social mores and instinct, civilization and the wilderness of the id, represents equally fragmented psychical topography, a terrain that "emerges piecemeal" to reflect the fractured state of an inner landscape (6). Ruburbia is undoubtedly a symptom of fractured modern-urban life, and provides further evidence of the invasion of the "middle ground" by the domestic surpluses of the metropolis. Juxtaposed by nature and the urban, ruburbia certainly fits within the rubric of modern pastoral—or *neopastoral*—by virtue of its relation to the domestication of hinterlands caught between civilization and something of the "sub-" declension. If we agree that the physical geography of a nation externalizes, at least in part, the constitution of the populations living within, ruburbia is a topographical reflection of the inner landscape of the modern American subject.¹⁴⁶ The

¹⁴⁶ Marx concedes, somewhat derisively, that "Americans, represented by the views of Frederick Jackson Turner, leader of [the] 'frontier' school of historians, have tended to exaggerate the relative importance of geography—or of space-based institutions and beliefs—in the development of [their] society" (26). What this means for American culture: the spatial dynamics of topography (natural topography in particular) are imbedded as a trope in the national and cultural temperament, and quantifications of human activity are usually framed according to geo-spatial metaphors. In other words, object orientation and geographical orientation go hand in hand; the subjective

accelerating exodus to the country in some parts of the United States¹⁴⁷ represents both an escape from the alleged corrupting influences of the urban and an exemplum of urbanity's omnipresence in a nation still influenced by the rhetoric of wilderness individualism, rugged self-determination, and the fantasy of recapturing a pristine, edenic, naturalist way of life. However, if we boil the pastoral down to its essence, and regard it as a middle state caught between civilization and mollified wilderness, a more visual definition would reduce modern pastoral to something not quite wholly removed, as of yet, from its bucolic, precursory facsimiles: fields of grain, beans, corn; machinery ploughing, planting, harvesting; livestock grazing, breeding, defecating. While the means of production and scope of the operations have changed, the concepts, as well as the tensions between urbanity and the simple life, remain consistent.

Long stretches of highway are a means to an end. Unless viewing these "whitish bands" from the upper portions of the troposphere, typically one passes through such spaces with a mind trained to the destination, or with attention divided among digital devices and the search for any distraction to make the journey as sedate as possible. Yet while some might pursue modern diversions in order to counteract the tedium of scene after blurry scene of freshly mown hay fields, other individuals clad in business attire (three piece suits, I imagine) in a marketing firm located in some distant metropolis have recognized the monetary value inherent in alleged pastoral emptiness, and have collaborated to exploit that so-called vacancy as an exhibition space to publicize their wares. When one begins to notice such odd contrasts as, say, a billboard hocking the wares of mass-production cast into relief against a plot of forest beside the highway, or a sign peddling the virtues of "deferred trash" (Stallabrass 407)¹⁴⁸ planted in the middle of a bean field, other tech- and commodity-oriented anomalies begin to materialize from the static of

identification with physical phenomena requires scenery (or geography) as the frame (or stage) for artifactual relations.

¹⁴⁷ See pages 21-22 in Marx's essay for his assessment of this migration from (sub)urban to ruburban regions in the United States.

¹⁴⁸ Julian Stallabrass argues that we "can think of commodities as deferred trash" (*Gargantua* 407); see chapter 1.

everyday life. Suddenly, strange juxtapositions fade in from the background—interject—on our commutes along the highways that carve rural space into commodity-sponsored versions of an eighteenth-century picturesque tour, something worthy of William Gilpin’s fetishization of “splendid ruin, contrasted with the objects of nature” (40).



Figure 4.1. *Highway Scenes: AI.SI*. Photograph, 2011.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ The following images (4.1, 4.2 and 4.3) were visible from public roads, or from the outside of the structure. I mention this more as a disclaimer buffering me from finicky legal pedantries than as a point of interest. Trespassing is at times a legal grey area when it comes to rural zones—particularly forested agricultural areas—as it can be difficult to know where public property begins and ends unless clearly demarcated. Nevertheless, as it pertains to my photography, permission was either granted by owners of the property to photograph and enter private land or structures, or the items were visible, as they appear, from public roads and therefore are not covered by the *Trespass to Property Act*. Moreover, according to the *Act* it is perfectly legal to enter a property to ask for permission to enter a property: “There is a presumption that access for lawful purposes to the door of a building on premises by a means apparently provided and used for the purpose of access is not prohibited” (R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s.3.[1]). One cannot be held liable if, upon approaching a structure to ask for permission, one discovers that the door on which he might have knocked has disintegrated. And one certainly should not be held in violation of the *Act* if, upon discovering a lack of occupancy while exercising that legal right of access, he or she snaps a few pictures of the scenery. It is a product of our litigious age that I feel the need to offer this disclaimer; poets like William Wordsworth and Robert Frost would have ignored a no trespassing sign in their rural escapades, or would have incorporated it into a poem as



Figure 4.2. *Highway Scenes: A1.S2*. Photograph, 2011. Taken along Highway 401 just outside of London, Ontario. Exhibited in Toronto at Ryerson University's *Literatures of Modernity Symposium* (March 2011), at *More Please: Explorations of Excess Free-Exchange Conference* at the University of Calgary, Alberta (March 2012), and at the *Canadian Pop Culture Conference* in Niagara Falls, Ontario (May 2013).

Take this abandoned silo for instance (Figure 4.1), the kind where corn and silage and other animal feed would have at one time been stored. The farmhouse and barn to which it would have been an adjunct are absent, their remnants likely archived in the subsoil of the local landfill.

The idea that this structure has maintained any existence, jutting out of a bare field next to a busy

they defiantly crossed the invisible threshold demarcating private property. As Brautigan puts it in *Trout Fishing in America*, a “NO TRESPASSING” sign represents “4/17 OF A HAIKU” (7). Suffice it to say: the three images that follow were not restricted by such signs at the time of access (see Section 6 of the Ontario *Trespass to Property Act*, which covers signs and property demarcation, accessible at: http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90t21_e.htm).

stretch of provincial highway, is an intriguing whodunit—or who-didn't-do-it. Its preservation is either premeditated or a pariah, and likely the latter. The once tall grass enveloping the structure, having withered and receded under the burden of autumn frosts, is nest to a trove of artifactual remains. Upon closer inspection I discover evidence of recent visitation (Figure 4.2). This silo, a neo-picturesque ruin, waste material in itself, has become a repository for discarded, mass-produced goods: a broken, white plastic patio chair; a red disposable drinking cup; a metal drum, enigmatic, grey and bare, whose former contents are a mystery; an old television reception antenna, barely perceptible, that might adorn the roof of a house; and so on. Upon entering the structure, one will find signs of appropriation (Figure 4.3). It has become a haunt for what my father would call gallivanting, wayward youth, whose occupancy is evidenced by empty plastic pop bottles converted to bongs, and who have claimed the space in the name of Anarchy, Satan, Hitler, et al. Such inscriptions are the fringe archivists' method of exerting authority over the things they wish simultaneously to preserve and destroy. Inscriptions work to claim not only the space of the archive, but also the power over its representation.

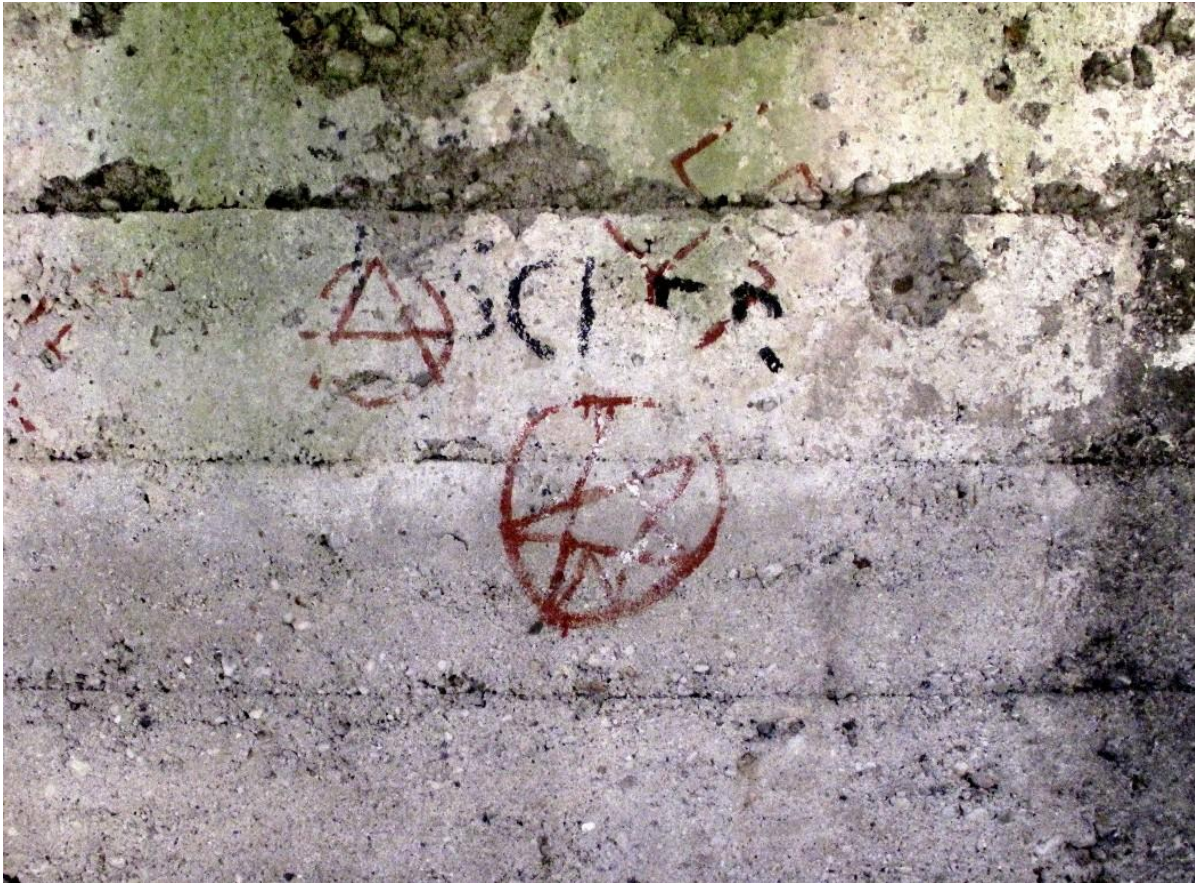


Figure 4.3. *Rural Abstract 4 or I Claim This Silo in the Name of Anarchy, Satan, Hitler, et al.* Photograph, 2011. Exhibited in Toronto at Ryerson University's *Literatures of Modernity Symposium* (March 2011), and at the *Canadian Pop Culture Conference* in Niagara Falls, Ontario (May 2013).

Without a doubt, my present interest in these enigmatic sites is a way to satisfy an archiving impulse I also had in my “wayward” youth, to achieve what these anarchistic appropriators have accomplished through imbuing a wall with traces of spectatorship and collaborative enterprise (through scrawling, ironically, the symbol for anarchy). At the same time I seek to inscribe my own narratives, however, the impulse to disassociate myself from hyperbolic and ostentatious evidence of my tampering persists—and I should likely make it clear that I am responsible for only the photograph, and not the graffiti, of Figure 4.3. To some, sifting through and cataloging the haunting remains of former habitation is fascinating on its own, while others find that contributing to the eventual ruin is a better indicator of authorial intent. When I

say that contributing to ruin has authorial intent, I am not referring directly to an aesthetics of destruction—that demolition is also a (pro)creative act—but rather to how we stamp our subjectivity (or physical presence) on archives by deciding what to put in and what to leave out, what to maintain and what to ignore. Such is the paradox of the archive and violence. Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* explains how the archive perpetrates hermeneutic violence when it “plays with citation” through inscription, how “every archive... is at once institutive and conservative... [r]evolutionary and traditional” (7). In the space between tradition and revolution, the desire to preserve and the desire to inscribe, “is the violence of the archive itself, *as archive, as archival violence*” (7). As a young man predisposed to wandering who grew up in a rural area, I witnessed how the abandoned dwellings of ruburbia, beset with the slow asphyxiation and reclamation of nature, became clubhouses for local children acting as amateur archivists. While I was off sifting through the itemizable remains of these “clubhouses”—yellowing hand-written letters, newspapers browned with water damage, rusty cans with corroded labels, a moldering school workbook preserved by the deceased ex-inhabitant, discoloured toys, ancient figurines, moth-eaten articles of clothing left hanging in a bedroom closet—some of my acquaintances would indulge the overtly anarchic archiving impulse by kicking or punching holes through deteriorating drywall, making improvised clubs from table legs to aid their contributions, lighting fires to smoke out the bats sleeping in the exposed rafters, or simply for the sake of lighting fires for the off chance that something beyond our control might happen. I cannot say that I didn’t participate in some of that destruction. Such was my adolescent predisposition to speed up the deterioration of a thing abandoned and left to the whims of the public.

This destructive behaviour, on the surface, contradicts my current impulse to preserve these sites as they appear caught in the transition to obsolescence. There is a certain authenticity, or perhaps a cultural vignette, that I strive to represent through intervening at a particular moment of decay. However, I have come to believe that there is more potential for violence to be done in my invasive academic and creative archiving practices than by destroying that which former inhabitants—inadvertent curators of things now representing departure—did not want prying eyes to witness. Hermeneutics is an act of theft, and every time an archive is opened to the gaze of the spectator, or is re-presented as an ostensible yet anachronic narrative, the archivist both preserves and destroys by inscribing tradition and self onto the interior. We must be wary of the things we leave behind, and how tradition, or what T.S. Eliot calls the “historical sense” (“Tradition” 40), is relative to the living gaze. The archivist roves through the contested space of the archive, (re)configuring here and defacing there. The archivist at times is no better, perhaps worse, than wayward youth who punch holes in water-damaged drywall as evidence of being-there. These anarchists slip in and out silently, yet are conscious of the contribution they have made to the representation of the interior. The archivist also “operates in silence,” but “destroys in advance [his or her] own archive” (Derrida 10), effaces the traces of individual influence while claiming a disinterested collaboration.

Other analogous remnants of the domestic are tacitly claimed not for an abstract concept or entity in absentia (such as Anarchy or Satan), but by an impulse to regard such sites as something museal and covertly on display—communal works in progress. What Derrida refers to as the “anarchy drive” in the archiving impulse (11) is precisely this paradoxical compulsion to

preserve the archive as a site of both communal re-visitation¹⁵⁰ and destruction via the inscription of tradition (community) and the individual subject. Wastes of the domestic are caught up in a tripartite relationship of communal otherness (based on trace and history), individual inscription (interpretation of the spectator), and the exposition of natural processes (decay), the latter representing a return to nature—the breakdown of the quintessence of dust, as Hamlet might put it—“where cultural objects begin to metamorphose into natural ones” (Doreski 21). Because “the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown” (Derrida 11), it represents not only an impulse to intervene into, and circumvent, the natural processes of decay, but also a gathering site for that which is broken, out-of-use, and outside of temporal location (anachronic). There cannot be an archive without structural intervention; archiving is always a co-authored venture and necessitates narrative remodelling as part of its machinations. As an example of narrative remodelling via theft and destruction, we can look to modern period poems like Robert Frost’s “A Fountain, a Bottle, a Donkey’s Ears and Some Books.” In this case, an introverted yet extroverted exhibition of the archive’s interior is represented in the quiet decay of a rural dwelling situated in the wilds of the Kinsman Mountains, New Hampshire. An abandoned home, particularly surrounded by the contested space that wilderness represents, is the *hortus conclusus* of the archive; it is a microcosm both enclosed (restricted) yet unguarded, and flirts with the spectator through the aura of mystery. A house decaying in the middle of nowhere has its viscera visible on the outside; while it conceals its obsolescence, at the same time it invites the silent, skulking intervention of “Boys and bad hunters” (line 102)—the archivist.

The poem begins on the pretext of a jaunt in the mountains, and culminates with breaking and entering into the rural residence left abandoned to the desires of the curious country

¹⁵⁰ See chapter two in *Archive Fever* on the connection between the death drive, the archive, and repetition compulsion—the impulse to revisit objects and artifacts as a form of control and mastery. The “death drive” as it is expounded in Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* will be visited in the next section.

flâneur.¹⁵¹ I will return to the topic of forced invasion as it pertains to the archive in a moment. For now, it is important to assess the narrative sleight-of-hand leading up to the home invasion and how it provides a fusion of natural and domestic objects to frame the event of the archive. To begin at the beginning: the unnamed speaker of Frost's poem (perhaps a fictionalized projection of Frost himself) is led by a guide (Old Davis) to view a "stone baptismal font" which is, interestingly, referred to as an "old bathtub"—not a relic per se, but rather residue of the domestic (10, 16), strangely out of place on the mountain where "woods" have most certainly "grown up" "around it" (21). The font acts as the more properly identifiable artifact of antiquity, a relic in earnest as per its religious affiliation (it is the historical remnant of Mormon settlers who attempted to conquer a portion of the New Hampshire wilderness), yet it is never found. This old bathtub remains missing throughout the entire 138 lines. But it was never meant to be located, just as the "famous Bottle"—a facsimile of a domestic implement stained by vegetation on a cliff face (38-39)—is never meant to be a satisfactory substitute for the pursuit of the artifactual in the wilderness. Both the bottle and the font are "empty" investments (43, 46), and although the bottle landmark is identified, the font is a perpetual lost object, the impetus to scour for relics in the wilderness in order to diverge from the *analogized* domestic object to enter, as a scopophilic tourist, the above-mentioned private but abandoned domestic residence. In defence of the excursioner-become-burglar, the windows of this residence have been shattered by previous relic hunters (72-73), yet the image of the speaker crawling through a frame of jagged

¹⁵¹ I call the speaker of the poem a flâneur because it is implied that the mountain is a site for idle urban tourists; however, it is a mica deposit, and later a natural formation that resembles a bottle, rather than the abandoned home that draws the urbanites. It is noteworthy that "thrilly tourists" have any interest in this "famous Bottle" (40, 42), as it is another example of the tendency to anthropomorphize and look for the domestic in the wilderness. The idea that the speaker dismisses the bottle as "empty" (43) demonstrates the spectatorial power that the human-made has over the wilderness that envelops and reclaims domesticated space. It is more impressive for the speaker to witness evidence of human trace than it is to see human trace fabricated by nature—and he "won't accept the substitute" (43).

glass to enter the dwelling offers a comic portrayal of the narrator-as-archivist complicit in, and compounding, that act of destruction and theft.

The narrative inscription facilitated through the creation of poetry is reflected, ironically, by the contents of the burglarized house: this residence belonged at one time to a poetess whose published books sit impotent and unread in a box in the attic. I call this ironic for a few reasons, and, as argued in chapter three, irony is a significant component of the pastoral genre whereby divergent objects and ideals exist in a middle space, and confront each other as skewed versions of their originary intent. First, the impotence of unread books becomes an ironic image through the attribution of fecundity and tumescence to decomposing literature that remains largely untouched by the multitude of trespassers. While some of the books are “overflowing like a horn of plenty” “near the window, toward the light / Where driven rain had wet and swollen them” (92-97), others are retrieved “fresh / In virgin wrapper from deep in the box” (125-126). Although itinerate trespassers have largely ignored the books, nature (the exposure to elements) has imbued (or ravaged) them with a paradoxical aesthetic based on their existence as art and trash. The juxtaposition of the fresh, virgin books and what they are to become as sullied, decayed, bloated fragments of garbage generates an aesthetic caught between the processes of decay (perpetrated by the invasion of nature) and the pristine condition that untouched books signify. In order to access the *mis-en-scene* containing what is symbolically the decaying corpus of the poetess, the rural excursioner treads “uncomfortably on crunching glass / Through a house stripped of everything / Except, it seemed, the poetess’s poems” (89-91). These books, which are both abandoned and archived (preserved), both virgin and decayed, represent the denuded—indeed, noumenal—embodiment of the departed poetess through an object both natural yet commoditized: not only are the poems reclaimed by the forces of nature; they are poems *about*

nature, and birds, and posies (80-81), generic and sentimental effusions perhaps meant to be consumed by equally generic audiences.

To recap: the confluence of broken glass and poetry suggests not only an eroticized, violent invasion and theft (“stripped”), but also a brand of waste material that is aestheticized by the collage of waste nature poetry and shards of glass reminiscent of fragments turned up in an excavation. The house exists as a deteriorating museum, an archive communally ransacked and pilfered—save for the unwanted books, some of which are “tried” and “dropped” and “left lying where [they] fell rejected” among remnant shards of the windows (119-120). Each act of communal interference and dismemberment adds to the aestheticized (and eroticized) nature of its abandonment, decay, and repurposing. Although Frost appears to censure the destruction of the home perpetrated by boys and bad (relic) hunters, that destruction and the resulting debris are the impetus for the poem’s communally generated procreative power. What the poetess could not “sell or give away” in life (122) takes on new aesthetic relevance in an afterlife as waste fragments contaminated by nature—and we cannot forget that Frost, via the narrative that he spins around the occasion, is complicit in that contamination. In the end, it is the books’ appearance as immaculate waste tempered by natural processes that reorients its value as an artifact.

The further irony, as alluded to above, is that these poems are a constituent of anaestheticized mass-productivity. Apart from the overt reference to these books as commodities to be sold, we can conjecture that they are mass-produced by the way the books are parcelled in a nondescript box, by their standardized duplication in batches, and by that fact that each is individually wrapped, perhaps in some brand of generic packaging (we are not told the material). In essence, the most identifiable aesthetic items are reduced to bloated corpses representing the

former inhabitant of the home, the contaminating interest and influence of trespassers, and the books' alterity as objects removed from commoditized use. The books as commodities have less aesthetic import than the poeticized nature of their abandonment and decay, and are subordinate to the archival space (the house itself), tempered, as it has been, by those boys and bad hunters. Although the books exist as a mass-produced representation of anaestheticized ephemera, as the only objects remaining in the house they occupy at once an elevated yet degraded status as the uncanny nucleus of the domestic space. The books as untouched by decomposition and abandonment are not unique objects, and would not command attention without the juxtaposition of decay and virginity. The poems represent formulaic, boilerplate, hackneyed—indeed, synthetically fabricated—replicas of nature better suited to the trash heap they gesture toward and ultimately blur into. We might deduce that Frost is commenting on modernist indictments of cloyingly sentimentalized effusions on nature presently characterized by mass-produced and unremarkable volumes of poetry quietly decaying in the wilderness of the Kinsman Mountains. Yet as the books metamorphose to natural objects through corrosive exposure to the elements, it is not the poetry, but rather the books' quality as abandoned trash, that imbibes an alterity representative of modern aesthetics. These books are poetic because their original intent, altered by the violence of nature, has been displaced—because their power *as* poetry has been lost, and then resuscitated, ironically, through their status as garbage.

It is significant that we are told by the guide, immediately prior to the break-and-enter, that “the outside doors have as yet held against” the procession of invaders responsible for reconfiguring the interior of the home (73). The inclusion of this detail prompts the question of whether or not moldering archives such as these are public or private spaces, and reinforces the violence perpetrated by disturbing the originary archive, the excavation site that is ground zero

for the plunder of objects. Because the doors to the home are either barricaded or locked, it is reasonable to suppose that the poetess did not intend for her dwelling, once abandoned, to be invaded by hunters and tourists and snooping archivists who feel that they are doing the deceased a charitable service by stripping the home of its objects. The speaker certainly treats the home as a public space, and he seems equally ignorant to the violence of his activity as he very casually appropriates one of the poetess's books—a symbolic act of destruction akin to his earlier fantasy of throwing one of her books from the attic window (110) to see it “lie [among] stones and bushes unretrieved” (116). In spite of his theft, the speaker of Frost's poem, as an invasive archivist, is fulfilling an archival desire that is an act of hermeneutic disfiguration by removing the book from the interior (the ordinary archive) and defacing its representation. Indeed, the burglar is “satisfied for the time being” (131) both through the narrative spun out of the event (the poem) and the act of theft that analogizes the speaker's misappropriation through spectatorship and (mis)interpretation. It “was a demand” (137) put upon both the poetess and the archive that wrested power from the space, an act that is projected onto future archivists who “in time” would help her “be rid of all her books” (138). The house stands as a museum to be plundered, and a space where authority through theft and destruction is to be inscribed. To the home has been appended, as Gilpin might put it, the picturesque “ornaments of time” (*Observations on the River Wye* 42), the patina of decay and destruction ornamentalized through natural processes and the visitors who affix their creative contribution to a poem-in-progress represented *not* by impotent and unread books of *poetry*, but rather by the house itself—the archival space.¹⁵²

¹⁵² It is important to point out that “trash” as a noun and a verb represents a mode of communal intervention and collaboration through violence. As Kennedy argues in *An Ontology of Trash*, “‘trash’ connotes violence. ... As a verb it can be used synonymously with ‘to destroy,’ as in ‘the thugs trashed the place.’ In this sense, ‘trash’ means a manner of physically relating to other beings.” Trash as noun is a product of the verb, of physically relating to



Figure 4.4. *A Final Aubade*. Photograph, 2011. Published in *Qwerty Magazine*. In this more recent visual facsimile of Frost's poetic trespasses—the interior of an abandoned farmhouse on a paradigmatic county road—visitors, excursioners, boys and bad hunters leave their contributions and traces of spectatorship in the form of trash. A soda can heaped haphazardly among rough, picturesque remnants adds audacious colour, points to communal intervention in an age of mass production, and combines to formulate a new brand of picturesque: the neopastoral interlaced with the artifactual refuse of commodity culture. The gaudy imposition of commodity refuse becomes the artifactual remainder of communal engagement imbricated in a new pastoral scene.

* * *

What follows is a consolidation of the theoretical structures I have formulated concerning neopastoral environments, domestic ruin in its many manifestations, and their connections to early twentieth-century poetics and object aesthetics. In previous chapters I have discussed the

phenomena as “a mode of comportment,” and although “to trash” is to treat that phenomena “negatively, and destructively” (xvi), it is nevertheless a hermeneutical act that is at once criticism and collaboration.

noumenal qualities of objects—particularly waste, fragments, and ruin—as they appear in natural environments, while gesturing toward the idiosyncratic investments made by the spectator as he or she attempts to make sense of the uncanny, de-contextualized object-become-artifact as perceived in its alterity in a natural space. In fleshing out this trajectory I have been arguing that objects possess traces of human ontology attached to their thingness, and that it is this ontological investment that facilitates the repurposing of objects to have them appear as a thing removed from function, but also as something other in the eyes of the spectator. However, while arguing my main premise regarding how wilderness, rural, and neopastoral waste objects influence at least the peripheries of modern object aesthetics, I will address how spectatorial interest in these objects reflects not only fragmented vestiges of tradition, but also the fractured, “piecemeal” state of the modern subject (Freud, *Dora* 6). In other words, I will reassert how the waste and fragments of modernity in relation to geo-spatial and -social metaphors concerning fractured identities (i.e., disrupted landscapes as reflections of human ontology) reveal just as much about the living subjectivity of the present as they do about the rigidified object correlations of the past.¹⁵³ As Eliot argues in an essay that has become a modernist manifesto, it takes little stretching of the imagination to understand that “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (“Tradition” 41). Although Eliot also argues within that same essay for depersonalization and a severance between “the man who suffers and the mind which creates” (45), I would think it inevitable that the act of spectatorship,

¹⁵³ Interestingly, Rathje and Murphy in *Rubbish! The Archeology of Garbage* argue that it is the moldering detritus of our cultural dregs that offers the best insight into how the past informs the present and future: “landfills represent valuable lodes of information that may, when mined and interpreted, present valuable insights—insights not into the nature of some past society... but into the nature of our own. Garbage is among humanity’s most prodigious physical legacies to those who have yet to be born; if we can come to understand our discards... then we will better understand the world in which we live” (4). As it pertains to the archeology, artifactualization, or poeticization of what we might categorize as waste, the debris of the past reflects the subjectivity of the present; rather than become fixated on the history of those artifacts, the encounter with refuse fosters a scene of aesthetic engagement, and fosters a dialectic by which past use-value is downplayed in favour of a subjective orientation to the present.

and the interest itself, will cast an impression of that so-called “perfect” artist who can metamorphose to a shred of platinum (44-45).¹⁵⁴ Encoded in Eliot’s manifesto is the inevitability of subjective investment in that which the poet chooses to archive, or which the historian chooses to interpret as an act of hermeneutic theft. If this were not the case, laws might not exist that grant intellectual property rights not only to those photographic, modernist snippets of jars and wheel barrows and fragments shored against ruins, but also to whatever one wishes to point a camera at. I digress slightly into legal quibbling here, but in an age where reader-response theory, empirical solipsism, and subject-oriented pedagogies have made an undeniable impact in the humanities, it seems evermore unconvincing to argue that it is possible to separate the subject from the objective product of perception. Art may attempt to approach this condition, as Eliot claims, but it is always consigned to an *approach* without attainment.¹⁵⁵ To summarize: my analysis will consider, just as Derrida has suggested in *Archive Fever*, how the perception of a system of objects reflects individual subjectivity while it navigates the fissured ethos of subjects in dialogue with communities, tradition, the past and the future. Through this approach, the modernist temperament can be placed into context with the fragments of its domesticated present, the primal wilderness of the past, and the neopastoral spaces in-between that influenced the modern subject from the peripheries.

¹⁵⁴ This statement is in reference to Eliot’s analogy likening the mind of the poet to a shred of platinum that is “unaffected” by the reactive influence of volatile chemical compounds. The shred of platinum represents the pure, neutral, inert product of the interaction between mind and phenomena free from the corruption of subjective emotions (represented by oxygen and sulphur dioxide). This “Impersonal theory of poetry” (44) in many ways sets the groundwork for Eliot’s entire “objective correlative” from “Hamlet and His Problems,” which aims to take the subjective investment out of the narrative voice, replacing it with a system of objects correlated to the image of the character, who, consequently, becomes another object situated among objects. Yet it is my view that, as removed from the archive as curators or narrators might perceive themselves to be, selections are made, objects are branded, and shreds of platinum are tempered in an arena of idiosyncratic influence, whether that influence is contemporaneous or tempered by history and tradition.

¹⁵⁵ With advances in artificial intelligence, perhaps one day we will reach the formulaic goal of perception divorced from subjective impression, and computer interfaces, synthetic shreds of platinum, will produce the most stunning examples of modern poetry severed from the emotive and idiosyncratic quirks that beset humankind. I am speaking facetiously here—but perhaps such a day has already come, as is evidenced by the handful of “poetry generators” available on the internet: <http://thinkzone.wlonk.com/PoemGen/PoemGen.htm>.

* * *

4.2. Fragments of Modernity, Fragments of the Pastoral

It is only fitting, particularly for my intervention into the topic, that Derrida invokes Freud's corpus as the ur-text for archive fever. Not unlike the "mystic writing pad" or palimpsest theory Derrida draws upon from Freud's writing to demonstrate the simultaneous effacement of exterior influences and retention of the substratum, the psycho-ontological structure of the archive impulse remains as an impression in the subsurface of archive theory. As Derrida argues, "The theory of psychoanalysis... [is] a theory of the archive and not only a theory of memory" (19). Put aside the significance invested in objects in psychoanalytic theory—the idea that, by Freud's own admission, psychoanalysis aims to mine the artifacts of the psyche in the methods of the "archaeologist" (*Dora* 7). Freud, as archivist of the artifacts of subjectivity, is responsible for arranging those psychical relics in a coherent form through narrative linearity and chronology. As Sara Haslam, quoting Steven Marcus, notes in *Fragmenting Modernism*, Freud's case studies were not merely clinical accounts, but rather narratives or stories of the self that, by Freud's words, moonlighted as *roman à clef* (*Dora* 3): "On this reading, human life is, ideally, a connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory place, and with everything... accounted for, in its causal or other sequence. And inversely, illness amounts at least in part to suffering from an incoherent story or an inadequate account of oneself" (qtd. in Haslam 21). Interestingly, illness or fever—*le mal d'archive*, as Derrida phrases it (12)—amounts from gaps or disorder in the archive, and materializes through the inability to reproduce a coherent narrative owing to disarranged or missing objects. This narrative dissonance might explain Freud's own *mal d'archive* as it pertains to his impulse to fill gaps in the stories produced through clinical practice: Haslam goes on to note how "Freud as a modernist writer [exemplifies] the

impossibility of such a writer ever knowing all—whether one’s subject is one’s patient, one’s character or oneself” (22).

Indeed, when syntactically arranging archived material, the substrate (or substratum) always contains the impression of the analyst or archivist—and, just as Bailey reveals about the enigmas surrounding the disinterred relics of archaeology, gaps cannot remain as gaps (Bailey 203). The narrative woven around artifacts of trauma is in part a projection of the subjectivity of the archivist, a story or brand of lore generated out of the interaction of archivist and archive that aims to suffuse archival lacunae with elucidations. It is in this way that the archivist’s inscription

... works to destroy the archive: on the condition of effacing but also with a view to effacing its own “proper” traces... It devours it even before producing it on the outside. This drive, from then on, seems not only to be anarchic, anarchonic... the death drive is above all *anarchivic*, one could say, or *archiviolithic*. It will always have been archive-destroying, by silent vocation. (Derrida 10)

To summarize Derrida’s somewhat cryptic assertion: the archivist-as-analyst effaces through the traces left of his or her syntactical arrangement, and destroys through the proposed mastery or control of the archive’s objects. The notion that the archivist aims to control the archive through its objects is explained by Derrida’s reference to the Freudian “death drive” from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), a psychological impulse that aims to wield mastery over death through object-supplements and symbolic relations.¹⁵⁶ As a by-product of this will to master, the

¹⁵⁶ The wielding of mastery through symbolic supplements is epitomized by the oft-quoted *fort/da* game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (page 284). The use of symbolic supplements—“throwing away objects instead of persons” as Freud puts it (286)—is predicated on an original scene of loss, in this case, an infant’s separation from the mother at the period of language acquisition in childhood. The idea that a child’s repetition of a distressing experience “as a game” might become a pleasurable scenario derived from mastering the symbols and objects of a traumatic scene of loss has significant overlaps with archive theory. The archivist, Freud might argue, derives a certain amount of pleasure through the violence done by reconfiguring (and thereby mastering) the objects of the past, and it is through this mastery of the past that he or she controls and manipulates the present. Archiving represents a drive toward death not only through the manipulation of objects representing persons long deceased, but also through the therapeutic derivatives of approaching the space of death signified by that past. Moreover, the child’s entire game of “disappearance and return” (284) mirrors the rules of engagement within the discipline of archeology. In order for an object to become an artifact it must disappear for a period of time (the fifty-year rule) over the edge of the figurative curtained cot, venture into the unknown, mature in the space of death, and return branded with enigmas.

archivist injects his image into the fissures and shadows of the archive while disavowing the co-authored nature of the structure. The archivist first configures the artifacts he engages, and then seeps silently into the archival subsoil to contaminate the original constituents with successive layers of activity.¹⁵⁷ The ingratiation of the analyst into the molecular fibres of archival material is endemic of the psychodynamics of therapy. Analysts act as the impression upon which the analysand cathects trauma;¹⁵⁸ they are conscientious curators who not only facilitate the narrative, but who are the catalysts for the archive's actualization. Maurice Blanchot in *The Infinite Conversation* offers a somewhat surreal illustration, reminiscent of René Magritte's *The Son of Man* and *Man in the Bowler Hat* paintings (1964), of the analyst who effaces/de-faces both the archive and his investment in it, yet facilitates the narrative while in pursuit of "archival desire" (Derrida 12). According to Blanchot the analyst is "one who seems the most negligent and absent of auditors, someone without a face, scarcely someone; a kind of anyone at all who makes a counter-weight to the anything-might-be-said of the discourse and who, like a hollow in space, a silent emptiness, is, nonetheless, the real reason for speaking..." (233). This "silent emptiness" engulfing the analyst complements the psychodynamics of archival practice: both

Removed from perception, it is an object deracinated from context that can now be cathected with the subjective impressions of the present.

¹⁵⁷ See chapter two for an analysis of how successive layering of activities, or "the application of theoretical or imaginary narratives to fill the gaps" (Bailey), contaminate the empirical findings of archeological practice. Through the application of artifact theory to Freud's figurative relic hunting, we can see how these gap-filling narratives are necessary in order to historicize events. However, these "multi-temporal entities," as Bailey calls them, are also the bane of archeological practice, as they disturb the originary archive and infect it with temporal disunity by "disrupt[ing] conventional views of temporal sequence" (Bailey 203).

¹⁵⁸ In his above-mentioned *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, Freud recounts the performative aspects of psychotherapy known as "transference," defining the term as "facsimiles of the tendencies and phantasies which are aroused and made conscious during the process of analysis," phantasies that "replace some earlier person by the person of the physician" (106). "To put it another way," Freud goes on to say, "a whole series of psychological experiences are revived, not as belonging to the past, but as applying to the person of the physician in the present moment" (106). Freud expands on the nature of the transference experience in his 1912 essay "The Dynamics of Transference," where he explains that the objectified trauma in the hysterical patient is invested (cathected) within the analyst. It is in this way the analyst is a slate on which to transcribe the anxieties of the analysand. The analyst is the substratum, the medium through which the subject's narrative is transcribed. As I am arguing, the medium through which the archivist-as-analyst filters archival objects is not the purely rationalized space it is made out to be, and contains idiosyncrasies that temper the transcription in the image of the analyst.

analyst and archivist generate anarchic inscriptions by “silent” vocation. Without the archivist acting as narratological curator, the archive ceases to exist as an archive. Beethoven’s quartets are potatoes in a cellar without the hermeneutic, spectatorial, narratological dynamic that imbues the archive with phenomenological significance as a microcosmic system of artifacts.

This account of Freud as some monstrous, faceless, “‘unreliable narrator’ in modernist fiction” (qtd. in Haslam 22) who imprints himself onto the interior of the psychological archive is significant for at least two reasons. First: it highlights the prevalence of lore generation within a field of modernist psychopathology that places a premium on subject-object relations. We should not forget that disinterring and then interpreting the symbolic artifacts of the mind is, to Freud, steeped in a scene of aesthetic engagement that calls upon the imaginative faculty to decipher meaning through “a poetical phrase of the greatest beauty and significance” (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 382).¹⁵⁹ Second: Freud’s entire enterprise, which is immersed (at least figuratively) in artifact theory and archaeological rhetoric, underscores that the “attempt to recognise gaps between parts of the self”—of which Freud was an influential proponent—“is powerfully resonant in the early modernist era” (Haslam 20). Selfhood to Freud, just like the atomization of the perceivable world at the turn of the century,¹⁶⁰ is a calculable (albeit elusive) mélange of things, right down to the minutia of its cellular structure. Because subjectivity is a quantifiable hodgepodge of ruin and “incompleteness,” it is this “unreliable” narrator’s task—while donning

¹⁵⁹ See chapter two for an extended analysis of how the imaginative faculty is involved in the interpretation of artifacts, some of which appear to the spectator not unlike a dream text (or rebus) to be disentangled.

¹⁶⁰ To refer back to an argument I began in chapter one, Strathausen in *The Look of Things: Poetry and Vision around 1900* offers a summation of the “epistemological crisis in modern perception” as it relates to the phenomenological world, and the atomization (indeed, dispersal) of objectivity: “The advances in physics and biology in particular frustrated the positivist optimism of nineteenth-century science and its belief in linear scientific progress toward objectivity and truth. Instead, modern physics revealed a mysterious and irrational universe whose laws appeared evermore incomprehensible. The general erosion of meaning around 1900 included even the most basic of facts... [and] the materiality of things started to slip through scientists’ fingers in the form of exceedingly small particles whose location and velocity could no longer be measured independently from the position of the observer” (55-56). The atomization of what were once holistic unities in the sciences is but another example of how the fragmentation motif was permeating even the positivist, self-evident empiricisms of modernity.

his archaeologist hat—to bring to “the light of day after their long burial the priceless though mutilated relics of antiquity” buried deep within psychical topography (*Dora* 7).

By testing Freud’s work against the relationship between the analyst and archivist, I am trying to emphasize Freud’s place as a representative of the psychological temperament of a period that culminates with, and thrives on, the image of the broken, the de-contextualized, the fractured object-become-artifact. As David Frisby points out in *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin*, the “central concern” of modernity “was the discontinuous experience of time, space and causality as transitory, fleeting and fortuitous or arbitrary” (4). What this all amounts to: a “society that is in permanent flux” (22) and a system of phenomenological relations appraised through the scope of contextual relativity determined by the impression of the subject. However, it is important to reiterate that the response to this cultural relativity—to mine the figurative artifacts of subjectivity for their idiosyncratic meanings—operates, to re-invoke Brown’s phrasing, according to a “poetics of detachment” and a “scene of aesthetic engagement.” The analyst-archivist operates akin to Eliot’s methods of depersonalization, as a presumed detached observer who nonetheless inscribes the self onto the syntactical arrangement of the archival narrative. Interpreting archival material is a poetic feat suffused with the rhetoric of that perfect artist who can metamorphose to a shred of platinum. Whether one agrees with his theories or not, Freud’s philosophies and clinical practices represent, through the motif of and aesthetic engagement with the fragment, a metatextual vignette of modernity, the modern subject, and the polygenic nature of modern subject/artifact relations steeped in lore and poesis.

Through assessing modernity in its adaptation to the “kaleidoscopic” realities of war and industry (4), Haslam draws a direct connection between the proliferation of things, the

polymorphic subject, and Freud's *Studies on Hysteria*, locating the aetiology for neuroses "in the fragmentary demands of modern life" (Max Nordau, qtd. in Haslam 4). Yet while Haslam emphasizes early twentieth-century military conflict as the *agent provocateur* of the fragment motif (largely owing to a focus on European theatres of war), I argue that this "demand" does not wholly stem from the miasma of the World Wars, but rather through the proliferation of technology, communications, and the fissures brought about by the dissemination—and dispersal—of the domestic self in the form of commodity objects. As Haslam notes, "Every letter written, every call made, every sight seen, every railway journey taken, wore away more nervous tissue by demanding too much..." (4). Modernity is synonymous with hyper-domestication, as well as with the piecemeal distribution of the objects of domestication. Civilization is not only an exercise in buffering humanity from the hideous and desolate wilderness, but also embodies an impulse to create implements to pacify that wilderness, or to mollify facsimiles of wilderness (unruly populations, for example) that cultural powerbrokers deem necessary to subdue. In this sense, it is intriguing that the word "domestic," as noted in chapter three, contains a conflated signification denoting both the process of "taming" and the manufacture of commodities that propel the act of domestication—and we should not forget that domestication is sometimes, paradoxically, constituted through acts of violence. Domestic objects are not merely commodities with commercial or societal value, but are also an atomized quantification of our separation from wilderness consciousness.¹⁶¹ In his study of Walter Benjamin's "prehistory of

¹⁶¹ Equations of the modern American temperament to its objects of manufacture have been explored in neo-Thoreauvian novels such as Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, where the anonymous protagonist, a domesticated and neutered urbanite with a white-collar job that fractures him between time-zones and bouts of insomnia, strives to validate his existence by indulging the "nesting instinct" (43) and the mundane drive to collect sundries from the IKEA catalogue. The idea that the protagonist ruminates on how being "trapped in [this] lovely nest... the things you used to own, now... own you" (44), is a postmodern adaptation of Thoreau's condemnation of the domesticated American subject who sees the self reflected in the dispersal of manufactured goods. After determining what domestic objects might define him as a person, the protagonist literally sees his domestic self dispersed after an

modernity,” Frisby notes that “the commodity form not merely symbolizes social relations of modernity, it is a central source of their origin. The ‘phantasmagoria’ of the world of commodities is precisely a world in motion, in flux, in which all values [commodities] are transitory and all relations are fleeting and indifferent” (22-23). The significance of Frisby’s claim is that the commodity is a molecular representation of the domestic self spread thin, dispersed, and often left in ruins (or in trash heaps). The relevance of war in this colloquy is how it signifies a return of the repressed that leaves the civilized self, analogized by objects of domestic manufacture, in disarray.

As it concerns the aesthetics of the fragment, the horrific realities of newly-industrialized methods of warfare are certainly germane to an analysis of the fractured modern subject. War in the mechanical age inverts the technology of the domestic to render the trappings of the metropolis uncanny, to turn the home into the unhome and convert its objects of *use* to artifacts of *disuse*. Yet it should be highlighted that the realities of modern warfare in the vernacular consciousness would be perceived quite differently in an American context, since much less domestic destruction visited continental North American than did its European allies.¹⁶² To reiterate, rather than focus on war, more applicable to my Americentric approach is the connection Haslam makes between the “Shell-shock [that] deprived men of their memories, of a complete personal narrative,” and the aftermath impressed in the landscape as a “geographical

explosion in his apartment, whereupon he lists all the domestic items—refrigerator, yin-yang coffee table, and condiments aplenty—lying scattered in the street (43-45).

¹⁶² Scholars like MacArthur have argued that assessing the nostalgia for remnants of domestic displacement in the American landscape must be approached from an American point of view that takes into account the nation’s avoidance of total war on the mainland. “Modern and contemporary Americans still ascribe considerable pathos to traditional rural dwellings and the ruins of them, not least, perhaps, because many of the ruins in the U.S.—abandoned houses—often were not the result of the destruction of war, but were more freely created by patterns of restless internal migration, in response to economic pressures and opportunities” (4). From a Euro-American point of view, ruins of the domestic in the landscape are tied to economic activity rather than forced and violent migration. This “free[ness]” of domestic and economic activity lends itself to a less pessimistic reading of “displacement” that spurned new growth through the ability to uproot and plant oneself in new contexts. However, an optimistic reading or displacement by economic boom-and-bust cycles would misrepresent the hardships surrounding economic nomadism.

map” that can “be informatively linked... to that of the individual” (30). This “link” between the subject and the landscape—how the subject sees him or herself reflected in topography—shares narratological gaps and wounds analogous to the neopastoral, particularly when considering how vernacular waste and ruin in topography represent fragmented, incomplete personal narratives of the domesticated subject.¹⁶³ Ultimately, fragments of the domestic, whether generated by wars, migration, economics or abandonment, represent a trauma, a gap in cultural memory. If the landscape, particularly as it might be portrayed in the aesthetic work of or about the modern period, allegorizes the psychical terrain of the modernist ego, then the narrative of the domesticated subject emerges from the lacunae of an incomplete projection of selfhood reflected in that landscape. In other words, it is not merely the landscape itself, but the cultural/aesthetic projection of that landscape that gauges the so-called wearing of nervous tissue from the epitomized modern subject. With natural topography being the substrate of the modernist artifactual self-image, the traces of the domestic as abandoned, discarded, destroyed or left to decay are Picassian representations of modern selfhood quantified by gaps and fissures rather than by idealistic unities (even if those gaps and fissures aggregate to form a disjunctive unity). In what would appear to be a regressive loop, some “blamed artists for projecting and deepening the problem” by exacerbating the neuroses of this kaleidoscopic reality (Haslam 4).

¹⁶³ Although not a modern-period text, descriptions of the aftermath of the Second World War in American novels like Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, where the metropolis of Dresden, Germany, is converted through a bombing campaign to a landscape “like the moon” (178), would no doubt act as signifiers of an inner fractured—in the case of Vonnegut’s book, schizophrenic—representation of modernity. (I say “schizophrenic” because the principal character in the novel, Billy Pilgrim, is portrayed as experiencing temporal dislocations and hallucinations characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder. These dislocations render the narrative, both as it concerns Pilgrim’s fractured identity and the linearity of the story, disjointed and temporally disordered.) The final image of the book, where we are presented with a collage of ruins and “moonscape” (213) and “trees... leafing out” (215), does not merely act as some trivial plot device indicating renewal through the archetypal progression of winter to springtime. The invasion of “green” works to render the ruins of domestic excess—an excess represented through the destruction, indeed, the *trashing* of domestication—uncanny through nature’s reclamation of what has been lost. The rather pessimistic irony of the destruction is depicted through the fusion of artifact and nature; an “abandoned wagon” “*green* and coffin-shaped” (my italics 215) is the only functional remainder of human ingenuity, with the birds, ambassadors of greenspace, having the final say: “*Poo-tee-weet*” (215).

The idea that domestic commodities represent humanity's removal from a primal home *and* the civilized self as an atomized being has further significance in its tension between landscape and artifactualization. Frisby's reading of Karl Marx's theories of commodity¹⁶⁴ as the elementary "cell-form" that comprises the anatomy of "bourgeois society" aptly summarizes how these molecularized components (23), metabolized within a figurative social body, are readymade to invite an aesthetic mode of spectatorship predicated on the ontology of human trace. Because domestic commodities possess an aura of human ontology built into their objectivity, the presence of discarded domestic objects, not unlike the presence of more painterly picturesque ruins (the cement foundation of farmhouse left to linger on an abandoned property, for example, or a crumbling castle overgrown with weeds), evoke an analogous, although not identical, reaction. As Frisby argues of the proliferation of domestic things (drawing on Marx's theory), "This seemingly insignificant fragment of capitalist production appears to us as something that might indeed [be] easily overlook[ed]: 'A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties'" (23). In other words (and to refer to Heidegger), a human-contrived thing—a work of art, a jug, a shoe—is not a *mere* thing, "not merely an aggregate of traits, nor an accumulation of properties... A thing, as everyone thinks he knows, is that around which properties have assembled" ("Origin" 22). What Frisby, Marx, and Heidegger point out is that objects possess a substructure beyond objectivity and, whether or not that beyondness is imbued by the hand of the labourer—the potter who "only shapes the clay" around the "void" that delineates the "vessel's thingness" (Heidegger, "The Thing" 161)—this aura of trace is a characteristic that all works of artifice possess.

¹⁶⁴ From *Capital*.

Frisby's assertion that the commodity represents the fragmented, cellular lifeblood circulating through the veins of capitalism implies that the seeds of fragmentation, pertaining to the domestic self, were sewn with the propagation of commodity culture. But how could modernity, analogized as clustered globules of cytoplasm interconnected by cellular commodities—thousands of which, not unlike biological cells, die and regenerate every day—be the embodiment of the fragmented domestic subject? Is the perception of humans and their domestic implements as a nebulous organism simply an exercise in trifling with metaphors? Or are there psychical and ontological dynamics at play in the idea that an everyday, human-made thing is actually rendered strange—even *alive*—upon conception?

With my focus trained on the *materia* aspect of material culture, I am less interested in ideologies that see objects as supra-phenomenological things that possess a life and form independent of the senses, and am more interested in how commodity objects, as (Karl) Marx argues, are consigned to the “product of labour” embedded in both the interior and exterior representation (qtd. in Frisby 23). When Marx proposes that there is something above the physical—even something religious—about a culture's association to its objects, it is *not* to say that Marx is promoting some form of neo-animism. Rather, it is the ontology imbued through traces of contrivance that bestow this aura, even though the perception of that aura may be interpolated unconsciously. What Marx's extrapolation of the ontology of commodity does not take into account, however, is the power of the object as artifact, a power that exceeds its contemporaneous existence and the use-value validated by extant circulation. In other words, he ignores (at least in Frisby's reading) the afterlife of the commodity as artifactual thing divorced from the posturing and deception of consumerist modes of production. Marx argues that the relationship between “money” and the “finished form” of the commodity “conceals the social

character of private labour and the social relations between the individual workers, by making those relations appear as relations between material objects, instead of revealing them plainly” (qtd. in Frisby 24). Yet although the social character of private labour is buried beneath consumer valuation, thereby muffling the stamp of the artisan, the ontological quality imbued in such objects cannot wholly be accounted for by circulation, ephemeral branding, or advertising campaigns that are relegated to the time in which the object-product is extant. As we know well, commodity objects fade in and out of living and public consciousness; it is rather the artifactual traces of labour, as well as objective testimonials of use in daily life, that lend ontological character to *dead things*, objects that have fallen outside of extant circulation. If we were to regard the ruins of a domestic dwelling—for example, fragments of a farmhouse whose collapsed cellar, interlaced with commodity trash, is now “closing like a dent in dough” (Frost, “Directive” 47)—it is not the extant brand of the detritus that draws one’s attention, but rather the appearance of the thing itself imbued with the ontology of *former* circulation and use. With the immediate social relation having been lost, the object appears as concentric representations of artisanship and use-labour, which prompts an aesthetic mode of engagement based on interpretations of human trace—a mode that looks outside of typical use.

Marx does not directly address this mode of aesthetic engagement where commodities outside of commercial use are re-appropriated as artifacts of poetic interest. Yet he traverses the territory of aesthetic spectatorship when he argues that commodities have the capacity to suggest something beyond their prescriptive functions. In Marx’s words: “the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things... It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (qtd. in Frisby 24). Marx’s

assertion suggests that labour inheres as ontological traces in made objects, and once the object is perceived outside of its commodity function, that labour will be evident. When dislodged from exchange value (as garbage, let's say), commodity objects return to their original state of artisanship, exhibiting the traces of labour that facilitate the transition from object, to aesthetic thing, to artifact. Outside of typical function, traces of labour are more readily discernible; we think less about the commodity brand and more about the human artifice that brought it into being, or brought it to be situated in some place out of context. A society's relation of self to thing, and the social identifications reflected in commodity fetishism as a system of thing relations, merely attests to how human subjectivity is conjoined to its domestic objects, and imbues in them an otherness that has an existence beyond material or commodity function. Ruin and domestic detritus reflect man's wasted effort—reflect humanity back to itself—while the juxtaposition of nature and ruin permeate that effort with a mysterious otherness akin to an anthropological fascination. What these traces of wasted effort represent is not merely a poetics of the everyday, but a poetics of trace via everyday labour and, therefore, a poetics *of* everyday labour. What redeems and rescues the everyday from its ephemerality are the subjects connected to its contrivance, the individuals connected to its appropriated use, and its bearing on the image of the present as reflected in that subjectivity.

When we situate this argument within the corpuses of modern poetry that examine the interaction of labour and natural environment, phenomena linking the poetics of the everyday to a poetics of labour become recurrent images marking the peripheries of modernist poetics. Some of Frost's earlier poems, such as "Ghost House" and "The Vantage Point" from his first published book *A Boy's Will* (c. 1913-1915),¹⁶⁵ explore not only the aesthetic response

¹⁶⁵ *A Boy's Will* was first published in London by David Nutt (1913); the American publication followed in 1915 (New York: Henry Holt).

surrounding the interjection of nature into scenes of human labour fallen to disuse, but also how inanimate “things” (“Ghost House” 29) take on anthropomorphized auras of subjectivity owing to traces of labour that, once hidden by everyday functionality, are now visible within a scene of aesthetic engagement outside of functionality. This outsideness, or dislodgement, is precisely how ruins and abandoned objects become artifacts; in the absence of persons linked to the objects through labour and circulation, lore seeps from the gaps between artifact and landscape like weeds growing from the cracks of a disused stone footpath. In “Ghost House” the speaker meditates *in situ* on a “vanished” and “lonely” dwelling that has “left no trace but the cellar walls, / And a cellar in which the daylight falls” (1-4), a property slowly devoured by the wilderness it once attempted to subdue. It is significant that, within this dynamic of nature and domestic artifact, it is “trace” that receives the literal spotlight: the cellar, an empty space or gap framed by evidence of labour (walls), is exposed to the revelatory light of day. The home as material object no longer exists, but the ghostly image of its being-there springs like a phantom limb from the green that overtakes it. Here we are offered an agrarian version of that anachronistic potter who “shapes the clay,” “shapes the void” around which is assembled “vessel’s thingness” (Heidegger). However, the “vessel” in this case is represented by cellar walls, a vernacular artifice constructed around, and carved into, empty natural space. The seemingly empty impression of the cellar in the landscape is the void into which the subjectivity of the artisan and spectator are cathected.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ This last statement references an argument I made in a footnote in chapter one. I suggested a connection between the emptiness at the heart of the real (trauma) and the emptiness of trash. Lacan borrows from Heidegger’s reading of the jug-as-thing, which represents a work built around emptiness, to posit his own assessment of art as that which “is characterized by a certain mode of organization around this emptiness” (Lacan 130). In this sense, all art is an attempt to fill in what is missing. Such a reading is particularly applicable to Frost’s poeticization of abandoned domestic dwellings (houses which, in many cases, are literally missing from their foundations). While remnant objects substitute for that which is missing, as unstable things represented by the subjective impression of the artist they become “something unfamiliar, disturbing, uncanny” (Schwenger 33).

When what was once private and darkened (the cellar) has been exposed to the prying inquisitiveness of the spectator-archivist, the poem transitions to the tension between nature and the human-contrived that facilitates, and garnishes, the compulsion to scrutinize and bring order to the objects. The first images presented are cellar walls adorned with “purple-stemmed wild raspberries” (5), a signifying focal point around which other botanical properties are assembled. A shift in gaze occurs as the panorama widens to appraise the entire scene for the variance between nature and artifact:

O'er ruined fences the grape-vines shield
The woods come back to the mowing field;
The orchard tree has grown one copse
Of new wood and old where the woodpecker chops;
The footpath down to the well is healed. (5-10)

Similar to Heidegger's vessel, the cellar is a structured void, a hollow carved into the landscape around which aggregates of things disrupting—or disrupted by—the landscape reinforce a paradoxical vacancy and occupancy, an uncanny symbiosis of nature and artifice. We might also imagine the “well” (10)—another instance of vernacular artifice craved into wilderness, one that signifies a hollow or vacancy—to be an extension of the anomalousness that the cellar hole embodies. With the footpath “healed” or overgrown, the well becomes, somewhat like Stevens' jar, an enigmatic yet common, bare, and hollow artifact situated in contested ground where the dialectic of wilderness and domestication alter both natural and human-made objects. This dualism of ruined fences overgrown with grape-vines, mowing fields reclaimed by the forest once held at bay—indeed, the reciprocity of “new wood and old”—is precisely the tension between the domestic home and the wilderness unhome that anticipated poems like “A Fountain, a Bottle, a Donkey's Ears and Some Books.” Whereas in “A Fountain...” the conspicuous historical relic (the font) is abandoned for the pursuit of domestic artifacts, in “Ghost House” the

historical sense (as Eliot might call it) is located primarily within the space of the vernacular domestic, a space once private but brought to light through its residual objects. While it is suggested that human presence has perpetrated a form of violence against nature that needs to be “healed” (10), the speaker has a “strangely aching heart” over the “disuse” and “forgotten” (ephemeral) nature of what requires sustained effort to create and maintain (11-12)—perhaps “strangely” aching because of his ambivalence regarding the violence done *to* nature through human interference, and the violence done *by* nature in its reclamation efforts.

Fundamental to the counterforce of these artifactual imprints in nature is the idea that, within the alleged “no trace” of human occupation, two stones placed beneath a tree become an ontological supplement for the ostensibly missing subjects. After meditating on the more identifiable evidence of human presence in the landscape, the speaker of “Ghost House” turns to extend the metaphor to immobile, yet ontologically poignant, lumps of inert matter:

I know not who these mute folk are
 Who share the unlit place with me—
 Those stones out under the low-limbed tree
 Doubtless bear names that the mosses mar. (22-25)

MacArthur has chosen to read these stones as grave markers,¹⁶⁷ and although Frost does not explicitly refer to the stones in this manner, such a reading is quite plausible owing to the implied inscription of “names.” Gravestones or not, these anthropomorphized “mute folk” perched under a tree in the shadow of nature’s influence offer a fading, even eschatological, image of human subjectivity at variance with the green that overwhelms it. The names the stones bear as stamps of human labour—perhaps they *are* inscribed tombstones, or perhaps they are field rocks set under the tree by former inhabitants of the property—become contaminated and effaced by moss

¹⁶⁷ In reference to the “mute folk” who haunt the scene, MacArthur has proposed that “the cellar hole becomes a sort of grave or memorial for their hopes, and their actual gravestones are nearby, though the ‘mosses mar’ the inscribed names” (46).

while immersed in a shadow that replicates, and supersedes, the expelled shade of the human-built cellar. Just like the famous bottle “stained by vegetation” on a cliff face in “A Fountain...” (39-42), nature, through reclamation, molds itself around human contrivance and replicates the artifact. At the same time it effaces the original, nature creates a doppelganger. What we are left with in “Ghost House” is the uncanny—perhaps even mocking—duplication of humanity’s effort to carve out a vessel in the wilderness, an emptiness ironized by the home’s vacancy, the cellar’s suffusion with the gaze of the spectator, and the darkness once belonging to the cellar now appropriated by nature.

If we are to regard “Ghost House” as a measure of Frost’s temperament concerning his outlook on the nature/human binary, we might conclude that Frost is quite pessimistic about the endurance, and relevance, of domestic space gobbled up, replicated, and superseded by a seemingly sentient (capital “N”) Nature. Domestication is an interjection that requires healing. Yet the tone is not one bemoaning the interjectory effect of humans on environment. If anything, the tone is that of pensive reflection on the objects left as anthropogenic footprints.¹⁶⁸ While the poem no doubt has melancholic cadences, “Ghost House” ends with a bittersweet acceptance of how labour and human contrivance will, and should, eventually face annulment: “in view of how many things,” these moss-ridden (grave)stones are “sweet companions” (29-30) in what is the twilight of this microcosm of vernacular artifice, space at one time carved out but now fallen to waste. The entire ground is imbued with a living character through the counterforce of nature

¹⁶⁸ MacArthur—whose chapter “Robert Frost: ‘The Ruined Cottage’ in America” influences my reading of the abandoned farmhouse in Frost’s work—also argues that the speaker of “Ghost House” “finds particular consolation in the imagined resilience of American wilderness, which effaces human loss or failure” (46). My reading diverges from MacArthur’s through my focus on how that effacement becomes the central image owing to the dynamic of artifact and wilderness, rather than owing to mere nostalgia for a lost rural past. Nostalgia certainly plays a role in the spectator’s meditation on failures of domestication; however, that meditation is object-oriented, and therefore indulges less of a melancholic effusion on lost ways of life and more on how dysfunctional objects caught in regression to a natural state bespeak the traces of subjects tied to their contrivance and use.

“healing” or re-appropriating that claimed space, and the poet caught in the middle ground who documents this oppositional binary.

“Ghost House” concludes with an apocalyptic image of two lumps of inert matter—humans anthropomorphized to stones eroded in the shadow of nature—lingering to watch the (agrarian) domestic world descend into its final death throes. Interestingly, this conversion of man to (grave)stone, to some inert thing among things in the shadow of both nature and the domestic, is a recurrent image in *A Boy's Will*.¹⁶⁹ In “The Vantage Point” (c. 1915), also included in *A Boy's Will*, the superimposition of man and mineral becomes a metaphor for humankind's existence as a domestic object plunked in the middle of a pasture. Rather than be ambiguous about what the “stone” might signify in “The Vantage Point,” humankind's former existence is conspicuously marked by gravesites (tombstones) archived within a pastoral scene and juxtaposed by active evidence of the domestic:

If tired of trees I seek again mankind,
 Well I know where to hie me—in the dawn,
 To a slope where the cattle keep the lawn.
 There amid lolling juniper reclined,
 Myself unseen, I see in white defined
 Far off the homes of men, and farther still,
 The graves of men on an opposing hill,
 Living or dead, whichever are to mind. (1-8)

The surface irony is that “grave” and “home” are contrasted as a portentous testament of what is to become of the artifice of domestication, those manicured pastures tended by cattle that foreground humanity's final resting place. As in “Ghost House,” one is a reflection of the other: gravestone *is* home, a physical trace of domestic activity having run its course. Yet there is an additional reflection being cast that is the reason for the archive's existence. Within eyeshot of

¹⁶⁹ Interestingly, the title of Frost's first published book seems to foreshadow those invasive archivists from “A Fountain...” (1923), “Boys and bad hunters” who are responsible for giving life to, and misrepresenting, the stasis of the archive.

domestic dwellings, tombs may certainly be “living or dead,” as gravesites possess an ontological character contingent on trace acknowledged by the living. Therefore, it is significant that the gravesites occupy the space of *both* life and death according to “whichever are to mind,” as “mind” (consciousness, visual/psychical appropriation) suggests that the ontological status of house and grave are dependent upon—vitalized by—the spectator’s gaze. As an “unseen” spectator, the speaker adopts the role of the ghostly presence—but he is certainly not mute like the stones in “Ghost House.” Rather, as the one “without a face” whose presence “like a hollow in space, a silent emptiness, is, nonetheless, the real reason for speaking...” (Blanchot 233), the speaker of the poem documents the scene through the objects present in the landscape, and allows those objects—their juxtapositions and variances—to converge into a metaphor for life and death based on the presence of human contrivance in nature. The interjection of the spectator converts the association between grave-marker and home into a multilayered relationship that interpolates the onlooker’s subjectivity as external phenomena in dialogue with those objects. In the same way the graves are either dead or alive, depending on what the spectator wills, the houses (symbols of domestication) on an opposing hill are suspended *in extremis* as living reflections of what they are to become as inert objects. Through association, the spectator as archivist of these things also exists in a space between life and death, a state of suspended animation resuscitated by the gaze of yet another interloper: the reader.

The somewhat narcissistic dynamic facilitated by remnants of agrarian domesticity is another recurring motif in Frost’s work, particularly as it concerns poems about staring into cellar holes. Here I use the term “narcissism” as divorced (for the most part) from its psychoanalytic libidinal implications; yet I can’t help but attribute the term narcissism, at least in its classical orientation to the myth of Narcissus, to psychical phenomena where the spectator

sees the self reflected in domestic ruin and gaping cellar chasms.¹⁷⁰ These cellars represent a figurative emptiness upon which an image of the spectator is projected and returned. In “The Generations of Men,” a poem where, as Paton puts it, “two ‘stranger cousins’ flirt and speculate about the mystery of ‘an old cellar hole’ that contains the ‘origin of all the family’” (*Abandoned New England* 105), spectatorial object-cathexis facilitates a brand of lore where domestic fragments haunt the space with reflections of the onlooker. “What do we see in such a hole,” inquires one of the cousins (“Generations” 91). Apart from the raspberry vines (97) that wreath the forsaken structure, one will also see among the remnants

“... a little, little boy,
As pale and dim as a match flame in the sun;
He’s groping in the cellar after jam,
He thinks it’s dark and it’s flooded with daylight.” (99-102)¹⁷¹

Following the materialization of this pale, child spectre—a nostalgic projection of the speaker in a dark cellar now exposed to the light of day—phantasmagoric enumerations of domestic things make the haunted grounds come to life, and supplant the ghostly image with domestic objects:

“...Listen. When I lean like this
I can make out old Grandsir Stark distinctly,—
With his pipe in his mouth and his brown jug—
Bless you, it isn’t Grandsir Stark, it’s Granny,
But the pipe’s there and smoking and the jug.” (103-107)

We can infer that the apparition of faces in the cellar are humans superimposed onto things, and that the remnant objects—the pipe, still seemingly smoking, and the jug—remain as ontological markers reflecting the subjectivity of both the departed occupants and the spectators. I should

¹⁷⁰ Ultimately the term “narcissism,” as I am using it, refers less to a sexual neurosis and more to the psychodynamics of allowing the self to share space with an external object into which the spectator has cathected his/her image. Rather than having wholly replaced external objects (the dyad of nature and artifacts in the case of my analysis) with an image of oneself, there is a dialectic that takes place that borders on narcissism by the simple fact that the external object’s autonomy (or its desire, were it human) is downplayed in favour of subjective interpretations. It is in this way that the dialectic of perceiving artifacts in natural space borders on narcissism while maintaining a collaborative connection to the external world.

¹⁷¹ Because the excerpt is from a conversation, quotation marks appear in the original.

note that the objects representing these departed subjects (the pipe and jug) may also be figments of the speaker's imagination; but they are, nevertheless, domestic equipment that substantiates a residual, ghostly occupation. It is also important to note that, while in "The Generations of Men" the spectators have familial connections to the figurative "smoking" crater upon which they muse, it is this familial connection that works as a motif to extend the projection of self into things archived within this indentation in the landscape. The meditation upon genealogy that occurs in the poem, a genealogy reified by the enumeration of abandoned domestic things, prompts one of the cousins to inquire: "Does she look like me?" (110). Although the speaker is asking, somewhat facetiously, if the imagined ghost resembles the cousin biologically, that resemblance is supplemented by a domestic object, a jug that rests inertly in a shaded basement. Indeed, the objects speak (figuratively) in the voice of the past inhabitants (184-194), and, in terms of the cellar as archive, "The life is not yet all gone out of it" (165).

In order to contextualize the particular modernist slant to Frost's ontological investment in domestic objects, it is important to talk about Frost as a modernist writer. As Robert Kern notes in "Frost and Modernism," "until fairly recently, the conventional wisdom about the relation of Robert Frost to modernism, when it was considered at all, was that for the most part there was none—that between Frost's poetry on the one hand and a virtually monolithic phenomenon composed primarily of the work of Eliot, Pound, Stevens, and Williams on the other, there was and could be little commerce" (1). Although Frost has been marginalized as a "modernist," perhaps owing to a more personal, subjective investment in the objects he poeticizes (which starkly contrasts Pound's imagism or Eliot's "depersonalization"), he is nevertheless guilty by association, and retains, consciously or not, the poetic techniques orienting

people to things, regardless of the presence of the subjective “I.”¹⁷² Moreover, one need only set some of Frost’s poems beside the work of other modernist heavyweights to recognize how Frost, perhaps in spite of himself, colludes with the imagist-objectivism of modernist technique, which aimed to distill the object to its essence, make it appear stark by rendering it unfamiliar through juxtaposition and superimposition.

Take as an example of this modernist technique Frost’s “A Patch of Old Snow,” a poem in which waste material becomes a metaphorical supplement for a natural object:

There’s a patch of old snow in a corner
That I should have guessed
Was a blow-away paper the rain
Had brought to rest. (1-4)

In his essay, Kern cites the above poem as evidence of Frost’s participation, however disavowed by Frost himself, in the imagist technique that prioritized objective reception at the expense of subjective impression. Although Frost ultimately “diverges from imagist aims,” Kern explains that “A Patch of Old Snow”

is organized, very much in the imagist manner, as a brief comparison of two images, a strategy close to what Pound called the “super-position” of one image upon another, and what T. E. Hulme called “the simultaneous presentation to the mind of two different images.” With some editing it could be reduced to a plausible imagist text. (9)

My view, much like Kern’s, is that Frost’s poetic techniques luxuriate in the imagism and objectivism expounded by his modernist contemporaries. The major difference between Frost and the purportedly more “objective” modernists appears to be that, while poets like Williams, Pound, Eliot and Stevens attempt, to a greater degree, to divest poetic objects of subjective

¹⁷² In noting the significant differences in Frost’s imaging techniques as contrasted by other modernist poets, Kern describes how Frost, more than other writers, is ego-oriented through his injection of the subjective “I” into his poetic material. His use of “straightforward narrative,” and his lack of “the ‘formal dislocation’ characteristic of much twentieth-century literature” (5), is a method undertaken by Frost that disavows the modernist myth that the subject is divorced from perception of the image.

contamination, Frost leaves those ego-oriented interjections unedited, thereby implicating the subjectivity of the speaker-spectator in his poetic objects. This is not to say that poets like Williams or Stevens do not invest a brand of subjective ontology in the objects they write about. It simply means that the ego of objectivist modern writing attempts to exorcise (or conceal) itself to a greater degree as a subjective investment formulated by an external spectator. However, as I have argued throughout much of this dissertation, disavowing investment of the ego does not mean that a poeticized object is divested of subjectivity. The act of interpreting an object—the archival, syntactical implications of (mis)reading—endows at least a modicum of subjectivity within external phenomena. As Kern notes of Pound’s “orthodox imagism” (drawing upon Pound’s own words from *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*), “the goal is to present ‘the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective’” (9). In spite of imagism’s ambitious motive to separate subject from thing, the object’s invasion of subjectivity evinces a type of phenomenological orientation that predicates itself on external impression.

Relevant to the nature/human binary prevalent in a great deal of modernist writing, Kern references Pound’s “classic” imagist poem, “In a Station of the Metro,” as a point of comparison to bring the prodigal Frost into the modernist fold. Because “In a Station of the Metro” has been brandished as the quintessence of modernism’s imagist technique of distilling external stimuli to its poetic essence—“a poem in which thirty lines, according to Pound’s own testimony, were cut down to two” (9)—its application to Frost’s object-oriented techniques, where nature and human presence are conflated, provides an interesting point of comparison:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

There are two key ideas to highlight when considering Pound's "super-position" of "one idea... on top of another" (qtd. in Kern 9)—what I will append to "superimposition"—in order to render an image uncanny. First, by juxtaposing objects and traces of humanity—identifying, in essence, the ghost in the bough—we are entering the domain of "indeterminate ontology" where, as Brown puts it, "things seem slightly human and humans seem slightly thing-like" (*A Sense of Things* 13). Second: although in Pound's example it is not the direct presence of the human-contrived that facilitates this ontological conflation, Frost's and Pound's poems intersect through the depiction of nature as the substrate that renders the urban (the metro) and domestic/commodity detritus (waste paper) uncanny. To rephrase, it is the substratum of the random and contingent (nature—"snow" and "petals" on a "bough") that renders both human presence (as apparitions of the urban—the metro) and the objects of human contrivance (blow-away paper) uncannily other through superimposition. To refer back to Crawford's delineation of the "third object" created out of the dialectical engagement of the "artifactual and natural" (194-195), it is the "the synthesis of [these] opposing forces" whereby an "emergent third object may become a new object of aesthetic appreciation" (194-195). The marginal difference between Pound's and Frost's poems is the material responsible for generating that so-called third object. While Pound superimposes petals onto faces to demonstrate the uncanny ephemerality and ghostliness of human presence in urban space, Frost chooses an object of refuse, "blow-away paper," to render both waste object and natural phenomena (snow) uncanny. If we are to take Frost's "A Patch of Old Snow" (published 1916 in *Mountain Interval*) as the subjectivist facsimile of Pound's monumentally modernist "In a Station of the Metro" (published 1913), as Kern appears to do, what this comparison marks is a movement toward the vernacular everyday as the representative objects of modernist aesthetics. It also marks a shift toward the fragmented

surpluses and the refuse of domestic culture as the agents of those ghostly human apparitions, objects that are readable texts “speckled with grime as if / Small print overspread it” (“A Patch of Old Snow” 5-6). The ghostly apparitions of urban life represented in the metro have been superseded in Frost by the ghostly apparitions contained within domestic and vernacular trash.

What does all this poking around cellar holes wreathed in raspberry vines, as well as this poetic conversion of man to stone, and waste paper to snow arrested by the rain, signify in terms of the *neopastoral*? I would like to suggest two arguments, the first approaching the topic obliquely, the other more directly. First, the sideways approach: Although “Ghost House,” “The Vantage Point,” and “The Generations of Men” do not contain explicit references to trash, or to the surpluses of commodity culture as part of the ruined domestic dwelling, these poems are testimonials of Frost’s evolving thought on modernity’s influence on the agrarian domestic scene, an interest that facilitated overt examples of the waste/nature binary in poems such as “A Patch of Old Snow,” and that culminated in pieces like “A Fountain...” (as well as in later poems like “Directive,” which will be discussed at length in section four of this chapter). In “A Fountain...” it is the poetry itself that becomes the useless commodity disintegrating in a domestic vessel in the wilderness, a book of generic verse on the subject of semi-domesticated nature—birds and flowers within the purview of the poetess’s home—that becomes the commoditized trash. Perhaps the metaphor of commodity fragmentation (if we are to apply a metafictional reading) can be extended to Frost’s poems themselves. In *Abandoned New England*, Paton provides an account of the twentieth-century conversion of rural obsolescence to commodity, the packaging of decaying agrarian life for an American audience, of which Frost was most certainly a proponent. As “nineteenth-century structures continue to disappear from the landscape,” Paton explains, “gorgeously illustrated coffee-table books called *Farm* and *Barn* are

published as if in memoriam” (209). The idea, Paton elaborates, that modern “interest in rural artifacts offsets the stresses of a contemporary society governed by excessive materialistic consumption and relentless social, professional activity” (209), corroborates how the material consumption associated with urbanity invades rural space through the commoditization of a mutating rural past. However, at the same time that urbanity invades rural space with scopophilic fervour, the rural uncannily bleeds into the urban scene through the generic packaging and proliferation of nostalgia, the fabrication of some primal memory where times were simpler and the land Edenic.

I realize that terms like “scopophilia” are quite loaded, particularly as they pertain to sexual deviances in psychopathology. Yet the dissemination of coffee-table books peddling rural nostalgia to urbanites is an exercise in marketing primal desire, a longing for the unhome represented by the space of wilderness, or perhaps the allure of a sexualized landscape (see Kolodny in chapter two). In her essay “Robert Frost and the American Landscape” (1999), Paton echoes Nash’s criticism in *Wilderness and the American Mind* that nature’s commoditization results in its being “loved to death” (see Nash in chapter three of my thesis). Paton, however, takes this analogy of pathological love a step further:

In literary and philosophic circles, nature writing undergoes a renaissance while explorations of environmental ethics and aesthetics confront both the virus of development and the possibility that nature calendars, featuring say a gorgeous red barn, are examples of eco-porn. In the broader population, “ecotourism” brings intense visitation to national parks, which in turn stirs debates about how to keep nature lovers from loving fragile sites to death. (83)

While I might not share Paton’s hyperbolic suggestion that a commoditized rural past is a subspecies of pornography, there is indeed a level of voyeurism involved in Frost’s invasion of once private domestic spaces, a deviant prurience extended to the reader through the process of exposing cellar holes to the light of day. Waste in some contexts is synonymous with failure—a

failure to maintain, sustain, or contain—and therefore evokes a feeling of shame,¹⁷³ or, as is the case in “The Generations of Men,” a sense of lost opportunity. However, while the protagonists of “The Generations of Men” lament what has been lost as they sit with legs dangling over the edge of an exposed cellar foundation, at least one of those cousins fantasizes about the regenerative qualities of waste and ruin, and imagines rebuilding atop the rubble: “...take a timber / That you shall find lies in the cellar charred / Among the raspberries, and hew and shape it / For a door-sill or other corner piece / In a new cottage on the ancient spot” (160-164). While waste and ruin in the poem exhibit the private (and shameful) failures of the people attached to the refused objects, those same objects, garlanded by raspberry thickets, become artifacts representing rejuvenation and potential for procreative growth. What is important about Paton’s sensationalized equation of rural coffee table books and calendars with eco-porn is their representation as deferred trash (or sensationalized, popular trash), aesthetic depictions complicit in their transmission from everyday commodity to domestic waste. As we might surmise from one of Frost’s consummating pieces on the subject of houses disintegrating in the wilderness, poetry on the obsolescence of pastoral domestication is a commodity fit to “lie [among] stones and bushes unretrieved” (“A Fountain...” 116); it is something both substantial (stone) but ephemeral (trash), a simultaneous private yet exposed object that extends its life through the voyeuristic gaze of the reader.

¹⁷³ In *Three Essays* Freud delineates the ocular pathologies of scopophilia, voyeurism, and exhibitionism, and how a typical act of spectatorship can become deviant “if instead of being *preparatory* to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it.” Although the act of looking can become a deviant pleasure, “The force which opposes scopophilia, but which may be overridden by it... is *shame*” (251). There are no doubt feelings of melancholia conjured in many of Frost’s poems about the invasion of abandoned rural homes. Yet the feeling of shame that might override Frost’s scopophilic archival activities is largely absent. Not once does Frost express a sense of shame—either as the authoritative “I” or through a personified speaker—for cataloguing or gazing upon these domestic failures now open to the public. The shame, if any exists, would come instead from the deceased ex-inhabitants for having their corpus, objectified by material things left behind, exposed to public view. Any sense that emblazoning a domestic corpus in the form of a poem is a deviant spectatorial act has indeed been overridden in the protagonists and personas that stock Frost’s poetry.

I will now turn to my second, more direct argument concerning how Frost's poeticization of cellar holes and the remnants of agrarian domesticity exemplify the neopastoral as I have defined it. Humankind's relation to natural space is one that is made uncanny through traces of artifice, and the husks of the domestic, just like the graves that juxtapose and reflect the houses in "The Vantage Point" (or even "Ghost House"), are artifactual traces of labour made even more uncanny by their direct interaction with nature. Frost's cellar holes are figurative dumps, resting places of abandoned domestic artifice in the process of being "healed" through the reclamation of wilderness, a process that converts human-contrived objects to natural things, that makes objects appear in their natural (*natus*) state removed from function. Although Frost acts as an "unseen," skulking archivist documenting and psychically arranging each scene while effacing the trace of *his* configuration, the irony is that Nature (again, capital "N" personified) acts at once as *genius loci*—the substrate, the dwelling place of the archive¹⁷⁴—and yet another anarchic archivist who effaces both itself as archival space while literally erasing (or attempting to erase) the human-contrived objects within its locality. It is through this process of erasure, this conversion from functional object to artifact, that we locate the ontological nature of things through reorientation to their subtexts. When we consider, as Derrida suggests, that "the death drive is above all *anarchivic*"—and we could invert that assertion to argue that the archiving impulse is thanatological—we can begin to see how the contrivance of poetry itself, as an archival vehicle that aims to impose syntactical and imaginative order, acts as a component of the death drive that converts the abstractions of the past into quantifiable, archivable things.

¹⁷⁴ I am using the term *genius loci*, which in Latin means "spirit of the place," to denote the phenomenological dynamics of a given space, environment, or locale. I derive much of my application of the term from Christian Norberg-Schulz's study *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. Norberg-Schulz traces the term from its historical usage as the presiding deity or spirit of a given locality to its present denotation, both of which aim "to uncover meaning potentially present in the given environment," and to determine the "relationship to the place in a physical as well as a psychical sense" (18).

Framing artifacts within the archive of poetry is a way of wielding control over objects while acknowledging, through juxtaposition of grave and home, the fate of human contrivance in relation to nature.

The archive itself is something between nature and the human-contrived, something that seeks to preserve while allowing those items of preservation to exist *in extremis*, or become contextualized, within a “natural” state, the condition of their origination. In other words, the drive to archive colludes with the preservationist attitude to suspend something in its original (natural) context. Yet it is in this return to, or preservation within, a natural state that archived objects become simultaneously historical but artifactual things divorced from functionality and reliant on the perception of the archivist/spectator/reader. When we think specifically of the archive as a geographical locale that both preserves and destroys its artifacts, it is within the *between* phase of utility and abandonment to this archive that the aesthetic of fragmentation comes to represent the paradoxical wholeness of subjectivity, the thingness of human effort depicted in piecemeal remnants.

* * *

4.3. Picturesque and Vernacular Ruins: Remnants of the Domestic and Their Influence on Modern American (Neopastoral) Poetics

Now in the time of spring (azaleas, trilliums,
Myrtle, viburnums, daffodils, blue phlox),
Between that disgust and this, between the things
That are on the dump (azaleas and so on)
And those that will be (azaleas and so on),
One feels the purifying change. One rejects
The trash. (21-27)

The above epigraph is from Wallace Stevens' 1942 poem "The Man on the Dump." I am prefacing this section with an analysis of Stevens' poem as a marker of where I intend to go when I examine, at the end of this chapter, the domestic waste found in Frost's "Directive." "The Man on the Dump," in its depiction of commodity trash interspersed with green, is an iconic representative of how subjectivity reflected in natural topography, and punctuated with remnants of the domestic, has been a fringe ingredient of the admixture that constitutes modern aesthetics. Stevens' collage of waste and greenery also offers a much more conspicuous example of what I have termed the "neopastoral" as it appears in modernist poetry. The easiest way to contextualize Stevens' *mélange* of verdant waste is to situate it within the prevailing fragmentation motif that is endemic within modernism. Any poem about a man drumming on a discarded, overturned lard pail flanked by flora and commodity refuse could certainly be read as the metaphorical dispersal of the domestic subject at opposition with a primal, Edenic existence symbolized by the "green" that pokes through here and there. But by superficially subsuming the poem within modernist fragment allegories, we run afoul of idiosyncrasies in the international perspective, the idea that, as argued above, the fragmentation motif, owing to the physical aftermath of war on the landscape, would be quantified quite differently for Americans than it would for Europeans.

Another way to contextualize "The Man on the Dump" is to place it within the purview of a changing pastoral paradigm, one that epitomizes a vernacular American fragmentation motif. Rather than being purely a product of war, the American vernacular fragment is predicated on the dispersal of the self by abandonment of the domestic to a frontier of sorts, a borderland, or an idealized pastoral setting. In other words, one could pore over the concoction of "wrapper[s]" on "can[s] of pears," a "corset," a "tiger chest, for tea" (7-9), "elephant-color[ed]... tires" (30), nightingales that "torture the ear" (39), "mattresses of the dead, / Bottles, pots, shoes, and grass"

(43-44) in conjunction with the domestic subject removed from the unhome (nature) that has become the pastoral interlaced with domestic surplus. In the concluding remarks to chapter three I introduced William Doreski's essay "Wallace Stevens at Home in the Wilderness" as a segue into the aesthetic movements that fetishize domestic detritus in relation to the counterforce of natural topography, and how this juxtaposition holds a mirror to the fragmented modern subject increasingly exposed to the interjections of industrial surplus. As a way of completing the argument I gestured toward, I return now to Doreski to deconstruct Stevens' dump "full / Of images" (3-4) and its metaphorical comparison to domestic culture at large, the metamorphosis of trash to aesthetic artifact, and the relationship between the modern American subject and the pastoral imbricated with commodity waste. Not only does Doreski highlight the importance of "Stevens' dichotomy of wilderness as both home and contested ground," "a site where wilderness and domesticity interact" to generate metaphors about ephemera, the everyday, and aesthetic human contrivance. More importantly, because "The dump is the place where cultural objects begin to metamorphose into natural ones" (18), it is within this metamorphosis that the artifactual character of trash emerges through its conflation as discarded commodity, aesthetic thing, and reflection of both the past and the subjectivity of the *in situ* spectator. As I argued in chapter one, the dump is the archive *par excellence*. In both the dump and the archive, cultural objects are preserved yet are mutated by external forces: in the dump, the metamorphosis occurs through the direct proximity to nature; in the archive, nature and its altering capacity is imposed by exteriority. Just as there is no archive without an invested subjectivity by the archivist, "*There is no archive... without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside*" (Derrida 11). The "outside" refers to communal/spectatorial invasion as well as to the interjection of nature, both of which warp the original intent of the archival object through spectatorship and deracination.

If we consider the epigraph in relation to Doreski's assertion that dumpsites facilitate the blurring of cultural artifacts into natural objects, an image begins to coalesce that reveals "the indeterminate ontology where things seem slightly human and humans seem slightly thing-like" (*A Sense of Things* 13). The subject's relation to natural topography, in dialogue with objective correlations made between domestic refuse and the domestic subject, provide a template for the neopastoral comprised of nature, trash, and the gaze of the domestic subject: "between the things / That are on the dump (azaleas and so on)" occurs a "purifying change" ("The Man on the Dump" 23-26), a shift whereby "One rejects / The trash." As it pertains to the presence of refuse in nature, objects are stripped of functions and labels to become something that facilitates rather than destroys the aesthetic. The speaker's appropriation of that "old tin can, lard pail" (35), through which he participates in a raucous symphony to accompany (or to drown out) the "solace" of "peevish birds" (41), generates a discordant harmony that reinvents the pastoral by striking an ironic balance between greenspace and the excesses of the everyday. Pan's oaten flute has been replaced by an implement one might expect to see in a folk industrial ensemble where metal drums once containing hazardous waste act as percussion instruments. Indeed, "One rejects / the trash"—but not the trash in itself. One rejects the trash *as* trash. Dislodged from "the scene of habitual use" (*A Sense of Things* 126), the objects of the dump have been repurposed by the "green [that] smacks in the eye" ("Dump" 14), and have been reoriented from "a scene of historical knowledge to one of aesthetic engagement" (*A Sense of Things* 126). The lard pail that one "beats and beats for that which one believes" ("Dump" 36) is the subjective, idiosyncratic investment in those things not as refuse, but as art of the everyday, art of the vernacular, the "janitor's poems" (6).

It is important not to ignore the readings that have placed “The Man on the Dump” within the realm of metafiction. As Doreski argues, “Critics”—most notably Harold Bloom—“have most frequently read ‘The Man on the Dump’ as a poem about rejecting one’s own poems, the dump rendered then as an intolerable place of ruin” (21). The dump might certainly function metafictionally as a site of poetic degeneration, one that satirizes Stevens’ perceived failures to rescue or repurpose an aesthetic of everydayness; however, interpreting the dump as something purely metafictional, and, moreover, as something “intolerable,” would be a misreading of Stevens’ intent. Just as Doreski downplays this analysis whereby the dump somehow bemoans and redeems one’s own “stale and used-up poems,” I choose to expand the scope of the grassy and floral midden to read “the dump as a place of refreshment and renewal” that scrutinizes the domestic self in relation to the primal space that pastoral represents. This reading extends not merely to the dump as some fabrication of the poetic process as isolated within the mind, but also to the exterior influence of nature and domestic trash as a productive metaphor for the repurposing of abandoned things. Most significantly:

The dump is not merely a place of discard but one of possibly fruitful confrontation between *rejection and purification through the reinvention of perception and metaphor*. The dump is the place where dichotomies unravel and have to *re-form* or die off. (my italics, Doreski 21)

This reformation and superimposition of dichotomies, whereby a third aesthetic object is formed through metaphor, is precisely the by-product of the neopastoral, the interaction with refused objects and nature that converts things to artifacts. Yet while we consider, as Doreski does, that “‘The Man on the Dump’ depicts a site where wilderness and domesticity interact,” a “dichotomy of wilderness as both home and contested ground” (18), it is important to consider that this contested space between home and unhome reveals its capacity to superimpose fragments of the domestic onto the modern subject. The man who sits on the dump beating a lard

pail—not *rejecting* the refuse but rather *contributing* to the aesthetics of the scene—is superimposed on the things that surround him:

(All its images are in the dump) and you see
As a man (not like an image of a man)... (31-32)

The man *on* the dump *is* the dump; he exists not as a (fac)simile (“*like* an image”) of his domestic ruin, but as the embodiment of vernacular artifice now subject to decay, artifacts that return to a natural state. The man on the dump is the reflection of his domestic discard “not in its degenerate state... but as a regenerative process” (18). This regenerative process is represented by the rescue of objects and the aesthetic potential they possess in their obsolescence. Refuse is rescued not only by the superimposition of subject, object, and nature, but also by the third aesthetic object—the music, the poetry—generated out of the encounter.

What is particularly poignant in terms of Stevens’ depiction of man reflected in a medley of green and domestic discard is how wilderness in the poem, as Doeski suggests, “shades into an *ironic pastoral*, in which culture and nature meet” (my italics 21). I suppose the irony emerges from the idea that in this dialectic “nature gradually absorbs culture”; in spite of vociferous doom-slinging about the effect of humans on the environment, nature always finds a way—just as in Frost’s depictions of cellar holes overrun by vegetation—to reclaim lost territory. However, nature does not completely obliterate cultural artifacts, as nature’s “power of singularizing objects is a primal means of producing culture and distinguishing it from nature” (21). In other words, nature does not merely corrode, but also swallows up and preserves. Through its power of “singularizing” the human-contrived, natural terrain acts in the capacity of a mutating agent, that which renders object matter strange and unusual but also exceptional, artifactual. The irony ultimately emerges from the power of nature-as-interlocutor to represent trash mingled with green as the inverse of its conventional signification.

If we consider that pastoral is inherently ironic, that its aim is to contrast the simplicity of natural environments with urban (or courtly) sophistry to reveal the strangeness of metropolitan excess, then the notion that “The Man on the Dump” is an ironic pastoral seems redundant. By reveling in contrary significations, pastoral is merely fulfilling its function as a genre that subverts the by-products of urbanity. What I would add, in a similar vein as Doreski, is that “The Man on the Dump”—without a doubt, an ironic poem—evidences a trajectory in American culture where the wilderness is repurposed in conjunction with the surpluses of refused domestication, a phenomenon reflected in the works of contemporaries like Frost and W.C. Williams (among others). This repurposing interrogates the dispersal of the modern ego by casting a reflection of that subjectivity onto the primal substratum of American frontier and pastoral mythoi. In a sense, assessing oneself in relation to topography is a way to begin at the beginning, to orient oneself to the future by appraising the abandoned artifacts of a mutable and ever-changing environment, one characterized by the counterforce of urbanity and the wild. In “Anecdote of the Jar,” the contest between wilderness and the interjection of the “gray and bare” object obliterates both the jar as a common jar and a wilderness scene that is no longer wild. Both constituents of this dialectic wipe the slate, so to speak, and start over as things with potential otherness, things that may be reinvented from the ground up. This wilful act of placing a trivial domestic object in the wilderness—as art of the everyday, the janitor’s poems—represents the aesthetic potential imbued in common things situated out of context, a potential to begin afresh. In light of the third aesthetic object produced in the dialectic between refuse and nature, I would agree with Doreski that a dump is not merely a critique of the wasted efforts of urbanity; rather, a “dump is a critique of both wilderness and domesticity” (21), the site of counterforce between the green, the grey and the bare.

* * *

“One of our most remarkable cultural acquisitions, surely, is our capacity for an aesthetic attraction to objects and situations that document decay.”
—Wolfgang Kemp and Joyce Rheuban, “Images of Decay: Photography in the Picturesque Tradition”

My analysis of the picturesque in connection with the pastoral is meant to frame the *neopastoral* within a larger concurrent framework of environmental phenomenology, what amounts to a study of human contrived things imbricated, or at variance with, wilderness or natural spaces. As I have argued in previous chapters, the trajectory of the picturesque is concomitant with the evolution of the *neopastoral* as that which is influenced by industry and the interjection of domestic detritus. My reference in chapter one to the work of William Wordsworth and his adventures in gallivanting amid the crumbled edifices of rural dwelling was meant to reinforce the trajectory I am attempting to flesh out. After all, it can be argued that Wordsworth *is not* the pre-twentieth-century progenitor of interest in rural artifacts and ruin brought about by increasing industrialization, urban influence, and domestic abandonment. Theories of the picturesque propagated by eighteenth-century aestheticians like Gilpin and Uvedale Price certainly laid the groundwork with treatises such as *Observations on the River Wye* (1782) and *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794), and would influence nineteenth-century aesthetic manifestoes such as John Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* (published in five volumes spanning 1843 – 1860). Although the picturesque has been adapted in modern times to refer to anything worthy to become a picture that might appeal to clichéd estimations of beauty, its original meaning necessitated very specific criteria that revolved around an intermingling of the

“unpredictable dialectic between nature and culture” (Jacobs 9).¹⁷⁵ As one of the pre-Wordsworthian progenitors of the picturesque movement, Gilpin stipulated that “picturesque composition exists in uniting in one whole a variety of parts; and these parts can only be obtained from rough objects” (qtd. in Punter 222). To get a true sense of how Gilpin perceived the phenomenological constituents of picturesque beauty, his complaint about the gable-ends at Tintern Abbey will suffice for a demonstration. Commenting on how we might improve its “picturesque beauty,” Gilpin stipulates that “we must use the mallet, instead of the chisel, we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps. In short, from a smooth building we must turn it into a rough ruin” (qtd. in Punter 235).¹⁷⁶ This active creation of heaps of picturesque rubbish, turning what is symmetrical into the asymmetrical, has significant implications for the development of the neopastoral in the age of commodity. Instead of averting the eye from the presence of ruin and waste in nature, the

¹⁷⁵ The term “picturesque,” as several scholars of the genre explain, has undergone a semantic metamorphosis that has neutered the meaning and reduced it “to a mere bundle of clichéd conventions” (Punter 221). Andrew Ballantyne in “The Picturesque and its Development” suggests that “The afterlife of the picturesque has been prolific but of low status: in the watercolour views of the Sunday painter, or even in photographs of conventionally beautiful scenery. Some of the practices of the picturesque are now so completely ingrained in the way we see the world, that we take them for granted and revert to them by default when our attention lapses—when taking a snapshot, or choosing a route for a walk” (117). Indeed, the “picturesque,” like the words “nature,” “environment,” or “wilderness,” is a site of ambiguity: the word had “originally meant after the manner of painters, and... that which calls the work of painters to mind” (119). It seems to have reverted to this generic meaning in modern times; Wolfgang Kemp and Joyce Rheuban argue in “Images of Decay: Photography in the Picturesque Tradition” that “The term picturesque today, of course, means more than the small subject area of ruins. Today we think of the picturesque as anything especially well suited for reproduction in painting...” (104). It was the appropriation of the term by theorists like Gilpin and Price (among others) that narrowed its concentration on things returning to a natural state—in particular, the effect of nature on ruins. Drawing on Price’s 1794 *Essay on the Picturesque*, Kemp and Rheuban explain that “Everything that appeared smooth, bright, symmetrical, new, whole, and strong... was placed in the categories of the beautiful or the sublime. According to this system of classification, whatever was in the process of decay was potentially picturesque, because one could detect in it more, and more obvious, signs of wear and irregularity” (104). Ultimately, while popular misconceptions of the “picturesque” conjure scenes of generic beauty that are usually affiliated with nature, the term has a denotation veiled from the popular understanding. Yet while this underlying association to rough asymmetricality and ruin exists buried in the term, its latent meaning nonetheless reveals itself in photographs of a station wagon abandoned in a swamp and overgrown by vines, which is then published onto photo-sharing websites like *Flickr* (see introduction to chapter one). At its core, the picturesque is concerned with capturing the moment, as Jacobs contends, when cultural objects begin to metamorphose into natural ones. Through the unity of nature and asymmetrical ruin, a scene of contrary elements might be appreciated for its holistic variation.

¹⁷⁶ From Gilpin’s *Three Essays*.

picturesque observer invites, even actively seeks, waste and ruin as they appear couched in greenery. To be clear, what we might call the “classic” picturesque does not seek exclusively the vernacular domestic as part of that object matter, but it certainly subsumes the grit of the everyday under its ideological umbrella. As Jonathan Bate points out in “The Picturesque Environment” (2000), “A little pleasing peasant poverty is a necessary prerequisite for the picturesque. If your scene is to be peopled, it should be with beggars or, better still, colourful gypsies. They are the human equivalent of run-down buildings” (128).

There are social (even socio-economic) implications to the equation of people with things—in this case, beggars analogized to the “run-down buildings” desired by the discerning picturesque aesthete—that are deserving of scrutiny. As Raimonda Modiano argues in “The Legacy of the Picturesque: Landscape, Property and Ruin,” “The use of the destitute figure... illuminates another controversial aspect of Picturesque aesthetics, namely the question of the relationship between landscape and property” (198)—or, more accurately, a lack of property. In his influential *Modern Painters*, Ruskin offers an oft-quoted indictment of the picturesque that anticipates Modiano’s concern regarding classism within the movement. Ruskin differentiates between the “higher” and “lower” picturesque, and, in true form to the connotation of “lower,” derides the latter as a mode of spectatorship that might appeal to herds of socially aloof aesthetes who travel to rural and urban slums to glorify the gentility of poverty. Ruskin stops short of affirming that “the lover of the lower picturesque is a monster in human form” (10-11)—but he does *say* it, and perhaps there’s some truth in such a statement. The picturesque worth of a destitute figure is gauged by how well that figure, as well as the material that externalizes his inner condition, translates to aesthetic object:

The shattered window, opening into black and ghastly rents of wall, the foul rag or straw wisp stopping them, the dangerous roof, decrepit floor and stair, ragged

misery or wasting age of the inhabitants—all these conduce each in due measure, to the fullness of his [the lover of the lower picturesque's] satisfaction. What is it to him that the old man has passed his seventy years in helpless darkness and untaught waste of soul? The old man has at last accomplished his destiny, and filled the corner of a sketch, where something of an unshapely nature was wanting. (9-10)¹⁷⁷

Ruskin's tone is quite sardonic, and while this might sound like a biting indictment of the movement by one of its most renowned critics, at the same time that rough objects were sought in marginalized figures and social underclasses, "Playfulness... and not tragedy is the choice province of the Picturesque" (Modiano 198). In other words, the picturesque has less to do with political or social consciousness and more to do with the dynamics of disinterested spectatorship.

However sociopathic the aloofness of the picturesque observer might appear, the waste-gazing of the picturesque is an exercise in looking askance, in observing phenomena—even deformed, rough objects—with a detached ironic wit. Wolfgang Kemp (*et al.*) in "Images of Decay: Photography in the Picturesque Tradition" addresses this ethical grey area concerning what appears to be the exploitation of phenomena surrounding destitute populations as the central aim of picturesque curiosity. As Kemp explains, rather than being a cruel exercise in finding beauty in the displacement of social classes as tragic farce (a sort of aesthetic slumming that assesses scenery through callous forms of irony), locating the picturesque was more about disassociating the subjective impression from the object itself:

Because it is more demanding to value something worn or decayed than to like wholeness, what sparkles, what is acknowledged as beautiful, a preference for the picturesque must be regarded as a sure sign of good taste and aesthetic training. In a sense, the picturesque provides a test of whether the spectator is always able to assume the perspective of "disinterested pleasure" that Kant designated as a precondition of the aesthetic attitude. (107)

To paraphrase Kemp, being able to explain why garbage and destitution are beautiful is not only a strategy to distinguish oneself socially among the aesthetes of the day, but is also a means to

¹⁷⁷ Part of this citation appears in Modiano's essay.

separate oneself from the generic, prescriptive, prosaic categorizations of beauty. It takes little imagination to determine how something new and polished might fall into conventional categories of aesthetic taste, but it is another task altogether to argue the aesthetic merit of waste and heaps of rubble—one that requires erudite instruction and aesthetic sophistry.

If the entire machinery of the picturesque sounds like some shifty exercise in deeming something so deplorable that it acquires spectatorial interest (i.e., something so bad that it's good), then it must be pointed out that there is more going on beyond the visceral pleasure of witnessing human failure, humiliation, and abjection garnished with a bit of green. Again, the machinations of the picturesque, on the surface, aim not for the subjective impression, or to view objects as contextualized within their typical function, but rather lend themselves to the depersonalization and imagist endeavours of the modern period—things divorced from context. “The admirer of the picturesque,” Kemp explains, “sets himself apart from the standards of taste of the average consumer of art. He adopts a distanced relation to the object of his look by consciously disregarding the object's utilitarian value” (107). In other words, it is the goal of the picturesque aesthete to divorce himself from preconceived notions of beauty in order to reassess how the asymmetrical, the abject, the discarded, can be beautiful. Not only does this playful, somewhat ironic way of observing one's environment sound like more of an egalitarian approach to beauty that attempts to imbue the everyday artifice of the “janitor's poems” with aesthetic meaning (“The Man on the Dump” 6), but it also sounds quite reminiscent of modernist dictums that aim to deracinate the object from its use-value or cultural context in order to arrive at beauty independent of function. In this sense, Duchamp very well may have been an inadvertent student of the (urban) picturesque; his appropriation of toilets and shovels had a driving force similar to picturesque aesthetics: to locate the strange attractiveness intrinsic to anaestheticized everyday

objects, even if those objects, like Duchamp's notorious *Fountain*, signify a trash metaphor compounded in waste and the disposal of waste.¹⁷⁸

In Wordsworth's poetry it is not necessarily the direct interjection of industry and the urban into pastoral spaces that prompts the repurposing of rural ruin, but rather the abandonment of farms, perhaps out of economic necessity, that feeds interest in domesticity abandoned to the whims of the wilderness. Pieces like "Michael: A Pastoral Poem" demonstrate this brand of industrial encroachment that moves invisibly among the pastoral scene to drain it of vitality: rather than stalwartly preserve the rural way of life and defend the agrarian stronghold from obsolescence, the next generation of farmers would sooner "slacken in [their] duty" and "at length, / in the dissolute city g[i]ve [themselves] / To evil" (445-447). The direct encroachment of industry is seemingly downplayed, obfuscated, or completely elided in some of Wordsworth's most renowned meditations on rural scenes. In "Tintern Abbey," for example, Wordsworth does make note of "wreaths of smoke / Sent up, in silence, from among the trees" (18-19), but he is ambiguous about whether or not this smoke is the by-product of industry or evidence of more recognizable fare for picturesque consumption, "vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods," or a "fire" concocted by a picturesque hermit who has made his home in a cave (21-22). As Michael Mason writes in a footnote in his edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, this smoke is "perhaps from charcoal making operations in the woods, as noted by Gilpin" (208). So while Wordsworth *perhaps* averts his imaginative gaze from the direct encroachment of industry, we can refer to Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye* to verify from where that smoke might originate: "The

¹⁷⁸ As Modiano explains, "The writers of the picturesque delight in found objects"—a brand of *objet trouvé* undertaken by many modernist artists—"and court nature precisely because among its inexhaustible riches there lies 'some accidental rough object,' as Gilpin put it, 'which the common eye would pass unnoticed'" (213). The phenomenon of the found object in twentieth-century aesthetics was certainly not a modernist invention. Yet this way of looking askance at common objects, which had its conceptual birth in the appraisal of ruin "court[ed]" by nature, did accelerate ironic modes of spectatorship identifiable in the modernist poets, where everyday things become deracinated and repurposed for aesthetic consumption.

country about Tintern Abbey hath been described as a solitary, tranquil silence; but its immediate environs only are meant. —Within half a mile of it are carried on great iron-works, which introduce noise and bustle into these regions of tranquillity” (45). The point I am making is this: instead of cataloguing the direct interjection of the machine in the garden, Wordsworth chooses to demonstrate the machine’s effects through the remnants of rural domestication, defunct pastoral objects that “will be found unnamed... [of] a private and peculiar interest” (“Poems on the Naming of Places” 323), left to linger in the aftermath of urbanization. Like the everyday objects of the collapsed twin towers that speak for the subjects linked to those ruins (see chapter 1.3), it is fragments of a wooden bowl scavenged in the foundation of a cottage that speaks for the interjection of urban-industry represented by smoke wafting up from a forest. In much the same way, Frost allows the remnants of the domestic to speak for the patterns of restless migration precipitated by economic diaspora brought on by the acceleration of urban-industry in the modern period.

The indictment of the urban because of its miasmic—or “evil” (“Michael”)—influence, and the subsequent fascination with the rural excursion it precipitates, is not something pulled out of thin air by Wordsworth. However much we might attribute singular genius or authorial autonomy to monoliths of poetic copiousness like Wordsworth, he is quite implicated in the aesthetic philosophies of his day. As Bate points out, “Wordsworth was a subtle critic of the picturesque, but he was at the same time an active participant in the movement and an economic beneficiary of it. His best-selling publication was not a volume of poetry but a *Guide to the Lakes*” (128). Ironically, Wordsworth was a corroborator in the damage done by writers who perpetuated a brand of eco-pornography: “He did more than anyone to popularize his native Lakeland landscapes, and in so doing bring in trainloads of day trippers whom he then said

would destroy the place” (128). In fact, when placed side by side, Gilpin’s and Wordsworth’s aesthetic manifestoes, both of which actively stirred interest in picturesque tourism, bear quite a resemblance. Even Wordsworth’s famous directive to add a “colouring of imagination” to ordinary things appears to be lifted directly from one of Gilpin’s essays published roughly two years before Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

The principal object... was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way... (“Preface” 59)¹⁷⁹

Compare Gilpin’s 1798 *Observations of the Western Parts of England*:

The beauteous forms of nature and art thus impressed on the mind, give it a disposition to happiness, from the habit of being pleased, from the habit of seeking always for pleasing objects, and making even displeasing objects agreeable by throwing on them such colours of imagination, as improve their defects... (qtd. in Lueck 12)

It is important to emphasize that for both authors these “colours of imagination” originate from the intermingling of “nature” and artifice “impressed on the mind” of the observer. This is precisely why, as Wordsworth explains, “Low and rustic [a.k.a., rural] life was generally chosen” as the backdrop to his observations of common things; “in that condition of life our elementary feelings”—as well as the phenomena encountered—“co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated” (60). In other words, pastoral scenes offer a space that strips “ostentatious” display in order to communicate the more “durable” and “permanent forms of nature” through the contemplation of common phenomena (60). To reiterate, this movement to go beyond the ostentatious display of the urban and into the greenery of the cow pasture is a product of the aesthetic philosophies of

¹⁷⁹ This quotation is from the 1802 version of the Preface, but also appears in the original 1800 version with slight differences in syntax.

Wordsworth's time, philosophies that idealized "nature" (and by association, the pastoral) as the unifying substratum through which the rough objects of the picturesque can be examined in a sort of ornamented purity.

Ultimately, my justification for bringing Wordsworth into the viscera of this examination of pastoral and rural obsolescence is twofold. First, Wordsworth's poetry about rural ruin and destitution is known to provide the groundwork for what would become an American version of the dialectical counterforce between pastoral and domestic ruin in the age of accelerating industrial development. Wordsworth's poetic influence on Frost (as well as on American Romanticists like Emerson and Thoreau) is undisputable, and has been noted by several scholars.¹⁸⁰ For example, Kern argues that "Frost's newness" (and here, *newness* is sarcastically toned) "consists in his radical renewal and revision of the Wordsworthian project of appropriating the language of everyday life for poetry" (3). Where Frost's and Wordsworth's subject matter intersect is not only through the extension of commodity value to the picturesque, but also through the appraisal of domestic selfhood in relation to the landscape and the remnants of human labour it archives. It is through this appraisal that, in Wordsworth's view, "We see into the life of *things*" (my italics, "Tintern Abbey" 50) and, in Frost's view, we see life in the forsaken objects of the domestic at variance with nature.

Yet while Wordsworth bewails the "Getting and spending" spirit of urban-industry for being "too much with us" ("The World is Too Much with Us" 1-2), there are moments in his focus on the simple produce of the rural everyday where he anticipates the aesthetic transition

¹⁸⁰ Case in point: the title for MacArthur's chapter "Robert Frost: 'The Ruined Cottage' in America" is adapted from Wordsworth's poem of the same name, and, as mentioned in a footnote in chapter one, MacArthur argues that Frost "transposed Wordsworth's 'The Ruined Cottage' onto the cellar holes and abandoned farms of the American landscape" (34). MacArthur's entire reading of Frost is tempered by Wordsworth's influence on the poet; indeed, the American fixation with vernacular ruin is a geographically relative adaptation of Wordsworth's poeticization of picturesque ruin.

from the common objects of nature to the ubiquitous by-products of industry. In *Into the Light of Things*, Leonard posits a few wry questions about the evolution of Wordsworth's poetic interest in the ephemera of the everyday: "Wordsworth had aspired, in the 'Prospectus,' to help us find Paradise in the 'simple produce' of our daily lives. In 1800 he could assume that [simple produce] meant nature. Would it alter his plans if something were to replace natural things as the simple produce of *our* common day? If Brillo boxes were to become more common than daisies" (124)? Through his equation of daisies and Brillo boxes, Leonard is suggesting, as he does throughout his book, that Wordsworth's ruminations on things in nature, or things caught out of place *in* nature, are ideological precursors to Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup cans and other pop art that appropriates mundane objects of the cultural vernacular to make them appear strange through "a certain colouring of imagination." In reference to Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Leonard notes that "In his time Wordsworth is the poet of nature—but 'if the time should ever come' when the objects produced by even 'the remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist' are a 'familiar' part of our lives, then 'these things... will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed'" (128). As a poet of "nature" who is directly influenced by the nature-waste dichotomies of picturesque aesthetics, Wordsworth, as Leonard points out, is both endorsing and predicting the transposition of an aesthetic way of perceiving the everyday objects of the pastoral onto the everyday objects of the urban—and these everyday products of the urban materialize as the products of technology and domestic commodities. If we agree with Leonard's assessment, we might conclude that the Wordsworthian project of colouring the everyday produce of the rural, as a response to increasing urban-industrial activity, is predisposed to consider the aesthetic nature of domestic and everyday objects that are products of urban industry. It is, in a sense, a method of bringing

the pastoral to the street, of introducing to city-space an aesthetic of inversion that originates in the idealized pastures of the pastoral mode.

If we regard the neopastoral as that which progresses from the influence of industry/urbanization on rural topography to a fascination with domestic refuse in pastoral space, then Wordsworth's poems on abandoned rural objects and artifacts stand as precursory reference points to the demonstrable evolution of rural waste to poetic object, particularly if we consider that Wordsworth acknowledged the by-products of industrial technology as legitimate fare for the artist's palette. Frost, in many ways, is the modernist American counterpart of Wordsworth, an updated facsimile of the motivation to catalogue pastoral detritus increasingly infected by both domestic and commodity concerns. This is not to take away from Frost's originality as a poet; but when considering that Wordsworth is a product of the intellectual and aesthetic climate of his time with respect to the break-down of domestic objects framed by nature, we can also see how Frost is ingratiated with his contemporaries in what would be an analogous, American version of the picturesque: vernacular ruin and domestic waste framed within wilderness frontiers and middle space ideologies.

Before I return to Frost's poetry in relation to the vernacular ruin as a way of closing out this analysis, it is important that I address a paradox within the picturesque that has significant implications for the counterforce that haunts the margins of the neopastoral. While the eighteenth-century picturesque viewer ventures out into the landscape, Claude-glass in hand, to assume the role of disinterested observer, and to catalogue *mélanges* of high and low aesthetic phenomena, the very symbol of the Claude-glass (mirror)¹⁸¹ as a picturesque tool reveals a

¹⁸¹ Ballantyne explains the use of the Claude-glass in picturesque viewing. He tells us that a "convex glass would be mounted on a dark background: it would reflect a miniaturized scene, and subdue its colours, but tantalizingly it did not allow the image to be taken away. ... Of course a modern picturesque traveller would photograph it, but in the eighteenth century the only way to fix the image was in a sketch..." (117).

contradiction in that necessary separation between, as Eliot would put it, “the man who suffers and the mind which creates” (“Tradition”). The mirror as the apparatus for picturesque viewing certainly invites speculation about its symbolism, especially when we think about a mirror’s typical function: to identify or behold oneself. While the picturesque viewer alleges a disinterested collaboration between landscape and apparatus, that land is being shaped in the desired configuration of the spectator—is carved out as an image of the viewer’s desire.¹⁸² As Bate contends, “The admirer of picturesque scenery pretends to be submitting to the power of nature, but in fact she is taking something for herself from it... just as the man who encloses land does so in order to increase its yield” (132). Both the enclosing of land and picturesque framing bespeak a subjective investment through the arrangement desired by the encloser—and, in the case of the picturesque viewer, the spectator carves out that land as a reflection of what she actively repurposes as a projection of that desire. Involved in picturesque viewing is a type of parasitical narcissism symbolized by the landscape-as-mirror.¹⁸³ The connection between the picturesque and narcissism, and, by extension, the sublimation of self into neopastoral ruin, offers yet another avenue through which to explain how the neopastoral observer, rather than simply being a “monster in human form” (Ruskin), relates the self to external objects in order to generate an ontological affinity.

Just as it seems counterintuitive to look for beauty in a landscape befouled by ruin and rough objects, it is curious that waste ecologies would be affiliated in any respect to the picturesque, what David Punter in “The Picturesque and the Sublime: Two Worldscapes”

¹⁸² Etymologically “land-scape means land as shaped, as arranged, by a viewer” (Bate 132). Hence, land-scaping in relation to aesthetic viewing is an act of shaping land according to one’s idiosyncratic investment in a particular scene. Scaping has its contemporary culmination in photographs that compartmentalize geography while they reflect the subjective interests of the viewer—a sort of externalization of the spectator through a geographical metaphor.

¹⁸³ I am drawing upon David Punter’s assertion that “the Picturesque traveller and his mirrors and glasses” cannot help but conjure to mind the myth of Narcissus (226). Punter’s argument will be expanded on below.

equates to a psychopathological obsession with the “divine rubbish tip” (225). Gilpin offers a handy description of the conversion process from rubbish to divinity: artifacts of coarse human contrivance, when perceived up close or individually, “are disgusting in a high degree. But when all these regular forms are softened by distance... when farm houses, and ordinary buildings lose their vulgarity of shape, and are scattered about, in formless spots, through the several parts of distance—it is inconceivable what richness, and beauty, this mass of deformity, when melted together, adds to the landscape” (qtd. in Bate 130-131). Through a type of collage or patchwork mode of perception where the picture is taken as a whole, that “disgusting” “deformity” can combine to convert a vulgar prospect to a pleasing work of art whose premise is variation. Yet as several theorists have pointed out, the picturesque at its very basic meaning is something worthy of being represented in a picture, a definition that does not account for why the term transitions from that which is pictorially significant to that which is rough, asymmetrical, and associated to waste and ruin. This is where I would like to suggest, through a reading of Punter, an extrapolation of how and why waste material as it concerns the picturesque, as well as the neopastoral, is so central to its design.

According to Punter, when we speak of the object correlations of the picturesque—the theory is, after all, engaged with material cultures—we must also speak of the ego, the desire to anthropomorphize, or repurpose, the external world in terms and metaphors that convert the mystery of nature into something we can readily understand as a reflection of our humanity. This external repurposing seems to be a cognitive process that teaches the self how to make sense of external stimuli.¹⁸⁴ It is in this way that the “Picturesque is a property of given forms or a

¹⁸⁴ As Nietzsche famously complained in “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” the “truth”—and by extension “language”—is a “mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, [and] anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification” (878). That is, we shape the external world (find truth) according to anthropogenic symbols that in turn anthropomorphize their referents.

description of a transformational psychic process, a process which can only be narcissistic as the ego seeks to remodel the outer world in its own shape” (225). In other words, “The Picturesque... represents a movement of enclosure, control, the road which moves securely and fittingly into the countryside, the comforting flanking of the ‘side-screen’ hills, roughness subjected to symmetry, the ego’s certainty about the world it can hold and manage” (226). When deconstructing Punter’s claim, one might ask what roughness has to do with certainty. “Roughness” and “certainty” appear to be counterintuitive, unless Punter is speaking about certainty in roughness, the idea that the ego is but a fractured entity projecting itself outward as it organizes the external world. If it is true that this eighteenth-century landscape movement is ego-oriented, and that the projection of the picturesque is fundamentally a superimposition of self onto topography, then the focus on ruins and waste as the ideal picturesque vignette speaks volumes about the evolution of the fragmented self in modernity. What this evolution denotes is a dispersal of the domestic self not owing to war and external conflict, but rather to the evolution of urban and commodity industries that simultaneously bled agrarian life dry while it revived interest in landscapes beyond—but invariably influenced by—the phenomena of urbanity. The obsession with waste in natural settings is, in essence, an obsession with selfhood (even national selfhood), with material traces, with humanity as contrasted by the existential forces of nature and environment over which we ultimately have little control. What we *do* have control over, however, are the human-contrived artifacts that appear as residue of the conflict between nature and domestication. This narcissistic sense of looking for the fractured, fragmented self in the landscape is precisely what ties the picturesque to modernity, and what serves as evidence for the rural artifact’s fringe influence on the object-based epistemologies of twentieth-century

Moreover, the metonyms and metaphors we employ filter phenomena through human perception, and then generate an understanding in relation to our cognitive processes and experience. In essence, the non-human is tempered by the human.

modernism. The objective correlatives of the modern period—where selfhood, identity and character, especially in a literary work, are to be determined by “the way objects and subjects animate one another” (Brown, *A Sense of Things* 16)—share attributes with this mode of spectatorship that searches for the piecemeal self among the rubble and the green.

Perhaps, in an American context, the application of picturesque viewing, which assesses the rural detritus as a microcosm that represents the macrocosm of national temperament, simply fit the stage of urban-industrial development taking place when Frost began writing his pieces on cellar holes. The affinity shared between Wordsworth and Frost regarding the poetic documentation of rural obsolescence would seem to corroborate that the simultaneous disinterested yet subjective modes of picturesque viewing had some substantive effect on modernism as it developed in the United States. Although she does not mention Frost or Wordsworth, Carrie Bramen in her essay “The Urban Picturesque and the Spectacle of Americanization” (2000) acknowledges that “the term [picturesque] actually played a formative role in the popular representation of American modernization” (444). She elaborates:

In the emergent magazine culture of the late nineteenth century, the picturesque sought to make modernity less terrifying by making it familiar through a gradualist approach that linked old concepts with new phenomena. Its hackneyed language promised to turn the urban realities of class disparity and ethnic heterogeneity into potentially pleasant aspects of the modern experience. (444)

Here we return to the idea that the picturesque had a covert (even monstrous) agenda in relation to destitute populations—in Bramen’s case, to trick a potentially rabble-rousing populace into regarding their impoverished condition as something aesthetically moving, even noble. While this is an interesting reading of the underlying motivations of picturesque spectatorship, in her extrapolation of the term Bramen does not reference its ecocritical foundation, nor its origin as a movement that appraises (the failures of) human contrivance in relation to nature. In spite of this

omission, Bramen's assertion that the picturesque manifests itself in modernity as a form of control over external phenomena in a world undergoing rapid change is a place where our arguments intersect. Essentially, the picturesque takes the threat of the fractured ego, the reflection of the dissipating, fragmented self it imbues in the landscape, and attempts to soften the terror of modernity by projecting symmetry onto roughness and irregularity. Perhaps, then, an interest in ruin, waste, and garbage is not merely a fetish with waste, but is a way to satisfy the death drive, to wield mastery and control over that which resists control; it is the adoption of the anarchic archivist's role, who organizes the artifacts of the past as a way to manage the present.¹⁸⁵ The modern subject sees the fractured remnants of the self, epitomized by the remnants of human effort, and by projecting a sense of picturesque-ness onto those ruins he mollifies the shock of progress, of his own obsolescence.

In spite of this doom-and-gloom analysis of how the ego searches for the fractured self in an equally fractured landscape, and the rather existential, nihilistic sentiments that accompany such apocalyptic portents of the modern subject, we must remember the regenerative aspects of Frost's cellar holes and Stevens' dumps interlaced with green. As sites of counterforce, these dumps and the craters left in the wake of refused domestication are duplicitous in their moral

¹⁸⁵ There is little doubt that the invocation of picturesque forms of spectatorship, as a way of familiarizing oneself with the landscape through geo-nationalistic identification, was a significant force in the formation of American character. As Beth L. Lueck explains in *American Writers and the Picturesque Tour: The Search for National Identity*, the British picturesque tours of the eighteenth century were essentially transposed onto the American landscape, as is evidenced by the ubiquity of travel writing and sketches written by nineteenth-century literary heavyweights such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe. "Picturesque travel," Lueck says, "led to the development of the American picturesque tour, a written version of the popular British tour. But what was most significant about this phenomenon, in which almost every major author of the first half of the nineteenth century participated, was the role it played in shaping the literature of the new nation" (4). However much the British picturesque tour influenced its American counterpart, it is important to remember, as Lueck points out, that the American picturesque was not a direct facsimile of the British tour, but "enabled American writers to celebrate verbally the unique landscapes and associated legends and peoples that set their nation apart from the rest of the world. Its many variations in tone, from straightforward description to irony and satire, also allowed writers to adapt the picturesque for various types of writing, including nonfictional forms such as tours and essays and fictional forms such as sketches, tales, and novels" (5). For more on the American picturesque tour as it has been represented in visual culture, see Albert F. Moritz's *America the Picturesque in Nineteenth-Century Engraving*.

intent, and while they might lead the reader into realms of either sentimental nostalgia or visceral aversion, the green poking through here and there makes for a complicated binary at best. As a bit of comic relief, Punter introduces the deflationary interlocutor of the picturesque: “I offer you Hermes as its presiding god...”

... he stands at the door of every freakshow, every circus. He stands also, however, for thievery, trickery, wiles and deceit: what we shall see is not, in the end, really what we expected because we shall never know the teller of the tale, shall never see the painter in the picture (he is thus, of course, the god of criticism): we shall be subjected to the trickery of the consummate narrator, and shall never know whether the world of which he tells was there before him or of his own invention. (232)

Irony, trickery, and playfulness are the true provinces of picturesque viewing, and, by extension, the motivation of the neopastoral. The purpose of these modes of spectatorship is not to look solely for the nostalgic attributes of a scene, although nostalgia may certainly be a factor in the spectatorial exchange. Like the unreliable narrator and the anarchic archivist, the picturesque viewer *invents* from behind the scenes. She looks for the asymmetrical, the disordered in the external world and internalizes it, filters it through her subjectivity, and sends it back out into the world. While purporting to look for what is innate or intrinsic to the design, she shapes and forms phenomena as an idiosyncratic externalization of her desire, a piece of the self projected. It is a deceitful, ironic and satirical act of looking askance, and is fictive in its dimensions. It is irony that rescues the domestic ruin of neopastoral in the same way that the picturesque “deceives us about the crucial borders between man and nature, between inner and outer” (233).

* * *

4.4. “Hidden in the Instep Arch of the Old Cedar”: Broken Goblets, Shattered Dishes, and Vernacular Waste in Robert Frost

As a way of closing out my argument, I would like to return to the spectatorial framework suggested by Stevens’ “The Man on the Dump,” a poem engaging the neopastoral mode through its conspicuous posturing as an ironic pastoral, one that repurposes the refuse of domestic commodity through metaphors of renewal associated with the malleable materiality of natural space. As I pointed out when I introduced “The Man on the Dump” in this chapter, it seems redundant to call the poem “ironic,” as pastoral by its very architecture aims to ironize, that is, to invert subjects and objects and make them appear stripped of sophistry, ostentation, context, and preconceived notions of what a thing is supposed to represent. This counterforce that prompts the viewer to abandon preconceived identities is precisely what links the pastoral and the picturesque: just as the pastoral relies on the assumed simplicity of natural space to reveal the strangeness of human contrivance, the picturesque superimposes natural phenomena and the human-contrived as a way to see the aesthetic otherness of waste, ruin, and domestic fragments as a holistic interplay of nature and artifact. W.C. Williams is no doubt working within this mode in poems such as “Lines” and “Pastoral,” both of which obliterate the psychological binaries erected between human and natural design as a way of repurposing or re-evaluating the import of an object contextualized within the new realities of twentieth-century urbanization.¹⁸⁶

Williams’ focus on the distorted fragments and remains of rural existence in poems like “Pastoral” capture a particularly anomalous transition between rural and urban life that is of interest to modernist aesthetics in terms of how rural objects haunt the “back streets” of what appears to be civilized space (5). In the poem we are presented with an ironic rural excursion (but what is actually an urban *dérive*) where the speaker—perhaps as that aloof “monster in

¹⁸⁶ As noted in chapter one, this division between human contrivance and nature as it pertains to “Lines” and “Pastoral” is obscured through the juxtaposition of “greygreen” “leaves” in combination with “glass broken, bright green” (“Lines” 1-2), or “old chicken wire” and outhouses in relation to the urban “street” (“Pastoral” 10, 14, 5).

human form” (Ruskin)—“admir[es]” the “houses / of the very poor” (6-7), which are characterized by deteriorating rural things:

the yards cluttered
with old chicken wire, ashes,
furniture gone wrong;
the fences and outhouses
built of barrel-staves
and parts of boxes, all,
if I am fortunate,
smeared a bluish green
that properly weathered
pleases me best of all colors. (9-17)

It may seem counterintuitive that a disorderly mixture of things “gone wrong” might “please” the spectator, but when “properly weathered” by natural processes, and with the right colouring, even an outhouse, something at once pleasant and grotesque, can possess aesthetic merit through an uncanny conflation of waste and hues indicative of a pastoral scene. Alongside the irony inherent in the poem’s title—the name “Pastoral,” as is the case with Duchamp’s work, is meant to stir the reader through its incongruity with the poem’s content—the idea that the outhouse is “smeared a bluish green” (green being an explicitly pastoral symbol/motif), and is constructed of “barrel-staves” and “parts of boxes,” might place the object within the realm of folk art, a mishmash of human-constructed things that exhibits waste material while purporting to be an ironic monument that is “of vast import to the nation” (21).¹⁸⁷ The outhouse is certainly a loaded image, not only by what it symbolizes as a vernacular domestic object (it is, essentially, an exteriorized component of the home), but for what it represents in its iconography. After all, an

¹⁸⁷ In Brautigan’s novel *Trout Fishing in America*, the monumental nature of an outhouse imbued with the lingering traces of human presence demonstrates how such tools-*cum*-folk sculpture might be of vast import to the nation. Brautigan writes of “an outhouse with its door flung violently open” beside a highway and next to a river, ironically flanked by both nature (the river) and the urban progress that has sprung up around it (the highway). “The inside of the outhouse was exposed like a human face and the outhouse seemed to say, ‘The old guy who built me crapped in here 9,745 times and he’s dead now and I don’t want anyone else to touch me. He was a good guy. He built me with loving care. Leave me alone. I’m a monument now to a good ass gone under. There’s no mystery here. That’s why the door’s open” (8). The idea that there is “no mystery” to be found in such an ironic pastoral instrument “exposed like a human face” is contrasted by its anthropomorphization, its ability to speak about the people, now deceased, who used it as a tool to dispose of waste. Indeed these instruments speak, particularly as they become situated out of context alongside a highway and begin to acquire the mystery they might wish to disavow.

outhouse as the central object of a poem called “Pastoral” cannot help but stir speculation about pastoral’s place within a changing urban scene, and urbanity’s place within a changing rural scene (rurbia). Moreover, as a vernacular depository of human waste, there is a statement being made regarding the condition of the pastoral mode as that which is now represented by waste, but which also contains new aesthetic relevance through that waste.

Although a reader of Williams’ poem is presented with a depiction of the rural as situated within a potentially urban or settled space (as opposed to urbanity making a shocking and sudden appearance within a pastoral setting), it is the juxtaposition of the “street” and rural dwelling that elicits an uncanny look-again moment predicated on the roughness and waste material of human processes. Aesthetically, the reciprocal relationship of the machine’s sudden appearance in the garden has the same uncanny effect as that of the garden surrounding or invading the machine. Williams’ assertion that such an ironic juxtaposition is “of vast import to the nation” could be a tongue-in-cheek criticism of the false idealization in modern times of the waste materials of a rural past decaying in the shadow of the city, an idealization that leads to the simulacral packaging of rural obsolescence for consumption (see Paton above). If, according to Williams, pastoral in twentieth-century American consciousness should conjure images of waste as vernacular artifice, then we might argue that “Pastoral” is Williams’ iteration of “The Man on the Dump.” “Pastoral” is a poem that presages and questions the significance of urban/rural phenomena both interfused yet at opposition, a counterforce which produces waste while it searches for novel ways to incorporate that waste ideologically into the shifting American pastoral landscape. Certainly Williams’ “Pastoral” and Stevens’ “The Man on the Dump,” like many of Frost’s poems on cellar holes, are microcosmic representations of the national climate. However, it is waste of the everyday and not necessarily grand technological innovation that both substantiates this climate and exemplifies a new pastoral paradigm.

If the trajectory of modern aesthetics is in part predicated on the fragmentation of object-based knowledge and the domestic self, and if the response to that breakdown is a new form of uncanny archaeology that wrests things out of context in order to behold them in unostentatious light, and if the crumbling objects of “the pastoral” indeed provide even marginal content for that archaeological revelation, then poets like Stevens, Williams, and Frost act as modern purveyors of an old paradigm, supplementing the enchanted looking of “vernacular ruin” in place of the Old World picturesque as a way to measure the domestic self against modernity. In her chapter “The Vernacular Ruin and the Ghost of Self-Reliance,” Paton explains that “If Old World cultures have colossal monuments testifying to the course of development and ruin of empires, the nativist tradition offers weathered houses, collapsing sheds, empty barns, and cellar holes ‘closing like a dent in dough’ as vestiges of history and moral emblems” (*Abandoned New England* 208-209). Paton’s reference to cellar holes “closing like a dent in dough” is borrowed from Frost’s poem “Directive” (which I will return to as the coda of this section) as an example of the pastoral aesthetic that evinces not merely a loco-descriptive brand of modern poetry, but also the superimposition of artifact, selfhood, and topography that pervades modernist poetics. Both the Old World picturesque and the vernacular ruin require a brand of surreal archaeology that aims to obliterate nominal attribution while it appraises the waste and failures of domestication for their poetic and reflexive qualities. In many ways, “vernacular ruin” is a carbon copy of the picturesque spectatorship that permeated the British Romantic period; however, it is a facet of picturesque viewing that possesses its own attributes which aim to represent a uniquely American encounter steeped in frontier consciousness. In other words (as per its nomenclature) “vernacular ruin” seeks as its object the minutiae of the everyday (usually rural or non-urban) rather than the grandiosity of Old World architecture. MacArthur elaborates on the mechanics of this American mutation of the picturesque: “vernacular ruins are not made of stone, like the European ‘ivied ruin,’ but of wood, the ‘universal structural material’ of North

American building” (5)—a fitting substance to represent a particularly American object-oriented aesthetic rooted in “the random and the contingent” (Grosz), the ready-at-hand, the provisional. What we can deduce from Paton’s and MacArthur’s definitions of the vernacular ruin is that facets of American ecopoiesis, particularly as it concerns domestic refuse situated in nature, are rooted in expedients rather than in grandiose monoliths of cultural achievement. Ingrained in the poetics of vernacular ruin is a frontier mentality that is perpetually reinventing itself, its surroundings, and the everyday domestic that is readily abandoned and then re-appropriated as objects of permanence when encountered in a scene of aesthetic engagement.

It is interesting how timber, as commodity object matter carved out of nature, works to epitomize both the *ad hoc* character of American frontierism (appropriating expedients directly from the land) as well as something random and ready-at-hand that represents a modernist aesthetic. Such is the case in Frost’s poem “The Wood-Pile,” where we are presented with a haphazard instance of “enchanted looking” (to refer back to Greenblatt’s phrase) in relation to an object that exudes commonality, a thing stamped by human design yet abandoned in an unassuming “gray” and “frozen swamp” (1). While the speaker is engaged in an ostensibly aimless rural excursion (he contemplates “turn[ing] back from here” but then decides that he shall “go on farther” [2-3]), the thing appears with startling suddenness—“*And then* there was a pile of wood” (italics added, 18)—as an object dislocated, by the absence it connotes, from the rural artisan who sculpted this vernacular monument. In his essay “Architecture in Frost and Stevens,” David Spurr suggests that the pile acts as a referent to some “ghostly woodman ‘who lived’ and ‘who spent himself’” on the design now abandoned; “In the presence of this absent figure, the wood pile acquires an uncanny, sepulchral monumentality, grown over with clematis like a classical temple in ruins...” (77). The dichotomy of the human-made in contrast with the vegetation that overgrows the pile projects an uncanny duality, and the isolation of this anomalous artifact encountered in the wilderness dissolves circumambient images: like Van

Gogh's painting of a peasant's shoes, the background provided by the swamp becomes fuzzy, out of focus, and the pile floats in undefined space. For example, interest in the "bird" that the speaker earlier followed—the emissary of nature and therefore of more generic representations of aesthetic taste—is sidelined as soon as the pile materializes in sight. This bird, as metonymic representative of cloying, emotive, subjective romanticism in relation to the natural scene, "like one who takes / Everything said as personal to himself" (15-16), is "forgot[ten]" (19) in favour of a seemingly sterile object of vernacular artifice. This disavowal of the more appropriate fare for landscape poetry demonstrates a shift in interest from pure nature to the traces of humanity *in* nature, just as how the books of unwanted nature poetry in "A Fountain..." are fit to be thrown out a window, and yet possess new aesthetic value as artifacts lying among stones and bushes unretrieved ("A Fountain..." 116).

As one of his earlier works from his second book of published poetry *North of Boston* (c. 1914-1915), "The Wood-Pile" sets the stage for Frost's unique intervention into modernist object aesthetics, and is, I would argue, a precursor to Stevens' monumental jar abandoned in the backwoods of Tennessee.¹⁸⁸ Both poems search for vernacular artifice in the American wilderness, one that, as Stevens' phrases it, does "*not* give of bird or bush" (my emphasis, "Anecdote" 11), but rather makes the vernacular jar (or wood pile) central to its poetic interest.¹⁸⁹ Yet as much as these vernacular objects become central to the poems, Frost's

¹⁸⁸ "Anecdote of the Jar" was published in Stevens' first collection of poetry, *Harmonium*, in 1919.

¹⁸⁹ In her essay "Wallace Stevens' 'Jar': The Absurd Detritus of Romantic Myth," Patricia Merivale comments on the "two schools of thought" that read the imposition of the jar positively and negatively. There are scholars who see the jar as "a modern Grecian Urn, a worthy symbol of creative imagination bringing order out of the chaos of the 'slovenly wilderness,'" and others who interpret the jar as "an intellectual construction corrupting innocent beauty; proleptically, it *makes* the wilderness slovenly... like the aftermath of an untidy picnic" (527). As for my own analysis, I am less concerned about the pejorative or positive implications of the jar's imposition, and more interested in how the jar ironizes a brand of object aesthetics that sees poetic value in domestic things abandoned to the wilderness. There is no doubt that the jar might bring to mind "the aftermath of an untidy picnic" to some, but when read in context with poems like "The Man on the Dump," which depicts the regenerative aspects of waste and green, I would argue that the jar represents the potential for poetic otherness located in the domestic artifice of the everyday. While Merivale finds the pejorative interpretation "to be closer to the truth" (528), it is my assessment that we cannot lump the jar into polarized "schools of thought," as the true potential of the jar as an aesthetic object lies somewhere between its existence as waste and appropriated vernacular object. Perhaps its grey and bare sterility

intermingling of waste¹⁹⁰ and wilderness does not merely scrutinize the uncanniness of human-contrived, domestic things by wresting them from use-value, but rather evaluates the aesthetic tension invested when these *things* are contextualized in relation to nature. In the midst of that swamp, there is meticulous observation of the utility of the pile, an examination that converts the object to artifact through the lore it elicits:

No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.
And it was older sure than this year's cutting,
Or even last year's or the year's before. (26-28)

Similar to Stevens' jar, the pile is "gray" and common ("The Wood-Pile" 29), but is certainly not bare: the clematis, like the wilderness that forms around the jar to become no longer wild, winds strings around the pile "like a bundle" (31)—an image not merely of symbiosis, but of superimposition of thing and nature. Frost's choice of material to demonstrate this uncanny fusion acts as a vanishing point where the central tension of artifact and nature collapse into each other. Both the vernacular material (wood) and the literal reclamation efforts of the forest render the holistic image uncanny to its constituent parts; yet somewhat like a sculpture in the category of *objet sauvage*, the whole is unified through the literal binding of nature to artifact. It is not purely the superimposition of chopped wood and vines, nor the juxtaposition of a tree "Still growing" at one end of the pile and a human-appropriated "stake" at the other used as props to hold the thing together (31), that combine to render the pile artifactually significant. The swamp

is a pejorative presence in the landscape—but even Merivale acknowledges the absurd function of the jar as that which ironizes the "supposed" perfection of nature, and which is skeptical of the myth of pristine, unsullied greenspace. While the jar conjures images of untidiness, it appears also as a specimen of perfection, as Merivale claims, with nicely curved and rounded edges. In much the same way, the wilderness as an ideological object inverts its supposed perfection to something untidy: "the wilderness has every right to oppose [the jar's ironic] perfection with [its own] apparent untidiness" (530). The jar perfects and brings order to nature while it also suggests chaos through the presence of refuse in the wilderness. All the while nature contains a similar duplicity: it is both pristine yet unkempt in its wildness. The ultimate irony is that one reflects the other (waste-as-refuse and waste-as-wilderness), and that the jar as a brand of waste draws its spectatorial power from the wilderness surrounding it.

¹⁹⁰ I would argue that the wood pile represents a form of vernacular waste, as it is decaying "far from a useful fireplace" (37), and is essentially wasted through not being applied to its purpose. However, there is irony in that the pile redeems its function by "warm[ing]" the cold swamp (a *wasteland* of sorts) when encountered in a scene of aesthetic engagement (39). It acquires new use-value as an object of poetic interest.

itself, as a microcosm of nature, instills within the object an aesthetic of dislodgement that trumps practical utility for aesthetic utility: the pile is located “far from a useful fireplace” and yet animates the natural setting, “warm[s] the frozen swamp as best it could / With the slow smokeless burning of decay” (38-40). Again, vernacular objects such as this anomalous pile are modern-period exemplars of an old paradigm, one that seeks the superimposition of nature and artifact as a method to reassess those things the eyes might normally avoid or gloss over. Poems like “The Wood-Pile,” where the enigmatic potential of the human-made, literally carved out of nature while being reclaimed from whence the creation was hewn, become by its location in a “frozen swamp” an icon of atemporality—an image of “Cold Pastoral” not unlike the static images of John Keats’s Grecian urn that transcend time (“Ode on a Grecian Urn” 45, 47)—where the seemingly useless expenditure of human energy, the “labor of his ax” (“The Wood-Pile” 47), is put on aesthetic display through its abandonment to nature.

As much as Frost’s “The Wood-Pile” is an exemplum of the third aesthetic object created in the counterforce of artifice and environment, the vernacular ruin, as a brand of neopastoral phenomena, is not defined by that which is simply composed of wood. Nor is it relegated to the ambit of domestic *agrarian* life deteriorating in a pastoral setting, as evidenced by Williams’ “Pastoral,” which brings the roughness of crumbling rural architecture into the shadow of urban space. It doesn’t necessarily matter from what material these vernacular objects were constructed. Rather, the unifying factor among neopastoral objects and vernacular ruin is that they appear as tools (literally and figuratively) fallen to disuse within a space that evokes symbolism attributable to nature or pastoral mythology. They are things with literal use-value that have become waste (broken), wasted (the wood pile), or symbolize waste (the outhouse weathered blue-green), but that also have figurative use as orienting icons meant to bring order to a disoriented setting. In other words, these wasted tools and domestic implements represent at

once the people who used/created them and the ontology of the spectator, a reflection that becomes a self-referential means of geographical and spatial orientation—markers of being-there. For example, while the wood pile acts as a referent to the ghostly woodsman, the speaker is also concerned about his own position in the landscape: while he is disoriented by the “tall slim trees / Too much alike to mark or name a place” (6-7), the speaker is searching for something “So as to say for certain *I* was here” (my italics 8), to mark his place as the woodsman has done with the pile-as-cairn. In poems like “The Grindstone,” featuring the eponymous tool fallen to disuse and propped against “a ruinous live apple tree” as a folk ornament (20), everyday rural equipment is invested with the speaker’s ontology as he recalls the labour expended that contributed to its “worn... oblate / Spheroid” shape (39-40), which now rests in ruined “discord” against an equally ruined but living tree (54). The discord (or disharmony) the object elicits is of chief interest in the waste-nature dialectic: as Harman proposes in *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, “When the tool fails, its unobtrusive quality is ruined. There occurs a jarring of reference, so that the tool becomes visible *as* what it is: ‘The contexture of reference and thus the referential totality undergoes a distinctive disturbance which forces us to pause’” (45).¹⁹¹ To connect Harman’s assertion to the neopastoral: the somewhat archaeological or museal fascination with broken, obsolete, or disused things has the capacity to elicit a jarring of reference by virtue of the tool’s dysfunction. However, when set against, or abandoned to, the plasticity of nature the tool’s dysfunction becomes more apparent; the spectatorship elicited hearkens back to a frontier encounter, where the subjective interpretation of artifacts in the wilderness generates a brand of lore through misreading: “I wondered what machine of ages gone / This represented an improvement on. / For all I knew it may have sharpened spears / And arrowheads itself” (“The Grindstone” 35-38). The abandoned tool as an artifact is displaced

¹⁹¹ Harman is drawing on Heidegger’s *History of the Concept of Time* to make this assertion, and the last portion of the citation is taken from Heidegger’s text.

physically *and* temporally through subjective interpretation: “For all [he] knew” the grindstone might exist at any moment in time, just as it now exists propped against a tree that reflects the tool’s ruined nature, and its capacity to “live” (regenerate) through the spectator’s gaze.

Certainly Frost, as a Harvard-educated man, could have done some research before putting pen to paper so as to devise a poem that more accurately reflected the grindstone-as-tool. Yet these artifacts, as they drift through time and become spatially dislocated, are atemporal; they lose their tool-being and invoke interrogatives linked specifically to what the spectator knows (perceives) in the present moment.

It is Frost’s 1946 poem “Directive” (published in his 1947 collection *Steeple Bush*) that offers one of the more striking examples of the neopastoral, the distinctive disturbance of wasted, fractured objects in a pastoral setting upon which the invasive archivist descends and injects into the contexture of domestic ruin an image of himself. This poem also epitomizes the evolution of Frost’s engagement with the surpluses of the domestic at odds with nature, in that we begin to see images not only of cellar holes and decaying foundations, but also of what we might categorize as commoditized domestic implements abandoned to the elements. Whereas Frost in his earlier works featuring cellar holes perhaps averted the poetic eye from the more conspicuous interjections of domestic waste, in “Directive” we are offered as an orienting image the “shattered dishes underneath a pine” that belong to the children’s “playhouse” of “make believe” (41-43). While the poem has been interpreted as one that mourns a scene of both personal and national loss (see below), it is playfulness and the imaginative appropriation of those broken dishes interred in the terrain of an American pastoral, “little things [that] could make [children] glad” (44), that frames the interpretation. In many ways, the poem is perplexing and childish in its parody of the hero’s return to “a house that is no more a house / Upon a farm that is no more a farm / ... in a town that is no more a town” (5-7). Owing to its wiles and deceit, Frost’s “Directive” might even evoke Hermes as its patron god. As Paton tells us in *Abandoned New*

England, the “supposedly regenerative pilgrimage” “has haunted readers” in part through “Frost’s sly designing, because the advice can be read as straight and sincere or as ironic and duplicitous” (228). This journey back home is *supposedly* regenerative because Frost, after all, has in mind our “getting lost” (“Directive” 9).¹⁹²

Before delving into my own analysis of broken goblets stuffed into cedars and shattered dishes abandoned beneath pine trees, it is important to address how the poem has been interpreted both as an intensely personal, perplexed, and self-referential meditation on Frost’s family struggles and lost farm in Derry, and as a post-World War Two extension of the fragmentation motif depicting the consequences of a military conflict that, for the most part, did not visit the continental United States. As MacArthur notes, the poem was first published shortly after the war in the winter edition of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*—many of whose articles “dealt with the global legacy of WWII” (MacArthur 70)—and can be contextualized, MacArthur argues, as a post-war American vignette. The forty houses represented by cellar holes in “Directive” are, MacArthur adds, “forty shells of former homes that may also remind us of the bombings in Europe” (75). While a reading of the poem through the aftermath of the most horrific war in modern history (one driven by considerable advances in technology) definitely helps to contextualize a more domestic American experience of the event, perhaps the truth of what those cellar holes signify is somewhere in the middle, caught between the realities of agrarian domestic abandonment and the changes brought about by war through conscription, migration, and the indirect displacement of families by technology. Whatever the “correct” interpretation of “Directive” might be, the trauma of displacement is readable in the shattered dishes, broken goblets, and craters in the landscape left as artifactual evidence of former dwelling. In Eliotian fashion, Frost has led us to a place with fragments shored against ruins, but

¹⁹² MacArthur makes a similar assertion about Frost’s intention to bewilder the reader when he speaks of the simultaneous orienting and disorienting effect of “Directive.” MacArthur’s reading of loss and (dis)orientation in the poem will be taken up below.

has allowed those fragments their own history that is intermingled with the speaker's subjective impression, and that generates new artifactual meaning based on their integration into a natural scene.

"Directive" is a part of its time and place, and a reading of the poem through a war-oriented fragmentation motif is certainly relevant, and complements my reading of waste in pastoral space as a geo-social metaphor. However, the poem can also be read as a semiotic, waste-oriented representation of agrarian domestic loss that demonstrates a paradigm shift through the objects that represent that loss. The rather anomalous opening of the poem brings us back to a past through object correlation, "Back in a time made simple by the loss / Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off / Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather" (2-4). In other words, the poem begins with the image of something dissolved or broken, but which is still vaguely readable (although that readability is made "simple" because the detail—perhaps a reference to an epitaphic inscription—has corroded). Yet we are not entering a ruined domestic scene razed by man, but rather one dissolved by "the weather," the elements, nature. The frontispiece object is a broken graveyard marble sculpture, a human-contrived artifact symbolizing death, effaced by natural forces. The next image is indeed one that has been made simple by the loss of detail: "a house that is no more a house / Upon a farm that is no more a farm" (5-6). Guided by a speaker whose doubletalk is meant to confuse the spectator (the guide directs our attention to phantom things that are "no more"), what we are embarking upon, as James Dougherty phrases it in "Robert Frost's 'Directive' to the Wilderness," is "the retreat out of some complexity into the simplicity of a lonely encounter with wilderness" (208), but one that is complicated by the trivial domestic object matter ("little things") representing a devastated pastoral scene. The "wilderness" to which Dougherty refers, as I interpret it, invokes an image not of pristine natural space, but of the randomness and contingency of a middle ground encounter, one that warps the material by-products of cultural and domestic development.

If “Directive” represents a retreat out of complexity, as Dougherty suggests, it is one that is obfuscated by the duplicitousness of the speaker-guide, who is leading us into terrain haunted by inconsequential objects elevated to the status of artifactual things. As we meander through the scene we are ironically told not to mind the “serial ordeal / Of being watched from forty cellar holes / As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins” (20-22). We know that the tourist (perhaps the reader) who travels with the guide is not actually being watched from the cellar holes. As in “Ghost House” and “The Generations of Men,” the grounds are haunted by apparitions substantiated by artifactual trace and the abandoned labour of the ex-inhabitants. The only eyes in the poem would belong to the guide or to the tourist-as-reader of the scene. The spectre-like eyes that materialize from the darkness of the cellar holes are reflections of the spectator’s gaze projected back from the figurative vessels (“firkins”) carved into the landscape. It is the spectator who breathes life into these artifactual remains through the act of orienting himself in relation to those remains. As noted above, critics like MacArthur have posited that the cellar holes featured in “Directive,” as well as the shattered dishes flanking the scene, are a projection of Frost’s own imaginative scene of loss, the idealization of his farm at Derry as a home to which he can only return in imagination (71-72).¹⁹³ Quoting critic Blanford Parker, MacArthur notes that in “Directive”—which is “a New England name for a guidebook”—“The poet gives the impression that he is reenacting a journey that he has already taken, going down a road which is no longer mysterious to him... he has become a kind of master arranger of all circumstances of the trip” (qtd. in McArthur 73). Parker’s language might remind us of the “mastery” associated with the archival impulse and the death drive—a drive symbolized by the epigraphic image of the graveyard marble that is the frontispiece artifact in the poem. If “Directive” is at all

¹⁹³ By the time “Directive” was published, MacArthur explains that Frost had lost his son Carol to suicide (1940), had lost both his son Elliot and his wife Elinor, and was dealing with the mental illness, and consequent institutionalization, of his daughter Irma (page 72). Frost’s life was plagued with loss of both family and home through incessant migration, death, and mental illness, and MacArthur suggests that “Directive,” although complicated in its ironic tone, might be an idealized return to simpler times in Frost’s life. See MacArthur’s chapter on Frost in *The House Abandoned*.

autobiographical, Frost's impulse to revisit the past becomes a method of mastering disorder, of giving significance to those trivial little things that, in their abandonment to nature, are the only items remaining to substantiate the life of the past and the onlooker's relationship with that past.

It is important to reiterate that this scene of *personal* loss represented by "little things" become fragments—the dialectic of artifact, wilderness, and spectator—acts as a microcosm that extends not merely to the spectator, but to a national (American) scene of loss. These sites of personal abandonment become part of a larger geo-social metaphor that solicits the subjective impressions of those who stumble upon them. MacArthur explains: "Recalling Frost's nine years on the Derry farm, the abandoned rural scene we are asked to go 'back' to [in 'Directive'] is also metonymic for what was becoming the national past, as the population shift from rural to urban areas continued" (74). While it is plausible that the domestic detritus of "Directive" is the projection of Frost's personal history as a microcosm for a national history, it is the ruins of the domestic that become the metonym for a national past, for the present moment, and for a future portended by those fragments. "It seems perfectly reasonable," MacArthur continues, that "being lost in such a landscape means 'being lost enough to find yourself'" (75), to search for one's own image among the debris; and yet while we are asked, somewhat sardonically, to "make [ourselves] at home" ("Directive" 39), "there is no house or home, only memories and broken artifacts" (MacArthur 76).

Fittingly for its duplicitous tone, the poem begins with the image of effaced graveyard marble as its orienting artifact and ends with a broken drinking cup—from which none can actually drink—as the locus of an inaccessible past, a metonym for the unhome elevated to a Holy Grail. MacArthur draws a connection between the broken cup and the broken font (the old bathtub) in "A Fountain..." (77),¹⁹⁴ and although he argues, as Williams does, that these scenes

¹⁹⁴ MacArthur aptly points out that "The brook the reader is lead to [in 'Directive']—'your destination'—recalls... the 'stone baptismal font' that the speaker seeks and does not find in 'A Fountain...' The 'broken drinking goblet

of pastoral waste are of great import to the nation, he does not comment on the significance of their “broken” status in relation to the water (the goblet is hidden beside a stream) that can no longer be contained within the vessel. Rather, MacArthur focuses on the regenerative aspects of viewing this vernacular waste in pastoral space—a reading with which I agree, but that also must take into account what a “broken” cup represents in terms of that “renewal” (78). The cup becomes a sort of Tantalus fruit, a vessel by which the idealized memories of the past, symbolized by water, are drawn out, but which leak or dissolve through the cup as the speaker attempts to drink the restorative fluid. Therefore the directive at the end of the poem to “Drink and be whole again beyond confusion” (62), while toned as a gesture that might revitalize the spectator, is a double-dealing and cynical proposition. Such promises to be made “whole” by a thing that is broken (or *not* whole) is a farce perpetrated by a trickster guide, just as any return to the unhome is always an imaginative re-visitation. A literal return, as a broken domestic vessel that can hold no water will signify, is impossible. Like the central house in the poem that is “no more a house” and the farm “no more a farm,” the cup as an artifact is no more a thing that facilitates a practical return, but only an imaginative, aesthetic return driven by the relationship between spectator, artifact, and a wilderness space that corrodes these things yet preserves them as entombed in nature.

Whether or not “Directive” is a poem in which Frost-as-author is directly injecting his own history into the fragments he encounters, the guide and the tourist are surely injecting themselves into the scene through their interaction with, and preservation of, the ruined artifacts. As elegiac vernacular monuments that have become “belilaced cellar hole[s], / Now slowly closing like a dent in dough” (“Directive” 46-47), Frost’s dents in the landscape are empty vessels caught between picturesque beauty and the rough fragments of past labour they denote.

like the Grail’ should also remind us of the empty bottle figured in the landscape in that poem, and of Wordsworth’s broken drinking cup in ‘The Ruined Cottage’” (77).

These holes are at least figurative vessels to Frost (“firkins”), with the ghostly eyes of the former inhabitants peeking out from the darkness to reflect the gaze of the rural sojourner. Yet while empty, these vessels represent things that are to be filled with the lore and imaginative engagement of those who are willing to lose themselves in the scene as a way to relocate themselves in artifactual refuse. Though the wilderness attempts to conquer this site of vernacular ruin, the hole and the absence it represents, like Stevens’ jar, seems to “take dominion” (“Anecdote” 9) in the dialectic of fragmented waste—the “shattered dishes underneath a pine” (“Directive” 43)—and the evergreens that adorn the scene. These remnants from some “children’s house of make-believe” signify the imaginative leaps involved in encountering things out of place (42), and the ontological affinity between artifact and the onlooker who makes those leaps. Again as in “Anecdote of the Jar,” the speaker of “Directive” places an object—which he “stole from the children’s playhouse” (60)—in the wilderness as if to memorialize the absence with his own artifactual contribution:

I have kept hidden in the instep arch
 Of an old cedar at the waterside
 A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
 Under a spell so the wrong ones can’t find it[.] (55-58)

This act of playful theft becomes the ultimate orienting icon, one that invites further acts of theft through the enigmas it elicits as a thing intentionally situated out-of-place in the arch of a tree. The speaker’s interjection into, and contribution to, the (dis)order of this rural ruin is a creative act meant to offer a final image of perplexed clarity that epitomizes a modern aesthetic: a broken, common object repurposed to take on new significance through its mysterious interment in nature.

As a domestic tool imbued with imaginative play and interposed in nature, refuse becomes relic: this broken goblet is a nationalistic *and* spiritual symbol. As a spiritual symbol the goblet-as-Grail becomes the material supplement of subjectivity projected onto the landscape;

through a brand of transubstantiation,¹⁹⁵ the Grail represents the speaker while also representing the potential for any spectator to drink from the same cup, that is, to perpetuate a brand of misuse as a marker of being-there. The act of locating oneself in an artifact, like the conversion process proposed of transubstantiation, is both literal and figurative, a symbol which takes its imagined referent as real. The Grail interred in the wilderness, therefore, is a supplement for the speaker's body. Ultimately, the placing of this broken goblet within the arch of an evergreen—the pine trees flanking the shattered dishes are also of this arboreal genus—stands as an emblem of artifactual preservation and the new significations garnered from the conflation of waste and wilderness (the conversion of goblet to Grail). When, like the picturesque spectator, we divert attention from the minute components, step back from the scene to take in its contextures, the constituents coalesce to give even fragments of broken dishes and a fractured goblet aesthetic significance in relation to the de-contextualized natural space in which it is found. The entire scene becomes a vignette representing a brand of surreal archaeology, as the objects, like the goblet, are “hidden” in nature so that only those who know *how* to look, and *where* to look—only those who happen to be wandering among the trees—will see not the goblet, but the *Grail* in its fragmentary, artifactual magnitude.

* * *

¹⁹⁵ I use this term intentionally to invoke its religious significance, particularly because the speaker of “Directive,” through the iconography of the Grail, is alluding to a religious rite whereby the symbolic blood of Christ becomes real when consumed. In the same way that something symbolic becomes real, the Grail becomes a *real* supplement for the speaker's body, just as the cellar holes are substitutes for their inhabitants *in absentia*. As MacArthur explains, “The spell the goblet is under refers to Mark 4:11-12” (78), which does not, I must clarify, refer to the holy sacrament of communion, but rather to the disguising of the truth in parables so that “the wrong ones” (Frost 58)—or those who are outside “the mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4.11)—cannot perceive what is plainly in front of them (“That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand” [Mark 4.12]). This perception by parables offers yet another reading of “Directive” through its object matter. The lingering debris in the poem, like the domestic refuse in “The Man on the Dump” that is converted to metaphor, is itself a parable that invites the *right* ones to look beyond the surface, and to see the ghostly presence of both the guide and the former inhabitants who haunt the grounds.

Given all this poetry on the subject of outhouses “properly weathered” (“Pastoral”), crumbling vernacular edifices, cellar holes, tin lard pails, bare vessels and broken Grails placed with prominence in a natural or pastoral setting, there are certainly many interpretations that might be posited about this particular scene in modernism that has poets like Williams, Stevens, and Frost turn to the refused objects of domestication in natural spaces as lost objects of modernity. An easy response to the question of *why* waste in pastoral space is a recurring motif, as was suggested by Paton’s assertion that interest in rural artifacts “offsets the stresses of... excessive materialistic consumption,” is that the proliferation of material/technological cultures creates a longing for something, as Wordsworth might put it, “plainer and more emphatic” that is attributed to the so-called “primary laws of nature” (“Preface” 60)—a longing that in post-modernity takes on a more heavy-handed ironic slant (for example, Banksy’s paintings of goatherds foregrounded by rusting vehicles). That longing is tied to an objective correlative based on the debris of what has been lost; yet in our return to these sites of “real and imagined vernacular ruins,” Paton explains, “effort—physical, economic, emotional, and imaginative—is required to make the return valid and to realize when it is impossible” (238). The return to sites caught between debris and wilderness is both a real and imaginary journey, and solicits, if not requires, a poetic method of engagement to balance the absurdity, the irony, the tragedy, the empathy, and the regenerative qualities of things that have been left for dead. A visit to the dump is a return home, but a return that is readable only by looking askance at the broken, wasted, common, everyday domestic objects that have become metonyms for the domestic self.

Highmore tells us that “Everyday life registers the process of modernization as an incessant accumulation of debris: modernity produces obsolescence as part of its continual demand for the new” (61). Emerging from this equation of modernity, excess, and the production of obsolescence is “the problem of finding a poetics that is capable of articulating the actuality of modern life” (61). The difficulty of reading the artifactual debris that modernity has generated in

terms of epistemology and objectivity, those famous Eliotian “fragments” “shored against... ruins” (*The Waste Land*), is a post-industrial motif that unites poets as seemingly divergent from one another as Frost and Eliot. “With rich tonal complexity,” MacArthur argues, “Frost also takes up in ‘Directive’ the themes of *The Waste Land*, making his claim, amid rural desolation, to offer mitigated hope. ... Here in the peculiarly American scene of an abandoned farm, there is water; here is what Eliot seeks but cannot promise. ‘A broken drinking goblet like the Grail’ will provide renewal and reintegration, reviving the saddened visitors to this landscape of failure and death” (78). In this problem of finding a poetics that might represent the actuality of modernity through debris—debris that finds renewal in the poet-as-spectator—we might throw Stevens’ man on the dump and Williams’ shards of green glass into the mix of artifacts that echo the themes of *The Waste Land*. These poems are emblems of a brand of artifactual correlation that look to the malleable materiality of nature to express the condition of the fragmented domestic subject. While these objects ostensibly are lost (wasted or refused), nature provides new contexts to jar the spectator out of familiar modes of perception. In the figures cut by these men on dumps, who make Grails out of broken goblets, or music from a discarded lard pail, is a vignette of how mislaid things represent a regenerative process through their imaginative appropriation—a potential for new contexts and spiritual meanings that converts refuse to relics.

5.1. Epilogue: Frontiers of the Neopastoral

My attempt to delineate the neopastoral and its trajectory into the modern period and beyond has been, in many ways, an exercise in putting flesh onto the skeleton of a discourse that exists buried in the static of numerous other discourses—from ecocriticism, to environmental aesthetics, to thing theory, to material cultures, to archaeology, to phenomenology, to metaphysics, to psychoanalysis, to the pastoral and the picturesque. Another way of putting it: my groping about within various disciplines has been an exercise in reconstructing Frankenstein’s creature from the viscera and appendages of multiple corpses, each part of which belongs to a distinct and separate body. The ability of the pastoral to admit the world, to accept into its purview divergent viewpoints akin to the forty cellar holes in “Directive” out of which forty different ghostly eyes materialize, is a testament to the potential for pastoral to adopt new contexts for reading. I have no doubt that this will continue to be the legacy of the pastoral, which, as Leo Marx suggests, is predisposed to adapt to novel contexts, and to facilitate all manner of encroachments.

As a further testament to its ability to adapt—for pastoral to take on new forms—is the *neopastoral* as I have defined it, a concept that appears to be at odds with clichéd notions of untouched wilderness space, and that weaves metaphors around the artifacts of abandoned domestic and technological activity. Although some of Frost’s poetry on the craters left by domesticating activity might not directly engage the commodity or tech-oriented objects of modernity (a refrigerator plunked in front of a wood-plank barn, for example), the evolution of his depictions of abandoned houses stand as precursors that point a ghostly finger toward the future. I have structured the archival evidence for my analysis around Frost, as well as other modern poets such as Stevens, Williams, and to a lesser extent Eliot and Pound, because they are the foregrounding agents of a larger phenomenon that can be traced through the later portions of

the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. The pastoral, as it exists today (and as Frost and company demonstrate), adapts to accept into its fold not merely the stylized ruins of the eighteenth-century picturesque, but also the unfashionable fragments of dishes and drinking cups stuffed into trees. As the age of commodity intensified its commercial output in the later portions of the twentieth century, the presence of shattered dishes and broken goblets elevated to Grails begot its counterpart in the rusting cadavers of technological advance. In an epilogue that follows her chapter “The Vernacular Ruin and the Ghost of Self-Reliance,” Paton explicitly links the American mutation of the picturesque that focuses on domestic ruin to the commodity-driven phenomenon of nature interlaced with consumer-oriented waste: “If the image of the decaying country homestead is rooted in pre-modern agricultural history, it is updated by the sight of equipment rusting in a field. While farm trucks and tractors stir boyish nostalgia—the big new toy recovered at last, but transformed by neglect—the obsolete machine can be separated from a rural context to become an icon on its own” (236). Imbedded in this “boyish nostalgia,” this return to the unhome through the artifactual refuse of things caught out of place in a natural setting, is the thing-as-emblem that will dissolve circumambient images—become an icon on its own—while imbued with lore through the mystery it elicits.

Yet these properly weathered emblems are not relegated to the nostalgia produced by *farm* technology alone. Like the tourists in Frost’s poems who embark on their rural excursions to sift through the fractured, artifactual remnants of a vernacular America, new forms of rural waste begin to stir the ontological affinity between spectator and thing:

The totems and trademarks of modern prosperity become quaint to such a camera eye, as “Ice Cold Coca Cola” signs lose legibility and gain a patina like that of the weathered wood facade of a store that now stocks nothing. A Texaco sign lies fallen in the weeds, a forgotten warrior that the earth half entombs. These scenes imply that deterioration reverses the object’s significance so it becomes something other than bright and non-biodegradable waste. A battered car in the

landscape suggests a crack in technology's prosperous dominance; it becomes a type as ruin and an individual in its irregular surface, with a story to keep secret. (Paton 237)

While I might disagree with Paton that a “battered car in the landscape suggests a crack in technology's prosperous dominance”—indeed, the encroachment of non-biodegradable tech waste into rural space might signify the contrary, that the pastoral is in the grips of commodity culture and its excesses—I wholeheartedly agree that the mystery generated out the paradox of wilderness and urban surfeit transforms the neglected object to something that can be repurposed by that “quaint” “camera eye.” Certainly, these scenes *imply* that an object's significance has been reversed in a *commercial* sense. But through becoming “something other than bright and non-biodegradable waste,” and through divesting themselves of exchange value, these objects abandoned to the whims of natural reclamation and regeneration enter new contexts, a scene of aesthetic engagement that invites the archivist to posit interpretations of that waste's significance in relation to the earth that half entombs it.

On May 20, 2012, I entered an antique store in Collingwood, Ontario, Canada. A town of roughly 20,000 residents situated on the shores of Georgian Bay, Collingwood has built its reputation as a retreat for well-to-do urbanites who wish to escape the city to return to a manicured form of nature represented by ski hills, well-maintained nature trails, and all the amenities the local yacht club has to offer. So I'm not sure if I was really all that surprised by the book that drew my attention as I walked into the antique store that day: *Abandoned Ontario*, published in 2011 by Bruce R. Bringham, an 11' x 9' coffee table ornament packaging rural obsolescence for the modern consumer, and depicting abandoned buildings photographed around the province.¹⁹⁶ As I flipped through *Abandoned Ontario* (which I eventually purchased), I immediately thought of Mason Fletcher and his book *Old Memories* (and subsequently thought

¹⁹⁶ Bringham's *Abandoned Ontario* website is accessible via the following link: www.abandonedontario.ca.

that Brigham's book would make a nice end-piece to bring my study full circle). Both Brigham and Fletcher, as self-directed documenters of vernacular and rural obsolescence, demonstrate the popular interest in these crumbling pastoral artifacts as sites of cultural significance. Yet like many of the theorists of environmental or natural aesthetics who appear to avert their eyes from the persistence of commodity waste in the new pastoral, Brigham does not mention in his blurbs that accompany each photograph what I find to be the most conspicuous of interjections. In his photo-documentation of these vernacular ruins appears the ironic interlocutor: a discarded tire resting against "One of the few remaining log homes from the days of early settlement" (page 44), or a car seat plunked in front of an ancient roundhouse (a building used to repair locomotives) being reclaimed by nature (47). Perhaps the fact that Brigham does not mention these conspicuous interjections of commodity waste points to something more significant. The interjection of commodity refuse in a natural or rural scene is so commonplace these days that it has indeed become ingrained in our perception—it has become expected rather than exceptional. A tire reposing casually against a two-centuries-old pioneer home is the quintessence of the neopastoral; these are the new fragments shored against ruins that coalesce to offer a poetics of debris articulating the actuality of modern life.



Figure 5.1. Untitled photograph from Bruce R. Brigham's *Abandoned Ontario* (2011). Included with permission by the artist.

My reference to Brigham's photography points us in the direction of the new frontiers (or supplementary regions) upon which a study of the neopastoral might embark. Paton asks a poignant question about the aesthetic validity of these new pastoral scenes laced with mass-productivity, one that reveals a bias in what we deem to be proper grist for poetic-vernacular appropriation: "Wooden structures bear the mark of human self-reliance working with and against nature's cycles; what metaphors can vinyl siding yield" (216)? An answer to Paton's question has been aggregating in the frontiers of ruburbia, where the properly weathered materiality of vinyl siding has indeed garnered aesthetic resonance—at least since the 1960s. In *Beyond the Picturesque*, Jacobs examines the photography of a group of American artists called

the New Topographers, who documented the American ruburban invasion and sub-suburban sprawl of the 1960s and 70s. Jacobs provides a précis of their 1975 exhibition *New*

Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape that would transition very well into a further analysis of the incursion, and subsequent ruination, of commodity forms of architecture in natural space:

In contrast with... romantic and modernist photographers... a predilection for a pure and virgin nature is completely absent in the work of the New Topographics. While such landscapes still adorned plenty of tacky calendars and postcards and also dominated the art photography of the day, New Topographics emphasised that the idea of the untouched landscape had become a myth. Instead of the hygienic landscapes of Ansel Adams, the New Topographers direct their attention, as indicated by the exhibition's subtitle, to a 'man-altered landscape:' a landscape that is a cultural construction in the first place and that can hardly be defined by means of strict geographic and aesthetic categories. Their iconography contains the amorphous area between city and nature that has just been colonised by suburban tract houses and office parks... (47)

In his discussion of the New Topographers' photo-documentation of the myth of the untouched landscape—an “amorphous area between city and nature” replete with vinyl siding, I might add—Jacobs emphasizes the image of the “*ruin in reverse*,” “the motif of the building under construction” (47). The idea that suburban encroachment into natural space might be considered “ruin in reverse” serves to ironize Romantic notions of idealizing the wastes of human effort, as the building itself is an aggregate of cheap, slapdash commodity fragments that portend their ruination through the ornamentation of time (as Gilpin might put it). Just as Gilpin argues that one must apply to smoothness and symmetry the destructive brushstrokes of a mallet to render a scene aesthetic through variation, neo-picturesque viewers look for irregularity built from the ground up, ruins constructed as ruins. These vinyl-clad ruburban boxes are ruins in progress, not merely through their cheap, sterile, and shoddy construction that lacks the artifice of Heidegger's potter, but through their position as something gaudily human-made that portends, and

contributes to, conspicuous waste in the midst of a borderland environment. Many of the images, particularly by member Robert Smithson, capture suburban houses in the midst of completion, human-made things caught in a state of transition from one thing (the raw material of artifice) to another thing (its proper denotation as a cheap, makeshift, expedient house). Whether or not Smithson would agree that it is a human constructed object's appearance in a natural environment that gives the house-as-commodity-object its uncanny quality, there is certainly a theme of *middle ground* aesthetics being exemplified in his photography, as well as in the photography of other New Topographics artists like Frank Gohlke. The apparition of a discarded tire just beneath the surface of a pond (refer to figure 3.4 in chapter three), a little like Pound's apparition of faces as petals on a bough, comprise the remnant material with which to connect Stevens' dumps and Frost's cellar holes to a poetics of inversion ongoing in the present.

While Jacobs situates the work of the New Topographers within the genre of "the picturesque," there is, as I have argued, great overlaps between the pastoral, which represents a middle space flanked by urbanity and wilderness, and the picturesque, which represents the "unpredictable dialectic between nature and culture" (Jacobs 9). Indeed, much of the work of the New Topographers explores how the urban invades the rural scene to become an errant limb of suburbia. In an examination of the phenomenon of waste interposed in natural space, sites of counterforce become galleries generating a third object of aesthetic interest—and those galleries find their place as a *non*-place, outside the walls of where museal display is traditionally transacted. Jacobs notes how the work of New Topographers like Smithson "constantly operated within the dialectic tension between 'site' and 'nonsite.'" He exchanged the museum space for the deserts of Southwest [and] did not connect his artistic praxis to the romantic idea of virgin nature" (39). We return here to the blurred line between gallery and natural space and how these

domains of counterforce, “site” and “nonsite,” generate a dynamic that obfuscates the division between the two. While it is the invasion of the urban into natural space that suggests such an uncanny tension between place and non-place, an inversion of this phenomenon might also be examined: how the rural or pastoral invades urban space as an ironic, or even gentrified, form of the tradition.

Just as there has been new academic work appearing on the urban picturesque that examines the relationship between nature, culture, and decay, a study of the neopastoral could investigate what has been called “urban pastoral” in order to locate material that further examines the dialectic of nature, culture, the myth of a pristine landscape, and how the waste by-products of urban-industry temper this new form of the genre. As mentioned in my study, novels like *The Great Gatsby*, *House on Mango Street*, and *Fight Club* would provide appropriate raw material to analyze how pastoral ideologies have adapted in American literature to a waste- and commodity-laden urban scene. Furthermore, essays like Terence Diggory’s “Allen Ginsberg’s Urban Pastoral” would furnish the study with analyses of how artists beyond the modern period have negotiated the incongruence between pastoral idealism and the lurid, raucous interjection of urbanity. As Diggory notes, poets like Ginsberg both reached for and ironized the pastoral ideal they knew was a product of ideological fantasizing, a lost artifact of the American past invaded by commodity excess. In Ginsberg’s poem “Eclogue,” for example, “The dream of a ‘safer, healthier’ place is exposed as an illusion” and, at the poem’s conclusion, “farmer Ginsberg stares in mock-horror—that is, with the mockery turned on himself—at ‘bottles & cans piled up in our garbage pail’” (114). In a poem with the title “Eclogue,” Ginsberg is no doubt ironizing the pastoral genre with the (dis)orienting image of a garbage pail overflowing with the emptied husks of domestic commoditization. The “mockery” amounts from how much domestic

commodity becomes a prosthesis that follows us even into our dreams of an environment untouched by domestic waste.¹⁹⁷

At a practical level, there is a distinct difference between Frost's and Stevens' poeticization of how the distorted waste materials of the pastoral haunt the object-based aesthetics of modernity, and how self-published poet-photographers like Mason Fletcher, or appropriators of rural detritus like Scott McKay, or photographers of domestic ruin like Bruce Brigham, might archive and preserve the decomposition of backhouses, rural implements, and the remnants of vernacular decay. Although amateur archivists like Fletcher and Brigham do not likely regard the objects they archive as "waste" materials, but rather as things that ought to be rescued from complete mnemonic obliteration, I will refer you again to the abandoned tire propped against the skeletal structure of a pioneer home, the deflationary interlocutor, "round upon the ground" ("Anecdote" 7), attesting to the new ornaments the aesthetic eye must accommodate in order to represent the pastoral for what it has become: a genre steeped in commodity exchange signified by the refused amenities of modern domestication. There is a sense that the drive to give new life to defunct equipment rendered invalid by progress is one that attempts not merely to imbue the past with a sense of nostalgia, but also to reify memory by the objects of labour that defined its presence. As poet A.R. Ammons proposes, "garbage has to be

¹⁹⁷ Another study of interest to the topic of "urban pastoral" as it relates to the dialectic of commodity waste and greenery is Anne Stillman's "Frank O'Hara and Urban Pastoral" (2011). Through an analysis of O'Hara's poetry, Stillman examines the interplay of the city as a "dirty" (376), impure environment and pastoral-as-commodity that both ironizes and veneers the surpluses of that environment. What, Stillman inquires, "does Urban Pastoral mean? Something green and something grimy? Something innocent and something knowing? Walking down Second Avenue but looking as if you've just been rolling in the hay" (380-381)? There is no easy answer to this series of interrogatives, but Stillman attempts an answer through a reading of pastoral's place as an urban "prop for a theatricalisation of experience" that creates a particular atmosphere through brand association: "'Urban Pastoral' is a pithy, oxymoronic phrase. It could be the name of a fad, like 'heroin chic,' or 'dishevelled elegance; URBAN PASTORAL might be the section of city store selling exquisitely frayed peasant blouses" (381). In other words, pastoral might represent a revival of "sprezzatura" or "studied carelessness," the commodification of things that are rough and unkempt to offer "the appearance of acting or being done without effort" ("sprezzatura," *OED*). What is key in Stillman's delineation of urban pastoral is how the genre, like Frost's poems on cellar holes and the coffee table books aimed at nostalgic urbanites, is as much an urban commodity as it purports to be separate from the urban. Pastoral as concept does not exist without the urban populations to idealize it.

the poem of our time because / garbage is spiritual” (*Garbage: A Poem* 18); like the ghostly ephemerality of memory, waste is both transitory and a quantification of being here, something tangible with a signification beyond its materiality. The conversion of refuse to relics in the poetry and artwork exploring waste’s dynamic relationship to nature supplements that spiritual reading, and informs the present about how the perception of the modern self emerged from the detritus of the middle ground. Caught out of place where our domestic things have come to rest as trash, one is invited to re-interpret these artifacts that, once so familiar, have been rendered utterly strange.

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