

# minor literature[s]

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## TODAY, AT THE DUMP, THE WORLD IS IN THE BIN —

Andrea Mason



TODAY, AT THE DUMP, the world is in the bin: a classroom globe, tossed into TV & MONITORS, sits on its head, a round peg in a square crate wanting the hard angles of a TV or a monitor. She has tasked herself to visit her local waste facility once a week for a year. She wants to know about waste. She needs to know the nature of it, and the volume of it, like a storm chaser terrified of storms. She will examine the discarded goods with a dispassionate eye, in the way that a hospital consultant matter-of-factly dispenses with the person in front of them, writing a follow up letter which cites that “this pleasant woman” has a bone density, for instance, that implies a fragility that the woman does not recognise.

Yesterday she watched a You Tube clip of Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek. A dramatic soundtrack accompanied the camera as it panned down from a shot of industrial fluorescent strips to a heap of mixed waste: plastic bags and clothing. *This where we should start feeling at home. We are used to our waste disappearing, like shit*, he said. *In fact, waste is our nature and we should love it. Love is not idealisation. True ecologist loves all this.* He gestured to a heap of plastic bottles as the camera panned around to reveal that he too was standing in a London waste facility.

George, a site worker, waves cheerily at her as she notes the TVs and monitors: BUSH, DELL, DAEWOO, SHARP, GOODMAN'S, JVC, SAMSUNG. An Apple iMac has dints on its back, either side of where the stand is attached.

In *Viet-Flakes*, artist Carolee Schneeman's film-montage, composed of Vietnam atrocity images, plays across fourteen old-school, boxy TVs, which hang from the gallery ceiling; cables drape down like tendrils and spool on the floor around fourteen DVD players.

The world in TVs.

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TODAY, AT THE DUMP, a forest: pine prunings cover the concrete floor. The green against the grey reminds her of a sweatshirt she bought at H & M, attracted by a green forest transfer which contrasted pleasingly with the grey of the sweatshirt. Back home, she found the sweatshirt too thick. She felt heavy. She improvised by rolling up the sleeves each time she wore it. Then, she chopped off the waist band and cuffs and slashed the neck, *Fame*-style. It was ruined: unreturnable, unfit for the charity shop, nonrecyclable. She stuffed it into a bin bag alongside other similarly neutered items and sent it off to landfill.

In *Make a Salad* artist Alison Knowles stands at a table, knife in hand, on the bridge of the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, and chops cucumbers, radishes and tomatoes to the accompaniment of a live orchestra. On a count, she throws the salad onto a giant green tarpaulin which covers the concrete floor, chucks over the dressing and descends into the hall where she forks it into colanders from which the salad is served. *Every time you eat a salad*, Knowles says, *you are performing the piece*.

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TODAY, AT THE DUMP, a headless horse: a hand-carved decorative rocking horse. As she walks along to get a better view she sees that the head has been sawn off. *Spooky*, Denise says when she tells her later. *Last week we had a dead cat and a dead dog*. Denise is her portal into the dump. She writes her name into Denise's open book, and Denise gifts her a hi-vis vest and a red hard hat. Entry is via an open hangar. She's always careful to look left for exiting traffic (she has watched the Health and Safety video and signed off her compliance), and takes the pathway alongside a low aluminium barrier, which leads to a small flight of metal steps. Up here, a ribcage-height concrete wall is all there is between her and PLASTERBOARD, METALS, HARDCORE & RUBBLE, GARDEN WASTE, WOOD & TIMBER, HOUSEHOLD WASTE, CARDBOARD. She looks over this wall as one might look over a cliff edge, to see what's been dashed against the rocks. PLASTERBOARD and METALS sit side by side in large containers. The other categories are partitioned by concrete walls, which taper down to the ground floor, down there, to the land of JCB crushers and diggers, and men with long-handled brooms.

Two diggers, travelling in opposite directions, draw alongside each other. The nearest driver shouts across to the other driver, who wears ear protectors. George, wearing scarf and woollen hat – *to keep the flies off he says*, shouts to this driver.

She walks back along to METALS. George follows her, wheeling a red trolley full of bikes and scooters. The JCB driver is using the digger arm to bash down the metals, making room for these new bikes and scooters. A trolley catches in the teeth of the digger. The digger arm bashes repeatedly against the side of the container in an effort to dislodge the trolley, like a horse kicking its belly to dislodge a fly. George flings his arms up and down. The driver presses the trolley against the inside edge of the container, and jerks the digger arm upwards. The trolley falls off, and George raises his arms in celebration.

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TODAY, AT THE DUMP, in FREESTANDING APPLIANCES, a Hoover Link washing machine stands alongside a Flymo Easimo stands alongside an electronic clothes dryer stands alongside an oven stands alongside a Zanussi Electrolux. The appliances stand on the ground floor, where she can walk around them.

She has tried running, to tamp the bones, but then her right knee throbs.

In *In the Kitchen (Fridge)*, artist Helen Chadwick stands coffined in a tall fridge freezer, its interior upholstered with white PVC. Chadwick's body is just visible through a layer of PVC, the dark upside-down triangle of her pubic mound, the shape of her pink body. Her head, uncovered, pokes above the top shelf.

The lightbulb is on.

In SMALL APPLIANCES: a black boombox, a cassette deck, a kettle, a transistor radio, a Portable Powerfoot, two coffee-makers, a fan heater, a toaster, a car tyre, seven bicycle tyres.

The tyres are interlopers.

Alongside SMALL APPLIANCES, a large red wire crate contains CAR BATTERIES, inside which a brown, dog finger puppet is categorically misplaced.

In *Orange Lion*, by Paul McCarthy, a dirty toy lion sits sad-eyed, legs out in front, its tail poking out – “penis-like” Max Glauner tells us in *Frieze* magazine, between its legs, its left paw “about to grab hold”.

She has tried hopping, less impactful on her knees: fifty hops on each leg, ten on the spot, ten forwards, ten backwards, ten sideways, outwards and in. One day, she entered the park and started hopping, thinking she was alone. Ten hops in she heard a shout. *Oi. Oi*. A man sat on the low stone bench secluded by a yew hedge. She stared at him as she walked on. *You look like someone from a mental hospital though don't you, don't you*. He gestured at her with a can of lager.

In *Babel*, artist Cildo Meireles has stacked radios in a spherical tower, progressing through radios of the ages: the oldest styles – big, wooden, boxy, form three base layers. Smaller boxy shapes in metal and black plastic and even smaller silver-coloured plastic boxes with rounded edges form a series of concentric rings, some of which sit proud, giving the look of a thing with moving parts, like a camera lens. Tuned in to different frequencies, the radios emit a cacophony of sound, asking her to listen.

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TODAY, AT THE DUMP, in HARDCORE & RUBBLE, a handheld showerhead covered in dust pokes out from a broken up concrete floor heaped up against the retaining wall. Breezblocks sit heavily on top of the rubble. It is just six weeks since the recent earthquake in Turkey and Syria. For some twelve days she has woken daily to images of rubble and dust-strewn people and things, this being the timespan where one might expect to recover people alive from the rubble. After this, the story disappeared from the news.

In *Regular/Fragile* by artist Liu Jianhua a repetitious facsimile of everyday objects: shoes, toys, hot water bottles, hammers, bags, mobile phones, cast in shiny white porcelain, cascade down the gallery walls; made in response, the gallery info says, to a series of aviation disasters that happened in China when the artist was going through a hard time.

In Turkey and Syria, during recovery efforts, a hand was found in the rubble.

In *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, artist Cornelia Parker has exploded and reconstituted a garden shed: shards of wood, wheelbarrow wheels, tattered wellington boots, and bent bicycle frames are suspended by wires from the gallery ceiling, lit by a single bulb which creates shadow play.

In Turkey and Syria, during recovery efforts, a foot was found in the rubble.

Later, at home, in a dream, a woman is on a hospital trolley. She has three loat-like eyes. Her skin is warty. The woman stares at her. Beseches. She is beseeching. She is *something*. The nurse talks as she inserts her hand into the woman's left eye socket and rummages in the woman's face, in the way that we see vets' forearms shoving into cow's uteruses. Poor cow. Like in *Cow* by Andrea Arnold. Poor bloody cow.

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TODAY, AT THE DUMP, in HOUSEHOLD WASTE, a copy of *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell. The paperback book has a pale yellow band, top and bottom on its front cover; pale and pissy, not unlike the colour of the stained patches of the mattress it sits atop. She presses her ribs against the cold dusty wall as she leans in to read the subtitle: *How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, just as a man gently floats pieces of bubble wrap and polystyrene packaging over the cubicle wall, which obscures the book's title. To her left, at WOOD & TIMBER, a woman throws in pieces of a cupboard with abandon. With release. A satisfactory thwuck, thwack, crack, as each item meets the criss-cross pile of Victorian pine doors, wooden pallets and broken up particleboard kitchen cabinets.

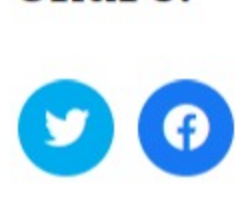
In *Der Lauf der Dinge* artists Fischli and Weiss harness the energy of never-ending collapse: tyres and wood and tables and bags of rubbish spin and turn and flip and fall, substances ignite and explode, and drip and drop, chemical reactions cause explosions and eruptions, expansions and contractions; dust flies, fluids flow, chairs tip, tyres roll, carpets unfurl, planks topple, wheeled contraptions power along tracks, barrels barrel, sparks fly, oil burns. At midpoint, a weighted object on a string ignites and flies around a central pole like a comet circling a Swingball; clogs trundle, air gusts, a cardboard box floats. And, fin, a volcano of white steam explodes out of a bucket.

Later, at home, she opens up her laptop. The screen moves, rebooting the episode of BBC's *Sort Your Life Out*, a reality TV programme where families clear out their houses of all their possessions in order to radically declutter, which she was watching before she fell asleep. It's the part where the family come to see their stuff laid out on the floor of a mega warehouse, organised by category and colour, like a Tony Cragg sculpture. This family watch now in wonder as the shutter goes up to reveal 111 bottles of nail polish, 80 packets of out-of-date medicine, 203 hair accessories and 1000 books. She imagines every person, everywhere, emptying out everything from their homes, turning the streets and roads the world over into one gigantic categorised and colour-coded artwork. In the programme the families displace the problem of what to do with usable but unwanted items by taking them to charity shops, creating an endless feedback loop of donate, rebuy, lay out, donate, rebuy, lay out, donate, rebuy, lay out: a merry go round of buying and giving and buying and giving and buying and giving of goods, that we must love.

*This story was a runner-up in The Desperate Literature Short Story Prize 2023. You can buy a copy of Eleven Stories, Desperate TODAY, AT THE DUMP, THE WORLD IS IN THE BIN, as well as the rest of the shortlist and the winning story, here.*

**Andrea Mason** is a London-based writer and artist. Her fiction pamphlet *Waste Extractions*, was published in 2022 with Broken Sleep Books. She is Runner Up in the Desperate Literature Short Fiction Prize, 2023, won the Aleph Writing Prize, 2020, was shortlisted for the Manchester Fiction Prize, 2020, and was shortlisted for the inaugural Fitzcarraldo Editions Novel Prize, 2018. Online and journal publications include *3: AM magazine*, *UEA New Writing*, *Failed States*, *Tar Press*, *Happy Hypocrite* and *Sublunary Editions*. Twitter: @Andrea\_Mason

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