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Waste in the Anthropocene: Practices of Forgetting and New Environmental Awareness

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses waste practices in terms of social order and challenges of the Anthropocene. The first part analyses the role of waste in our everyday practices. Based on M. Douglas and G. Hawkins, it begins with the spatiality and temporality of waste, showing how waste is a matter out of place, revealing the temporal structure of use-discard-forget, exploring the relationship between symbolic order and purification rituals, and connecting practices of forgetting to practices of the self. It then moves on to the challenges of the Anthropocene, which complicate the inside-outside distinction and practices of forgetting. In revealing the challenges of the Anthropocene, the main focus is on our changing attitude to waste due to awareness of hyper-connectivity and the accumulation of insignificant actions, and on the new environmental awareness emerging with its unique reflexivity, imagination, and responsibility. A new awareness is discussed, one that evaluates everything not according to the functionality of objects, but their potential to transform into waste. Finally, it asks how "old" and "new" awarenesses can coexist, shaping the conditions of everyday life in the Anthropocene.

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1. Introduction

Everyone produces waste every day. Waste is a silent companion in our lives. We usually do not pay much attention to it. By evening, we can hardly remember what we threw away in the morning. This is completely normal in everyday life; the possibility of throwing things away is a condition for maintaining order in our everyday lives. However, in today's world, which presents itself with many threatening names — climate crisis, global warming, global pollution, microplastics – a world that forms a new *Zeitgeist* – the Anthropocene – with expanded scales of time and space, our usual behavior towards waste becomes no longer so self-evident and requires us to rethink our relationship with waste. What did not seem significant 50 years ago, such as the disposal of everyday unwanted things, packaging, and so on, is now linked to questions of how our usual and "innocent" disposal practices affect and damage the environments of other beings; how

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this contributes to climate change; and how we might find an appropriate ethical relationship with damaged natural environments and non-human beings. New environmental self-awareness raises even more fundamental questions about what a human being is, this new *homo detritus*, what its place is in the world, and the history of human and non-human beings.

The discussion of how appropriate the term Anthropocene itself is, and how adequate the concepts of humanity as a geological force and a dominant species are, would be another story. What is important to us is that, in Timothy Clark's words, the Anthropocene allows us to understand how numerous "insignificant" human actions come together into a unique, "imponderable physical event" that changes the planet's ecological cycles.[1] This is what allows us to link everyday practices with global processes. Here we can find a certain tension between how we practice the forgetting of waste in our daily activities and a new awareness (or even self-awareness) that recognizes (and sometimes greatly overestimates) the damage caused by everyday habits. I would consider the Anthropocene alongside Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, who interprets the Anthropocene in Heideggerian terms as *Stimmung* and *Befindlichkeit*, as a mood and an attunement when we "find" ourselves in the new hermeneutical situation. For Wentzer, the Anthropocene is "a hermeneutical event", "a general frame that enables us to see and understand entities, objects and processes".[2] If we accept Wentzer's view, we should ask what this new context says about our behavior towards waste, what practices it requires, and what responsibilities it evokes. The mood of the Anthropocene is characterized by a sense of crisis (i.e. the experience of crisis and a unique reflexivity), an imagination that connects the consequences of insignificant actions with global processes, and an increased sense of responsibility that affects not only the intensity of the response to the damage done, but also the self-awareness of the subject itself. If the Anthropocene requires the inclusion of non-human perspectives in our understanding of the world, the disposal of waste in non-human environments also requires a rethinking of everyday activities.

The aim of this article is to examine the structure of waste disposal, the role it plays in maintaining the order of everyday life and practices of selfhood, and to examine how the new scales of time and space in the Anthropocene complicate the temporality and spatiality of these practices, and require a reconsideration of their boundaries and dimensions. I will focus mainly on everyday practices from a phenomenological perspective. However, I will not examine the structures of consciousness – the functioning of the consciousness of disposal or the experience of encountering waste. I have already done so in another article.[3] So here in the first part, I will focus on the relationship between the practices of maintaining order and the specific forgetting that accompanies them. I will raise the question of how the practices of discarding and forgetting maintain the order of my daily life, overcome the possible dangers posed by unwanted things to it, and shape my practices of selfhood and identity. I will explore the spatiality and temporality of waste in these practices, basing it on Mary Douglas and Guy Hawkins. The context of the Anthropocene will be significant to me as a disruption of everyday practices of forgetting and the

[1] Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 72.
[2] Wentzer, "We Humans. Epochal Consciousness and Responsibility in the 'Anthropocene'", 69.
[3] Gutauskas, M. "Phenomenology of Waste in the Anthropocene." In S. E. Wilmer & A. Žukauskaitė (Eds.), *Life in Posthuman condition. Critical responses to the Anthropocene* (pp. 71–86). Edinburgh University Press, 2023.

emergence of a new environmental awareness. To understand the nature of this new awareness, I ask how the scales of time and space in the Anthropocene can change my evaluation of everyday activities and my understanding of waste disposal. These issues will be explored by examining the nature of the new environmental awareness's imagination, reflexivity, and responsibility. I will conclude with the question of how much the "old" practices can be replaced by "new" ones that are more environmentally friendly, and I will attempt to articulate the tensions the Anthropocene creates for us.

2. Practices of Forgetting

Let me start with seemingly simple questions. How does something become waste? What everyday practice is discarding? First of all, it should be noted that there is no such thing as waste from the outset; objects only become waste when they lose their value. This loss depends on the context of the activity, specifically on the structure of the field of meaning and on the decision to discard the object.

There are many ways things become waste and are discarded. They can be old, useless, broken, or otherwise lose their value, and are thrown away. Some things, such as packaging, are thrown away immediately after use. Disposal is characterized by a change in meaning from *useful* to *useless*. In the first case, the object participates in daily activities as part of the field of activity and order; in the second case, it already interferes with the field of activity and requires action, i.e. throwing it away. The field of daily activity has its own normative value landscape. It may coincide with physical space – useless objects are removed from the living space – or have a semantic configuration such that removal takes place not so much from the room as from the field of attention. Trash bins have a specific role here; by remaining a functional and important tool in the living space, they conceal the waste and "remove" it from the field of order.

The boundaries of the field may be broader or narrower, but all practices of discarding are characterized by a distinctive temporality and spatiality of waste. In spatial terms, to paraphrase Mary Douglas, waste is a matter out of place. This implies an inside-outside distinction, where inside refers to the field of order covered by everyday practices, and outside refers to those places – trash bins at home and on the street, and ultimately landfills. Also, discarding has its own temporality – a use-discard-forget structure. Discarded objects disappear not only from place, but also from our lived time, become unimportant in our future plans, and are forgotten.

The significance of discarding in everyday life should be properly understood. It would seem that by throwing things away, we are doing a simple action, just as eating breakfast, turning on the TV, and so on. Discarding is a form of purification, and it is no coincidence that waste researchers often draw on Mary Douglas's insights and compare discarding to purification rituals. In fact, there is a moment of creativity and a reset of the order here. As Douglas says:

> "In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience."[4]

[4] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 3.

We see, then, that removing dirt is not an insignificant action. Douglas names it by emphasizing creativity – "conform to an idea" and "the unity of experience". She was among the first to show that waste and dirt require a system: "Where there is dirt, there is system".[5] Douglas's "system" refers to a "symbolic order" that structures the field of activity. Objects can appear as dangerous threats to the order, as moral or material dirt, and must be removed from the field of symbolic order. Purification rituals primarily serve to restore it. Douglas provides many examples of purification rituals from pre-modern religious societies. In pre-modern societies, purification rituals primarily serve to restore religious order. For "us moderns," in Douglas's words, dirt and waste are a matter out of place, but in the context of hygiene, ethics, or aesthetics. Our order is more flexible, even unstable, yet it still maintains the symbolic order and creates new rituals of purification. For example, washing your hands after using the toilet or sorting waste. Hand washing is clearly primarily related to hygiene, but the danger is not always real. However, it becomes a ritual that restores "purity" after "the act of dirt". The decision to sort waste also creates a symbolic ritual. Disposal is understood as a removal of useless ("dirt") things – used plastic bottles, broken glass, paper, etc. It must be thrown away in the right place – the trash bins themselves have different symbolic meanings. Plastic, paper, and glass waste should not be mixed, as mixing them can disrupt the symbolic order.

Waste philosopher Guy Hawkins echoes Douglas's insights, highlighting other aspects of waste practices:

> "After all, disposal is a kind of purification ritual that restores us to an ordered state; that is its function and its pleasure. Framing things as rubbish doesn't just help us eliminate things from our lives; it also helps us experience the fantasy of self-sovereignty and ontological separateness. In order to be able to reject we have to convert objects into worthless rubbish simply meeting its fate".[6]

References to self-sovereignty and ontological separateness are not accidental. Maintaining order is a part of our identity, and it is no coincidence that Hawkins links waste management to practices of the self:

> "Waste (…) *constitutes* the self in the habits and embodied practices through which we decide what is connected to us and what isn't. Managing its biological or material reality is part of the way in which we organize our self and our environment, keep chaos at bay. This is why styles of waste disposal are also styles of self and why waste management, in all its cultural mutations, is fundamental to the practice of subjectivity. It is part of the way in which we cultivate sensibilities and sensual relations with the world; part of the way we move things out of our life and impose ethical and aesthetic order. No matter how insignificant putting out the garbage may seem, the way we do it reflects an *ethos*, a manner of being."[7]

We see that maintaining the social order and symbolic system is closely related to our practices of the self, daily routines, lifestyles, and identities. Therefore, our main focus in the field of attention is precisely on this. Since many new elements appear every day, changing their symbolic meaning and appearing as "dirt", useless, or disruptive, the

[5] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 44.
[6] Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste*, 80.
[7] Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste*, 4.

system must constantly and vigilantly remove those elements that disrupt order. Moreover, removal from the field of order requires a certain degree of forgetting so that attention remains focused on order rather than on what has already been removed. Therefore, the use-discard-forget structure plays a very important role here. Hawkins emphasizes that this practice of maintaining order requires a kind of blindness.

> "As one of our most everyday habits, disposal depends on a particular kind of blindness that helps us *not* see, *not* acknowledge the things we want to be free of. To throw things away is to subordinate objects to human action, it is to construct a world in which we think we have dominion".[8]

Therefore, we see that maintaining social order requires not only creativity in accordance with the symbolic system but also the ability to forget what is useless. This forces us to focus our attention on the elements that maintain social order and to discard and forget those that are useless. We can see that people's forgetfulness about discarded rubbish and their attitude towards waste as insignificant are not coincidental. Blindness and forgetting must be cultivated to maintain the field of order.

It is important to note that this forgetting is not only an individual practice; it is also supported by institutions. In the modern world, there is an entire infrastructure for forgetting waste, letting it rot silently in landfills or storing it in containers or in remote places. Individual habits are interdependent with social institutions. For instance, Hawkins notes that the privatization of human waste is only possible after the construction of public infrastructure such as sewers. Only under these conditions can we release human waste into the most private place – the bathroom – and at the same moment to forget it.[9] The modernity thinker Anthony Giddens shows how modern institutions maintain order and this kind of blindness. For order is control; for blindness is the sequestering of experience. Control based on reflexivity and disembedding encompasses space and time through the "colonization of the future", through the calculation and management of risk. Although Douglas notes that we modern people are more fragmented than pre-modern religious people, Giddens shows that everyday life in late modernity, despite its great diversity, still strives for a certain consistency and stability in social order, but does so through expert systems and risk management, which implements control. They organize waste management at the institutional level. The sequestration of experience has another function – to support practices of forgetting. As Giddens explains, "the term 'sequestration of experience' refers here to the connected processes of concealment which set apart the routines of ordinary life from the following phenomena: madness; criminality; sickness and death; sexuality; and nature".[10] Thus, everyday experience is "ontologically secure" when it is isolated from the unknown, threatening processes that challenge the order of everyday life. According to Giddens, sequestration of experience and everyday security is provided by institutions that isolate elements of potential threat in asylums, prisons, funeral homes, and landfills. The first step in hiding waste is to throw it in the trash bin. However, this would not solve the problem of hiding and forgetting waste if we did not have the infrastructure to transport waste to landfills. It is "removed" from the social order and sequestered

[8] Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste*, 80.
[9] Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste*, 49–61.
[10] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 157.

from experience in such a way that landfills are difficult to reach, and their problems do not figure in everyday life and public discourse.

Taking into account the temporality and spatiality of everyday life, which revolves around my here and now, we see that it is characterized by a certain normative value landscape, the maintenance of which is part of the practices of selfhood. Thus, discarding according to the structure of use-discard-forget is necessary to maintain symbolic order and cultivate personal identity, whereas modern institutions only ensure the stability of disposal practices and order-maintenance processes. Waste disposal practices are specific practices of forgetting, because the disposal of waste from space and time is considered a "solution to the problem." Useless objects can become a problem and a threat to order only when it is impossible to get rid of them, when they lie around in rooms, on the street, or in public places, after it has already been decided that they are useless, but the infrastructure does not work, and they do not disappear from view. But most often, disposal practices ensure that the problem is solved before the useless thing becomes a problem. In other words, they act preventively, and therefore the sequestration of experience in modern societies allows for the creation of a safe and comfortable daily routine.

3. Challenges of the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene, with the emergence of new environmental awareness, shows that it is possible to practice forgetting waste only under the condition that there is limited consumption, that there is enough space outside of the place of order (to store waste), and that this waste is not lethal to various forms of life. The Anthropocene marks a certain shift in ecological awareness. The lethality, accumulation of waste, and non-decomposability of new materials do not allow for the practice of forgetting and blindness as it was usual. Especially, such dangerous and lethal waste as chemical and nuclear waste cannot be pushed out of the space of order; it has to be always under control. So, it deprives us of the ease of forgetting. As Nicolas de Warren and Basil Vassilicos point out, high-level nuclear waste, as "epic waste," requires "eternal" vigilance of human institutions.[11] Nuclear and chemical waste will be bequeathed for future generations for thousands of years. From a phenomenological perspective focused on everyday life, the Anthropocene means we must pay closer attention to the materiality of things, not only to their meaning and functionality. In the early twentieth century, Martin Heidegger's famous example of the hammer worked as a demonstration of the structure of experience.[12] We pay attention to the meaning of the hammer, and the better we use it by hammering, the better we "know" its readiness-to-hand. Its materiality only comes into the field of attention when it breaks. I think we can take this as a metaphor for the environmental awareness of the Anthropocene. It starts to look at things not so much through the lens of the working hammer but more through the lens of it being broken. Of course, that does not mean that we firstly think of materiality in every action and only sometimes of functionality. That means that the experience of things is becoming increasingly more

[11] Their book, *We Nuclear People. Responsibility for Nuclear Waste in the Vastness of the Time* is forthcoming. I'm very grateful to them for sharing their ideas in numerous workshops and conferences.
[12] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 98.

complex. We cannot say that materiality was not important before the Anthropocene (any carpenter with experience in practice can tell whether a hammer is made of good or bad material, has right or wrong shape and weight to use), but the current situation brings new aspects in the dealings with the materiality of things. Throwing away a broken hammer may seem like an insignificant event, but the further we go, the more we have to pay attention to the danger and lethality of the material. Throwing away such ordinary things of contemporary life as cell phones, batteries, electric appliances, plastic packages, etc., is not the same. Therefore, in the structure of the meaning of *Zuhandenheit*, a new awareness includes the materiality and lethality of future waste.

However, materiality in the Anthropocene appears significant in several respects. Not only in terms of what objects are made of, which determines their durability and proper functioning, but also in terms of waste and consequences. In other words, a new dimension of objects emerges, one that includes their transformation into waste, the dangers and toxicity of that waste, and the possible directions it may "travel" polluting or destroying the environments. It is precisely this new environmental awareness, characterized by a unique imagination and an understanding of the interconnectedness of processes. The perspective of hyper-connectivity proposed by Earth system science shows how global processes are interrelated. Increased CO_2 in the air causes ocean acidification, which leads to coral bleaching, a decline in biodiversity, and ultimately a decline in fish stocks. The interconnectedness of global processes is only one dimension. A new environmental awareness links our daily actions to global processes, fostering an understanding of the long-term impact of those actions on the environment. For instance, every time I eat, wash dishes, or throw away waste, it has certain consequences for the environment – new chemical elements (detergents, medicines, small textile waste, etc.) enter the environment in one form or another. Flying to a conference contributes to increased CO_2 in the air, or buying a computer encourages the mining of lithium and other rare minerals, thus increasing the amount of electronic waste that is difficult to recycle. A new environmental awareness interprets objects and actions in terms of their consequences and accumulation, making decisions accordingly. One example of such consciousness is the approach of Zero Waste pioneer Bea Johnson. She questions the practice of use-discard-forget and does not believe that throwing things away solves the problems of order. She questions the very act of throwing things away:

> "We drag the trash can to the curb at night, and by the time we get up the next morning, the cereal liners and dirty paper towels have disappeared, as if by magic. But when we say "we threw something away," what do we really mean? "Away" might take trash out of our sight, but that doesn't mean it should be out of our minds. After all, our discards don't just evaporate because the garbageman whisked them off. Our waste ends up in our landfills, spoiling our precious environment, leaching toxic compounds into our air and soil, wasting the resources used to create the discarded goods, and costing us billions of dollars each year in processing".[13]

Therefore, Johnson has no "away" or "out of place"; she never discards trash "out of her mind", out of space, and out of time. It is an example of the refusal to forget the garbage, and it witnesses a new form of awareness. With the new awareness, the act of "throwing away the trash" is no longer obvious, since everything is interpreted in

[13] Johnson, *Zero Waste Home*, 14.

terms of its resistance, accumulation, recyclability, and potential pollution trajectories. Johnson's *Zero Waste Home* shows how all things and activities (school, work, leisure, holidays, entertainment, and games) can be reinterpreted from the point of view of waste. The new pyramid of needs, based on the five Rs (refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle, rot), shows a new value system and demonstrates how order can be maintained not according to the functionality of things but rather to their potential to become waste. Before disposal, all alternatives must be considered to avoid it. First, you need to think about whether you really need the item, refuse to buy it, or reduce your need for it; if you already have the thing, you need to think about how you can reuse it or pass it on to others; if it needs to be thrown away, then consider recycling or composting, and only finally, if all alternatives have been exhausted, can it be thrown into the trash bin, which will go to the landfill. This new value system represents the opposite of consumerism. In consumerism, it is primarily important to consume things with a focus on their cultural meaning, and to focus on the experience itself, with an obligation to enjoy consumption, to obtain "greatest satisfaction" and achieve "happiness without the slightest hesitation".[14] Meanwhile, for Johnson, it is not the cultural meaning of things and the specific ways they are consumed that are important, but their materiality, temporality, and spatiality, which are constituted by what kind of waste they can become.

On the other hand, Johnson's program only appears to be simple and problem-solving oriented. Undoubtedly, it encourages the reduction in consumption and waste, and even transforms purification rituals, because here, throwing things away does not mean purification. It is consumption itself, or the inability to reduce waste, that becomes "dirt", while purification is achieved by choosing to refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle, or rot. However, the context of the Anthropocene and hyper-connectivity, which seems to demonstrate even more clearly that there is no such thing as "I threw it away and solved the problem," nevertheless dissolves the possibility of the solution and purification themselves. Not only is it impossible to control the possible trajectories of waste "travelling around the world", but even supposedly innocent consumption without consumer excess, e.g. cleaning the house, doing laundry, taking medicine (which is simply necessary for human life), ultimately causes environmental damage.

As mentioned above, the Anthropocene *Befindlichkeit* is characterized by a peculiar reflexivity and an increased sense of responsibility. Reflexivity manifests itself in a specific understanding of one's place in the world. Questions of identity become inseparable from the atmosphere of crisis. Constant reports of global warming, planetary boundaries being exceeded, ocean acidification, etc., not only inform us about changes on a planetary scale, but also create a narrative that, by showing the extent of the human species' (and "I" as an individual of the species) impact on the environment, draws attention to the materiality of human existence and the consequences of that existence for the environment. It should be remembered that, as Hawkins has shown, waste practices are closely related to practices of the self. My own self is cultivated by maintaining order and removing from my order and daily life activities anything I do not want to be connected with. As mentioned above, the trash bin or toilet, where everything easily disappears, serves to maintain a "clean self". However, if it is understood that any of my actions have harmful consequences for the environment, where are the limits of my self? If

[14] Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 69.

there is no such thing as "I threw it away and solved the possible problem," does the inside-outside distinction disappear altogether? Perhaps the planetary thinking that Anthropocene theorists talk about is evidence of the disappearance of this distinction? And with it, the expansion of the boundaries of my self to a planetary scale? In part, one could agree with this because, if we identify ourselves with human activity, we see through the consequences that I contribute to a chain of insignificant but cumulative effects. Perhaps one may even feel that one is contributing to the growth of the anthropogenic mass[15] or that one has a place in the biomass of the human species.[16] Of course, this identification must be understood correctly. It is entirely possible to agree with Dipesh Chakrabarty that it is impossible to experience oneself as a species, because the species itself is an abstraction.[17] However, as Chakrabarty and Wentzer argue,[18] we are connected to humanity through a sense of responsibility – we take responsibility for the damage humans have done to the environment.

Responsibility in the Anthropocene, like reflexivity, is linked to crisis. Paul Ricoeur, considering how far the limits of one's responsibility can extend, argues that "our responsibility for harm done extends as far as does our capacity to do harm".[19] What does this mean in the context of the Anthropocene? Generally speaking, responsibility consists of two components: (1) the extent to which I can control my actions and carry them out properly, and (2) the damage I cause if my actions take an unexpected turn. For example, if I drive a car, I am responsible both for driving properly and for the damage I cause if I drive carelessly or recklessly and cause an accident. In the context of the Anthropocene, these two components take on different weight, scale, and meaning. Looking through the lens of global control and management, we see that my ability as an individual to control the current situation and contribute to reducing pollution and global warming is negligible (Paul Crutzen's idea of climate optimization through geoengineering projects is certainly not within the power of an individual or even individual states[20]). However, at the same time, I see that the consequences of my consumption are significant; they contribute to the accumulation of the human species' impact on the environment. This view through the lens of hyper-connectivity and accumulation expands my responsibility for damage and greatly diminishes my understanding of my power to have a positive impact. As D. Bacevičiūtė shows, taking on too much responsibility for global processes, such as the impact of humans on the environment, often leads to "inflation of responsibility".[21] In other words, it increases feelings of powerlessness, and ultimately, by taking on endless responsibility, the individual becomes irresponsible for anything. However, even when taking on global responsibility, the question of its limits remains complex. By proposing

[15] In 2020, the mass of anthropogenic materials (concrete, asphalt, bricks, plastic, manufactured goods, etc.) (1,154 gigatons) exceeded the total biomass on Earth (1,120 gigatons), indicating that humanity is becoming a force of planetary significance (Elhacham, Ben-Uri et al.: 2020).

[16] Comparing human biomass with that of other mammals (Greenspoon, Krieger et al.: 2023) reveals a great deal about the enormous scale of wildlife extinction and the sheer size of the human population and the animals raised for human consumption: 390 million tons of humans, 630 million tons of mammals raised for human needs, and 60 million tons of wild mammals show the proportion of humans and nature. Here, humanity appears as a dominant and depleting species.

[17] Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, 43.

[18] Chakrabarty, *One Planet, Many Worlds. The Climate Parallax*, 12, and Wentzer, "We Humans", 79-82.

[19] Ricoeur, *The Just*, 30.

[20] Crutzen "Geology of Mankind."

[21] Bacevičiūtė "The 'Inflation' of Responsibility", 159.

very long scales of time and space, the Anthropocene makes it impossible to predict the consequences of harmful actions both in space and time (e.g. the spread of microplastics in space or the storage of nuclear waste in the future), and thus to clearly understand the limits of responsibility for causing harm. Moreover, by offering more time perspectives, the Anthropocene removes the clarity of action assessment and prevents us from remaining in a single symbolic system. As mentioned, any activity by individuals contributes to the accumulation of harmful effects on nature. It is not necessary to think only about waste and microplastics. Research on planetary boundaries shows that activities such as agriculture, transportation, water use, heating, etc., which are necessary for my life, nevertheless have harmful effects that ultimately contribute to the planetary crisis and the crossing of planetary boundaries.

Theoretical attempts to solve the problem of responsibility for the distant future are very important for fostering new awareness, but do not seem very effective at changing everyday practices. In the second half of the twentieth century, Hans Jonas attempted to reformulate Kant's categorical imperative so that it would encompass not only contemporaries but also responsibility for future generations ("Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life" or "Do not compromise the conditions for an indefinite continuation of humanity on earth"[22]). However, these formulations as guides for sustainable life now seem insufficient and anthropocentric. Chakrabarty, criticizing the universal orientation towards sustainability and the belief that such an orientation is an appropriate response to the environmental crisis, argues that sustainability is a "humanocentric term"[23] and suggests thinking about habitability – that is, on a planetary scale – deciding how life could be sustained so that the living environment could be bequeathed to future generations. Chakrabarty sees this perspective as the orientation for future policy: what is being proposed is a coexistence of different life forms that would ensure the "orderly" functioning of the planet. Planetary thinking expands the field of "my order" to encompass the entire planet. This is peculiar for new environmental awareness, which tends to encompass the whole planet in "my space of order". However, at the same time, it makes the identity and responsibility of the self as a limited and finite being living "here and now" very problematic. In other words, practices of the self, which, as Hawkins showed, must have limits and depend on how much we can disconnect ourselves from things we do not need and want, become problematic and require a rethinking of the boundaries of my space of order and of the practices of forgetting. Thus, the new environmental awareness is characterized by great attentiveness to the consequences of activity, but at the same time by great uncertainty about the boundaries of the self. This uncertainty does not help to transfer the new awareness into everyday practices. New awareness may take on endless responsibility, anticipating that even everyday actions have far-reaching consequences, but everyday practices require very concrete decisions on how to maintain order in one's own sphere.

[22] Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 11.
[23] Chakrabarty, *One Planet, Many Worlds*, 5.

4. Conclusions

When considering the extent to which the new environmental awareness can change "old" practices, we must not be naive. If we imagine that scientists' warnings about exceeding planetary boundaries, increasing species extinction, global pollution, and the spread of microplastics will change our discarding habits and institutional waste management, we should remember P. Sloterdijk's study on cynicism, which shows that cynical consciousness can do harm despite the knowledge that harm is being done.[24] One could even be less optimistic about the Capitalocene dimension of the Anthropocene. Capitalism produces "cheap nature",[25] which lacks the status of the ethical subject and is reduced to a mere resource. Such a nature can be exploited without any moral questions, quietly performing free labor, providing materials or energy used in production. In terms of waste, we can see that the capitalist system constantly demands "cheap places" to export consumer waste. The transport of textile waste to the Atacama Desert is a very good example of this.[26] However, we do not need cynicism, capitalism, or the exposure of greenwashing practices to understand that waste management cannot be changed with the emergence of new awareness. As we have seen, waste practices are deeply connected with the practices of the self. They require an inside-outside distinction, external places into which elements of disorder can be removed. If we want to develop planetary awareness, understanding how everything is connected and how the damage caused by insignificant actions accumulates, then we must think not only about expanding the boundaries of my local order, but also about transforming the symbolic system. We must recognize that understanding the scale of Anthropocene processes truly complicates the spatiality and temporality of waste, no longer allowing us to unambiguously trust purification rituals. However, the response to this can only be the transformation of those rituals and the limited expansion of the field of order. Improper waste disposal can also be understood as dirt, as an act of contamination. Excessive consumption itself, which produces polluting waste, can be understood as dirt.

Therefore, to develop more environmentally friendly practices, it is necessary to create new purification rituals and transform symbolic systems. This will not save the planet, but it will reduce environmental damage. Even small actions should not be underestimated or considered meaningless in the face of threatening global processes. However, we should not be infected with unfounded optimism here either, but rather understand the tensions that arise between waste disposal practices, which are necessary to maintain order and the self, and a new environmental awareness that problematizes these practices by revealing their damage on a global scale. These tensions cannot be eliminated by hoping for a synthesis of "old" and "new" practices in our everyday life. Not synthesis but unsolvable tensions are the conditions of human life in the Anthropocene. If we want to diminish these tensions, we have to find a balance between practices of forgetting and the new environmental awareness.

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[24] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 5–6.
[25] Moore "The Rise of Cheap Nature", 99.
[26] https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/chile-fashion-pollution

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